

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR RICHARD C. HOWLAND

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is January 26, 1999. This is an interview with Richard C. Howland, a retired Foreign Service officer. It is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. You are known as Dick, aren't you?

HOWLAND: Yes.

Q: And you've been Ambassador to Suriname most recently.

HOWLAND: Yes, from 1987-90, before becoming an inspector. Before that I served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Indonesia. I retired in 1994 but I'm still active with the Inspector General's Office.

Q: When did you come into the Foreign Service?

HOWLAND: It was August 8, 1960, almost forty years ago.

Q: You've had a very distinguished career.

HOWLAND: Well, I've been very lucky. Luck has been the key ingredient. In the Foreign Service it's not the luck of the draw, but the luck of the corridor. A chance meeting in the hall can re-orient your whole career.

Q: Did you come straight into the Service from college?

HOWLAND: Yes, but not in the usual way. I had a few adventures between high school and college, a lot of casting about. You see, I started college late, at age 22. I had graduated from high school barely 17 years old and started at one college but left after a few months. I was too young to start college right away, I hated it. I worked and goofed off for a while and then joined the Army to get the GI Bill.

Q: Dick, I'd like to start with the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

HOWLAND: Yes. I was born in Brooklyn, New York on April 11, 1934. My father was George W. Howland. He was born in 1887 on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. He was 47 when I was born, and my mother was 31. My mother, Alice Bertha Stellman Howland,

was born on May 15, 1903, on the East Side of New York City. My father told me he had a typical Massachusetts island boyhood, fishing and studying and messing around with sailboats and so forth. His family eked out a precarious living. He was descended from a rather old Massachusetts family.

When my father was 17 or 18, he was a terrific baseball player. He tried out for a Boston Red Sox farm team and was accepted. This was a Triple A, minor league baseball team. He had finished high school and was supposed to go to Tufts College. I believe that he was going to study at the medical school. So he set off for Tufts, but instead of spending a whole lot of time in college, he went off and played Triple A baseball. A year after his first year in college, his father died of a stroke. His father was fairly young when he died. My father had to leave college. His mother moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and he went to work in a textile mill.

My father worked his way up and became the head of sales for Butler Mills of New Bedford. He continued to play baseball for the New Bedford Mills League, winning the batting championship year after year. My father was a great bunter and a great base runner. At 60 years of age he could still run out a bunt. At 60 he could run faster than I, a boy of 13. He then became sales manager of the mill and went down to New York City to do business with a textile factoring concern called J. W. Valentine. This firm was an intermediary between the mills that produced yarn and cloth, and the end-users who turned them into clothing and other products. Most of the mills were in New England and the South, and the end-users were in the garment district of New York. This was 1929. At the time my mother was a receptionist and secretary for the J. W. Valentine Company. My father met her and decided to stay in New York. He actually got a job with J. W. Valentine. They married, and that is how my family settled in New York. My mother had a son from a previous marriage, my stepbrother Tommy. On my mother's side, the family emigrated from Schleswig-Holstein after the German takeover in the 1870s. They did fine until the Depression came along, and it was hard to change jobs. I think my father had some troubles then.

Q: Oh, yes, 1934 was not a good year for changing jobs.

HOWLAND: Yes, I was born in 1934. My younger brother, John Howland, was born in 1937. I mentioned my mother's child from a previous marriage, my older brother, Thomas F. McHenry. My father too had a child from a previous marriage, whom I never met. Her name was Mazelle O'Gorman. She had married and left home. So, when I was born, my father was 47, 16 years older than my mother was.

My father was an expert on rayon and nylon, not the science but the business processes. He had been trained by the Department of Agriculture during World War I, when cotton was in short supply. That had kept him out of the war. Then he branched into artificial fabrics. So when World War II came along, and nylon and rayon were two very popular fabrics for military use, he got his job back with J. W. Valentine without any difficulty. However, for four or five years before that, I think life may have been kind of tough. I

know that things improved in 1939, because we were able to buy land on the north shore of Long Island for a summer place. With his own hands he built a summer bungalow on a cliff overlooking Long Island Sound. It was in a summer beach club I'll talk about later. That's where I really grew up, more than in the city. We were out there every weekend till winter came and all summer long. It was wonderful. That was a big piece of luck. Kids in my neighborhood who stayed in the city during the summer often got polio or whooping cough in those years.

My father and mother went through World War II rather swimmingly. He was in the booming textile business and made a lot of money. He moved down to Florida at the end of every November, playing gin rummy and doing business by the swimming pool, then moved back to New York every March and played gin rummy and did business in New York. That was the textile business. Sometimes my mother went with him and my grandmother took care of my brother and me for weeks on end. She was a very wise but crotchety lady who lived to age 94. As a girl, she had seen William Jennings Bryan give a speech. Meanwhile, my older brother - half brother actually - was drafted and sent to Dutch Guiana, later Suriname, as a U.S. Army Geodetic Surveyor. He spent three years there during the war.

Q: Where you later became Ambassador!

HOWLAND:

There, you can see the role of coincidence and luck in my career. I would become Ambassador to Suriname over 40 years later with no other previous professional connection with that country or South America. But that was much later and my childhood began in Brooklyn; then my family moved to Queens Village, St. Albans, and Bellerose in the Borough of Queens, and finally wound up in a nice big house in the part of Bellerose located in Nassau County. I went to Floral Park-Bellerose Elementary School and then Sewanhaka High School, and graduated from there in 1951. Sewanhaka High School was probably one of the five best public high schools in New York State. It had a vocational and agricultural side, but academically it was quite well regarded. The area where we lived, Floral Park-Bellerose, was a fairly upper class area. It was at the level of Potomac or McLean or one of those suburbs of Washington, D.C., though much more urbanized. We lived two blocks from the New York City line.

Q.: What were your brothers like?

HOWLAND: My older brother is a very bright guy and an independent thinker who invented devices used in exploring outer space. He's retired now, of course. He's 13 years older than I am. He had a great influence on me as far as interest in intellectual pursuits go. In a sense, as a boy I was always striving to be smart and to know things, so that I would be able to stand up to my older brother. To this day that hasn't occurred.

My younger brother is also quite a bright kid. We were all pretty bright. My younger brother was also a great athlete. He was an All American lacrosse player at Rutgers

University. I believe that he still holds the collegiate record for goals scored in a single season, dating back to 1958 or so. He scored 65 goals in a single season. Golly, it always seemed to me that if you get one goal, you are doing well. Maybe with all of the new equipment, that will change. Anyway, my younger brother was a great athlete. I was not a very good athlete. So I always had to try to find a kind of niche for myself.

Q: Let's talk about grammar school and high school. Regarding your high school, what sort of books were you reading, and what were your interests in high school?

HOWLAND: From the beginning in high school, I was very interested in what were called, in those days, social studies. That is, civics, and all of that good stuff.

Q: They also include history and political science in that category.

HOWLAND: Right. I also studied English. I read voraciously.

Q: Can you think of the names of any of your favorite books?

HOWLAND: I was a great fan of Conrad, Hemingway, and Faulkner. Of course, as a boy, I read all of the "Tarzan" stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I thought that that was wonderful stuff. Then there was James Ramsay Ullman, who wrote The White Tower, which was about mountain climbing. I read other books like that. I read a lot of books about Asia and Africa. But not Europe. I was never terribly interested in Europe. I thought that it was kind of boring. I don't know why. I liked books about adventure.

Q. - Did you read books by Richard C. Halliburton?

HOWLAND: All that kind of stuff, yes. I read about the explorations of Mungo Park, Speke, Burton, Livingston and Stanley. Africa was the center of the world for me. But I was terrible in math. I was quite good in writing and social studies. I won the school social studies prize twice, both in my junior and senior year in high school. It was a certificate and a book Rommel: the Desert Fox. I read it many times. At the same time, I was steadily failing algebra, geometry, and anything else to do with numbers. Actually, the numbers weren't so bad, arithmetic I could do. . It was abstruse, mathematical concepts, like geometry. Imagination was my forte, not logic. I had no interest in theoretical reasoning. So I failed math, even though my English and social studies grades were very good. My math pulled my average down. Have you heard of the New York Regents' Exams?

Q: Oh, yes, I used to use those for exams.

HOWLAND: I got excellent scores in the New York Regents Exams on most subjects, but not in mathematics.

Q: They were mainly essay type exams.

HOWLAND: Because of the math disasters I had a 75 average, barely high enough to graduate from high school. The only college that I could get into was Adelphi College, down the street from where I lived, so to speak. Finally, since I had skipped the fourth grade [been double promoted] in grammar school, I was always a year younger than anybody else in my class. This was very inconvenient when I tried to date girls. I graduated from high school at age 17 and two months. Everyone else was older.

I went on to Adelphi College for three months and I was miserable. I didn't like the school. All of my friends had gone off to "Ivy League" schools. So I walked out on college. I said that I wasn't going to do this any more. I wanted to get a job. My father, happily, went to a friend of his and got me a job at the United States Steel Corporation in downtown New York City, where I worked in the mailroom. This was in January, 1952. I graduated from high school in June, 1951, and left Adelphi College in January, 1952. I worked for U.S. Steel until the summer of 1952. Just after my 18th birthday in April I was called for a pre-induction physical for the Army. They found I had high blood pressure. So they sent me to Governor's Island overnight to lie down in bed until my blood pressure went down. As soon as it reached 140/90, I was pronounced A-1 and sent home. Later that summer I was spending a weekend in Southampton and having a good time. I had saved a little money, so I decided to quit and spend the rest of the summer at my family's place in Long Island. I was now 18 and alone out there; the rest of the family was working in the city. Like most adolescents I was self-absorbed. In the fall of 1952 I decided that I was going to be a writer. I was going to write novels, like Hemingway and Faulkner.

Q: You were going to write the great American novel.

HOWLAND: Exactly. So I got the occasional part time job to make some spending money. My family was very understanding at first, although this changed later. Anyway, I fiddled around with that for about six or seven months. I sent short stories off to various magazines. They came back with rejection slips; I really had no idea what I was doing. I had no experience of anything to write about. In the spring of 1953 I again went out to the summer place. It was located in a community of bungalows called Sound Shore Club. I got a job working with the caretaker for the club, a guy named Jack Rector. He drank a lot and told lots of stories about his time in the South Pacific during World War II. I worked for him for a couple of months, cleaning up places for the summer residents. I tried to write stuff at night. When summer came I stayed on as a lifeguard at the beach.

In the fall of 1953 it was too cold to stay out there. I went back to the city and got a job working for Look magazine, as a photographer's grip, moving scenery and so forth. I saw an ad and applied for this myself – no help from the family. More than two years after high school my parents were getting disabused of my hanging around. At Look I worked for a photographer named Phil Harrington. He had just accompanied and filmed Ernest Hemingway on his last African safari, and he gave me copies of his photos. That started a life-long love of photography. We also did a spread on Jayne Mansfield. That didn't hurt

either.

Q. She was a sex symbol who more or less replaced Marilyn Monroe.

HOWLAND: That's it exactly. When Harrington didn't need me, I worked in the mailroom, as I had at U.S. Steel.

Q: And at some point you joined the Army.

HOWLAND: Yes, it was time to grow up. You see, I was dating a girl in Bayside, Queens, and we broke up over Christmas. That was depressing. Finally, in January 1954, when I was a few months from, I guess, my 20th birthday, I said to myself, enough of this. I thought, why don't I ask to be drafted into the Army? So I went over to the Selective Service Office - the draft board - in Hempstead, Long Island. They told me, "Your draft registration number is coming up in June, 1954; that's when you'll be inducted." I said, "I'm ready to go right now." They said, "When is your birthday?" I said, "April 11." They said, "We'll let you spend your birthday at home." I thought that was great and signed the piece of paper.

Then I went home and told my parents about it. They were appalled. My father couldn't imagine why I had done this. Join the Army? He thought that I would die in some foreign place. He was very much against foreign places. Senator Joe McCarthy was his great hero. My father was an old-line isolationist. I had joined the Army in order to get away from home and do something exciting. Although there was a ceasefire in Korea the war hadn't officially ended, so I would get Korean veteran's status. That included the GI Bill. Plus at the time the French were beleaguered at Dien Bien Phu. There was speculation on possible U.S. involvement in the late days of the Indochina War. The thought of going to Indochina was an exciting one. I had never been anywhere but Nassau County, Long Island, and once to West Palm Beach.

To help you remember how draft boards functioned, within two weeks I was in the Army! So much for their waiting for my birthday. At night the temperature was down to six degrees below zero [Fahrenheit] at Ft. Dix, NJ. the induction station. There I learned to march my post "in a military manner" while I slowly froze to death. We had only our civilian clothes and no one had brought very many.

One night they woke us at midnight and we fell out with duffel bags packed with our civilian clothes. We marched several hours to McGuire Air Force Base and then we flew off in a ramshackle, old C46 twin engine transport plane made by Curtiss Aircraft, which was operated by Flying Tiger Airline. We flew from Ft. Dix, New Jersey, and the next morning we were in Camp Chaffee, Arkansas. To me, Camp Chaffee and Arkansas were as remote as South Korea. You know native New Yorkers, very provincial. Do you remember the cover on the New Yorker, which showed a map of the U.S., as seen from New York?

Q: New York was the center of the universe.

HOWLAND: Exactly, that was my outlook. So there I was in Arkansas. As we marched with duffel bags and winter civilian clothes from the airport to Camp Chaffee, it was 86 degrees, a nice warm spring day in Arkansas – and a change of about 80 degrees from New Jersey. I was thrown into a basic training company with a bunch of guys from the South. I was a New Yorker, a native New Yorker and not from the South or West. It was not a happy situation. I found that no one liked easterners. It was hard to understand why, but I had a number of fights, all of which I lost. Luckily or unluckily, after two weeks I fell and sprained my ankle on a bayonet course. I nearly got bayoneted in the back when I stood up, not realizing what was going on. The next guy in the line, was coming at me with a bayonet fixed to his rifle!

So I was admitted to the base hospital. Army hospitals are very interesting. It is very easy to get into an Army hospital. It is almost impossible to get out of an Army hospital. I kept begging to leave, and the Corpsman kept saying, "No, no. We'll give you another week here." I said, "I'm missing my training company." The fact was that, if you lose your place in your training company, you have to start basic training all over again – with no buddies at all. Sure enough, that's exactly what happened. Finally, I walked all over the hospital following and pestering the doctor. He noticed I was walking vigorously and finally reached the conclusion that my leg was healed. I was discharged that afternoon.

My first basic training company was in the 10th Medium Tank Battalion. I started over with the 14th Armored Infantry Battalion. Now I should explain that all basic training units in Chaffee were run by field First Sergeants who were psychopathic tyrants. Under the field First Sergeant were cadres (pronounced cadrees) who were mostly Corporals and Privates First Class. They ran each platoon, which had one floor of a two-story barracks. I had no idea if there were any permanent officers; I never saw one during eight weeks except on payday, when they watched you sign for your pay – about \$75 per month. Now in my second basic training company I was surrounded mainly by young African-Americans from Hamtramck, Michigan. I believe Hamtramck is a separate city but is largely surrounded by Detroit. It is a tough town and they were tough guys. You can imagine what it was to grow up in an area like that, but to me they were the nicest guys you could ask for. You see, I wasn't a southerner so they liked me. But the basic training cadres were afraid of them because of an incident on the Stump.

Q: What was the Stump?

HOWLAND: Yes, I have to tell you about the Stump. I could never forget it. Camp Chaffee had been built hurriedly during World War Two – trees had been cut down but not uprooted, and two-story barracks were built on top of the stumps. The barracks were set on cement blocks, usually three to four feet off the ground, and each barracks usually had a few stumps under it. Standard punishment for some grievous offense like having a shaving brush out of line in your footlocker for inspection was to spend a night under the barracks with a mess spoon and canteen cup, cleaning out dirt from around the stump.

You crawled under, filled your cup with dirt, crawled back and carried your dirt to a big pile, spilled it out and then crawled under again. A cadre was detailed every night to check all the barracks where trainees were on the stumps. The next day you went off and soldiered, totally exhausted. It seemed the goal of basic training was to make you the weakest combat soldier possible.

Well, right off the bat the field first, a white man, confronted one of the biggest black guys from Hamtramck. This guy was chewing something in formation and the field first asked him what it was. "My cud, sir," the guy replied. "Put that man on the Stump," said the field first. Now this guy was huge – well over six feet with great bulky shoulders. And of course by this time ten years of basic training cycles – let's say 60 platoons – had worked on the stump. That night the black man took his entrenching tool under the barracks, dug for while, cut some roots, and then braced his feet against the cement blocks. He pulled the rest of the stump out of the ground and hauled it out from under the barracks. Then he went to bed. The next morning, we all looked at the stump lying there. It was huge. This guy washed up and then carried the stump over his head across the quadrangle to the Orderly Room and bounced it off the wall, yelling, "here's your damn stump, man!" All the cadres were standing there. Then he fell into reveille formation. No one said a word. It was a real defining moment, as they're called. The stump sat there as we marched off to the mess hall. For the rest of the course, no one messed with that guy.

My bunk bed mate was also an interesting guy - a part Cherokee Indian from Tennessee. His name was Joe May and he said he was the son of a former Senator. He was a Yale graduate scholar with an Asian History Ph.D., and had worked on a history of the Korean War. After college he had been designated as a U.S. Army historian and done research on the battlefields of the Korean War for three or four years. Then he came home and found his draft notice was waiting for him. So after two years in the midst of combat, he had to start over in the U.S. Army as an enlisted man - and all of us expected to be sent to Korea. Anyway, he was a wonderful guy. From him, I think, I really began to be quite interested in Asia – but not Korea. His war stories were too scary about that country. No one wanted to be assigned there.

However, be that as it may, first I went through basic training, which was truly a nightmare. The mess hall cadres were stealing the meat and feeding us horseflesh. One Puerto Rican kid from the city hanged himself while everyone slept. He couldn't understand the vilification of the cadres and thought it meant he had committed some awful crimes, according to Joe May who spoke some Spanish. The unit that went through the infiltration course two cycles ahead of mine lost 12 trainees when a bolt snapped on a decrepit water-cooled machine gun and it sprayed them with .50-caliber bullets. But, at last I graduated, and happily, missed the usual next stop at Camp Chaffee of Cannoneers' School. If I hadn't sprained my ankle on the bayonet course, that was where I would have gone. So you see the role of luck in my life.

Instead, after a week of leave at home, I was assigned to the U.S. Army Intermediate Speed Radio Operators' School at the other end of Camp Chaffee. It was a Signal Corps

facility that taught you to send and receive Morse Code signals, called CW or continuous wave transmissions, at 18 words per minute. You used a Morse Code key strapped on your leg and had to pass the 18 WPM requirement after six weeks of this 14 week course. If not, they sent to you Cannoneer Basic Training School. That was the worst thing to have happen to you, so everyone passed by one means or another, some guys I think with bribes. I passed legitimately, as did Joe May, my bunkmate who had come with me to radio school. The rest of the course was practice and familiarization with code machines, radios and the like. It was a good course. It got better after I started swimming.

Q. – Swimming?

HOWLAND: Yes, there was a swim team. All the non-basic training units at Chaffee competed in swim meets. The commander of the radio school had swam competition in college and liked to win the meets. Part of being in radio school was trying out, and I made the swim team. As a lifeguard the year before, I'd had to swim two miles every morning. At the try-out, I beat everyone in the unit. The CO said, "Take that man off duty." They got a local high school coach to train me. So I spent the last four weeks of radio school swimming back and forth in the post swimming pool, admiring all the dependents in their bikinis. At the big meet, I swam my heart out; 100 meters in 65 seconds. But I lost to two former NCAA swimmers from Cannoneers' School, of all places. The base commander gave me a medal which the radio school commander took away the next day for his trophy collection. But as a result of being absorbed with swimming, I missed the whole assignment process at radio school. I had been training for this swimming meet when they announced the assignments for the class. Virtually everybody in the class either stayed in the States or went to Korea. Ah, luck of the corridor again.

Q. Wasn't the Korean War over by this time?

HOWLAND: Yes, this was in May, 1954 but we were still stationing troops there as we do today. However, the Indochina War was going on. Those of us who were unassigned for various reasons didn't know where we were going to go, perhaps to Indochina. For example, were we going to drop bombs on the Vietminh? Would there be forward observers who needed radio operators?

Q: This was the time of the battle of Dien Bien Phu.

HOWLAND: I would have loved to have gone to Indochina. However, be that as it may, the course at Camp Chaffee lasted from May to August, 1954. So here were these guys back from the swim meet and people were asking, "What are we going to do with them?" They needed to do something for me because the school commander liked me. They were looking frantically through the lists, and they found one of five trainees assigned as operators to artillery units in Germany had gotten sick at the last moment. Like myself, he had been sent off to the post hospital, never to be seen again. So they decided to send me to Germany in his place. There you are, the role of luck. If not for swimming and then a

sick trooper, I might have stayed in Camp Chaffee or been sent to Korea. Joe May who had seen combat in Korea as an Army historian, was kept in Chaffee as an instructor. I suspect his father's congressional friends took care of that. The Sergeant said to me one day, "Pick up your duffle bag, get on the truck, and off you go to St. Louis." Eight hours later I got on a train by showing my ID card. There were a lot of trainees from other bases along. We were met in New York and soon I was making a bunk in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Two days later I was getting ready to board a ship, the USS PATCH, which was going to Germany. I crossed the Atlantic on the PATCH and came back to the U.S. two years later on the USS BUCKNER, another troop transport.

Q: This was not the HODGES?

HOWLAND: No, I went over on the Pirate's Patch and came back on the Bloody Buckner as we called them.

Q: Your bunk was down in the hold.

HOWLAND: Yes, after we left Camp Kilmer, my bunk was down in the hold. However, before we left Camp Kilmer, I was on KP [kitchen police] every night. This was convenient because, as a result of my KP duties, I got to see my family before we left the U.S. They gave me one night off to go and see my family. At the docks in Staten Island, a nice little old lady with a cart came to the buses to offer us free little packets of gum, razor blades, etc. supposedly from the Red Cross. Underneath were small bottles of booze that she was peddling. Then we sailed away to Germany, a ten-day trip I believe. I think that we were put on a train and wound up initially at a kaserne near Stuttgart, Germany, at a small town called Neckarsulm. The unit was the 452nd Armored Field Artillery Battalion the four-nickel-deuce as it was called. I was in the Neckarsulm garrison only for about two days, and the entire unit suddenly went to the field for a three-week training exercise. Everyone was told to lock their belongings in footlockers and take only field equipment on the exercise. That was easy for me because I had no field equipment. So I just took everything. As it turned out, that was very lucky the footlockers didn't show up for months.

Most important, now I had to perform as a CW radio operator in the Headquarters battery communications section. Training was over, this was the real world. The section also had a small radio component and a large group of field wiremen who ran telephone lines across the battlefield - a high-risk occupation in combat to be sure. This was a real challenge along lines I had never faced before. It was growing up fast, luckily without anyone shooting at you. Germany was cold and I had never been issued winter clothing. They said I would not get it until we got back to barracks, so I froze. I was given an M-1 rifle because we were all supposed to be riflemen as well proficient in our primary MOS, intermediate speed radio operator in my case.

The radio equipment was totally unfamiliar. At radio school there had been a building called the House of Horrors. In that building they had all of this old communications

equipment. They showed it to us but said we would never use it. Instead we were trained on a truck-mounted radio called the Angry Nine, the ANGR9. This was a nice, little, simple, compact AM Morse code radio which could also be used for voice transmission. They told us that the ANGR9 worked beautifully, and that this is what was in use everywhere. Well, right! So I arrived in this unit in Germany and they said, "You're going to the field." I said, "Fine, where's my Angry 9?" They said, "Your what?" I said, "Where's my radio? I have to go into the field and I need my radio." They said, "That's your half track over there, buddy. There's a radio in it. Here's your driver and here's the guy in your turret, the machine gunner. "

So at Neckarsulm they had this old equipment, which at radio school had been called horrors from the 1930's. It was mounted in a Half Track, a vehicle which had wheels in front and tracks like a tank in the rear. Most of these vehicles dated from WW II or before. Everything newer was in Korea. The half-track carried a big, black radio with about 50 dials on the front designated the SCR506. I didn't have a clue as to how to turn it on, let alone operate it. Ah, learning by doing, just like the Foreign Service. I asked what's the frequency? What are the call signs?" No one seemed to know, it was trial and error. But it didn't seem to matter.

I operated with that piece of equipment for three days, trying to get this radio to work, bouncing around in Germany. Generally we went up on a mountaintop, put up the antenna, and got this thing to work somehow. We established contact with our field artillery group, the 288th Armored Field Artillery. So there I sat on a hilltop for seven days. At one point we went to a firing range called Baumholder. Among other things I also handled range control there because our artillery group was firing the guns, and a lot of other stuff was going on. We were having a ball. I loved it. After basic training, the Army was an absolute joy. It was wonderful. I had no problems with it.

Every so often an officer would come by to check us. I had a long-wire antenna. That radio, which was powered by a generator, required about 1,000 volts of power to operate and all of it went through the antenna. So whenever an officer would come up, I would say, "Watch out, sir! If you touch that antenna while I'm sending, you'll be electrocuted." When they heard that, they left us pretty much alone.

Q. I must say that this is a lesson that we've all picked up over the years. An enlisted man has an aversion to authority and learns how to handle it.

HOWLAND: Yes, directly after the field trip my unit was transferred to a Kaserne in Hanau, Germany, near Frankfurt am Main. No one's footlockers had arrived. We were re-designated the 288th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and the colors of the 452nd were retired for some mysterious Army reason. We practiced for days for the parade which commemorated the old unit and inaugurated the new, but it was a disaster. We were not a marching unit. We were actually a pretty good field artillery unit, and won several battery test and battalion test awards. The operations officer and the officers in the firing batteries had all served in combat in Korea and were first-rate.

But we were a terrible garrison unit. We had the highest court-martial and VD (venereal disease) rate of any artillery unit in Germany. We endlessly broke down during maneuvers. I don't recall a single instance when we made it to our alert area during the periodic surprise alerts which were simulating a Red Army attack from East Germany. Thank God that never happened. Not only troops, but thousands of American dependents would have been killed. In my 18 months in Germany, except in garrison, I never managed to get in contact with our parent unit, 30th Field Artillery Group. This didn't seem to matter either. Usually the Group was located so close nearby that you could run over and tell them things, or talk to them on the FM tactical radios.

Late the next year, 1955, I was promoted to corporal and made Chief of Section. This despite the fact I had never managed to get contact with Group on a field exercise. Now, again with no training or background, I had responsibility for a contingent of other CW operators plus armored personnel carriers, radios, etc. The equipment was probably worth millions, and I signed for all of it. As chief of section, I no longer had to pull radio shifts and I did a bit of traveling to France, Spain and Denmark. I really enjoyed living abroad. Before that I had never been anywhere except with my parents. I did that kind of thing for the 18 months I was there in Germany.

In those days being a corporal was a big deal, there were benefits. Theoretically you could go to the NCO club, but this was controlled by African-Americans and white soldiers never went there. The Enlisted Men's Clubs were the same way; the U.S. Army was very racist in both directions in Germany and no one did anything about it until much later. Unfortunately soon after I was promoted, the Army changed the rank system. The purpose was to beef up the role of the NCO who commanded troops. I was designated a specialist so they took away my stripes and put this dumb, little, green badge on my shoulder. As a result I pulled KP again on the troopship back to America!

I came back to the U.S. in January, 1956, and got out of the Army a little bit early. I was supposed to be discharged on February 4, 1956. I was discharged on January 15, 1956. I returned to my parents' home in Garden City, New York. While I was away my father had retired. Actually, he had lost his job because of deafness. He had been Vice President for Sales of the Iselin-Jefferson Corporation in New York, a big textile concern. My father and mother had never saved much money and had only a few thousand dollars in the bank. Nothing much else. My father had no pension. There were no pensions in those years at that level.

So my family withdrew their modest savings, and my father started to buy a string of gasoline filling stations. He thought he was going to run an empire of 10 filling stations, hiring people to run them under his supervision. He thought all he would have to do was collect the money. It was a crazy, harebrained idea, and everyone but he knew it. For the first time since marriage, my mother went back to work. She knew what was coming. And in fact, Gulf Oil drove him out of business. They wanted the stations individually owned so they could charge what they wanted for gasoline and get most of the profit. In

those years gasoline cost something like 27 cents a gallon. My father would make about 1/2 of a cent profit per gallon. Gulf Oil got the rest. The people he hired and the mechanics stole him blind. They did repairs at home, stealing his parts, and stood around getting paid at the station all day with no business. Within a year his company failed, and he had to run the one remaining gas station himself. It was a shock to see him fallen from the heights, sitting in a gas station, getting up to walk out to the pumps in the cold wind. This had a profound effect on me. I did not want to end up the same way. I now realized I had wasted four years that should have been spent in college.

I resolved to go to college the day I got home and saw him shuffling around in old clothes, his hands engrained with black grease from the station. My father couldn't imagine why I didn't just live at home and work with him at the gas station. But that was the last thing I could ever do. Both of my brothers had gone to college, the younger to Rutgers on a lacrosse scholarship, the older to Swarthmore and MIT on the G I. Bill after the Second World War. That was one reason why I had gone into the Army: to establish my eligibility under the Korean War GI Bill so that I could go to college with government help. In February, 1957, I took the SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test], because my high school grades had been so low. I think that I got whatever the maximum score was on the verbal section, much lower on the math. My overall score was fine, however, and the verbal score spectacular. The years of reading good literature had paid off.

I looked through *Barron's Guide to Colleges*. I applied to the Universities of Chicago, Harvard, and, for some reason, George Washington University (GW). I don't know why I did the last, I think I was impressed by its location in Washington DC. I had been to Washington as a kid. My father had taken me down for a visit, and I thought that I'd like to live in Washington. I thought that I would study government. I had studied government in high school. As it turned out, Harvard rejected me. Interestingly enough, the Economics School at the University of Chicago accepted me, even though my math score was terrible. And GW accepted me. When I looked at the costs, it was obvious that Chicago was out of the question. I was going to GW. Tuition was \$15 a credit hour, or \$225 a semester. Basic living costs would run \$2-3 per day. That seemed doable on the GI bill and summer work.

In April, I notified GW that I accepted their offer. I then went out to the bungalow at Sound Shore Club to see if I could find work out there, but this wasn't possible. In late May, I drove back to Garden City stopping en route to apply for a job as a checkout clerk at a King Kullen Supermarket near my home. It paid one dollar an hour for a 48-hour work-week, five days a week with four two-hour evenings. I got the job and that was how I spent the summer of my 22nd year.

Finally in early September 1956, off I went with two new suitcases on the train to Washington DC. From Union Station, I lugged two big Samsonite suitcases to 21st and "G" on a very hot afternoon. These two suitcases weighed a ton. I had hardly any money with me so I walked. I had a little money that I had earned during the summer, working in a King Kullen Supermarket. I was walking along Massachusetts Avenue from Union

Station. I did not want to spend the money on a taxi.

But at this point, a taxi driver pulled up. As you know, September can be blistering hot in Washington, and I was carrying two heavy suitcases. The taxi driver stopped and said to me, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to George Washington University. They're just opening for the school year today. I'm a new student." He asked why I didn't take a taxi. I said that I didn't have much money. I said that I had a few dollars but I was going to have to live on what I had until I was eligible for the GI Bill. I knew that I wouldn't receive any money from the GI Bill until November. I'd been to the Veterans Administration in New York and found out about it. The taxi driver asked, "Are you an ex-GI?" I said, "Yeah, I just got back from Europe." He said, "Hop in. I'll give you a ride." So the taxi took me to the Housing Office at GW.

I don't remember what the taxi driver's name was. He not only took me to the Housing Office. He walked in with me. He said to the people there, "This gentleman is a former serviceman. He's served his country and now he's coming to study at this university to make something of himself. So I want him to be treated properly." I don't think that they had ever heard anyone say anything like this. They said, "Yes, sir!"

It was marvelous. There was another guy sitting there, Gerry Fouche. He came up to me and said, "Were you in the Air Force?" I said, "No, I was in the Army." He said, "Well, I was in the Air Force. Why don't we room together?" I said, "Great idea!" So we turned to the woman behind the counter and asked her, "What do you have in the way of a rooming house?" She said, "Oh, there's one right around the corner at 21st and F Streets." In fact, the building is still there. That afternoon we moved into a room on the top floor. The temperature in the room was 107 degrees, and that's where I roomed during my first year at GWU.

I registered to study government. I cannot recall anything of any spectacular interest, as far as my life at GWU went, except that I was much older than the other students were. I was 22. So I skipped the full round of the fraternities and so forth. I wasn't interested. My idea of a good time was to go and sit in the Visitors' Section of the U.S. Supreme Court. I loved constitutional law. I took a lot of state and local government courses, I studied American history, and I took a lot of public administration and finance subjects. Arthur Burns [later Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board] was one of my professors. Another professor was Norman Toure, who was later Undersecretary of the Treasury for Policy during the Reagan Administration. He recently passed away. From the standpoint of a government "wonk" [specialist], it couldn't have been better. I was much happier there than I would have been at either Harvard, Chicago, or Georgetown Universities.

Q: Absolutely!

HOWLAND: I had terrific professors, many senior government officials who were moonlighting or awaiting a change in administrations. I could catch a trolley and spend the afternoon at the Congress or the Supreme Court. I loved going to school in DC.

Then I became interested in state and local government, thinking vaguely that I might become a city manager. Other than that there was really no goal to my studies, nothing I was aiming at. I think I went after good grades to prove I was bright, that I wasn't just a soldier or a gas station attendant. Also both my brothers were very bright and I was quite competitive about them. By senior year I had a 3.5 GPA and a possibility of a graduate fellowship at Yale. My political theory professor, Herb Kraus, and a few of his colleagues had recommended me. Also, my GRE scores were very high.

Q: So let's talk about how you got into the Foreign Service?

Yes, of course. I arrived in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia on March 17, 1961, and left on July 8, 1963. It was my first post in the Foreign Service, and was a two-year, junior officer "rotational tour." I had been given French language training because I was assigned to the political section, replacing an officer who was being transferred to Japan. The Embassy had said they wanted me there right away, since my predecessor, John Monjo, had already left. I flew from Baltimore, first to Bangkok via Hong Kong on Pan-Am, then in a smaller aircraft to Phnom Penh. It was about three weeks shy of my 27th birthday, and I had joined the Foreign Service seven months before. There was very little in my earlier life to prepare me for the Foreign Service or being stationed as an Embassy officer in Cambodia. My father was from Martha's Vineyard, a fisherman's son who became a textile company executive. My mother grew up in New York City and was a bookkeeper for a local bus company. I spent my younger years in Long Island, except for a brief few trips elsewhere. From the beginning in high school I was very interested in what were called, in those days, "social studies." That is, civics and government. I also was good in English composition and read voraciously.

After high school graduation in 1951, barely seventeen years old, I tried one nearby college but didn't like it and withdrew. I worked as a lifeguard and then for a few firms in New York City, then in 1954 enlisted in the Army, serving in Germany in charge of a radio section in an armored field artillery battalion. After discharge I was 22 years old and applied to several universities. Since I had always been interested in politics and government, I decided to go to George Washington University. In early September 1956, I enrolled there as a government major. I cannot recall anything of any spectacular interest, as far as my life at GWU went, except that I was much older than the other students. Because of my Army service, I was 22 when I started college. So I skipped the full round of the fraternities and so forth. I wasn't interested in anything but education and a job. My idea of a good time was to go and sit in the visitors' section of the U.S. Supreme Court, or the galleries of the Congress and Maryland State House. I loved constitutional law. I took a lot of state and local government courses, political theory, American history, public administration and economics. Typical policy nerd.

By my senior year I had a 3.5 GPA and a possibility of a graduate fellowship at Yale University. My political theory professor, Herb Kraus, and a few of his colleagues had recommended me. Also, my GRE scores were very high. So it looked at that point as

though I was headed for Yale. But as it happened, a young woman I knew, who was a secretary in the Office of the President of GWU, showed me an intriguing pamphlet on the Foreign Service exam. She thought I should get a job, not go on as a student. Now, I had been overseas in the Army, and liked living abroad. From time-to-time, I had heard about the State Department. So I asked her to get an application form for me. I filled out the form, and took it directly to the Department. At the time, I lived just a few blocks away at 21st and “Eye” streets NW. It was pretty convenient.

On December 4, 1959, I took the Foreign Service written exam at Gonzaga High School in Washington, DC. It was the first time they had given this exam since 1957. The applicant sitting next to me was named John Dewitt, and he wore the uniform of a major in the Marine Corps, while taking the exam. We ate our lunch together, and became life-long friends and colleagues. I put my heart into the exam – it was a good challenge – and passed without difficulty. After filling out the security forms I was scheduled for the oral exam at the Department – the New State building, just completed - on February 4, 1960. There were five examiners, all very pleasant. They seemed as smart as my professors and dressed a lot better. Luckily there was a lot of concentration on American facts and trends, not so much on foreign affairs. It was about two and one-half hours. I was sure I had failed. In fact I had passed. So almost by default, without really intending to, I was going to work for a government agency I knew little about. I had no idea what FSOs did in their daily lives and work. But I wanted to live abroad and this was a chance, almost the only chance except the military in those days. The work would be intellectual and challenging, in a way a continuation of college. And I had a job – at \$5,100 per year! This sounded pretty good after four years scrimping on the meager proceeds from the GI Bill and summer work.

On August 8, 1960, I reported to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) for basic officer training, the infamous A-100 course. In those days, FSI was under the parking garage in Arlington Towers. The A-100 course was the first door on the right after you came in the entrance. Between the garage fumes and the smokers, the atmosphere was murderous. I found I was in Class 39, and that my rank was FSO-08. I soon found my colleagues were virtually all better qualified than I was.

The course chairman was Alexander Peaslee, FSO-04 at the time, and a China hand. He had been trapped at the Consulate in Mukden when the communists took over the mainland in 1949. He told us the story. This was at the same time that Angus Ward, the Consul, had escaped by crossing China and getting out through Tibet. It was an exciting story, but those who didn't escape suffered more in the camp, judging from his account. Later his pay was almost docked for not having worked for five months while in the camp.

I have a very warm memory of the A-100 course, mainly because of Sandy. He taught us about life and work in the Service and answered our naïve questions without ever patronizing or embarrassing anyone. Within a few days there was a feeling of camaraderie and a sense of shared experience, learning a new set of values and concepts. I had been

older than other college students at GW, starting there at 22 after the Army. I really had been rather isolated. The A-100 course was my first real experience with colleagues my own age.

In Class 39, we had about 30 people, including two women, and one Hispanic guy. That was it for minorities. Most of us had Anglo-Saxon names. But surprisingly, not many were from the East and few had gone to Ivy League schools.

I did not find that my college curriculum was any help in learning the work of the Foreign Service except in the sense that the syllabus at FSI was based on lectures as in college. Apart from Sandy Peaslee's down-to-earth advice and anecdotes, we sat through a series of college-like lectures by desk officers, seemingly chosen at random. Naturally they spoke about policy matters they dealt with day-to-day. They didn't provide instruction on what we would do in our jobs – how to develop contacts and write a report, for example. And when we were put into the job context at the Department for training, we only did menial tasks. For example, each of us was supposed to spend one day 'working' on a country desk. I spent mine with the director of the East Africa desk, Frederick (Fritz) Picard III, a very dashing guy. This was before independence and the merger of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, before Julius Nyerere came to power, before the Arusha Declaration that destroyed the Tanzanian economy. The big issue on Fritz's plate that day was a flap caused by a report from Dar [es Salaam] that the Sultan of Zanzibar wanted to expel the US missile tracking station there. Reportedly one of his wives, perhaps paid by the Soviets, told him it was a rocket base aimed at Moscow. When I asked what he was going to do about it, Fritz said dramatically, "I'm going to take ACTION!" Then he ushered me from the room.

Later over lunch, he told me about his recent tiff with a Tanzanian named Julius Nyerere, then a visiting African dignitary; I didn't know his title or role at that time. Nyerere told Picard he had been insulted by a white taxi-driver and wanted to cancel all his Department meetings to retaliate. Picard had been able to turn him around. I was totally entranced, in an instant I wanted either to become a desk officer or go to Africa – or both. At last I thought I knew what the Foreign Service was all about. I could hardly wait to handle such matters. Then after lunch Mr. Picard gave me something to do. With a secretary, I set up a conference room for a meeting about the Zanzibar crisis. We put out pencils and pads, straightened chairs, got water pitchers, etc. When the meeting started we were told to leave. For this I needed a 3.5 GPA? It was kind of disappointing. Anyway that was my day of working on the desk.

Other class members seem to have had the same experiences, and there was generalized dismay and ribald humor about it all. We were bemused by all the social science cant in the course, some of it about foreign cultures but most just hypothetical. There was much faddish sensitivity training, designed to teach us to get along with each other, to understand ourselves. Of course we all got along fine already! People laughed about this. We all really wanted to know what we were going to do on the job. I think all of us soon reached the conclusion that the Foreign Service was a life-long on-the-job training

operation. You learn from colleagues, and from the work. You were supposed to be able to perform well whether you know anything about what you are doing or not.

The next week we went to an off-site experience at Front Royal, Virginia. Sandy had told us this would be a lot of work but also the best thing about the course. He was right, and I am sure everyone felt the same way. That week has stayed in my mind as one of the pleasantest experiences of my career, not because of the class work, but the camaraderie. It was really necessary in a system where you are all competing against each other for the same scarce rewards, yet still have to work together.

After Front Royal, there was some personnel processing and very little class work. We were all sworn in by Ambassador Raymond Hare, the Under-Secretary for Political Affairs. Things were much more intimate then – the Secretary of state, Christian Herter, signed our Diplomatic passports personally. We were now bona fide commissioned Foreign Service officers. Then came the great moment when Sandy read out our assignments. In those days there were no so-called personnel cones and almost everyone in the class wanted simply to become a diplomat, i.e. a political officer. However, most were sent to consular positions, some along the Mexican border. One officer, who cracked the most jokes about perhaps being sent to Monterey was sent to Monterey. I was lucky in being assigned to Phnom Penh as part of a junior officer rotation program. I was to start as a political officer, moving later to the consular and then economic sections on my first tour.

There had been a tremendous amount of concern about Southeast Asia already, going back to the French defeat in Indochina. Laos was a hot spot after the Phoumi Nosavan coup in 1960, later reversed. *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene, about a US clandestine officer in Vietnam, and *The Ugly American*, about an Ambassador in Cambodia, were well known. Actually I had vaguely thought I might be sent to Indochina in the last days of the French war when I enlisted in the Army in 1954. So I was overjoyed and a bit unnerved with Phnom Penh. Most of us felt the same way, except for those going to the Mexican border posts.

After the A-100 course, we were suddenly on our own and went our separate ways, never again to gather as a group. There was no more advice from our den-mother, Sandy Peaslee. Class 40 had moved right into our seats and he was busy with it. We had no mentors to guide us. Those of us with foreign assignments went on to a three-week consular course taught by a nice guy, who had been Consul General in Toronto, I believe. Mostly we read the Consular FAM and asked questions. The instructor knew his stuff but was slightly boring. None of it stuck in my mind, I just didn't see it as cogent. That was a mistake. Then came four months of French language training. That was excellent, the FSI method. One of the language teachers was Ms. Suzanne Cohen, wife of Hank Cohen who was a labor officer at the time. He was later Assistant Secretary for Africa and Ambassador to Senegal. I met them again in Dakar when I inspected the Embassy there in 1978. Even then, she still didn't think much of my French. As you know in this business you keep seeing the same people over and over again.

It seems strange as I look back now that I never went to be briefed at the Cambodian desk. But I belonged to FSI, not the Far East Bureau. There was simply no one at FSI to tell me to do that. But desk officers did come to talk to us at a three-week Southeast Asia orientation course, which was extremely useful.

Arranging for travel was much easier in those days. The regional bureaus in the State Department made the arrangements, and the Embassies did the vouchers afterwards. In fact only a few days later, I got into a first-class seat on a Boeing 707 at Baltimore Washington Airport. It was my first flight on a jet and in those days everyone flew first class, Third Secretaries as well as Ambassadors. I fell asleep, hoping to wake up at the right stop. I got to Hong Kong late at night, took a taxi to the Peninsula Hotel, where the travel office had made me a reservation, and collapsed into bed.

The next morning I woke up and looked out the window. Hong Kong was stunning in those days, before they covered, the hilly green islands with fifty-story white buildings. There was the brilliant blue-green of the water, the brown sailing junks, the Star Ferry, the Peak Tram, Tiger Balm Gardens, and the China Fleet Club, the floating restaurants at Aberdeen, the cheap tailors and shoemakers, the bustle of the Chinese crowds, the bars at Wan Chai. When I had applied to join the Foreign Service, I had no idea what it entailed; had stumbled into it almost by default when I passed the exams. Even en route, I was still vaguely thinking that in a few years I might quit and go to Yale after all – where I'd been accepted at grad school and get some sort of degree, and then teach political science or work in state or local government. I thought a few years overseas would look good on my resume.

But all those vague notions evaporated from my mind in that first long look at the old Hong Kong harbor on a breezy, crystal clear morning. At that point I hoped I would stay in Asia for a long time, which mostly turned out to be the case. Then I flew on to Bangkok for another overnight stop.

The Air Vietnam flight from Bangkok to Phnom Penh took about an hour. It was March, the height of the dry season in mainland Southeast Asia. Below I could see the countryside all sere and brown except for the Great Lake, the Tonle Sap. Soon we started to descend over some little hills topped by white Buddhist monuments. We flew straight along a watercourse, the Tonle Sap River. In the dry season now the water was low. The villages along the banks looked abandoned, with trees and palms casting long shadows in the late afternoon on the dry empty fields around them. I could see some oxen moving on a dusty track -- that was all.

Then we were over the city and someone behind me said it looked like a French country town in the middle of a garden. It was quite a contrast to the arid landscape earlier. The houses and shops were yellow with orange roofs and there were trees and foliage everywhere. It did look like a French painting, colorful and very peaceful. From the air of course everything always seems peaceful. Everything seemed to move slowly, as in a

dream. I could see river steamers and small fishing boats, some moored and others moving slowly along the riverfront. The palace compound was right where the Mekong River divided into four great arms, the widest part. The palace buildings were yellow and orange and green, surrounded by walls and seeming very ornate, even from the air. Broad avenues led through the city, and here and there were gleaming white pinnacles, more Buddhist monuments. The air was clear and the outlines of Phnom Penh were sharp, almost intense. For me, it was a dream landscape in the golden light of a dry season late afternoon.

Finally, after making a big circle south of Phnom Penh, we landed at a nondescript little airport and I stepped out into the heat. Only a few others got off the plane. After dumping luggage, the plane taxied right back to the runway, heading for Saigon. I was alone. I was standing there alone suddenly sweating hard on the hot concrete pavement having arrived at my first post. A sign said Pochentong Aerodrome. Beyond the runway were vast dry dusty fields, covered with dead rice stubble. Tall sugar palms that looked like huge green dandelions grew here and there on the low rice field dikes. They marched off into the bleary heat of Southeast Asia. No big river, no lush foliage here. The fields and the palms and the heat seemed all there was of this little Buddhist kingdom, once an empire, now surrounded by warring states which several times had gobbled it up, and would like to do so again.

As I emerged from Customs there was a Cambodian man in a white tunic standing next to me. He turned out to be an Embassy driver, so I wasn't alone any more. The Embassy had been told I was coming and had sent him to meet me. Actually, one of the first things I saw driving in to the city on the ceremonial airport highway was a huge apartment building for the large U.S. Aid Mission staff, known as USAID. Cambodia had been a French colony only eight years before, but now but there were a lot of Americans in Phnom Penh. Most Americans were U.S. officials or contractors – we were building a road from the capital to the Gulf of Siam - who lived mostly in villas and in several residential compounds. That realization took some of the edge off my excitement at being in an exotic land, the seat of the ancient Khmer empire. I knew I would be housed in a compound like the USAID apartments since I was too junior for a villa. I dreaded the thought.

It was late and the driver took me directly to the Hotel Monorum, a tourist hotel. After checking into the hotel I walked out into the side streets nearby. It was getting dark and the city was filled with noise and confusion and strange smells, the streets jammed with bicycle-rickshaws jousting with old trucks and wagons. In one street was a Buddhist temple. Many older people were going in and out of the temple amid the rhythmic sound of chanting. Men with shaved heads wandered along the streets, some of them smoking and browsing in shops. Later I found they were monks, who had taken off their orange robes for a little incognito fun in the late afternoon. Although the shops had shut down at mid-day in the heat, now with evening they bustled again, little stalls set up everywhere with candles and kerosene lamps. It was a classic scene from an old photograph, yes, the real and exotic Southeast Asia. Of course it was a scene that was utterly destroyed in the

years that followed, the years of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese takeover. No one arriving in Cambodia in March 1961 could have conceived what would happen later to that pleasant little country, my first post.

The next day when I got to the Embassy it appeared that no one was ready for me except the driver who picked me up again at the hotel. I had an office, but it seemed to have been used as a closet between the brief period between the departure of my predecessor and my arrival. There was junk everywhere. Also there was no housing ready so I stayed the first few nights at the Hotel Monorum until the Embassy General Services Officer, Marty Ryerson, could figure out where to put me permanently. Then I was stashed for a while in an Embassy apartment compound located several miles from the Embassy in a staid residential area. It was low-rise family housing garden apartments and could have been in Arlington, Virginia. Luckily I was first assigned to the Political Section in my rotational tour and knew I needed to have a place in town where I could entertain and make some contacts. No Cambodians would come to the U.S. apartment complex. I used this argument to lobby right away for a place in town. In fact, I also wanted to escape from the prying eyes and gossip at the golden ghetto, as it was called. The other residents, all married, couldn't understand that; they saw their little fortress as a safe haven. I saw it as a prison – plus it was distant from the Embassy and I did not have a privately owned vehicle coming from the U.S. Luckily there was a shuttle, and of course later I bought a car.

The Embassy had recently moved into an old French office building on a corner of Vithei (Street) Hassakan, one block from Boulevard Norodom, the main street of Phnom Penh, close to the commercial quarter. The USAID was there also. It was a huge operation in a massive building across one street from the Embassy. The U.S. Information Service (USIS) was on the third corner of the intersection. USAID had many more employees, of course, than the Embassy or USIS. In the Embassy there was a rickety old European-style elevator just past the Marine Guard desk. On Vithei Hassakan in the Embassy building were the Consular Section and the Medical Unit, with doors opening to the street. On the first two floors were the Administrative and Economic Sections, on the third was the Front Office, the Military Attaches and the Political Section, and on the fourth the station, some storage rooms, and the French and Cambodian language programs. There was also a military aid mission, the Joint U. S. Military Aid and Advisory Group (JUSMAAG), to the south on the outskirts of town.

So in March 1961, I replaced an officer named John Monjo as the junior political officer at the Embassy in Phnom Penh. At that time, the Ambassador was William Catlett Trimble and his wife was named Nancy. The DCM was Bob Moore (C. Robert Moore) who later served as Ambassador to Mali and Syria. Dan Arzac, a Marine Corps veteran of Guadalcanal, was Chief of the Political Section.

The other officer in the section was Bill Thomas (William Waite Thomas). His wife was named Sarah. They were both delightful and Bill was competent, irreverent, and funny. He loved to espouse unpopular positions and play devil's advocate. Besides being a good

reporting officer, he had a fey sense of humor and great insights into Asia and Asians. He saw language skills as the key to everything, and of course he was right. Bill was a southerner and one of those people with an innate gift for languages. He knew several dialects of Chinese, spoke good Khmer and had picked up spoken Vietnamese in six months. Then he taught himself to read Vietnamese because he wanted to read Ho Chi Minh in the original. And yet at times his southern English was difficult for me to follow, my being a New Yorker. Perhaps that is why he had trouble learning French, which he called the world's most difficult language.

Nevertheless, Bill quickly persuaded me that the most important thing to do at the outset was to work on my French language capability. For almost a century, Cambodia had been a French protectorate, part of French Indochina. Now it was independent. For two decades the central figure in Cambodia had been Norodom Sihanouk, first as a god-king and puppet ruler under the French, then a capricious little dictator on his own. He, like most of the political elite, was a Francophile. Plus there were more French in Cambodia – teachers, advisers and the like – than before independence. And of course, since I had not achieved the S-3 fluency level in French after my courses at the FSI, I was told I could not be promoted and might be selected-out from the Service in the next three years. Whether this was true was uncertain, but I did know that I could not be promoted to the next highest rank, FSO-07, without escaping from what was called language probation. It was best to be tested at the S-3 level while in Cambodia, where I could practice French every day. So I worked hard on French with a woman instructor, the French spouse of an aid officer. She had grown up in Hanoi.

My instructor was an inexhaustible source of wisdom on Indochina and its history. She also introduced me to a few of the arcane aspects of French culture in a former colony. As it happened, I passed the French test within a few months when a regional linguist from FSI passed through Phnom Penh. In fact I got an S-3+/R-4 rating, slightly better than fluent. It certainly helped that my French instructor administered the test, while the linguist – who apparently spoke little French – listened intermittently.

So I then concentrated on learning some Khmer to get about in the countryside. And of course, learning about my job, about becoming a good political officer. All that meant to me at the outset was that I wasn't a consular, economic or administrative officer – yet. At the start I didn't have a clue as to any of those functions, although as a junior officer I was eventually to rotate through them. The Embassy Khmer language instructor was named Chea Son. He worked hard teaching me and I learned enough to be able to get around and get help when I needed it in the countryside. As it turned out he - along with many other intellectuals - was murdered by the Khmer Rouge, in the 1970s.

How did I learn this, after all I only knew the man for a few months? Well, much later, when I was Country Director for Thailand and was visiting the Embassy in Bangkok in 1982, I heard from a refugee counselor at the post that a woman purporting to be the wife of a U.S. embassy teacher had been refused a visa to the U.S. An INS officer declined to believe that she, an uneducated woman, had been married to a so-called U.S. embassy

teacher. He had turned her down; the INS was responsible for visas for Indochina refugees. So I sought out the State Refugee Coordinator at the embassy in Bangkok. I drew a plan of the 1960s Embassy Phnom Penh building, exactly where the Marine Guards stood, the elevator to the fourth floor, etc. I told the Refugee Coordinator that I remembered a woman who brought lunch in one of those typical SEA tiffin carriers to Chea Son at the Embassy every day. I hoped that my plan could be used to confirm the woman's bona fides. The refugee coordinator took my drawing to the INS examiner and resubmitted the request for the visa. From memory the woman was able to describe the layout of the Embassy, and it correlated exactly with my plan. Thus it was clear she had not lied about her marriage to a language instructor, who had been murdered by the Khmer Rouge; INS issued the visa. The woman otherwise would presumably have been sent back to a Thai refugee camp.

This of course was the old Foreign Service, when political officers were born, not made. There had been virtually no job-related training for political officers at FSI before I came to Cambodia. Nevertheless, I was expected to know exactly what to do, and to do it brilliantly. Well, in fact, I neither knew much nor did very well. But no one ever commented on that to your face in those days - no supervisor that is. It was also the era of the confidential performance report. The section chief could tell me about the current situation in Cambodia and give spot reporting instructions but he set no formalized work requirements that I had to meet. One just sort of osmosed things and tried to appear hard working and bright. And after a few days in Phnom Penh, all I had been able to do was to find Monjo's desk in the corner office of the third floor political section. Being on the corner, the embassy flagpole extended from my window and I was told to make sure the Marines put the flag up and took it in every day. Of course no one had to tell the Marines to do that, so perhaps someone was joshing the new boy.

It seemed that the Foreign Service on-the-job training system was a little like the scene in *Streetcar* where Stanley asks Blanche Dubois how she expected to survive without money, and she replies, "I have always relied on the kindness of strangers." And, before long, Bill Thomas, the other officer in the political section became my kind stranger, my friend, and mentor. He took it upon himself to make me useful to the embassy, smiling and counseling in his amused and terribly good natured way. He decided that as long as I had been assigned as a political officer in Cambodia, I should become one. No one told him to do this, but perhaps another officer had done the same for him early in his career. Happily, the political section also had an excellent secretary named Ruth Thomas - no relation to Bill but also a southerner. Along with Bill she coached me on what I was supposed to do. Arzac was somewhat non-committal and seemed mostly involved with the DCM and Ambassador. I never got much from him on any subject that I recall. He spoke excellent French and had many Cambodian contacts, which he kept to himself.

So there I was, one-third of the embassy political section with workable French and no contacts, needing something to write about to get some visibility as the new kid on the block. For a start, there was press reporting - analyzing the significance of various stories and items in the local press. But apart from the government bulletin, *Agence Khmère de*

Presse (AKP), there were only a few French language newspapers in Phnom Penh. The most prominent was *La Depeche de Phnom Penh*. It was a four-page leftist screed edited by a French adviser to Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Chief of State, named Charles Meyer, and published by his Cambodian henchman Chau Seng, who was Prince Sihanouk's chef de cabinet. Everyone in the embassy seemed to be breathlessly studying, analyzing, speculating and reporting on the views and articles in *La Depeche*, all four pages of it, even the spooks and the Defense Attaché. Presumably, it was supposed to reflect Sihanouk's views, especially on foreign policy. The stuff in *La Depeche* usually appeared first or was replayed in AKP, also controlled by Chau Seng. Then, there was the weekly tabloid journal of Sihanouk's ruling party, the Sangkum. This was in Khmer and titled the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. Chea Son, my language teacher, translated key articles for the embassy. So I started out with press reporting. With no contacts and no access or knowledge of Palace politics, there was no other game in town for a new junior officer. But I didn't like it much, and I was making endless mistakes translating French, which Arzac always caught.

So Bill Thomas came to my rescue. With Bill's help in a few weeks I was writing what were then called Foreign Service Despatches. He took me on a few field trips and steered me to a few contacts. I spent a lot of time with Bill and Sarah. Bill was a wildlife enthusiast and especially a weekend bird-watcher. I wasn't in Phnom Penh more than a few days before we were off in his Volkswagen beetle on the American highway, built by USAID. It ran toward the jungles that stretched between the central plains and the Gulf of Siam, and then through them and down to Kompong Som – later called Sihanoukville, Cambodia's main port. In the jungle we would hike down some muddy trail to a waterhole and wait for elephants or other game while Bill looked for birds he'd never seen. In the process, we would stop at villages and talk to people, then write it up.

That was the way Bill and I would drive around Cambodia. It made a big impression on me. I loved being in the countryside and wanted to do reporting on it. But in those years the concentration was on politics in the capital. Only later, when the Khmer Rouge emerged did the Department see the importance of having officers out in the countryside.

One of the first things I learned about the job was that we were also there to collect intelligence as well as report on Cambodian politics. At that time we were entering the early throes of our massive involvement in South Vietnam – helping the Diem government combat what was then known as the Viet Minh insurgency, directed and supported by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north. There was great interest in anything to do with North Vietnam and its capital, Hanoi. Now it developed that Bill Thomas's interest in Vietnamese literature had produced a minor intelligence coup. His visits to a Vietnamese bookstore in search of works on Ho Chi Minh had turned up various Vietnamese publications. The bookstores were all pro-Hanoi of course. The proprietors thought Bill was a Russian Embassy officer, since few Americans or French in Phnom Penh spoke and read Vietnamese. So they began offering him other books – some of which had updated maps of Hanoi and other towns in North Vietnam. One work was a folio of planning documents for renovating the city and the port, which had maps

and plans in detail of all government installations. This was obviously an intelligence find in case we ever launched air operations in the north.

Bill went on collecting various books of this sort until unfortunately some other American greeted him in English as he was emerging from a bookstore. He knew they had heard that inside and afterwards he couldn't go back – his cover was blown. So it was clear to me at the outset how the responsibilities of an FSO in that era were intertwined with intelligence as well as the customary diplomacy of demarches and representation. Of course this could not be mentioned in efficiency reports – any hint of connection with intelligence gathering would have ended a political officer's career.

About a week after I arrived, the personnel officer from what was then called the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, an officer named Ericsson, came out to visit. In those days each of the various geographic bureaus in the department had its own personnel system. Central Personnel, supposed to look after the overall needs of the Service, was even weaker than it is now. There was no real system of bidding for assignments; the form to do so was called the April fool's sheet. It appeared that Ericsson was the key person in determining onward assignments in the Bureau's jurisdiction. So Bill suggested that, "we ought to take Ericsson out and show him what Cambodia is like and what we do. Then he will know what kind of officers to send here." Perhaps he was thinking State Department personnel made a mistake sending me to Cambodia, because I was so inexperienced.

Now at this time there was a great and typical furor in the Khmer government and press about Khmer Krom refugees. The Khmer Krom or Lower Khmers were ethnic Cambodians living in what was now South Vietnam. Originally this area had been part of the ancient Khmer empire. Over the years the Vietnamese had moved down from the north and taken it away. This process was made permanent when the French drew the colonial border between Cambodia and what was then called Cochin China - modern day South Vietnam. Subsequently, under the French, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese had even moved into Cambodia proper. So it was a very sensitive topic in Phnom Penh.

In 1961, there were some 500,000 Khmer Krom still living in South Vietnam. They hated the Vietnamese. During the first Indochina War, they had been, not surprisingly, pro-French. Some Khmer Krom units had reputedly been the best fighters in the delta, according to Bernard Fall, a French writer on Indochina whom I came to know later. Relations between the Khmer Krom and all Vietnamese were typically dicey no matter what their politics. Just about the time I arrived, in March 1961, the leftist Khmer press in Phnom Penh alleged that 500 or so ethnic Khmer Krom refugees, men and women and children, had fled from physical abuse by the Diem fascist clique, as it was known in Cambodia's leftist press. Some were reportedly castrated and hamstrung, and all were driven from their homes to cross the unpatrolled border into an area of Cambodia named Srok Phnom Den. A Srok is a district, and Phnom Den is a small mountain in southeastern Cambodia. I believe it is geographically part of South Vietnam's Seven Mountain Region, later notorious as a Vietcong stronghold. These are limestone pinnacles, very picturesque, just inland from the Vietnamese port of Ha Tien and

bordering a strategic canal. Offshore is the big island of Phu Quoc, also a Vietminh-controlled area at that time. The canal was an ideal supply route for the Vietminh from the sea. Bill thought that the Vietminh were clearing the area of Khmer Krom and other people to set up a redoubt in the Seven Mountains.

On March 27, 1961, ten days after my arrival, Bill Thomas and Mr. Ericsson and I drove down to Phnom Den in Bill's Volkswagen to see if we could talk to the refugees and find out what had really happened. At that time, we had a major USAID public safety program, which provided a lot of equipment and advice to the Khmer police. So we were accompanied by a Khmer police contingent that USAID had arranged. Some of the refugees spoke French, which was lucky because their Khmer was difficult for Bill to understand. But others spoke Vietnamese so he could handle that. The Cambodian government officials were actually quite helpful.

We learned right away that indeed the Vietminh, not the Saigon Government had mistreated and driven the refugees across the border. Later, of course, we found the Saigon Government had done its part in brutalizing the Khmer Krom in other contexts. But, this incident was the work of the Vietminh. The Cambodian police offered to take us to the border a few kilometers away where they said we could see the Vietminh flag flying over the formerly Khmer Krom village a few hundred meters away on the South Vietnamese side. Needless to say, we declined that offer and went on talking to the refugees. I asked one who spoke French, "Did you try to get help from the government forces?" meaning the ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. He looked at me and said, "Oh Monsieur, les Francais sont partis il y a longtemps," meaning, "oh sir, the French left a long time ago." I continued, "What about the government in Saigon, the government of Ngo Dinh Diem?" And he replied, "I know nothing of that. When the French left we buried our weapons. Then the Vietminh found them and punished us. We had to leave the country. There is no government now in Vietnam."

Well, we both took notes on this while the Cambodian police kept pressing to take us to the border. Finally, Bill suggested that we drive further on the road to the top of Phnom Den and look for the Vietminh flags from there. It would be cooler there and we could have lunch under the trees. But in fact, we almost died under the trees. We got into a Cambodian police jeep, Bill and Ericsson in the back, myself in the front, and a police officer driving. Off we went careening up the dirt road toward the mountaintop. Soon we came to a clearing at the end of the road. At the side of the clearing was a steep path leading further upwards to an old Khmer brick temple on the summit. Still driving fast, the police officer swerved the jeep and tried to get up the narrow path. Of course it could not make it, so it stalled and started rolling backwards. There were no brakes and the jeep rolled backwards across the small clearing and started down the steep slope at the other side. I felt what was happening and being in the front seat, was able to jump out just as the vehicle lurched over the side. Bill and Ericsson were trapped in the back. Through blind luck, the jeep hurtled downwards and slammed into the only big tree on the hillside, about ten feet down, and stopped. No one was hurt; it hadn't picked up any momentum yet. Ericsson was quite shaken but Bill and the policeman thought it was funny.

Finally, we climbed up the path, actually the remnants of an ancient brick stairway to what was an eighth century Khmer temple, more than a thousand years old. There it still stood, now a hollowed shell of old bricks wreathed in vegetation with a badly eroded lintel and a stone statue of a seated Buddha, minus head, on an altar. It could have been an old brick kiln except for the lintel and the Buddha. Since the temple must have been originally Shaivite, the Buddha was out of place, but probably some peasant had dug it up in his rice field and brought it here to what was considered a holy place. Perhaps someone else had lopped off the head to sell.

It was not really much of a temple but it was my first! Actually this pile of bricks was featured in a wonderful book entitled "*The Ancient Khmer Empire*" by Larry Briggs, a retired FSO who visited virtually all the temple sites in the late 1940s. Phnom Den had some great significance for the early development of Khmer history, which began with the early kingdom the Chinese chronicles called "*fu-nan*", probably the Chinese pronunciation of the Cambodian word "*phnom*" which means mountain. Cambodia was strewn with ancient temples and statuary, just lying around. If any of it was Buddhist, the penalty for stealing it was death. Harming a monk, damaging or stealing from a Buddhist wat, these were the most serious crimes in Cambodia. The most serious punishment was not death, but exile. For a Khmer, that meant you could never get off the wheel of existence and suffering. It meant endless rebirth, the worst fate. So in those days the Khmer would take nothing, in fact would bring objects to the old temples to venerate them. But the foreigners stole what they could grab when no one was around. Non-Buddhist sites were fair game.

For the police we made a show of looking for Vietminh flags with binoculars but I don't recall seeing any. Then when we returned to Phnom Penh from this trip Bill suggested that I write the report on what we learned. He was trying to teach me my job. So I wrote a "Foreign Service Despatch," my first ever, only a few days after arriving at the post. In that Despatch I had noted our conversation with the refugee who had claimed there was no government in South Vietnam since the French left. None of them had ever seen a government soldier, they said. Of course they could have been put up to this but their wounds were fresh and convincing. This seemed to be a key point. The Despatch was reviewed and approved by Dan Arzac, DCM Bob Moore, and Ambassador Trimble. Nobody changed a word. Then it was sent to the Department and other addressees including the Embassy in Saigon.

Three weeks later Ambassador Trimble walked into my office. He was, I think, a European specialist at heart, but an excellent though very traditional officer. Upon my arrival a few weeks earlier he had invited me into his office for tea and a chat. He looked aghast when I mentioned I had been a CW (Morse code AM radio communications) operator in the Army and had even made Corporal! Perhaps he couldn't imagine how an enlisted man had gotten into the Foreign Service. At least that was my impression of him. I emphasize that he was a very decent and capable man, just a bit straight-laced and perhaps from a certain social class, or so I thought. He radiated dignity, but always in a

pleasant way.

Obviously Ambassador Trimble was now concerned – in fact he said he was very disappointed in me. I said: “Sir?” as I leaped to my feet. He spoke in a measured but concerned way, never raising his voice. “You wrote this Despatch on your visit to the Cambodian border. I must admit I didn’t focus on it very closely, when I saw the report in draft. Well, Ambassador Durbrow in Saigon is furious about it.” Elbridge Durbrow was Ambassador in Saigon at that time, soon to leave. He had obviously called Trimble to complain that we had reported to the Department that the Government of the Republic of Vietnam was not in control of all its territory; indeed had little interest in controlling it. I hadn’t said that directly, of course, but the inference could be drawn.

Ambassador Trimble continued: “Now, I don’t want you to write anything more about other countries. In the Foreign Service we don’t do that. The Embassy in Saigon is responsible for reporting on South Vietnam.” After he left DCM Bob Moore called me in. Bob was a very nice man but like many Deputy Chiefs of Mission, his mind was on a hundred things at once and sometimes he could be a bit vague. He said something like: “Dick, you wrote something about Vietnam. I didn’t really focus on it but it was a telegram or something, maybe a Despatch. Ambassador Trimble is upset so please don’t do it again.”

I was surprised at the critique of my report, which I thought had been a useful contribution. In fact my first reaction was to become very skeptical about the effort in Vietnam. But in point of fact they were both right of course. The Despatch should have been cleared with Saigon but I knew nothing of the sacred ritual of clearances at the time. But if it had been sent to Saigon it never would have made it to Washington.

Bill Thomas thought the whole thing was funny and told me to go on reporting like that. But for a while I fretted about my own fate and the premature end of my career. But Arzac never mentioned it and indeed later recommended me for promotion – the following year I became an FSO-7 and a tenured officer. A little later Ambassador Trimble suggested that I become note-taker at Country Team Meetings. Since I had to clear the notes with everyone present, I learned about clearances to a fare-thee-well. Ambassador Trimble probably thought of it as a learning experience for me. Actually he was a nice man – just a bit too dignified and not in touch with the real Cambodia. I am sure he was doing the best job possible, given the difficulty in dealing with Sihanouk, who liked him personally.

Besides learning about Cambodia and my job, my job as note-taker at Country Team Meetings provided useful insights into Embassy management. For example, there were the personnel implications of our cold war relationship with the Soviets. The Soviet Embassy’s staff in Phnom Penh seemed to consist of two types: party hacks (one had steel caps on his teeth) who bullied you at parties, and smoother guys who endlessly pressed for biographic information. So the climate was one of extreme hostility. Whenever you saw one of these guys at a party, you knew he was going to start either

ranting about imperialism or interrogating you for biographic information, and you shied away. I am sure their underlying job was to recruit one of us as an agent, just as our intelligence people were trying to do with them. No one saw this as anything but normal cold war practice.

Settling in to New Quarters

After about six weeks I was moved from the “golden ghetto” to an apartment on the top floor of a local building. It was called the “Hassakan Apartments,” located about a block from the Embassy and in the heart of downtown. It was leased by the Embassy and open to the street. Across the hall on my floor lived another junior officer, David Chandler, who subsequently left the Service and is now a prominent Cambodia scholar. He has written many excellent works on Cambodian history. Downstairs lived a third junior officer, Peter Poole, an FSO who also later turned to scholarship and eventually became a senior government official.

My street, Vithei Hassakan, was lined with huge beautiful trees. From my little balcony if you looked straight down through the trees you could see all the vigorous life of the street, the Asian crowd. Across the street was the leading girls’ school in the city, the *Lycee Norodom*. The daughters of the elite went there. Beyond the girls' school were Chinese shops and restaurants and then a large movie theater on a corner. The buildings were only a few stories high and looking from my balcony across the roofs I could see almost to the river. Vithei Hassakan ran straight to the river through the heart of the Chinese section of the city. Farther north was the French residential section and many government buildings; to the south was the Palace. Beyond the Palace were more residences, then a broad avenue from the independence monument to the river. South of that avenue the city rapidly became squatter’s shacks and Cambodian huts, called *pailloles*.

I spent some time nearly every evening out on the balcony, enjoying the cooler air and watching the street. From my balcony through the trees I could watch the schoolgirls bathe – in their sarongs of course – in the fading golden light as the dusk came on. A Cambodian girl could take an entire dipper bath modestly wrapped in her sarong. Like Thai and Lao, they bathed all the time. It was a pretty scene, very Asian. Once I watched someone wandering along snapping off the radio antennas on each of the American cars parked in front of the commissary, which was in the basement of our building. Cars with non-diplomatic plates were left alone, but perhaps they didn’t have radios. It was unclear whether this was vandalism, theft, political protest, or all of the above. That too was Asian, but less pretty.

So Chandler and Poole and I - the three junior officers - lived in this big old Asian apartment building with bright red windows and wrought iron grills on the balconies. Next to the building was the residence of the Governor of Phnom Penh, so we seldom lost our electric power even when the rest of the city was out. Each bedroom had an air conditioner that worked intermittently. It was usually quite hot at midday but there were

French doors with screens along the balcony. The breeze from the river cooled the whole place in the evening.

That was a good thing, because outside it was very hot. As I mentioned I had arrived in Cambodia in March, at the absolute height of the hot season. Only six weeks earlier it had been cooler, especially at night. Now the heat was stultifying while everyone waited for the clouds to build up and bring the southwest monsoon. Every afternoon from my balcony I watched the Chinese businessmen mount to the flat roof of a nearby building to bet on the rain. There was a funnel and a clock; when the first drop fell out of the funnel and hit a pan, the clock would stop. Whoever bet on that moment would win. Occasionally a few drops would fall - the so-called "*crachins*" named after the anomalous February rainfall in Hanoi. But the full rains hadn't come yet, so it was hot.

Besides getting used to the heat, it was necessary to get used to servants. Yes, everyone had servants of course – you couldn't work all day and do shopping and housework at night. In fact, part of the job was attending social functions in the evenings. The servants in the building were all Vietnamese and lived in shacks on the roof. Too quickly, I hired a woman called a "*boyesse*," a Vietnamese cook/servant who (like most Vietnamese servants) seemed to be named Thi Hai. She showed up with illegible "references," yet I hired her. She could not have weighed more than 75 pounds but worked hard, and stole as hard as she worked. Again right away I made my first mistake: loaning her money ostensibly to put her daughter through school. Her real purpose, of course, was to guarantee her job security when I discovered how much she was stealing. She knew I was unlikely to fire her until the loan was repaid. Of course it never was repaid.

Learning About Cambodia

In College I had studied a lot of American Government and history but no diplomatic history. So I felt rather at a loss when I started in Phnom Penh, and knew I had to make up the gap. My boss, the political counselor Dan Arzac, provided very little help. As I mentioned earlier, Bill Thomas, bless his heart, rescued me with a few contacts and trip reports. Then I would read the daily traffic, and my predecessor John Monjo's chronological reporting file. Monjo seemed to know everything and that gave me some ideas. I began to realize how one had to build a database from experience on policies, people, and events while standing aside and trying to analyze it all as a whole. Dave Chandler and Peter Poole had also been in Cambodia for some time. They were a big help along with Bill Thomas. The station chief and several of his staff had wide area knowledge, and it was an amicable Embassy where one could chat with the agency staff at various times. And I took notes at the country team meetings, and listened to what was going on there.

But the fact was, as a junior political officer I was basically collecting information, or rather intelligence, and reporting it to Washington. I wasn't being a diplomat. I didn't know enough to put this intelligence together and analyze it except in a rudimentary way. I certainly didn't draw conclusions for U.S. policy. In fact very few people at the Embassy

were writing about policy, although everyone talked about it. Even the Ambassador had very little impact on policy, which was geared to South Vietnam and to a lesser extent, Thailand and Laos. There was no training for reporting officers, except for the tips from Bill Thomas. At basic officer's training at the Foreign Service Institute, before assignment, speakers from the Department had talked about what issues they handled in their jobs, not what a reporting officer should do in the field. Nevertheless a Foreign Service officer was expected to hit the ground running, to be a "quick study." Actually, most did, even I. Gradually a picture of what was going on in Cambodia emerged in my mind, and what our goals were. Of course just when I started to feel I understood the political situation, I was transferred to the consular section as part of my junior officer rotation. More about that later.

David Chandler, Peter Poole and of course Bill Thomas had a big impact on my views. They were really scholars at heart. Chandler in fact later became a renowned Southeast Asia historian. Another big plus was the large contingent of private scholars in the country. Roger Smith, from Cornell, was doing research for a book on Sihanouk's foreign policy. Mike Vickery, an art historian, was studying on a Fulbright grant at Siem Reap, near the archaeological park of Angkor. I went up there and asked him about the Ancient Khmer Empire. Milton Osborne, an Australian FSO, had been stationed in Cambodia and later left the Australian service to become a scholar. He became one of the great experts on Sihanouk. The famous French writer on wartime Indochina ("*Street without Joy*" – "*Hell in a Very Small Place*") Bernard Fall showed up a few months after the beginning of my tour.

Others came and went, circling around the "salon" maintained by Bud Overton, Director of the "Asia Foundation" in Cambodia. Leonard "Bud" Overton had been in Cambodia eight years, knew everyone, and was quite friendly with Sihanouk. He had come after Sihanouk abdicated in 1953 and stayed through the early years of independence. Bud had a huge library of old and new French books on Indochina, which inspired all of us to write away to obscure Paris booksellers to get some for ourselves. A local bookbinder would do up the paper-backed versions in Cambodian leather and silk.

Bud focused me on the history; he was a teacher at heart. His wife, a Korean lady named Lily, was a gourmet cook and they entertained beautifully. An evening started with drinks in his library, four walls of bookshelves, floor to ceiling. Then came a delicious Asian meal and conversation ranging from the eighth century to last week's Cabinet meeting or Sihanouk's latest mistress. All the history was there, not only ancient Angkor but also the French colonial period. To understand the problems with Thailand Bud had me read the account of the French team that drew the borders between Indochina and Siam in 1906. So it was very easy to glide into the historical context in that environment, to see the linkages with the past and speculate on the linkages to the future. Cambodia made historians of us all.

Conversations with Bernard Fall

Another great scholar, writer Bernard Fall, spent ten months in Phnom Penh when I was there and I got to know him pretty well. He was a French citizen but spent much of his life in America. He married an American citizen and was one of the better-known reporters during the early days of the American phase of the Vietnam War. His e books on Vietnam, including the well-known “Street without Joy” on Colonial Route 1, which the French-forces had tried but failed to keep open during the first Indochina war, were highly regarded. Bernard arrived in Phnom Penh soon after I did, on a ten-month sabbatical from Syracuse University, where he was teaching. He had met his wife, Dorothy, at Syracuse. The Defense Department had also provided some sort of grant because he consulted and taught courses at the Pentagon. In fact he was an icon there for the Special Forces types of that era because of his detailed notebooks on the French phase of the war. Bernard was studying what had happened on the ground in Cambodia from 1950 until the 1954 Geneva Conference. He was adding data to his notebooks, his incredible store of information on the war.

Fall was born in Alsace-Lorraine and in his early twenties served as an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. He learned “American” English there and was fascinated by it. He had notebooks with hundreds of the English usages, one of the many hobbies that preoccupied his restless and iconoclastic mind. I remember that once he mused that the same countervailing force – Spanish Catholicism, first in Spain and then in the Philippines - had halted the spread of Islam both to the east and to the west from its birthplace in Saudi Arabia. Why was that? He didn’t know, but liked to *poser des questions*. I

Because of the DOD connection, Bernard occupied a USAID apartment, and I think Dorothy may have been working there as well. But he didn’t have a car, and couldn’t really get to the temples he wanted to see on the weekends. So I drove him around on the weekends. I think he was also teaching at the Lycee Descartes in town. Soon after Fall arrived, Tom Hirschfeld and his wife Hana arrived at the Embassy, replacing Bill and Sarah Thomas. Tom had been a Marine Corps officer and led a platoon on the march back from the Changjin reservoir in Korea in 1950. He was a cracker-jack political officer, spoke perfect French and German, but was not entranced with Cambodia. He gravitated quite naturally toward the French because of his European outlook and language skills, and the new couple became quite close with Bernard and Dorothy Fall. Tom subsequently also left the Foreign Service and became a senior arms control negotiator.

We all listened endlessly to Bernard Fall’s philosophizing and his views on the French defeat in Indochina, particularly the fall of the garrison at Dien Bien Phu, about which he had written “*Hell in a Very Small Place*.” Although sometimes he came across as a bit of a French know-it-all deigning to enlighten us, we didn’t resent it. For one thing, he had the data to back up what he said. For another, he was always right. In his notebooks were all of the strategy, tactics, tricks, gadgets and whatever the French tried to wield in their struggle with the Vietminh.

For example, in the early 1960s we had the “strategic hamlet” program to safeguard villages in South Vietnam. It was modeled after British practices in the Malaysian

insurgency. At some hamlets AID officials were teaching the inhabitants to plant thorn bushes and string barbed wire around the site. When we mentioned this “new” tactic, Bernard looked through his notebooks and said, “ah yes, here it is. The French tried it in 1953 in the north. Here’s how the Vietminh got over it. They got double woven sleeping mats and threw them over the thorn bushes. The first Vietminh attacker threw himself on the mat and the others ran over his body and into the village. The strategic hamlets won’t work.” And indeed he was right.

Another point he made was that although the best local troops the French had were mountain tribesmen, the “*montagnards*,” and their Vietnamese opponents were from the plains, the French had lost their war in the mountains, at Dien Bien Phu. Why was that? Again he didn’t know, but liked to ask questions. After Cambodia, Bernard went back to Vietnam and, on a patrol with a US unit, stepped on a mine and was killed. It was the last outing he wanted to make before leaving Vietnam. His widow lives in Bethesda today, and recently has written his biography, a very moving book.

The French Presence

There were many other French scholars but we didn’t see them much because of the language problem and their opposition – indeed rage – vis-a-vis our presence in Indochina. Basically they wanted us to fail as they had. Nevertheless through Bernard Fall and Mike Vickery I met the doyen of French savants in Cambodia, Bernard-Philippe Groslier, Conservateur of the Angkor complex. He was seconded from the “*Ecole Francaise d’Extreme Orient*” to run what had become a Cambodian national park. His father, George Groslier, had been a French colonial administrator in the 1920-30s. He had written a lyric book on his travels, “*Un Journal de route sur le Mekong Cambodgien*.” I must have read it a dozen times. Bernard-Philippe had grown up in the shadow of Angkor during the era of Paul Mus and Georges Coedes, two commending figures in French archaeology. It was the time of many major excavations and restorations of ancient Khmer temples. Groslier’s goal was not scholarship but to protect the stone temples and statuary from the ravages of modern pollution. Already many of the bas-reliefs and statues were crumbling in places from the poisons in the air.

So many French were still there. But the French were a world apart, the world of Angkor and the rubber plantations and the banks and the import-export business. They held the commanding heights of the economy, the Chinese did everything else, and the Vietnamese ran the little shops and fixed the cars. Then there were former legionnaires who had taken up with local women and stayed on after 1954. And of course Sihanouk’s French advisers – Charles Meyer, Jean Barre – were anathema to us and never spoke to us anyway.

There were rumored to be an astonishing 6,000 French in Cambodia – more than at any time during the colonial period. Most were French advisers at all levels in the ministries, plus aid workers and lots of schoolteachers and students. French businessmen were still prominent. French businessmen were still prominent. They all sat around the pool at the

Cercle Sportif and gossiped among themselves about what was going on at the Palace, in the Cabinet and National Assembly. There was a strict hierarchy among them, with the “savants” at the top along with some French Embassy officers who had been colonial officials only a few years before. Virtually all of them had utter contempt for the Americans. We each kept to ourselves, we seldom met or spoke to them. We were each in our own circles, even at the Cercle Sportif – “circles within a cercle.” We could join the Cercle Sportif but we weren’t a part of it. Americans sat on one side of the pool, French at the other; it was the same at the bars. A lot had to do with the language problem. Few Americans spoke decent French, and no French person would speak English. We and the French and the Khmers and the Vietnamese and the Chinese each existed in our own concentric circles; sometimes they touched but – what’s the word – you could say they touched but did not intersect. Someone has said that before and it’s a good description.

Although we didn’t see the French that much, occasionally we ran into some we knew at Angkor Wat. Actually I didn’t get up there as much as I wanted. It was a long drive and I didn’t have a very good car. I wanted desperately to travel in the countryside and a few weeks after my arrival I bought a used Citroen “*Deux Chevaux*” from a departing American. It cost \$750, looked like a little French delivery truck, and was a French engineering disaster. Peter Poole had an old jeep, which was endlessly breaking down. It had come to Indochina as part of U.S. military aid to the French at the time of Dien Bien Phu, i.e. 1954. But my *Deux Chevaux* always started. The front-wheel drive would get me out of almost any marsh or sand dune. To put under the wheels in dire straits, someone gave me four strips of corrugated metal from the runway of a WW II Japanese airfield.

Most important, Cambodia was replete with old *Deux Chevaux*. In any Cambodian village someone could be found to fix one. I myself learned to carry a piece of fine sandpaper in my wallet to get corrosion or dirt off the distributor parts. That seemed to happen all the time. The spare tire was tied on with a liana vine, and you could cool white wine if you placed it in a wet towel in the engine compartment near the fan. For me that car was part of the mystique of being in Indochina. I even wore the usual French scholars’ field uniform when traveling – white short and shorts, black sandals, straw hat. No one listening to my accent could have mistaken me for French, but it was good to feel like part of the landscape.

The “Oasis of Peace”

Indeed, in many ways traveling in Cambodia was unique in Indochina, with the other two – or rather three – countries at war, and too dangerous for travel. Prince Sihanouk called his kingdom an “oasis of peace.” Yes, the countryside was at peace and it was easy to travel, especially in the dry season. You could drive anywhere; distances were not great and you could make good time on the roads. In fact the French had built excellent roads in Indochina, as Bernard Fall always pointed out. In the nineteenth century they had planted trees along the sides of the roads to conceal troop movements in the European fashion. Now the shade from the trees protected the asphalt and travelers from the intense sunlight. The French military engineers took the time to calculate the requirements for

drainage and raised the roads above the plain, unlike the American-built road to Sihanoukville. Even in 1961 the old French roads were shady and still in reasonably good repair. Traffic was light except on the way to the seaside resort of Kep in the south and on the road to Saigon. Elsewhere one shared the road with perhaps the occasional bus, truck or ox-cart. That was all.

So, driving along, driving to some old temple – perhaps with Bernard Fall - you might stop for a moment in the shade on the road and look out at the countryside. You would see the Cambodian peasants moving on the landscape in their black field clothes and checkered scarves, sometimes worn like turbans against the sun. If they saw you, they stopped working and smiled. “*Lahn, lahn!*” they called – it meant “vehicle.” They were the same race, the same Khmer who had built the old temples. The faces were the same on the bas-reliefs. So then you drove on to an old Khmer temple on a hilltop and stopped to climb an ancient stone staircase leading to it. As you climbed higher and looked out you began to get an impression of space, vast space – a strange feeling in a small country.

Indeed, Cambodia was a small country. Once, it had been an empire; now it was much smaller than Vietnam, which was on its way to inherit the French empire of Indochina. But from the hilltop the rice fields seemed to stretch out forever. Here and there small conical hills poked up like the tops of ancient volcanoes drowned in a great sea – a sea of mud from the Mekong. Beyond the plain were low blue mountains stretched out like sleeping beasts on the horizon. If the day was clear in the dry season you could look out from that temple and see a great distance. You could see the flood plain divided into rice fields, the pattern of the rice field dikes, the sugar palms on the dikes, the watercourses that were dry and empty now with kids playing in them. You could almost sense the curvature of the earth as the landscape seemed to round away toward the mountains. On that temple hill you could hear cowbells from miles away and see the dust rising as carts moved along the ancestral tracks. And so it did feel sacred there, as it must have a thousand years ago. Except for the colonial road it might have looked almost the same. There was a thrill in that, you know, it was eerie. Today as I write I find it difficult to believe I was ever really there looking out at the countryside in that far-off land.

A few months after I arrived the rains came early and that countryside turned green overnight while the Mekong rose 20 meters in front of the Palace. The Tonle Sap River, which normally emptied the Great Lake, turned to flow backwards channeling the rainy-season Mekong flooding to refill the Lake. On that rhythm, on the fluctuations of that lake, a great civilization had lasted more than six hundred years. Without the lake as a flood reservoir much of Cambodia and South Vietnam would be under a lot of deep muddy water. Even with this natural reservoir the countryside looked like a vast swamp when the rains started, with standing water everywhere. Then the rice cycle began. And as they started to plow the fields the Khmer peasants would find artifacts from the past – Angkorian bronzes, Chinese porcelain, old fragments of stone statuary. Almost anywhere you looked or dug, there was history. I wanted to learn all I could about Cambodia and to see everything, especially Angkor.

Getting to know the Khmer was not easy, and the secret was speaking the language more than the few phrases I could handle. The Khmer were polite but not effusively friendly like the Thai, or at least the Bangkok Thai I had met in my one-day stopover. Instead they were usually respectful and quiet with foreigners. Perhaps that was the result of the French, who seemed rather intimidating. Khmers were farmers and monks and government officials – it was as simple as that. The rice fields belonged to the Khmer small-scale farmers; the rivers and the lake belonged to Vietnamese. They – the Vietnamese - were fishermen, workmen, artisans, boatmen, truck-drivers, mechanics, butchers, and the technical people who make a society function. They were brought in by the French to do the jobs the Khmers were loathe to undertake – killing animals, for example or anything to do with commerce. The Chinese and the Khmer of Chinese or Vietnamese descent operated the economy, except for the big French banks and import-export companies. The Thai had moved in over the years, first as mercenaries in Angkorian times, then as overlords till the French came. But they were scattered in the western provinces and along the shores of the Gulf. The Government had tried to resettle Khmers from the plains to the coast but it hadn't worked.

The Khmers were a study in contrasts. Some were stolid, others were quite rambunctious. Let me mention a few examples. One weekend I was driving to Angkor Wat, which was about six hours from Phnom Penh to the northwest. As I waited to board the ferry across the Tonle Sap River north of Phnom Penh, a Cambodian girl walked by and stooped to pick something from the front grill of my Deux Chevaux. She brought it to my window, a big struggling green grasshopper. With sign language she asked if I wished to eat it. I said no, and she carried it to the edge of the road and set it free. As the grasshopper buzzed away she joined her hands in a '*wai*', the Buddhist sign of worship. She had made merit by preserving life - but being a polite Khmer girl, had checked with me first in case I was hungry.

Later on the same trip two of my tires blew out in the town of Stoung, west of Kompong Thom. Kids had strewn nails on the road so they could get paid for taking your flats to the local mechanic. I got into Siem Reap at midnight, and only got a hotel room because a member of the royal family happened to arrive at the same time. He ordered them to put me up, otherwise I would have had to sleep in the car. The next day coming back from the temple of Banteai Srei my Deux Chevaux stalled in a jungle village and dogs chased me up a tree. Kids drove them off and the village headman, the "*me phum*," hitched up his oxcart to pull my car to the highway where I could get repairs. He had white handlebar mustaches and the dignity of a great chieftain. When I offered him money, he refused. That's what it was like, what the people were like, traveling in Cambodia before everything fell apart in South Vietnam, as Bernard Fall had predicted it would – except in fact it fell apart in Cambodia first. .

Norodom Sihanouk, Chief of State

At that moment, of course, everything in Cambodia orbited around Norodom Sihanouk. From 1961-63 his power was at its height – his people worshipped him, the foreign

powers fawned on him, and his internal security apparatus kept any internal threat subdued or non-existent. Below him in the RKG everyone maneuvered for spoils and influence, both of which depended on him. The Cambodian political system in 1961-63 consisted of Sihanouk and a coterie of people around him, vying for his favor. The system was comprised of his cronies, and the second-level officials who were all required to belong to the ruling party, the Sangkum. A little known aspect was the hatreds and maneuvering within the royal family, the Norodoms and Sisowaths and all the subsidiary princelings. No one understood that, it was complex and steeped in the past. Then there were the vast and adoring masses of the people. Finally there was the fringe of leftists. Sihanouk was a Francophile and liked lots of French interlocutors around. He listened to them, but he did what he wanted. That was pretty much it.

Sihanouk's strong point was his appeal to the Khmer masses. The villagers visibly adored him. You could see the devotion in their big brown eyes, perhaps it is still there today although much of responsibility for the horror that later befell them can be laid at Sihanouk's door. Partly this devotion came from his years in the sacred position of monarch but also because he worked at generating it. He had a great touch with ordinary people. They loved to have him come to their village and play volleyball. He boasted that he had the complete support – indeed the devotion – of the peasants who comprised 80 percent of the population. That of course was as true as it was politically irrelevant. Though they loved him, they weren't going to march to Phnom Penh to save him. And in reality he mocked and derided the peasants out of their hearing. While he did institute projects and reforms designed to help the peasantry, the real purpose was to glorify himself, like the Angkorian monarchs who built the great monuments. The intellectuals despised him for those things.

One trick was particularly effective. At the beginning of the wet monsoon there were always some places where the rains came late because of the Cardamom Mountains, particularly towns in the rain shadow of Phnom Kulen, which was almost 6,000 feet high. The Chief of the Air Force, General Ngo Hou, was the Prince's helicopter pilot. He studied the clouds every morning to see where it might rain. Then he and the Prince were off in the chopper to some village with the government traipsing along behind by land. The Prince would get out and say: "here I am. Bring me the rain." At least half the time it would rain in a few hours, sometimes right away. So the whole next issue of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* would be about this 'miracle.' He would be compared to the great rulers of the past, who in legend would bring the rain through their sexual exploits. The peasants ate it up while, of course, the leftist intellectuals sneered.

From his viewpoint, I think he was consistent in two long-range efforts: first, he was trying to preserve his country from the Thai and Vietnamese. Indeed, they would have swallowed it up in the 19th century if the French had not intervened. And second, he was trying to preserve his own power over everything in Cambodia, down to the least detail. Obviously Sihanouk saw these interests clearly. But unfortunately he didn't come up with consistent policies to preserve either of them. And he did not pursue such policies with any particular determination, common sense or strength of character. In the evening he

would overrule a policy he had made in the morning. And he was a terrible bully. At one of his stage-managed “national congresses,” he exhorted the mob to beat a political adversary, one of the Pracheachon Party members, almost to death.

Meetings with Sihanouk

It was odd the way I met Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Chief of State – I got to play volleyball with him. This came about because the JUSMAAG had a volleyball team for physical training. Such exercise was required in the military, of course. After arriving in Phnom Penh I made a courtesy call on the JUSMAAG Chief, Brigadier General Edward ‘Pony’ Scherrer. “JUSMAAG” stood for “Joint U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group” which administered the sizable U.S. military aid program to Cambodia. The General noticed that I was tall and asked if I played volleyball or basketball. I mentioned that I had played volleyball for my A-100 class against a Russian Embassy team in Washington. So he invited me to try out for the JUSMAAG team. They played against a few other Embassies and also against the “FARK,” the *Force Armee Royale Khmère*, and the Cambodian Armed Forces. He wanted to make the JUSMAAG team a multi-agency group. Scherrer was a very broad-gauge person, a true General Officer. Everyone liked him.

Sihanouk sometimes took the Cambodian military team plus a few ringers out to the countryside, and he played alongside them. Actually, he had to be the star. His purpose was basically to entertain the villagers, a spectacle for them to watch after the ranting speeches they couldn’t possibly understand. Of course they loved it and cheered him, and he loved that. He was also trying to push the Sangkum development program, which had a youth and sports component. There was even a minister charged with making Cambodia a big sports power in SEA. His dream was to beat the Thai and Vietnamese in the Asian games.

Spotting a way to become friendly with the Prince, General Scherrer had begun providing some sports equipment to the FARK under the military assistance program. When General Scherrer called on the Prince they talked about sports, and he suggested a weekly game between the MAAG and the Palace team. This was great diplomacy on Scherrer’s part, and Sihanouk liked the idea. It turned out that the volleyball games were great fun. Of course you had to play by “Palace rules.” That meant whenever the Prince hit the ball over the net, you missed it and he won the point. I understand that in basketball games it was the same; if the Prince had the ball, everyone waited until he scored a basket. But after a few sets of volleyball the Prince would wave his hand and cold drinks would arrive and he would go around talking with everyone. It was hard not to like him except for his ego. Unfortunately his ego got in the way of his patriotism and his common sense.

I think at that time his anti-Americanism was not a conviction, it was a crutch – to strengthen him against Thai and the Vietnamese. Nevertheless I remember him as charming, very courteous, polite, a wonderful host, interested in what you had to say. Although I was of course nervous speaking to him, I remember him warmly. Despite his

anti-American rhetoric he had excellent personal relations with Trimble and Scherrer and Charlie Mann, the AID Director. Partly this was because they had aid goodies to give him. But it was more than that, I think he really liked them. He liked people and wanted people to like him. And, for instance, he worshipped the Kennedys. However, in his political mode, he came across like a petty tyrant out of control. Sometimes he treated those closest to him like dirt.

In contrast, every year he would give a big dinner party for all the personnel in the JUSMAAG, and the top people in the FARK. I was able to attend one year because I played on the JUSMAAG volleyball team. It was a gala evening out on the grounds of the Palace with an excellent buffet dinner and then a Cambodian dance performance. During this event Sihanouk made a point of stopping at every table and chatting with the guests. Later there was Western music and he went up to play the saxophone. He invited people to the microphone to sing and went about doing the Cambodian version of the Thai “*Ram-Wong*” dance with the Palace dancers. These included his daughter, Bopha Devi, the apple of his eye, and a son who today, even now I believe still runs the Palace Corps de Ballet in Phnom Penh.

Bopha Devi was very beautiful and a wonderful dancer but a bit oversexed. Nevertheless she was the favorite of Queen Kossamak, Sihanouk’s mother, who was the patron of the Corps de Ballet at the Palace. The Prince had her lined up to marry some relative from the nobility; a Sisowath several times removed. Everyone was invited from all over Southeast Asia. But the night before the wedding she ran off with the Chief of the Palace Guards. They fled to France and Sihanouk formally disowned her, she had humiliated him so badly. Well, a year or so later she came back to Cambodia, short of money. Sihanouk refused to see her and even Kossamak could not reconcile them. So she announced she was going to work as a bargirl at the Mekong Bar, which was on a boat in the river. With that, Sihanouk agreed to let her back into the Palace. But she knew she had him then. She stayed at the bar until one night he went there and asked her personally to come back. Within a few weeks she was back in the Corps de Ballet as if nothing had happened. That is the real Cambodia, you know? The all-powerful Prince knuckling under to the daughter who had humiliated him. I can’t remember if the Khmer Rouge killed her along with many of Sihanouk’s other children. Sihanouk lost five children and 14 grandchildren to the murder apparatus of the Khmer Rouge. Nevertheless when it suited his purposes he collaborated with them in the 1970s. He was really a strange duck.

He seemed to have only contempt for the FARK, the Royal Khmer Armed Forces. You might think that because Sihanouk feared and mistrusted the US he would have been nervous about the JUSMAAG’s excellent relations with the FARK. After all the Khmer military had the guns and was potentially the decisive political force in the kingdom. But Sihanouk apparently did not worry about them. He had the National Police as a counterweight and thought the FARK Commander Lon Nol was an apolitical crackpot. When Sihanouk had to crack down, he used the police, not the Army. And he thought the troops were also “*le petit peuple*,” the same little people from the countryside who worshipped him. So Sihanouk was quite comfortable with Scherrer’s relations with the

FARK as he was with the USAID Director Charlie Mann's relations with the economic side of the Royal Khmer Government, the RKG. Only the Embassy made him nervous because he saw it as the seat of the CIA. That was odd because in real terms the Embassy seemed less of a player in Cambodia than JUSMAAG or USAID.

Despite his courting of Communist China, Sihanouk's most demonstrated fear was of the French-trained leftist intellectuals, who were basically Maoists and hated Vietnam as much as he did. Of course he was wrong in this concern because in the end Lon Nol and the FARK and the right-wing intellectuals overthrew him, not the CIA or the leftist students. Again the problem was his ego.

For example, once Bernard Fall, Tom Hirschfeld (he had replaced Bill Thomas in the Political Section) and a few others were invited down to lunch at Prince Sihanouk's villa at Pech Nil. Apparently the invitation stemmed from Sihanouk's perpetual annoyance at how the foreign press treated him, his image. He read the international press intently and didn't like being called "mercurial," a 'popinjay,' the 'little brown Prince,' etc. Of course the main offenders were American newsmen. Sihanouk had raised this with Bernard Fall because of Fall's experiences in the U.S., bridging two cultures, so to speak. Fall suggested in turn inviting a few young American Embassy officers to discuss this and other questions. Sihanouk, in his curious way, was delighted.

Pech Nil was a mountain pass in the Cardamom jungle where the American highway left the central plains and headed downhill toward the sea. On a ridge overlooking the highway Sihanouk had built a "summer palace" because it was several thousand feet high and there was a cool breeze even at noontime. The Prince went there quite often and sometimes invited diplomats.

Unfortunately the villa also overlooked the worst deteriorating part of the "Khmer-American Friendship Highway" a USAID project that had never been properly finished. The USAID contractors had not calculated the drainage properly or perhaps had tried to cut the mounting cost by using inadequate culverts. As a result one whole side of the highway at Pech Nil Pass was sliding down a slope into the forest and only constant maintenance kept the road open. Some miles further down the road USAID had a big construction camp but the patch-up effort was hopeless; the whole section would have to be rebuilt. That meant big bucks and with Sihanouk's anti-American tirades, no one wanted to commit the money. The entrance to the villa was beyond the point where the road started to go bad. So every time the Prince went to Pech Nil he bumped along and saw the road washing away. It was quite symbolic, actually. *La Depeche* said that the road was deteriorating *au fur et a mesure de* (at the same rate as) Khmer-American relations.

So after a few hours drive, one day the Americans wound up having a delicious lunch with Monseigneur, as he liked to be called, at Pech Nil. There they sat looking out at the jungled mountains and listening to the noise of USAID construction vehicles trying desperately to keep the road open between the port at Kompong Som – then called Sihanoukville – and Phnom Penh. And they sat there listening to the Chief of State

whining about his “image in the American press.”

The person Sihanouk admired more than anyone on earth was General De Gaulle. So basically they were brainstorming to come up with ways to make the Prince’s image more like that of General De Gaulle. It was a strange feeling knowing that the next day Sihanouk might launch into an anti-American tirade about something else, but for now they were brainstorming together, casting about. It was truly unreal. Then finally Tom Hirschfeld noticed a Khmer-language book on the coffee table with Sihanouk’s picture on the cover. That gave him an idea. I forget his exact words but it was something like this: “one has noticed, Monseigneur, that like yourself General De Gaulle is a great statesman, a great leader of his people, and of course a great soldier. But he is also a great scholar. . .” – at this point Tom picked up the book – “and has written several very serious books, about military affairs and other things. He reads and writes constantly. General De Gaulle is considered a scholar as well as a soldier and statesman. So Monseigneur, one thought would be your own association with books and scholarship, perhaps getting that better established in the public mind?” The Prince liked the idea immediately. He began elaborating on it, making it his own idea. He went on about books, books, and books. That was fine with them and especially with Bernard Fall. They had come up with an idea, which was what they were down there for. Prince Sihanouk patted them on the back and gave them baskets of fruit and sent them on their way.

As I mentioned earlier the information environment in Cambodia at the time was not exactly flourishing. There was the leftist four-page rag “*La Depeche du Cambodge*”, and the government gazette, and a Cambodian language tabloid issued weekly by Sihanouk’s ruling national party, called the “*Sangkum Reastr Niyum*.” This paper largely consisted of photographs of the Prince playing basketball, inaugurating projects, working on the railroad with cabinet officials, etc. – all propaganda no news. Well, in the very next edition of the *Sangkum*, every picture of Sihanouk showed him in some way connected with books. He was holding a book, reading a book, his desk was piled with books, he was giving away books to some monks – every picture, Sihanouk had a book. It didn’t take long before the elite and the diplomats of Phnom Penh were aware of the luncheon at Pech Nil that had sparked Sihanouk’s new scholarly image. Unfortunately his ego and his minions had made a good idea backfire.

So it was obvious that the Prince was terribly inconsistent and troublesome to deal with in terms of day-to-day diplomacy. He had a short attention span. He tended to get terribly overwrought about things when he should have stayed calm. It was difficult to predict his reactions. Of course, he took any positive American remark about Bangkok or Saigon as a personal affront and sometimes went into a tirade about it. For example in May 1961 Vice President Lyndon Johnson breezed through SEA, stopping in Saigon and Bangkok but not Phnom Penh. While in Saigon LBJ referred to Ngo Dinh Diem in a speech as “the Winston Churchill of Southeast Asia,” of all things. The press of course played it up. Well, Sihanouk was livid and called in Ambassador Trimble for a tirade.

Given this personality, it was very difficult for us to develop a positive, forward-looking

government approach to deal with his country. The highest priority had to be trying to prevent Sihanouk from impinging on our other interests in the area - Thailand, Laos and South Vietnam. This we didn't always do well.

Sihanouk and the Leftist Intellectuals

At the Embassy, we knew a few leftists but only in a very casual sense. Unfortunately, no one seriously cultivated them. Two of them I knew, Hu Nim and So Nem, were deputies in the assembly. It later turned out they were secret and founding members of the Khmer Rouge of that day. Much later they were caught up in the factional purges of the Khmer Rouge and both liquidated. Another was Khieu Samphan, who was Under-Secretary of State for Commerce in one of the Penn Nouth Governments. He's still around of course, recently on trial in Phnom Penh after all those years. Sihanouk had manipulated them into government positions to try to corrupt these young leftists who had been "seduced" by the French Communist Party during their studies. His hope was that Khieu Samphan would be corrupted by all the bribes he would be offered by the Chinese businessmen. Well, it didn't work.

I think that the same analysis applied to many of the Cambodian students who were sent off to study in France, including Saloth Sar, who later became known as Pol Pot, So Nem, Hu Nim, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, and all of those guys. Not Ta Mok, who was always just a cruel peasant "butcher." I'm referring to the Cambodian intellectuals. Starting in the early 1950s, they were sent off to France on French or Cambodian Government scholarships. When they got to Paris, they were simply "dumped" on the street. The Cambodian Embassy took no care of them whatsoever. In fact, the Cambodian Embassy stole their scholarship money. These "kids," who were just bright young Cambodians, 17, 18, and 19 years old, were picked up, largely by the Communist Party of France [PCF]. The party found them lodgings, gave them food, bought them books, and found them women to sleep with in many cases. The PCF took them to party meetings and slowly made good Stalinists out of them. It's kind of ironic because of which Sihanouk was most keen on education of all the one development programs, and in fact a better education for the average Cambodian was the only real achievement of his regime. In the end it was the educated intellectuals who destroyed the country by trying to take it back to an uneducated slave state as it was in Angkorian times. How about that for unanticipated outcomes?

Later the Chinese Cultural Revolution influenced them, especially Mao's so-called "Great Leap Forward." They were trying to do the same thing in Cambodia in their warped way - create Cambodians with new mindsets to populate a utopia. But these ideas began when the Communist Party of France cleverly pick these Cambodians up and converted them to the Communist "faith" and then sent them back to radicalize Cambodia as a result of their studies. You can see that because, when the Khmers Rouge took power, some of them were married to Frenchwomen who were communists. When they returned to Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge treated these Frenchwomen in a humiliating way. They were forced to clean latrines. They were treated like dirt, because they were not regarded as ideologically

"sound", and they were "objectively" intellectuals even though they were married to senior Khmer Rouge leaders. Eventually most of the students too were murdered in the purges because they were considered "intellectuals," not objectively "of the people." Read Jacqueline Picq's book, "Au Dela du Ciel." She was there at the time, the wife of a Khmer Rouge cadre. She escaped, but in the end the rest were all killed.

I've always felt that the period which the Khmers Rouges spent in the jungle was also influential in forming their operational outlook, how to go about making Cambodia a communist utopia. They were in the jungles of southwest and northeast Cambodia, two of the areas I had visited. You can say that the jungle is beautiful. However, during the dry season, there is nothing to eat in the jungle. There is nothing there. During the rainy season, everything grows, but that is monsoon Cambodia. The dry season lasts from November till March, when the rains start. In fact, in the winter the jungle is like a desert. It is dry, the leaves on the trees are dead, and nothing grows. The Khmers Rouge had to survive down there, somehow. There are rumors that there were cases of cannibalism, and they had to steal chickens from villages. They lived like animals. We're talking about the period from 1958 to 1970. I think that period hardened and embittered these former students, Paris-trained intellectuals. They learned to survive through the teachings and lifestyles of the hill-people, the "*Khmer Loeu*."

Meanwhile, even in the jungle they could listen to the radio and hear Prince Sihanouk give his speeches. They could remember Phnom Penh, and hated the life there. They resolved to wipe it out and make Cambodia a mythical agrarian utopia. It was madness.

In addition to the leftist intellectuals who had returned to Cambodia in the late 1950s after education in France, we knew that hundreds, perhaps a thousand, Khmer communists who fought with the Vietminh in Cambodia during the French War had been evacuated to Hanoi after the 1954 agreements. We had the feeling that some of them might still be out in the "*maquis*," the Cambodian forest.

Dale Purtle, the Southeast Asia regional linguist for FSI, was stationed in Cambodia at the time and had brought a magnificent Land Rover with him. Once I went with him on a trip to Pailin, in the far southwest near the border with Thailand. In the 1970s this became a Khmer Rouge sanctuary after the Vietnamese expelled Pol Pot and his comrades from Phnom Penh. But this was 1962. We talked to the people in Pailin, the market people. The town was a center for rubies and sapphires and many Burmese had emigrated to that town to work the mines. Purtle could speak some Burmese and he could sense a vague discomfort among them. The people he spoke to said there were primitive strangers in the forest and with them were others "who had come from Phnom Penh." The market people didn't know who they were or what they were doing. My guess they were some leftists who were later part of the Khmer Rouge. They must have been subjected to terrible privations in those mountains. And also the people there influenced them.

You see, in those days there were still very primitive peoples in the mountains. These were called the "*Khmer Loeu*," or "highland Cambodians." They were people of the

forest, practicing slash-and-burn agriculture augmented by hunting and gathering forest products. Many of them were indeed Khmer-speaking peoples, but virtually all the mountain tribes hated the Khmers, just as the montagnards in Vietnam hated the Vietnamese. In the southwest the Khmer Loeu were all ethnic Khmer. The Negrito tribes called the “*Pear*” or “*Por*” that once populated that area had died out from disease. The forest Cambodians there gathered and traded a valuable spice called Cardamom, which came from a root that grew in the Cardamom Mountains, or *phnom kravanh* in Khmer. They bartered these and other forest products with villages on the plain, where they were derided and mistreated.

There was some rice cultivation in the forests of the southwest, but not much. So their relationship with the Khmer of the plains was symbiotic but not sympathetic. I felt their animosity once myself. Traveling on the slopes of Phnom Kulen, the huge mountain in southwest Cambodia, I rolled into a Khmer Loeu village as I was running out of gas. I saw a gasoline drum next to a hut and stopped. Standing next to the drum was a man with a native musket from the early French period and a bayonet fixed to it. I asked in Khmer: “*mien sang, eh?*” which means “do you have any gasoline?” He replied: “*ot mien,*” which means “no” and started toward me with the bayonet poised. I ran back to my Deux Chevaux and got out of there fast. Luckily I was able to coast back downhill till I reached another small town where I could buy gas.

Sihanouk tried to pre-empt, undercut, subvert and crush the leftists all at the same time. While I was there, most of the leftists were either in Phnom Penh or in Hanoi. Some in Phnom Penh were publicly associated with Sihanouk’s Sangkum ruling party and he was trying to buy them off with government positions that could provide them with graft. That was his tactic but it didn’t work. Others were on the outs, living in constant danger. These people had come back from France as hard-core communists. Sihanouk hoped he could wean the leftists away from communism and anti-monarchical sentiments but he botched this effort badly. He vacillated between trying to corrupt them and vilifying them unmercifully, especially at the “National Congresses.” Sihanouk had established these events in 1955. Supposedly all government employees attended and peasants and others were brought in from the countryside to express their complaints, etc. But that was just pro forma, in reality no one would speak but Sihanouk. The national congresses were yet another forum for Sihanouk to fulminate against his perceived enemies and generate praise for the putative achievements of himself, the Sangkum Party, and Cambodia in that order. Much of his oration was directed at foreign enemies, South Vietnam, Thailand and the United States. But part of the process was also to attack his domestic opponents, such as the leftists in the Pracheachon Party.

At the Congress I went to, a nominal leader of the Pracheachon Party was invited to the Congress. Sihanouk gave a harangue, and then demanded that the Pracheachon Party representative come up and speak. When he refused, the police grabbed him and put him on the podium. Then Sihanouk questioned and harassed him. Finally he asked the mob what to do with the poor wretch, and they shouted for his death. People rushed toward the stage and Sihanouk demanded that he ask for forgiveness. Then the police spirited the

guy away. Meanwhile other secret Pracheachon members, such as So Nem, Hou Yuon, Hu Nim, perhaps Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) would have to sit there and watch, not able to disclose their true adherence and sympathies. Gradually in the later 1960s they slipped away to the maquis as they came to fear for their lives. It appeared that as Sihanouk got closer to the Chinese People's Republic, he got more repressive of his own leftist intellectuals. He even turned on Chau Seng and Charles Meyer, who fled to France.

But none of us in the Embassy knew of this at the time. We had no idea there was a subterranean Communist party that tied the Pracheachon to the overt leftist intellectuals. We were focused on people like Chau Seng, Charles Meyer, and Tep Chhieu Kheng, who wrote anti-American diatribes for the Prince and for *La Depeche*. They were sort of cocktail party leftists. Meanwhile the secret members of the Khmer People's Revolutionary party, were all about us, smooth-shaven and dressed in white suits and black ties just as we diplomats were when we all went to Sihanouk's Palace fetes. To this day, perhaps only David Chandler because of his detailed research has a clear picture what was really going in the spectrum from mild leftist to hard-core Stalinist in Cambodia.

Even Hu Nim, So Nem and Hou Yuon, who we thought were ringleaders of the left, were tools of the hard-core like Saloth Sar (Pol Pot). In fact they were not sufficiently revolutionary and were liquidated soon after the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975. They had law doctorates and had married upper class women; therefore according to Khmer Rouge ideology they were "objectively" enemies of the revolution. During 1961-63, we didn't know anything about the real communists and their organization. Only through the work of scholars like Dave Chandler and Ben Kiernan decades later have we come to learn how much was going on with the young communists and their secret organization, in the 1950s and 1960s.

Sihanouk's Foreign Relations

The Prince didn't know how to handle us any better than we did him. The worst thing from our standpoint was his sort of "whiny-brat" diplomacy, endlessly complaining and even screaming about everything going on. It never stopped. Having been a former monarch he saw diplomats as his courtiers, to be always at his beck and call for complaints about their policies. This especially drove Ambassador Trimble up the wall. Trimble was supposed to be mollifying Sihanouk and getting him on board with our SEA policy, when in fact Sihanouk was said to be screaming at him most of the time. Then too he was a busybody. For example he tried to get involved in other problems such as Laos where the U.S. had become heavily engaged under Kennedy. We absolutely did not want to contend with Sihanouk as a stalking-horse for the Chinese in the Laos tangle. It was already complicated enough. Parenthetically I should note that Laos in 1962 was starting to rival Vietnam as an area of U.S. interest. President Kennedy was taken with Laos for some reason. Back in Washington they had no idea how flaky the pro-U.S. sides in these places were.

In May 1961 while he was pushing for a Conference on Laos, Sihanouk went to Luang Prabang -- where the Lao king, Savang Vatthana, told him to mind his own business. Sihanouk was livid. He flew right back to Phnom Penh and got the Foreign Ministry to deliver a note to all the Ambassadors well past midnight, calling a meeting with them at seven a.m. Ambassador Trimble went and listened to a Sihanouk diatribe for most of the morning. Sihanouk was uncontrollable, he screamed for hours. He claimed that he was “right,” he had been “right” in 1954, he gave a long history of Cambodia starting when he assumed the Throne in 1941. The Ambassador returned from this experience in a mild state of shock, I think. He wanted to report that Sihanouk had taken leave of his senses but the Deputy Chief of Mission, Bob Moore, probably talked him out of it.

Sihanouk’s main foreign policy ploy in those days was to build on the 1962 Geneva Conference on the Neutrality of Laos by convening a similar conference on Cambodia. I think he called it a “14-nation Conference” and he would of course be the star. The idea was to bring us together with Chou En-lai and all his other Communist buddies to guarantee Cambodia’s territorial integrity. That was supposed to bulwark the kingdom against the Thai and Vietnamese. He was endlessly ranting about this and attacking the US for being lukewarm toward it. Of course there was no way we could go along with that so we were interminably “studying” the idea. Naturally the Communist countries all supported his position because it scored them points in the diplomatic arena while costing them nothing.

Sihanouk had already been affected by the diplomacy of the Chinese and North Koreans whom he greatly admired. I think when he abdicated in the early 1950s, he swung over in the direction of what might be called “pop socialism.” He was frightened that the radicals would overthrow the monarchy. He never understood anything about socialist ideology but he thought it enhanced his popular image. You see at that time more and more young Cambodians were beginning to return from schooling abroad with socialist, even Communist views. The French Communist Party took them under its Stalinist wing, we used to say.

To offset the sobriquet of the “playboy Prince” he became the “socialist Prince” somewhat like Prince Souphanouvong in Laos, who was in fact a genuine Communist Party member. He formed a youth group named the “*Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère*,” the “Royale Khmer Socialist Youth.” They had brown uniforms and little red scarves and they worshipped Sihanouk. The intellectuals sneered. He said he was “building Khmer socialism,” with development projects. What nonsense! At the same time he presided over a classically corrupt, incompetent government of his cronies who were stealing everything they could from the nation. Meanwhile young intelligent Cambodians were coming back with foreign degrees and finding nothing to do unless they joined – i.e. were co-opted into the corrupt crony government. Most did, but others were outraged and became communists. Yet because of his ego Sihanouk could never step back from the scene and his own role in it, to try to understand it. And of course, no one would tell him the truth. They were too busy groveling and stealing.

So Sihanouk tended to dart back and forth among these contradictions until at last they overwhelmed him – but that was much later. Cambodia needed a big friend but not one that would stir up domestic opposition to him, especially among the increasingly radicalized youth. At some point he had decided that the US could not be relied on because of our interests in Thailand and South Vietnam. He railed about alleged constant threats of Thai and Vietnamese incursions during this time although I do not remember any serious ones. There was the perennial problem of the Thai occupation of the Cambodian temple of Preah Vihear, which I'll talk about later. And the Vietnamese occupied some border islands at one point. I think no one saw either of these as a *casus belli*, however. And there were some plots against him. This is all typical Southeast Asian politics, not different from the Arab world in fact. But of course Sihanouk was always the butt of the jokes, the object of the plots. The only way he could strike back was with his diatribes and his diplomacy.

So because of his wounded ego, and ostensibly to protect Cambodia from the Thai and Vietnamese and to try to build his credibility with the leftist youth, Sihanouk actively courted the Chinese Communists and they actively responded. The leadership of the Chinese community in Cambodia was largely purged of pro-Taiwan adherents and Chinese Communist police agents were secreted within the Cambodian “special police.” The Russians were also active, but Sihanouk's great allies were the Chinese. He figured that if there were ever any real threat the Chinese would come in. Of course by pushing the Chinese connection he was infuriating and frightening the Thai and Vietnamese, and the Khmer youth were not impressed anyway.

Sihanouk wanted desperately to be taken seriously but he also wanted to have a good time. Our attitude was that he was a loose cannon. We could not understand why he didn't see the American viewpoint, why he tried to undercut us on issues like Laos. USAID provided a lot of aid to Cambodia and he thanked us, but it seemed to mean nothing. The Chinese provided a few rundown factories that never worked, but he praised them to the skies. You may say we couldn't deal with him, and that was right. He wanted to be fawned over but at the same time not patronized. It was a difficult line to walk in dealing with him – Ambassador Trimble had an impossible job. In fact, Sihanouk had his ideas, his plans, and how he wanted to do things. His own people couldn't dissuade him from nutty ideas. They didn't even try because all they wanted was to make money for themselves. His principal wife Monique, her relatives, his other mistresses, they were all feeding from the trough he provided with a wave of his hand. Their corruption was staggering in such a poor country.

Let's say a crisis was going on, yet all of a sudden he would drop everything and get involved in making a movie. Once Jean Cocteau came to Cambodia to make a film set in ancient Angkor. Sihanouk got up to his ears in this, providing “technical assistance” on a day-to-day basis. He got so involved in this film, nothing else got done. When it premiered in Phnom Penh, the film was ludicrous – the Cambodian peasant characters spoke in the French subjunctive, which caused gales of laughter in the audience. Sihanouk was furious and walked out.

It was baffling to me why the prince could not develop better relations with the Thai, which could have solved a lot of their problems. In fact, diplomatic relations were broken about six months after I got there. During this period the Thai Prime Minister was Sarit Thanarat, a military dictator. He endlessly taunted and insulted Sihanouk. Later when he died, in 1963 I think, Sihanouk declared a week of national rejoicing in Cambodia; everyone wore little pink ribbons which were Buddhist symbols of joy. The insults were mostly related to the dispute between the two countries over the temple called Preah Vihear, built in the 11th century on the edge of the bluffs of the Dangrek Range, the border between northern Cambodia and Thailand. During the early 1960s this was a major factor, who had owned and who would get the temple. The World Court in The Hague was to rule on it.

Dean Acheson and the Temple Dispute

The Preah Vihear temple dispute occupied a lot of our time at the Embassy. It was the major diplomatic issue with the Thai. Secretary Acheson came as a lawyer, not a mediator, and it was dealt with but not settled. Preah Vihear is the Khmer name for the temple. In Thailand it is called Prah Viharn. Both names mean 'high' or 'holy' temple; in Sanskrit it would be *praya vihara*. The temple was built on the lip of a bluff about 600 feet high at the edge of the Dangrek Mountains, projecting out over the Cambodian plain. The Dangrek Range divides Thailand from northern Cambodia. Both the site and the temple are magnificent, especially from the air.

Preah Vihear is a typical Angkorian style temple, a small replica of Angkor Wat in fact. No one has ever contended that ethnic Thai built it. Most obviously the Khmers built it, probably in the 11th or 12th century. Some parts may be older. Now, the Dangrek Mountains in fact are the southern edge of the Korat plateau, the arid high plain due north of Cambodia. That part of Thailand was an integral part of the Ancient Khmer Empire. In historical times not many Thai lived there. Below the Dangrek cliffs to the south the terrain drops sharply to the Cambodian plain, which then slopes gradually down to the Tonle Sap, the Great Lake. There are also many other ancient Khmer ruins on the Korat plateau, including several well-preserved temples, at a great distance from the border. Cambodia has never claimed them, of course. But this one is different. Historical evidence shows it was related to Angkor, like Wat Phu in southern Laos.

During the years following the collapse of the Ancient Khmer Empire, the Thai pretty much incorporated all of Cambodia west of the Mekong River into what was then called Siam. When the French moved into Cambodia during the 19th century, they started to take it back. There were many border disputes. By 1900 it was clear that the border between French Indochina and Siam would have to be demarcated. Where the Mekong separated the two entities, as in most of Laos, that would be easy. Cambodia would be more difficult, because for many years Thailand had occupied the two westernmost provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap, the location of Angkor. Thai and Khmer lived on both sides of the border, sometimes far into Cambodia. In addition, pressure was extremely

heavy from the archaeologists of the *Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* in Saigon to get as much of Cambodia's archaeological patrimony into French Indochina as possible so French savants could study and restore the ruins. It was part of France's mission civilisatrice, restoring the glories of the ancient world. And of course, these two provinces were Cambodia's rice-basket. With Cambodia's sparse population, they would be able to provide rice for export.

The diplomatic picture was further complicated by the desire of several nations to establish coaling stations for their fleets on the Thai islands. The French worried that the Germans would do that, endangering their colony. It was the age when European nations scrambled for colonies, as much for prestige as for economic gain. For example, we took the Philippines about the same time. Finally the French moved troops into southern Thailand proper and occupied several important towns in order to force a border negotiation on their terms. In 1904-06, a joint Franco-Thai border commission traced the border, giving Battambang and Siem Reap to French Indochina. The leader of the French side was a brilliant Army officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard. At the end of the negotiation, he had gained for France hundreds of thousands of square kilometers. All France really gave up was the privilege of extra-territoriality for its nationals in Siam, which was indefensible anyway. Farther north, the French team successfully negotiated the incorporation of Sayaboury and Champassac provinces, which were west of the Mekong, into French Indochina. To this day they remain part of Laos. As a reward, Bernard was retired as a full Colonel with a *Legion d'Honneur*.

The demarcation principle accepted for the Dangrek range between Cambodia and Siam was, not surprisingly, 'crests and watersheds.' A line was traced on the French maps and surveyed on the ground following this principle. Since the Thai contingent had no maps, and could draw no maps – according to the French account they were drunk a good bit of the time – the French did the work of surveying and mapping. The Thai, by and large, agreed. It was a brilliant and rather typical negotiation between the purposeful West and the befuddled East of the times.

When they came to Preah Vihear there was a problem. The great shelf on which Preah Vihear stands drops sharply into Cambodia to the south, but slopes gradually northward into Siam. There is a long esplanade running to the north, and obviously the huge blocks of stone came from that direction. The temple is oriented to the north and east. Along that sloping plateau there are hummocks and valleys caused by erosion and stream flow. On the maps drawn originally by the French Delegation, the temple is shown as being in Cambodia by virtue of a dry streambed, which, if water were flowing in it, would probably flow off the edge of the precipice and into Cambodia. On the basis that it was therefore in the Cambodian watershed, the French claimed the temple in 1906, and the Thai did not object. French archaeologists visited and studied the temple up to the time of the Second World War. It was considered part of the Angkorian complex, lying at the end of a long road built by the Khmers in those centuries, but now of course fallen into disuse.

After the Japanese occupied French Indochina in 1942, Thailand moved back into the

Preah Vihear temple area. The Thai also reoccupied Battambang and Siem Reap provinces under Japanese rule. In 1947 they were forced to withdraw by the postwar settlement, but in 1954, when Cambodia received its independence, the Thai again occupied the temple. The Bangkok Government claimed that the French maps were fraudulent and had been imposed upon them in 1906 by a colonial power under threat of war. The Thai also pointed out that the lay of the terrain made it inconceivable that the temple had been built or worshipped from within Cambodia. They said that it was part of a feudal state on the Korat plateau, which the Thai had conquered and replaced many centuries ago. The French had never claimed the Korat Plateau, on which Preah Vihear stood. Therefore it belonged to Thailand, in their view.

Cambodia's position was simply that it was a Khmer temple, the French border maps placed it in Cambodia, and the Thai had stolen it from them. After a good bit of to-ing and fro-ing, the Cambodians took the case to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the 'ICJ.' By 1960 Sihanouk decided that Cambodia needed to hire a really high-powered lawyer to plead its case there. So the Cambodian Government engaged Dean Acheson, the former U.S. Secretary of State who had returned to private law practice in 1952. The Cambodian move was a shrewd one in several respects. Basically Sihanouk thought it hindered U.S. support for the Thai position. Well, we would not have gotten involved, of course, but he probably thought we would. Second the chief jurist on the court was a Polish judge. It was widely presumed that he would support the Cambodian case because of the Soviet desire to court Sihanouk. The Thai were complaining about this likelihood. Acheson's role as Cambodia's representative lent a cachet of impartiality to this potential outcome – it was presumed he wouldn't lend himself to a spurious judgment, especially from a Soviet bloc jurist.

Thailand was, as usual, taunting Cambodia on this issue and Sihanouk broke relations with the Thai in November 1961. The next year, Acheson was going to argue the Cambodian case before the ICJ in The Hague and naturally he wanted to see the temple. But Thailand continued to occupy the temple and would not let Acheson get access to it via Thai territory. Acheson had already met Sihanouk years earlier, I suppose at the UN. Naturally he came out to Cambodia to call on Sihanouk and discuss the case with the Cambodian Foreign Minister of the moment. Afterwards he wanted to see the temple. It was potentially too 'high-profile' to use the Defense Attaché aircraft from Saigon to fly him up to the Dangrek range to 'eye-ball' the temple. That would have been reported by the Thai at the site and caused big complications in Bangkok. So Charlie Mann arranged for a USAID contract flight in a civilian aircraft, which routinely ferried USAID personnel to various aid projects in Southeast Asia. The Ambassador had decided that Peter Poole should be the control officer, so he went along. The flight plan called for a survey of northern Cambodia, with a stop at Siem Reap. This was a routine sort of flight. The aircraft flew to the northeast and then cruised westward along the border, first with Laos, then with Thailand.

After circling Preah Vihear a few times at a respectful altitude, well inside Cambodia, the plane continued along the border to the west, then turned south and landed at the Siem

Reap airport. Acheson told Peter he had never toured Angkor Wat and wanted to see it. They were able to arrange for the Auberge des Ruines, the French guesthouse at the Angkor Park, to send a car and driver to take Acheson to see Angkor Wat, a few miles away. Now, the former Secretary of State was of course wearing his office shoes, so on the way Peter suggested they stop at the Siem Reap market to buy some Bata sneakers. He pointed out that the temples were full of bat-droppings and the causeway was muddy. They actually found a pair of sneakers that fit Acheson. Then they went off to see Angkor Wat. Peter Poole showed Acheson many of the bas-reliefs and explained them to him. Angkor you know is a funerary temple, oriented to the West to get the last rays of the setting sun. Acheson was fascinated and they drove around the archaeological park until late afternoon. Finally the pilot said they had to get back to the Phnom Penh airport before dark, otherwise he might lose his contract with USAID. So they flew back to Phnom Penh.

That evening there was a reception for Acheson and I got to talk to him. He was quite charming but had little regard for Asia. He said to several of us clustered around him: “you know these ex-colonies are never going to amount to anything. You young officers should try to get to Europe as quickly as possible. Don’t bother with this area. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is the whole thing. You have to associate your career with NATO now, at your early stage. Leave all of this area behind. These ancient civilizations are fascinating, but they’ll never amount to anything again.” Well, by this time most of those to whom he spoke, including myself, had fallen in love with Southeast Asia. We were rather appalled by his words. We felt that in Southeast Asia, for example a junior officer could deal with ministers, even the head of state as I had. That was not possible in Europe where Third Secretaries spoke only to other Third Secretaries.

But as it happened Acheson developed a good court case and the ICJ ruled in favor of Cambodia. The Court argued that although the French maps were inaccurate, the Thai had accepted them as a matter of policy for almost forty years, only seizing Preah Vihear under the umbrella of the Japanese take-over of the whole region. The logic was impeccable. No one challenged it, and there was national jubilation in Cambodia at the outcome. Ambassador Trimble and senior Embassy officers attended a great dinner at the Palace. The Thai were furious, but we leaned on them and they respected the decision. Marshall Sarit Thanarat, despite his virulent hatred for Sihanouk, ordered the Thai troops withdrawn from the temple precinct. They took down the barbed wire fences between Preah Vihear and what was now Cambodian soil. New fences were built along the dry streambed, which now marked the border with Cambodia. Cambodian troops were deployed in and around the temple. A few weeks later, Prince Sihanouk and the top government officials, plus the leaders of the Buddhist *sangha*, made a pilgrimage to Preah Vihear, climbing the steep cliffs to get there. It was a wonderful inspiring victory for Cambodia and the Khmer people.

Unfortunately it was also one that didn’t last very long in the public consciousness or Sihanouk’s mind. Of course he wasn’t concerned about the temple, only about the restoration of Cambodia’s sovereign rights and his own glorification. About two months

later, Dick Melville, a USAID officer who traveled quite a lot, went to the town just south of the temple, Cheom Khsan, on USAID business. While there he wangled a vehicle and drove to the base of the cliff on a road that had been improved for the Prince's visit several months earlier. He climbed the cliff and walked about the temple. He found that the handful of Khmer soldiers still there had not been resupplied for weeks. The whole country had just forgotten about them. Some had left the temple and wandered away, others went down to Cheom Khsan to buy food. They had also gotten food from the Thai soldiers who guarded the other side of the barbed-wire fence along the streambed, which now marked the border. The soldiers told Melville that the Thai were kind, but also made fun of them. That's a perfect description of the Thai.

So that was the outcome of the temple dispute, with Dean Acheson and the ICJ. The Cambodians had a big one-day splash, and that was all. Four years later, in 1966, the Thai moved back into the temple enclosure briefly and border incidents continued in the Dangrek range for many years. After 1970 the Khmer Rouge occupied the whole northern area of Cambodia and I presume they controlled the temple. As I write, almost 50 years later, the Thai and Cambodians still come occasionally to the brink of war over the temple on the brink of the Dangrek range.

USAID at Work

Probably the most influential American official in the country was the AID (Agency for International Development) Director, Charles Mann. He was a very skilful bureaucratic warrior and had climbed rapidly through the ranks of AID, starting as an end-use checker on the docks in Saigon only a few years before. As AID Director, he presided over more money and people than anyone in Cambodia. He got along with the Prince very well, and frequently went to see him with no one else along. Basically he tried to give the Prince anything he wanted while limiting the damage on various problems that had marred the aid program in Cambodia since the beginning.

Most of the problems had to do with the commodity import programs (CIP) and budget support programs. These were basically just pots of money made available to local importers and government officials with virtually no USG supervision. Charles Mann was a recognized expert in these programs, which were supposed to generate counterpart national currencies to finance development programs. It worked this way: a businessman could buy dollars at the official rate in Cambodian riels, then use the dollars to import some useful product -- let's say truck axles. Then he sold the axles at the black-market rate, perhaps tripling his money. With the riels he bought more dollars, etc. Of course some of them never imported anything, just dummied the invoices.

For example, in the alleged "Green-Spot Bottle swindle," a Sino-Thai businessman named Songsakd Kitchphanich, with Palace connections, got USAID money to import bottles for a soft-drink factory he was allegedly building in Phnom Penh. He had bribed the Cambodian railway officials all the way from the Thai frontier and got the USAID money even though no bottles were imported and no factory ever built. All the paper

work went through USAID and no one ever checked it. To its credit USAID tried to get the Khmer Government to investigate but Songsakd had somehow gotten himself “adopted” by Queen Kossamak, Sihanouk’s mother. So that was the end of that.

Another AID problem was the deteriorating Khmer-American highway to Sihanoukville, which I mentioned earlier. If I remember correctly, the problem came when the consulting engineers, who were supposed to monitor the project, got into cahoots with the contractors who were building it. Even before the road was finished, it started falling apart, and become impassable in some places. Unlike the French, the engineers apparently did not account for the fierce tropical rains and the problem of drainage. In contrast, the Soviets were praised for having built the port at Kompong Som, renamed Sihanoukville, so that the Cambodians would not have to bring everything up the river from through Saigon. Our road went there but heavy traffic could not use it.

Sihanouk wanted to use his own port. The only other access to the sea from Phnom Penh was a narrow colonial road to Kampot, which was not a decent port. We had told the Congress that the road was needed to support our involvement in the war in Laos; at least that was our rationale. We thought it would make Sihanouk like us too. We didn’t understand that the context in which he had chosen to operate made this impossible, i.e. the friend of my enemies cannot be my friend. Sihanouk was building a railroad to the port, but it was never completed and became something of a joke. We were also improving other parts of Cambodia, and helping with the railway. Of course this entire infrastructure became extremely useful to the Communists after the Prince broke relations with us, when the FARK was bribed to transship supplies to the Vietcong. It became a major alternative to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And of course after Sihanouk was overthrown, the road came under the sway of the Khmer Rouge. So that is a lesson never to build a road lightly, especially if it falls apart while you’re building it.

The Station

The station chief was a very good guy and extremely able. He had been in China with the OSS during the war and loved the Asian countryside. Like him, the station seemed heavily focused on China, Chinese activities in Cambodia, and the Chinese community, which was riven with strife. There were a lot of China experts in the station including one who later became Ambassador to China.

So I had the impression that the station was heavily focused on things Chinese. We had no diplomatic relations with Beijing at the time and were still enemies from the Korean War. My feeling was that the station was only tangentially interested in Cambodia itself.

The agency had been badly burned in 1958-59 when an American said to be a staffer was allegedly observed taking a radio transmitter to a renegade warlord in the northwest, Dap Chhuon. The latter was eventually caught and tried, and the staffer’s expulsion from Cambodia embarrassed the agency and I suspect reduced any great desire to meddle in Khmer politics. From then on I think they concentrated on intelligence collection against

the Chinese and Vietnamese “targets,” properly so I suspect. I had the feeling their main concern with Cambodia was how it impinged on their objectives for Communist China and Vietnam. I emphasize I had no direct knowledge of this. And indeed, the China hands from all agencies in general were concentrated in SEA because they couldn’t serve on the mainland of course. So quite rightly they focused on China, our principal adversary in Asia. Later I learned there were great struggles over designating positions for Chinese language officers because those positions tended to be lost to SEA specialists.

Relations between the station and the rest of the Embassy were excellent. We were all good friends. I got to know the station chief, Bob, quite well in the course of my tour in Cambodia. In fact we made a couple of lengthy trips together. I doubt this could happen now, everything has become too stratified. I doubt that station chiefs fraternize with junior officers from other agencies any more. But then, one of the nice things about serving in Southeast Asia in the 1960s was the camaraderie that often extended across agencies and ranks. I could detect little of the bureaucratic separatism and infighting which have developed in later years as all the agencies grew too large and developed their own interests. Then too in the 1960s there were far fewer agencies involved, so the missions were smaller. Morale was excellent, everyone knew each other and there was the bond of the anti-Communist effort.

The station had a number of fine officers while I was there, and most of them lived their cover quite well. They would turn over to the political section memoranda of conversations not acquired by clandestine activity. We saw occasional reports that the station prepared on Cambodia. Most of them were what the Prince had said on some subject or other. Frankly, you could find that out at cocktail parties. The Cambodians were very open people. It was usually not difficult to find out what was going on, except about corruption and the left. No one would ever talk about stealing. There were no reports from inside the Pracheachon Party, the crypto-communist party to which Pol Pot (then known as Saloth Sar) and other radicals secretly belonged. The agency must have never penetrated them – or if they had, the information was too sensitive for my level.

As I mentioned, in Phnom Penh we all saw each other socially very often and that helped quite a lot. The station chief was very popular with everyone. He was very likable. He was a sleepy looking guy, the sort you’d never notice in a crowd, like John le Carré’s George Smiley. Underneath the quiet façade Bob was a dynamic and erudite guy who ran a good station. I imagine that he had been brought in to repair things after the alleged Dap Chhuon incident. In later years Bob retired early from the agency and became a magazine publisher or so I heard. Very recently I read that he had passed away. I have great memories of our trips together, one to a little-known area of the northeast, the new province of Mondulakiri, early on in my tour.

The Trip to Mondulakiri

In early December 1961, the rains had ended and the countryside began to dry out though it was still lush and green. The roads became passable into the tribal areas of the

northeast: Kratie, Stung Treng, Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri provinces. The latter two provinces were the southernmost extension of the Annamite Cordillera, the great mountainous spine of Indochina, which is itself an extension of the Himalayas. The new provinces had been specially carved out for development purposes, to show that the Royal Khmer Government was taking care of the tribal brethren, the *Khmers loeu*. Otherwise, of course, they feared the Vietnamese would move into those areas.

There were three types of highland peoples in Cambodia, whom the French lumped together in the name *montagnards*. The *Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* had issued an ethno-linguistic map of Indochina in 1955 which made the peninsular look like it had a bad case of multi-colored measles. First there were ethnic Khmers, officially called "highland Cambodians" or "*khmer loeu*" – the obverse of the *khmer krom* or "lower Cambodians" who lived in South Vietnam. Then there were the *montagnards* of Malayo-Polynesian descent, the *Rhade* and *Jarai*, well known in the highlands of Vietnam. These were the aristocrats of the highlands, with strong, vibrant cultures. They lived mostly farther north, in Ratanakiri, and across the border in the Vietnamese highlands. Some of the third group was Negrito, others perhaps of Mon origin. Ordinary Cambodians of the plains tended to call all of them "*phnong*," which meant "savages" or "barbarians."

In Mondulakiri the main tribal peoples were from a Mon group called the "*Stieng*." By chance the subject of visiting this, the nearest easternmost province, came up at one of the station chiefs parties. Another junior officer, Peter Poole, was at the party. Once he had driven part of the way to Sen Monorum, the "capital" of the province, in the rainy season but had to turn back because the road was impassable. He wanted to go again. Bob had never been there but was anxious to re-live his OSS travels in tribal areas of China during the War. After a few drinks the three of us decided to go together. It would be an adventure.

So on December 7, 1961, the twentieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor, we set off in Peter's World War II-model Jeep to Mondulakiri Province via the main road to the provincial capital of Kompong Cham and then to a town called Snoul. The jeep had come to Indochina as part of Marshall Plan aid to the French. Peter had recently had it checked at the JUSMAAG motor pool garage and assured us it could make the trip. He always got a bit testy when defending his vehicle. We later found that in his vehement assurances was a certain degree of unwarranted pride in his vehicle. It had been built in the 1940s and spent the better part of ten years deteriorating in various parts of Indochina, a breakdown waiting to happen. Bob and I joked that if Peter's jeep broke down and we couldn't get back, we would spend "a cool Yule in Snoul." This of course was prophetic.

We drove north from Phnom Penh on a lovely fresh morning and crossed the Tonle Sap River at Oudong on the old French colonial ferry. Farther north at Skuon the main road forks east toward Kampong Cham. There we crossed the Mekong on a new, larger ferry. The weather was perfect; fleecy clouds blew over the mighty brown river, which was lined with the old French colonial buildings and bustling with riverside commerce. After we crossed the river, the road stayed good and very soon we came to the main rubber

plantation areas at Memot and Chup.

There are few forests more beautiful than a rubber tree grove, deep and green, well-tended with virtually no underbrush. We stopped for a few minutes beside the measured rows of rubber trees and watched the white latex dripping down each tree into a little cup. The brush was carefully trimmed so that all the nutrients of the rich red laterite soil would go to the trees. There were a few small sheds where the latex was being cured and the odor of smoking rubber came on a breeze through the open forest. Workers in Vietnamese (not Khmer) field clothes could be seen moving among the trees, and the ambiance was peaceful and otherworldly.

At one place new small trees were being planted. The old uprooted trees were piled to one side for burning and a few kilometers to the south, across the newly open field, we could see a French villa. There the manager of the plantation must have lived. Judging from the map, it could not have been more than a few hundred meters from the Vietnamese border. Producing quality rubber was a French art form and no Cambodian officials would bother the plantations. Every cup of latex meant a few francs of foreign exchange for this struggling under-developed country. Probably there was also an arrangement with the Vietminh on the other side of the border. Here the French once again were in their own circle; they knew how to handle such situations.

Then further on where the main road turned north again, at the small town of Snoul, we stopped for lunch - rice and dried fish. At Snoul we had finally joined the old Route Coloniale 13. It began at Saigon and ran north more than a thousand miles to the royal Laotian capital of Luang Prabang. Just north of Snoul, we turned east onto a muddy track with traces of cobblestones and paving here and there. This track generally followed a watercourse, the Chhlong River, really just a stream. It flowed through a valley where old rubber trees, no longer productive, had turned into jungle. There were small wooden or concrete bridges over the tributary streams and some were in bad repair. It was slow going. After a little while the big jungle trees thinned out and heavy dense bamboo ran right along the sides of the track and arched over the road. Once this too had been a great forest but tribal "slash-and-burn" agriculture over the countless centuries had leached the soil. Nothing could grow except bamboo. We started blowing the horn at every sharp turn for fear a Cambodian Army truck or other vehicle might be hurtling downhill toward us at any moment. But we saw nothing through the bamboo or on the road. We knew from the maps that the road skirted the border with Vietnam, only a few kilometers away. At one point Bob - harkening to his OSS days - said: "there could be a Vietminh patrol five feet off the road and we could pass and never see them." We were all a bit nervous.

But then the road began to climb, still in dense bamboo, and dried a bit so we could move faster. We crisscrossed the terrain on switchbacks still blowing the horn and beginning to feel chilly in our light clothing. Down on the plain it simply hadn't occurred to us that it would be chilly but of course we were now on the Mondulkiri plateau at 3,000 feet in December, a cooler time. Luckily we had brought light jackets and extra shirts, but not much more because there was no room for luggage in the jeep. Finally the track leveled

off and we came into a clearing with a tribal village in the shade of several huge tropical trees. It was Phum Loeu, "highlands town." There were two dozen or so huts, some fancier than the rest and on stilts, others on the ground. Some had woodcarving under the eaves. Cooking fires were smoking and there was forest litter everywhere. Pigs and chickens and children abounded; tribal women in short ragged sarongs moved among the huts, carrying baskets of rice and vegetables. But it was not a wealthy village. Everyone simply looked sick and dirty.

There were a few men wearing loincloths and one of them, an older man, approached when we stopped. He was obviously the village headman. He carried an old rifle and had a hand-made tribal machete in a beaded wooden sheath at his side. Peter addressed him in Khmer, using the honorific phrase for greeting a stranger of high rank. As it turned out, he had served in the French army France years earlier and been to Marseilles. We were stunned. All day since we had crossed the Mekong we had felt that we were driving into another world, another circle, the old French Indochina of the montagnards, a far-off exotic land. And here it was, in the figure of a tribal chief in a loincloth who had served in the colonial army and seen Marseille.

We chatted innocuously with the headman for a few moments and started to move on. Soon after leaving the village we emerged from the forest and moved onto the endless rolling grassy hills of the plateau, golden and shimmering in the dry season wind and the late afternoon sunlight. The breeze was blowing hard, the light was beautiful and it looked as though the Kansas wheat fields had been moved here and set down at 3,000 feet of altitude. The hills stretched on to the horizon in all directions, with light forest in the little valleys where streams and rivulets glistened in the sunlight. The dirt road was excellent now and we moved handily along. Occasionally we saw someone in the distance, perhaps a Stieng hunter with a crossbow moving out across the hills looking for game in the fading light. In the distance there appeared to be stockaded towns. It was another dream landscape, like the central plains with the phnoms sticking up topped with temples. Very shortly we came to the main town of the area, O-Raing, probably a busy place with a market, but now deserted in the late afternoon. It was marked on the old French maps. The road forked here and we turned north toward the provincial capital of Sen Monorum, a new small town with just a few wooden Cambodian government buildings surrounded by a stockade. We did not stop there since we had planned to spend the night at Poste Deshayes, an old French fort 15 kilometers away that was right on the border. A USAID officer, Richard Melville, had been in Mondulkiri the previous year and spent the night there. Following his advice was our second mistake.

We were about five kilometers beyond Sen Monorum when two things happened. First, the jeep engine simply quit and the jeep coasted to a halt. Second, darkness fell, and I mean you could almost hear the crash. Night comes quickly in the tropics and at this height the air was clear and dry. First there was a sky of rose and pearl, then one of dim gray, then one of black, all in a few minutes. Suddenly we were alone in the breeze under a huge black sky with a million stars and no moon, trying to decide whether to walk east to Post Deshayes or go back to Sen Monorum where we should have stopped in the first

place.

Now, all day Bob had been regaling Peter and me with tales of his exploits evading Japanese and Communist patrols during his OSS days in China. So here we were, probably within a few hundred meters of the Vietnamese border in the no-man's-land of the Da Lat Plateau. I rapidly formed the impression that we might be in some kind of trouble. Peter Poole acted nonchalant, but that was a pose. He was trying to live down the failure of his beloved jeep. We were both FSO-8s, at the time the most junior category of Foreign Service officers. Being in a quasi-war zone at night was relatively new to both of us so we were a bit nervous. Finally Bob said: "we'll walk along the road for a while and go back to that town we passed through. If we go the other way we may walk into South Vietnam." So we opted for the known, Sen Monorum, and started walking.

After about twenty minutes Bob said: "we should move off the road once in a while and wait for a few minutes till we get closer to the town. I'll count off the paces and then we'll go rest off the road." So we did that a few times, going over a ridge and onto a reverse slope and looking back towards the road. Then I realized why he wanted to do that. After one maneuver we looked back and saw three people walking the same direction along the road. Perhaps they were hill people, perhaps Cambodian troops, perhaps Vietminh. After they had passed out of sight, we moved back near the road but walked beside it in the grass, looking carefully ahead.

Finally we came to Sen Monorum, surrounded by a stockade. Bob said: "Here is how we should handle this situation. The Cambodian Army people will be nervous about sudden intruders. We can't just walk in. Right now, we should turn on our flashlights, wave them around, and start yelling in Khmer, run forward inside the gate and fall on our faces so we don't get shot." So we did that. The town had a gate, which was actually open. You could see couple of little huts inside. We ran up inside the gate and fell to the ground, waving the flashlights and shouting the Khmer word for "help!" Shortly after that, a door opened in one building and some people came out with flashlights and saw us lying there. We stood up slowly with our hands up. They said: "oh, you're white people, how did you get here from Saigon?" We answered that we were from Phnom Penh, not Saigon. A soldier, who turned out to be a Lieutenant commanding the post, said: "oh yes, we saw you come through in a jeep. You were leaking oil. Why didn't you stop? You're breaking the law and you're going to jail. Where are your passports?"

For the time being, we were safe though perhaps in some diplomatic trouble. Peter and I had diplomatic ID cards, but Bob had no documentation whatsoever. He told the Lieutenant to radio back to Cambodian Army headquarters and get in touch with a certain officer, who would vouch for him. The Lieutenant seemed to know that officer's name, and we spent the rest of the night sleeping on wooden pallets in the town's infirmary. We noticed there were no medical supplies of any kind in this facility.

The next morning they drove us out to the Jeep with a mechanic. There had been a leak in the oil pan and he fixed it. It was miraculous we hadn't burned out the engine. At the jeep

I was able to get my “*exequatur*,” the document host governments customarily accord to consular officers after they present their commissions. The purpose is to facilitate their work in support of their own citizens, a main function of consular officers. I always traveled with it because Prince Sihanouk had himself signed it, in blue ink. When a Cambodian official saw that signature, the bearer became more than an accredited Consul, indeed an honored guest. In fact, everyone who saw the *exequatur* responded with a respectful “*wai*,” i.e. their hands in a praying position as a sign of respect. That kind of greeting is called a “*wai*,” it is used for everything. The lower ranking person must “*wai*” first. After seeing the *exequatur* the Cambodians could not do enough for us.

After repairing the Jeep, we all drove to Post Deshayes, walked across the border into Vietnam and took pictures with the fort in the background. We drove back to Sen Monorum, had lunch, and went to visit a few development projects. They were along a track that ran north from Sen Monorum across the grassy hills, and ended many hundreds of kilometers further north. Stieng tribes people were being resettled into “model” communities with substantial housing and stockade fences, partially funded by USAID. There were also some lowland Khmer in the settlement. They had been persuaded to move up to the highlands with money, oxen, land, a house etc. Wells had been dug and there were plows and other farming implements lying about. However, they were also promised medical support, which was never forthcoming. Most of the Khmer came from the rubber plantation areas not far way. The purpose of these settlements was to anchor the land against the Vietnamese, but it wasn’t working. We were told that as soon as the money ran out, the Khmer went back to their villages in the lowlands. For one thing, they were afraid of the Vietminh. For another, they resented being settled with the people of the hill-tribes whom they regarded as barbarians and tried to treat as inferior servants.

Then we went to see a Rhade village right on the border. The Rhade were a Malayo-Polynesian, not a Mon-Khmer people. They looked like Malays or Indonesians. They were basically hunters and gatherers, not farmers although they planted some rice. Late in the afternoon as we watched, Rhade men with crossbows were leaving the village to stake out the waterholes in the little valleys where streams flowed. I was told that a hunter would lie motionless on a tree branch with his crossbow cocked for hours, perhaps all night, for that one moment when a small deer would come to drink. Their traditional way of life may have seemed noble and romantic but of course the reality was in the faces of the women and children, who simply looked sick and dirty.

The officials had taken us to this village to demonstrate the benefits of resettlement to the stockaded villages, which we’d already seen. Nevertheless these people did not wish to be resettled. They were happy living right on the border where both sides had difficulty controlling them. In the settlements the Cambodian government had tried to stop them from wearing tribal dress, the sarongs and loincloths. Sihanouk had put out an edict that the women had to wear shirts, the men sarongs or shorts instead of loincloths. They did not like this. The government wanted them to wear the “*krama*,” the stereotypical Khmer red-checked scarf. But they would rather die than be mistaken for a Khmer.

In Sen Monorum we spent a second aching night trying to sleep on the wooden pallets and the next morning headed back for Phnom Penh. It was a long and uneventful drive, but we talked excitedly of our great adventure. I had learned much about the country. And I had taken lots of pictures, which later, as the post graphics coordinator, I sent back to Washington for INR/G – the “graphics register” (I’ll talk about the “graphics coordinator” job later when I discuss my time in the Consular section). In 1970 when U.S. forces invaded that area of Cambodia, I felt a great deal of pride that perhaps my photos from the trip had saved a few American lives because the tactical commanders had pictures of the roads and terrain. That was the purpose of what I was doing as graphics coordinator – the first officer stationed at Phnom Penh who had undertaken that job. Before me, no one had been interested.

The photos were not the only souvenirs. Bob had warned us not to get too friendly with people we met in the field, but Peter and I did get pretty chummy with the Lieutenant. Figuring we’d never see him again, we invited him to visit the Embassy. Unfortunately he showed up and became a terrible pest. He wanted money, visas to the states, a scholarship for his nephew, medical assistance for his relatives, etc. He tried to get the servants to let him into our apartments. It was the usual grasping Southeast Asian attempt to victimize the foreigners. We gave him a few things and eventually he went away after we complained about him to the JUSMAAG.

Transfer to the Consular Section

Although I was a junior officer and should have been quietly accompanying more senior officers on demarches and the like, in order to learn the business, neither Trimble nor his successor, Ambassador Sprouse, took junior officers along to the Palace or to see Ministers. So I didn’t get to see how they handled the Prince. And after my eight months in the Political Section I had been transferred to the consular section as part of my junior officer rotation. After that I rapidly lost touch with the course of politics in the country. I think the Embassy managers were happy to stash me down in consular because a new and very competent officer had arrived in the Political Section, Steve Lyne, with a Ph. D. in political science from Stanford. Moreover, the section chief Dan Arzac had been replaced by an FSO named Herb Gordon. I knew I had to get some consular experience so I didn’t object – it wouldn’t have mattered anyway.

Well, there simply was not a great deal of consular work. Cambodians, as a people, did not like to leave Cambodia in those years. Exile was the worst punishment. Under their Buddhist beliefs, if a Cambodian died outside Cambodia, he or she would be further condemned to an endless cycle of re-births and never reach nirvana. They would never get off the “wheel of suffering.” Much of this may have changed now because of the national trauma of the Khmer Rouge, but then even wealthy people and government officials were nervous about going abroad for very long.

Ergo, very few Cambodians came to the Consular Section to request visas to the States, which after all was 12,000 miles away. About the only visa work I did was 300 or so

“participants” in USAID or USIS programs. In the case of USAID participants, most were students who would go for the academic year. All of them left at the same time. USAID did all the preparatory paper work for them, filling out the forms, etc. My Cambodian FSN employee, nicknamed “Expert” because he knew so much about the process, stamped the visa in their passports. I just had to sign my name on the right line.

There were very few official or non-official Americans in Cambodia apart from the tourists who were there for a weekend at Angkor at most. Pretty much the same process applied to Cambodian visas for newly arrived Americans. “Expert” had formerly been a Cambodian Foreign Ministry Consular official before he got his job with the Embassy. He knew everyone in the Cambodian Ministries of Foreign affairs and Interior. He was so well wired that he had all the Cambodian rubber visa stamps in the office – he did all that work himself, filling out the forms and entering the stamps properly in the American passports. Then he would announce he was going to the Foreign Ministry, and disappear for the day. I supposed he simply took the passports to some friends in the ministries for signature and seal. For all I knew, he signed them himself. He had a stock of Cambodian diplomatic ID cards and pasted the photos in himself, then got them signed somewhere. Finally, he was a whiz at the occasional American passport case – renewal, new baby, marriage, etc. I tried to learn as much as I could about consular work, but “Expert” – invariably polite and cheerful – blocked me at every turn. He wasn’t letting anyone else learn too much and perhaps break his rice-bowl by hiring someone new who could do his job. In fact, there was no chance of that.

There was the occasional welfare and protection case. ‘Expert’ had great antennae for sensitive cases and would bring them right in to me. But that was it. He was really a great bureaucrat, presumably trained by the French. On anything controversial, he would offer virtually no advice – just pull the disappearing act. I always knew something controversial was coming when ‘Expert’ suddenly came in to have me sign a leave request. Then he went on leave. One of these cases brought me afoul of the powerful USAID Director, Charlie Mann. Another got me involved with the station via a ‘Trotskyite’ Vietnamese émigré. A third involved a Hungarian refugee who was deported from the U.S., allegedly for spying. These three cases were the only Consular fun I had in nine months in the Consular section.

The AID case came first. One day an USAID officer came to me with an “adoption” case. There was a U.S. doctor and his wife from the Tom Dooley Foundation, stationed in Kratie in the northeast, who wanted to adopt a Cambodian child. The Tom Dooley Foundation did lots of good work in Laos and Cambodia. It was reportedly also a cover for certain special activities, but I have no personal evidence of this. Tom Dooley was a heroic U.S. Navy doctor who in the 1950s helped to evacuate non-communist Vietnamese refugees from North Vietnam and get them to the South. He wrote several books on this subject and I believe died in the 1960s. The Foundation was named after him and emplaced medical doctors to treat the sick in some pretty isolated places in Southeast Asia. The doctor in Kratie had had a young child of his own who had drowned in the Mekong River. Another of his children had died of disease. Yet he was engaged in

adopting a Cambodian child. I felt a bit uncomfortable about that. I had heard that other Americans had been able to purchase Cambodian children from their parents. The adoption procedures were often “worked through” the Cambodian government with bribery. I must admit that I had no firm information on this particular case but it struck me as been odd. A *doctor* had lost one child through drowning and another through disease, and now was adopting a third?

So I discussed it with “Expert.” He brought me the Consular Section of the Foreign Affairs Manual, the so-called “FAM,” and went on leave – signaling that this was a sensitive matter. In reading the FAM, I found a sentence that said if the Consular official has any reason to believe that the case in question is not a bona fide adoption, he should refuse the visa. I felt I did have such a reason, and refused.

In doing so I stirred up a hornet’s nest. Charlie Mann came personally to the Consular Section to exert pressure on this case. I must say the more fuss that emerged, the more suspicious I got, and the more I stood my ground. Finally Bob Moore, the Deputy Chief of Mission, called me up to his office and ordered me to issue the visa. I explained the reasons why I could not do that, as a matter of conscience. The DCM finally said: ‘well, all right, I’ll issue the visa.’ He cabled back to Washington, got the necessary authorization, and issued the visa to the child. That was fine, it was his decision. For myself, however, I didn't want to do it, as a matter of conscience. Perhaps I was right, perhaps not.

A little vignette of Indochina’s history emerged soon after my arrival in the Consular section. One day a diminutive Vietnamese in a white suit and tie came to my office and said he would to get to know me better. He invited me to lunch at *La Taverne*, the restaurant frequented by many French expatriates near the main post office. I saw no reason not to go. So the next day I put on my white suit, the little guy showed up, and we went off to *La Taverne* in a big Citroen limousine. That car should have made me suspicious, but it didn’t. While we were looking at the menu, into the restaurant walked a man with the type of camera used for news photos, and snapped a picture of the two of us. I said: “hold on! What’s going on? I haven’t done anything with this man. I don’t even know who he is! Why are you taking a picture?”

Then the Vietnamese man said: “I am the last living Trotskyite member of the Indochinese Communist Party. All of the rest of my comrades were murdered by Ho Chi Minh. . . .” So I said: “Goodbye, I’m leaving.” I rushed out of the restaurant and back to the Embassy. I went straight to the station chief and told him the whole story. The next day when the photo appeared in the newspapers, I was lectured by the Front Office not to accept such invitations but as it turned out the station was interested in the man. So that cushioned it a bit. I don’t know what ever happened to him after that.

The final interesting case involved a Hungarian refugee who had gone to the U.S. after the Hungarian revolt in 1956. One day he walked into the Consular Section with a UN “stateless person” certificate asking for a visa. He told me he had left the States, but not

why. He had spent several years wandering around the world, including a few months living in a monastery in Thailand. He was a gypsy violinist, and had worked in a restaurant in Hong Kong for a while. There he had gotten a visa to Cambodia, and was in the process of opening a Hungarian restaurant in Phnom Penh, or so he said. He was a very engaging guy and quite credible. He planned to return to the States to get some financial backing, then come back to open his restaurant. To tide himself over, he was playing the violin in a local French restaurant. His bona fides seemed okay, and I was on the verge of issuing the visa.

But my recent adventure with “the last Trotskyite in Indochina” made me nervous and I thought I’d better check with a knowledgeable source. I decided to call the U.S. Consul General in Saigon for advice. He was an experienced Consular officer. He knew the name and said the applicant had requested a U.S. visa in Saigon some weeks before. He had turned him down informally since he was not a resident of South Vietnam. He told the applicant to try elsewhere. So obviously he had come to Phnom Penh to try here. The Consul General in Saigon suggested that I tell him to apply in Hong Kong, where he had apparently lived for some time. Joking, he said: “Transferring a difficult case to a bigger section is the noblest act of consular man.” So I refused the visa and suggested that the applicant apply in Hong Kong, and never saw him again.

A week later someone came down from the station. He had read my weekly activity report, and noted the name. He said the applicant had indeed come to the U.S. as a Hungarian refugee but had been deported on suspicion of being a ‘double-agent,’ i.e. possibly a Soviet spy. He also suggested that I let them know about all visa applicants immediately. I decided to do that via memo through the front office, which praised me for being alert.

Those were my only interesting Consular cases. So basically I sat there in the Consular section, day-after-day, with nothing to do. I had just been a busy political officer and now I was going out of my mind. So I started reading the entire “Foreign Affairs Manual,” the “FAM,” which had numerous sections on the various aspects of Foreign Service work. I learned there was a classified section of the manual, called “political affairs.” I tracked that down and read it cover to cover. I should have done that before I arrived at the Embassy, but no one told me it existed. I read the whole section on administration of overseas posts, what the Ambassador and DCM were supposed to be doing. It was illuminating.

In the political affairs section of the FAM I found there were a number of functions related to ostensibly *overt* intelligence collection, which were normally performed by Foreign Service officers, not by officers in the station. By definition this meant collecting intelligence without paying for it. The station officers were engaged in clandestine intelligence activities, i.e. recruiting spies for pay or whatever. On the overt side there were three functional taskings: the “Publications Procurement Officer,” the “Map Coordinator,” and the “Graphics Coordinator.” These functions were performed by Foreign Service officers – if they were done at all. The results would appear in USG

publications of all sorts, classified and unclassified. In most Embassies someone was named for these functions, but often nothing was done. No FSOs wanted to be tagged as “spies.” So I checked the Embassy duty list and found Bill Thomas had done the pubs and maps. No one had done the graphics.

I was really interested because I loved photography, and had no qualms about career damage. This function would get me out of the office and into the countryside. I went to the station and they were delighted to have me do that. No one had done it before, and they had no station personnel to do it. Of course the DCM approved, but didn’t have a clue what I was going to do. The station thought it was a great idea. It provided me with film and taught me how to use the station’s darkroom. So off I went taking pictures of roads, bridges, terrain, buildings, and rivers, just everything. The Army Attaché’s office was happy to supply me with very detailed maps of the interior and charts of the coast. Where I had spoken to people, I reported that. It was good provincial reporting, and I got to write a lot. The “OM” format was not subject to any clearance or approval from the Embassy and was not classified, but “administratively controlled”. It went only to INR, not to the desk. They liked the material in INR – later when I worked in that Bureau several analysts remembered the OMs.

In those years INR and the agency produced the “National Intelligence Survey,” (NIS) a multi-volume study of all aspects of every country on earth. My photos illustrated a number of “pubs” on Cambodia in addition to the NIS. I went around to news bureaus, collecting photos of Cambodian politicians and government officials. They were used in biographic studies. I asked friends to borrow and submit their negatives, promising them free film in return. And all the terrain shots were valuable for military use if we ever wanted to conduct military operations in Cambodia – as we did after the overthrow of Sihanouk in 1970. Meanwhile I was lost down in the consular section and largely forgotten by the Embassy. At last I felt I was doing something useful in a larger context than issuing visas to USAID trainees. In the process, I got to some interesting places.

Trips to the Vietnamese Border

During this period, the situation was drastically worsening in South Vietnam. The Diem government had virtually withdrawn from the countryside, as I had reported after my trip to Phnom Den with Bill Thomas a year earlier. In Washington there was mounting concern everyday about what to do. No one cared about Cambodia, and no one knew what to do to get Sihanouk on board with U.S. policy toward Vietnam.

For Khmer-Vietnamese relations the most sensitive areas were the lowlands around the Mekong River, a major source of supplies for the country since Saigon was the major port between Hong Kong and Bangkok. During this time there was much traffic in goods coming up the Mekong River from Saigon and toward Cambodia. This was the era of Sihanouk’s “*oases de paid*.” River traffic had declined slightly because of Sihanouk’s efforts to bring more goods in via the port of Sihanoukville on the Gulf. It was not until much later, the Khmer Rouge period after 1970, that anyone interdicted Mekong River

traffic to Phnom Penh. I reiterate that the Vietminh, directed by North Vietnam, were enjoying positive benefits through an amicable relationship with Cambodia. I think Sihanouk may have thought that if Hanoi took over South Vietnam, they would be so preoccupied with pacifying the south that they would leave Cambodia alone. But he didn't reckon with the Khmer Rouge. Neither did the Cambodian Army when it overthrew Sihanouk in 1970.

Probably an early version of what became the Ho Chi Minh trail was functioning then and perhaps we had been standing near it on our trip to Mondulhiri, but the scale of the operation was much smaller in 1961. In that period I think the Vietminh were still conducting hit-and-run attacks, not operating in South Vietnam as main force units requiring massive supplies. Mostly they could live off the land. I'm sure stuff was coming down through Laos and probably through part of Cambodia along the network of colonial roads and tracks the French had built years earlier. This was later perfected by the North Vietnamese engineers and became known as the Ho Chi Minh trail. I had mentioned earlier the presumption during our trip to Sen Monorum that all along that border there were "arrangements" with the Vietminh. I mentioned that Bill Thomas had learned Vietnamese because he wanted to read Ho Chi Minh in the original. He patronized a Vietminh-controlled bookstore in Phnom Penh and was ordering books there directly from Hanoi. Once when he complained that his order was months overdue, the proprietor – who thought he was Russian – apologized saying: "it's a long walk through the mountains from Hanoi." So stuff was getting through but at that stage I would guess nothing more than could be transported on the back of a man. After all we had walked part of the trail, from Post Deshayes to Sen Monorum and seen only three men, not a logistics train. And it was unclear who they were.

Another issue was the tactical or battlefield use of Cambodian territory by the Vietminh of that era. Yes, it was being used tactically I am sure. Knowing how venal the Cambodian Army, the FARK, was, I'm sure bribes were passing one way and supplies the other. But not on a huge scale. I do not recall any major Vietnamese communist incursions into Cambodia while I was there. Although Sihanouk was anti-Vietnamese, the Vietnamese he was against were those in Saigon. Hanoi was far away, and to the extent the Vietminh weakened the Saigon regime, Sihanouk was their ally. Later it was alleged that during a visit to Beijing, Chou En-lai had assured Sihanouk that the Chinese would prevent Hanoi from taking over Cambodia. Be that as it may, the Vietminh did not want at that early stage to run the risk of alienating Sihanouk. Probably they were already harboring some of the cadre of what later became the Khmer Rouge and were confident that when the time came, Sihanouk as a "feudal remnant" would fall of his own weight.

But the Defense Attaché office at the Embassy in Saigon was always putting out reports that there were Vietminh bases and hospitals on the Cambodian side of the border. I felt these were exaggerated. In the Phnom Penh Embassy the Army Attaché who checked out these reports and I were good friends and he debriefed me after my trips near the border.

I was still excited after our adventure in the northeast highlands of Mondulhiri and I was

anxious to make another trip farther south along the border. I was doing nothing in the Consular Section by then and really wanted to travel. As I mentioned my Citroen Deux Chevaux would go anywhere and at the time was running well. South of the Khmer town of Takeo, a provincial capital, stretched the vast plains and swamps of the Mekong/Bassac delta. I had never been there and wanted to see it. Virtually right on the border was a little hill, a *phnom* only a few dozen meters high, not nearly as high as Phnom Den was. I can't remember the name of it. A number of reports had come out of Saigon claiming there were Vietminh bunkers on that hill. Looking at my old French books and maps one evening, I found that hill had a very early Khmer temple on top. It was believed to have been built as early as the seventh century, long before the first Angkor king had unified Cambodia in 815 AD. It was from the early period when the Hindu priests and voyagers had first arrived, the times of "*fu-nan*" and "*chen-la*" in the Chinese chronicles.

I decided to go down to the border to look at that hill and recruited Roger Smith, a Cornell scholar, to go with me. He later wrote an excellent book on Cambodian foreign policy. Of course I didn't tell him about the Saigon reports, which were classified. I said it was a trip to find that temple and take a look at the border before the rains started in earnest.

We left early one morning and by this time, it was hot season again. We drove along Route Provinciale 2 from Phnom Penh to the provincial capital of Takeo. We turned onto a graveled road south from Takeo and headed for the border. In colonial times this road had crossed the border and gone to Chau Doc and Long Xuyen in South Vietnam, both areas that later became Vietcong strongholds. Just before the border we turned into dense bamboo groves and came to a small village along with sides of a stream. The houses there were built on the ground, not on stilts so it was a Vietnamese village. No one was there except women and children who sat and stared. It was very quiet.

Passing through the village we came to an old French colonial "Bailey-Bridge" built over the stream. We had given France the girders for many of these bridges after the war and some had been sent to Indochina. The roadbed of the bridge had deteriorated and lengths of plank a few feet wide had been laid over the metal girders. It looked chancy but we noticed mud tracks from vehicles on the planks. Someone else had done it so we decided to try it. Steering carefully, with Roger guiding me as he walked backwards across the bridge, we made it over. From there we emerged from the bamboo forest and were on the floodplain again. We could see the *phnom* a few hundred meters away and drove over the hard-packed soil to stop nearby. A path led up through the vegetation and we followed it to a small brick structure, the seventh-century Khmer temple. Indeed it looked strongly like a Hindu crypt, not one of the grandiose Khmer temples of later centuries. The lintels of the structure were remarkable in that chubby little faces with Indian features were carved into them as though looking out through windows. This was only case of this type of motif in ancient Cambodia and was never found at Angkor. It pointed to a South Indian origin for the first Hindu colonists of Indochina in the early centuries A.D. In 1961, however, it was full of bats and smelled awful; we did not go in.

From the time we left the village we saw no other persons. Perhaps the men were away trading across the border, which was a common practice despite the animosity between the two countries. We walked all over the hill and found nothing to indicate Viet Minh had ever been there. There was no blackened earth from fires, no bits and pieces of materiel, nothing. Also the temple had no little Khmer remnants of worship: incense sticks, dead flowers, and little pieces of tinsel. It was the most deserted little hill temple I had ever seen – so much so that we started to feel very nervous and decided to high-tail it out of there. We managed to get across the bridge again and found that the village was now completely deserted. Perhaps it was naptime but it was still eerie. It was a relief to come out of the bamboo grove and get back to Takeo and later Phnom Penh.

A few days later I was recounting my exploit to the French Consul General, who had become a friend after I dealt with him on a few consular matters. He was appalled that I had placed myself in such danger by going to the border. Since I drove a Deux Chevaux and spoke passable French, he said that I might pass for French if the Vietminh stopped me, but only if I had a French passport. With such a passport, he said, if the Vietminh stopped me I would escape with a propaganda lecture. He said he had had such an experience on a drive he made to the South Vietnamese beach resort at Cap St. Jacques, now known as Vung Tao. My conversation with him brought home to me the recklessness of traveling to the border. I decided that was the last time I would court danger to check out a Saigon border report. First, I think I had been very lucky in the past. Second, I had proved nothing, and no one cared anyway what I reported from Cambodia – except a few analysts at INR.

Transfer to the Economic Section

In late 1962, my replacement for the Consular section, John MacDougall, arrived and I was rotated into the Economic Section for my third junior officer-training job. My boss Mr. Parke was an old-line commercial officer, not an economic analyst or policy maker. He had transferred into the Foreign Service and saw his career prospects as determined by what Department of Commerce officials would say to the State Department about him. To be fair, he had no choice --- USAID ran the U.S. interface with the economy of Cambodia. The AID Director Charlie Mann had a huge staff of economic analysts with instant access to Cambodian statistics, such as they were. There was no way USAID would allow an independent estimate of Cambodian economic progress, for which they felt themselves responsible, to be sent to Washington. Moreover, the only valid statistics that the Economic Section could obtain and send to Washington were produced by USAID. If Mr. Parke alienated USAID, I suspected the powerful Charlie Mann might simply cut him off from the data.

Earlier, Bill Thomas had served in the economic section and drafted some critical pieces on various aspects of the Cambodian economy, including the corruption and inequities of the rice business. Perhaps in retaliation he had been transferred to the Political section to focus him on something else less disruptive to Embassy-USAID relations. After Bill,

David Chandler, Tom Hirschfeld, and Peter Poole had put in their time working for Parke. So now I was working for Mr. Parke, who focused completely on the production of reports required by the Department of Commerce. I must say Mr. Parke, and his charming wife, were very nice to me personally and I liked them both ---- but only out of the office.

In the office our main job was producing reports and statistics on the business and commercial scene of Cambodia with a view toward stimulating the export of American products. The main output was ‘World Trade Directory Reports’ – ‘WTDRs’ – which gave the prospects for selling American goods in Cambodia, and a type of creditworthiness report done on Cambodian firms. Both these required some outside research and were interesting to do – once. But the problem was, we weren’t selling anything to Cambodia. There was little they wanted from us apart from the Commodity Import Program. The French and Chinese dominated the Cambodian market – the French by tradition and old relationships, the Chinese because their goods were cheap and nearby, and they dominated the Chinese community politically. American products only came to Cambodia by virtue of USAID’s Commodity Import Program. As I’ve already mentioned, there was a lot of corruption and waste associated with that program. But American businessmen who wished to sell through that program did not deal with the Embassy’s Economic section, they dealt with USAID and the Cambodian importers themselves. So the Economic Section, and Mr. Parke and myself, were essentially spinning our wheels.

For example, one day we received an instruction from the Department of Commerce to make a trade survey on the prospects for selling automatic milking machines, the kind used on every American dairy farm, in Cambodia. Someone in Washington had seen picture of Cambodia with lots of cows grazing in a field. In fact, there were a lot of oxen in Cambodia, used as draught animals and for meat. But this chap had decided to push milking machines because he saw so many cows in that picture. Mr. Parke asked me to get in touch with a few Cambodian importers and distributors and persuade them to become official distributors of these milking machines. It was called: “getting the agency.” But the importers told me that no one milked cows in Cambodia. They pointed out that in Cambodia, only calves drank cow’s milk. Cambodian children drank their mother’s milk, sometimes until they were five years old. Since there was no way of pasteurizing or refrigerating milk in Cambodia, and tuberculosis was rife, people would get sick if they drank cow’s milk. They said there was simply no market in Cambodia for milking machines.

I went back and wrote up my report based on that information. Well, Bob Parke was annoyed. He said we couldn’t possibly report this, since the Department of Commerce would criticize him. He ordered me to get out and find some distributor willing to accept an “agency”, i.e. agree to distribute these machines. So I sought help from a social friend, a rather shady Sino-Khmer businessman and USAID contractor named Ly Kim Heng. He put me onto a colleague of his named Gui Hoc Hua, a Khmer-Vietnamese who agreed to sign a letter indicating intent to distribute these machines. I gave it to Parke and he was satisfied. He sent it to Commerce under cover of a beautifully drafted transmittal slip. But

nothing ever came of the milking machine project as I recall.

The New Ambassador

Luckily it was about this time that a new Ambassador arrived, replacing Ambassador Trimble. A few months later a new Deputy Chief of Mission arrived as well. The new Ambassador, Philip Sprouse, had been one of the “China Hands” whose careers had been derailed if not destroyed during the McCarthy era in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Sprouse had first gone to China as a junior officer in the 1930s. His first year there was spent traveling around learning Mandarin and other dialects. Much of his travel in those years had been on foot, by palanquin, or in little fishing pirogues with cormorants perched on the prow. Sprouse considered this year the greatest of his life and constantly talked about it. He had never married and the Foreign Service was really his home. In the early 1950s during the dispute over the so-called “loss of China,” Sprouse had drafted a large portion of the Department’s “White Paper” on that subject. After that he had had to lay low for a while.

Sprouse was a capable manager and a breath of fresh air after Trimble who always seemed a bit out of place and sometimes aloof. David Chandler and Bill Thomas had left the Embassy by this time so Peter Poole and I were the only junior officers left. David’s replacement, Roy Haverkamp, had arrived but he was on a second tour so had a bit of rank. I was really the only Junior Officer around for the new Ambassador to travel with – plus I knew the country well because of my “graphics coordinator” job and spoke a few words of Khmer. Sprouse was very anxious to get out into the countryside to compare it with his youthful days in China. Although he had the official limousine, he imported a small car and asked protocol for an inconspicuous diplomatic plate number.

One Saturday he was invited to the Japanese Ambassador’s weekend retreat near the Gulf of Siam and he took me with him. We drove down to Bokor, a high cliff in the Elephant Mountains that overlooked the Gulf. As we drove he told me about China, how it was different from what we were seeing. I tried to keep him focused on learning about Cambodia but it was a lost cause. As we passed the Chinese Communist-built cement mill at Chakrey Ting, he noticed the limestone peaks, reminiscent of some landscapes in China that surrounded it. Then on through Kampot, the center of Cambodia’s pepper-growing region. Of course Chinese ran the pepper farms, with Chinese-style houses and neat fields of pepper vines growing on bamboo frameworks. A few miles west of Kampot a well-maintained road led up the slopes of Bokor and then through the jungles to an overlook where there was a casino. Probably it had been a resort hotel in the French colonial period. The bluff was about 1,000 meters high and breezy and cool – you could not stand comfortably in the wind at the overlook for more than a few minutes. The casino was not open when we were there in the middle of the day. It was only for non-Khmer Chinese and Vietnamese. Cambodians were not allowed in, supposedly.

Back in the jungle was a small villa owned and maintained by the Japanese Embassy for its staff. In the Japanese context, it was very “*shibuya*” – modest but well designed for its

locale. Ambassador Shiro Haga was recuperating there the day we visited. He had fallen off a temple ledge while taking a picture and broken his leg. Haga was a Diet member turned diplomat and his junior officer was named Yukio Imagawa, a good friend. The latter's father had been a Japanese occupation police officer in Cambodia during the war, and Yukio spoke perfect Cambodian. He did a lot of traveling and knew a wide range of Cambodian regional officials. It was a perfect time for Sprouse to learn about Cambodia, but the conversation inevitably turned more often to China – which was, of course, of great interest to the Japanese as well. Sprouse talked of his early days in China.

Ambassador Sprouse was a good diplomat and really knew Asia, but may have reminisced a bit too much about China. It was the Prince's great protector, of course, but he didn't want to hear about the place from the American Ambassador. And with his tenure relations began deteriorating for other reasons as well.

The Koh Kong Trip

By the time of Sprouse's arrival I was only a few months from the end of my tour – or so I thought. I would have been due out in March 1963, but the Department ran out of travel money and I was “frozen” until July. I had to find something to do. I tried writing some economic analysis but it was hopeless. The DCM would not accept it unless it had been cleared by Parke, and Parke wouldn't even look at anything I wrote. So I went back to writing OMs transmitting photographs.

Then a breakthrough came. An officer in the station mentioned to me that it had been tasked with a contribution to the National Intelligence Survey (NIS) section on coasts and landing beaches for all of Indochina. The section on Cambodia hadn't been done since the Second World War. He asked that, since I spoke French and a little Cambodian, was a Consular officer, and knew the country, could I help arrange for two naval attaches from Embassy Saigon to get a boat, and make a trip along the coast of Cambodia.” I told him in fact I'd love to go along with them. The two were Jack Stone, an Assistant Naval Attaché at Embassy Saigon, and Judd Redfield, a Marine Corps officer, also assigned to the attaché office in Saigon.

Luckily for me, Ambassador Sprouse had taken a liking to me when we made a few trips together. In fact, he had offered to write a letter to Personnel to help get me a good onward assignment. He wrote Ericsson, the chap who had gone over the cliff at Phnom Den with Bill Thomas during our visit there almost two years earlier. I don't need to say what Sprouse had recommended for me – Chinese language training of course! There had been no answer to his letter when I asked to see him. I said the station had asked me to make some arrangements for an overt intelligence collection trip by boat along the southwest coast of Cambodia from Sihanoukville (Kampong Som) to the Thai border. The other part of the coast, eastward toward the Vietnamese border, was heavily trafficked and could largely be done by land. It was the southwest coast, which bordered the impassable jungled valleys and hills of the Cardamom Mountains, that was the mystery. There was no way to get to it except by boat.

I am sure I conveyed my enthusiasm to Ambassador Sprouse and he agreed that I should go along. I suppose the trip smacked of his own adventures as a first-tour officer in the China of the thirties. His approval took care of the DCM and Mr. Parke, so the next day I drove down to Ream, the coastal port and former French “naval base.” I doubt whether anything bigger than a patrol boat was ever based there in the French period. Now there were only typical Southeast Asian fishing junks, all owned by Chinese and painted a livid blue just like the Chinese shops that lined the only street of Ream. There were dozens of boats and I didn’t know where to start to contract for one. So I found the inevitable stay-behind former French sailor who ran the local bistro and asked his help. He took me to a Chinese fishing operation, just a shack on pilings over the water with a dock in back. Within a few minutes, I had contracted for a small fishing junk for two weeks with three seamen at a total cost of 6,000 Cambodian Riels – less than a hundred dollars.

A week later on February 22, 1963 Jack Stone, Judd Redfield and I were driven by an Attaché car from Phnom Penh to Ream and boarded the vessel. This was my first real look at it, and it was right out of an old French folio of exotic Asian ship drawings. With a high prow and stern, it was about 25 feet long with eight feet of beam but only eighteen inches of freeboard. That is, the top of the gunwale at its lowest point amidships sat about eighteen inches above the water line. It was lower there so that nets could be hauled aboard when fishing. There was a foul-smelling cabin amidships with barely any room and an empty oil drum lightly lashed to the roof. That was the lifeboat; if we went down, it was supposed to float free and you swam to it and held on.

Forward of the cabin was a mast about eight feet high, which served no purpose that we could see since there were no sails. It looked as though it had been sawed off and Jack Stone thought it was probably a batten for hauling in nets. The foredeck was a goodly size, with a hatch cover near the bow. It was a dry hold where we could store our duffle bags. Forward of the hatch was a slightly smaller mast and several lines ran between it and the mainmast. Perhaps this had once been a sailing-ship, converted to power, and it was easier to cut off the masts than take them out. Finally there was the prow with a little bowsprit and a big Chinese eye painted on each side. To the rear of the cabin was a hatch covering the engine, a one-cylinder 6 HP “chug-chugger.” There was a tiller at the stern, and that was it – our home at sea for at least a week. There were no charts or compass, and nothing to bail with except bare hands.

The boat came with three pre-paid Khmer crewman. There was the Captain, the cook, and a handyman. We were told they would sleep in the cabin, so we agreed to sleep on the foredeck – we had air mattresses and sleeping bags and could stretch out there side by side. Only the Captain spoke Khmer and a little French, and none of them would tell us their names. I suppose they were afraid we might turn them in to the Police if something went wrong. So we gave them nick-names; they liked that. First: “Captain Bruno,” obviously the man in charge; “Elvis” the cook, who had long unkempt hair; and “Useless” the handy man, who seemed to do nothing right at the start. As it turned out, he was the best fisherman and proved invaluable. I had brought along old French army hats

for them, and I became an immediate friend, even with my “pigeon” Cambodian. We were told that these three had worked together for some time, which was a blessing. And Captain Bruno turned out to be terrific, both in ship handling and navigation, and spoke a little French.

I couldn't believe we were heading out into the open sea in this flimsy vessel but Jack Stone, a naval officer, looked it over and pronounced it seaworthy if a bit under-powered. We were excited about the trip and there was the usual confusion in getting underway, stowing the gear and provisions, including a case of Heinekens Beer, plenty of canned goods and bread, and – broken down in Jack's duffel-bag – a 30-06 rifle. We had three five-gallon cans of boiled water and had bought fresh fruit at the market in Kampong Speu on the way to Ream. We were able to pile the sleeping bags against the forward roof of the cabin and sit on the foredeck leaning back against them. Our adventure was beginning as we put-putted away from the dock. The engine sounded like a sick lawnmower.

Our excitement disappeared as soon as we emerged from the tranquil waters of the Bay of Ream into the choppy afternoon swells of the Gulf of Thailand. A stiff onshore breeze was pushing up waves to about four to six feet, cresting to small whitecaps. The good news was that our little craft was sailing up and over the swells with aplomb, pitching a bit but keeping that eighteen-inch freeboard intact. Some spray came over the bow and we hastened to put the sleeping bags away, and get out the raingear. It was wet and chilly in the wind. (We had expected to spend the days in bathing suits, but wound up in trousers and shirts most of the time at sea.) As we headed offshore that first day we watched Captain Bruno handling the tiller, and listened to the little “one-lunger” chugging away. We were a little nervous at first. It was hard to believe this small engine could keep up our headway against a steady sea, but looking back it was clear that the low green mangrove forest of the mainland was falling behind as we headed out toward the first good-sized island, Koh Samrong Sam Lem. Stone had designated this island and its lagoon as a possible landing place and anchorage for a good-sized fleet. Happily the name of the island on my vintage 1944 wartime charts of the coast coincided with the name by which Captain Bruno knew it. That was not to be the case as we headed farther up the coast.

In addition to getting charts, in my preparation for this trip I had gotten a Modern Library edition of Joseph Conrad stories from the USIS library and re-read *The Secret Sharer*. This is a story of a transition from youth to maturity, a sailor who goes from First Mate to Captain on a sailing ship out of Bangkok in the late 19th century. It takes place as Conrad's hero sails his new command along this very coast. He wrote that the islands “seemed to be floating on patches of silvery water against the blue background of the high coast.” Even the larger ones with their “ribs of gray rock under the dark mantle of matted leafage” were “unknown to trade, to travel, almost to geography.” Yes, his descriptions were perfect, the island still looked exactly the same. Conrad coursed by these islands in light airs during the late 19th century. As far as I could see nothing much had changed since then despite two wars and 75 years of foreign colonialism. It was

another Cambodian dream, this time a seascape, which too had seen much history, yet had never changed. Later I confirmed with Captain Bruno that most of these islands had no sources of fresh water, so no one could live on them. The meager population was clustered here and there in coastal settlements, mostly Thai and Vietnamese.

Koh Samrong Sam Lem was a case in point – not a soul there, nothing to indicate anyone had ever set foot except a few dilapidated palm-frond shelters along the beach obviously used for the occasional fisherman’s midday nap. And it was a good-sized island judging from the huge lagoon we found when we pulled into the leeward side of Koh Samrong. The lagoon was deep in the channel but shoaled rapidly into broad sand flats all along its shore. In theory the entire Seventh Fleet could moor here, but only if they drew but a few feet of water.

Stone and Redfield quickly realized the island was too far offshore to for any large-scale use. Nevertheless we collected all the data just the same, as we would at many of the beaches (but only one more island) all the way up the coast to the Thai border. First we cruised parallel to what looked like the broadest beach, and Stone took panoramic shots with his camera. Then we went ashore, carefully taking note of any foreshore obstructions or other unusual features. On shore we collected a “sand-sample” to assess “trafficability,” putting the sand in a Heineken beer bottle, which Stone carefully numbered. Stone measured how deep and dense the sand was with a metal spike. Then, we measured the “cusp” – the lip where the edge of the forest soil drops to the sand of the beach. Finally, we walked beyond the cusp a few dozen yards to survey and photograph the rear beach area.

I was baffled as to why they concentrated on islands, but perhaps they were thinking of another Taiwan someday. That seemed far-fetched at the time., but in 1975 even Dr. Kissinger pondered whether the Lon Nol government could be moved to Phu Quoc, another big island off southern Indochina. We thought at the time though that we would be the first and last Americans on Koh Rong. We were wrong – 12 years later the crew of the *Mayaguez*, seized by the Khmer Rouge, was sequestered on that island. Now, as I write, a resort is located there, written up in the *New York Times*.

But as we stood there it was apparent there were no Cambodians on that island. The boat crew must have wondered why we wanted to go there. But perhaps they had dealt with foreigners because they sailed out of Ream, a former French base. I suspect that like most ordinary Cambodians they were baffled and bored by the things Westerners did, or perhaps thought it was not their place to ask. Remember the concentric circles with the diverse communities in Phnom Penh that I mentioned earlier, that touched but did not intersect. We and the Khmer too were just in separate worlds and they were not particularly interested in ours. We told them we were looking for a good beach for a tourist hotel. Later when we stopped in the town of Koh Kong they passed that story on to the local citizens. It seemed to allay most suspicions.

We departed to the north-east, surprisingly out to the windward side of another island,

Koh Rung. My colleagues were not interested in the island because it was too far offshore, right in the mouth of the Bay of Kompong Som. Immediately after we emerged from the lee of Koh Samrong we were in very heavy swells. We were slanting up the sides of these heavy swells for the first time, and it went scarily on and on. After a few minutes of rolling uncomfortably Captain Bruno turned further west into the swells for a while, then reversed course and ran due north rolling forward then with a following sea.

I had been on small boats since I was a kid. A few times I was almost swamped in a rowboat when an afternoon wind came up in Peconic Bay, on Long Island. But then I knew that I could probably make it to shore, and there were other boats around. Someone would come looking for me. Here we were 10 miles offshore in the Gulf of Siam. If something happened, no one would ever know what had become of us. It was exciting and scary all at the same time.

Jack Stone was baffled as to why the captain had decided to go out along the windward side of Koh Rung so I clambered back to the stern to ask and our Captain's was, in Khmer, "big water, many fish." While we were nervously pondering our situation, Useless went back to the stern to squat next to Captain Bruno and put out a fishing line. He attached a torn piece of white rag on the big hook and let the line out, jigging the lure as he did. In not more than a moment: Boom, he had a strike and pulled in a lovely fish as long as your arm. It looked like a small king mackerel. Soon after that the swells started to recede and just before dark we anchored in the lee of a lovely tropical island that was obviously Koh Samit judging from the chart. Elvis got out a steel bucket with an open grill at the bottom, filled it with charcoal and began roasting chunks of fish on bamboo spits. It was delicious, even with warm beer. We finished with mangoes as we suddenly realized then that our windward passage offshore Koh Rung had been for the purpose of catching dinner.

As soon as darkness fell it was chilly, even in the lee of the island. By seven o'clock we were doused in mosquito repellent and lying in sleeping bags on air mattresses on the foredeck. Useless and Elvis slept together in the cabin, and Captain Bruno simply curled up on a mat on the stern and fell asleep. My sleeping bag was along the gunwale and I rolled over sleepily to look over the side of the boat. All the phosphorescent sea animals were emerging and it was a wonderful show, a little electrical storm under water. Taking stock, I thought here I was on a little boat off some unknown island, rocking gently in a light breeze with an absolute swarm of stars overhead. At any point that day a slight miscalculation by the helmsman could have sent us to the bottom. The spice of danger lent a special glow to the scene, like the glowing animals in the water. We all slept soundly until dawn.

The next day we sailed due north along the coast, slipping in and amongst islands and reefs on our way to Koh Kong Island. We ran along several coastal beaches and went through the same exercise as at Koh Samrong: panoramic pictures, then samples and measurements and more photos on shore. We also filled notebooks with observations and coordinates. The beaches were stunning, backed by the "false pines" (Casuarina) that the

French called Filao trees. The long needles of the trees gave the strands a sort of wistful, forlorn look. Inside the reef the waters were calm and we beached the boat easily. The shore sloped just enough that the propeller was clear of the bottom when the bow grounded on the white sand. Heavy foliage grew right to the beach and there were birds and flowers. It was idyllic, another dream landscape of Cambodia.

Further along the coast in the delta of one small river was a picturesque settlement of large houses and workplaces for drying and preserving fish. It was set in the midst of a mangrove forest along a lengthy canal, lined with boats the same as ours. On both sides of the canal there were bamboo walkways connected to the structures, all on pilings sunk into the mud. Most of the people were Thai and Vietnamese. Fish and squid were drying everywhere in the sun and the stench was barely supportable. We quickly bought food for ourselves and the crew and ate while heading toward the offshore side of Koh Kong island, cruising outside the reef again in the heavy swells. This time we were used to them and quite confident in our boatmen. Occasionally we saw a small fishing boat much like our own, passing far out to sea.

Koh Kong was a big island with no offshore reef and there was heavy surf. It was the place Jack Stone really wanted to see. Apparently it was a major NIS requirement and there was suspicion about the existing maps of the rear shore area. There were no settlements on the island, which was really beautiful. Captain Bruno had to anchor the boat somewhat offshore and we swam in through the waves, pulling a small rubber raft with cameras in waterproof bags and a few beer bottles for sand. We found that indeed, just behind the beach, the terrain deteriorated quickly into a muddy swamp. It had been concealed from aerial photography by light brush and looked like a firm plain on our maps. But a driftwood bamboo pole poked down into the mud just kept going. It was “untrafficable.” There was no point in surveying the beach and we swam back through the surf to the boat.

Now, every time we went ashore we took everything that we needed, but of course the rest of our stuff was on the boat. We were usually in shorts and T-shirts. At any time our crew could have pulled away from the shore and marooned us someplace. We could not have survived more than a day or two, driven mad by mosquitoes and thirst. But it simply never occurred to us that they might do that. Luckily for us, it apparently never occurred to them either. By this time perhaps there was a bond among us. The reefs, the islands, the hills and jungles beyond, the birds and flowers and sea creatures, all bathed in brilliant tropical light, were compelling, perhaps for them as well as us. Perhaps they felt pride in taking us there. Perhaps they also felt it was an adventure, as we did. I thought of Bob, the station chief and Phil Sprouse, and their days in China. These days, like theirs, would never happen again. Here again we thought we were to be the first and last Americans on these forgotten shores.

We went around the northern tip of the island and along the coast to a sizable town also named Koh Kong, but located on another island. The sea was rough offshore and there were stone jetties protecting each side of an entrance channel. As we passed through, a

big sailing junk was headed out with all its lateen sails set. At the head of the little harbor we saw a delegation of Cambodian police standing on the dock. They wanted to know what the Americans were doing on Koh Kong; perhaps someone had seen us from a fishing boat offshore. They were suspicious of our military hats. Before we set sail from Ream, we had explained to our Cambodian crew through a local Frenchman who spoke Cambodian, that we were looking for places to build an American "luxury resort hotel." This would bring in lots of tourists to Cambodia, in keeping with Prince Sihanouk's desire to promote development. So we landed, and our boat crew sort of explained this to the police. Then I showed them my exequatur as my identification. I think that I mentioned previously that when I unrolled the exequatur, there was Norodom Sihanouk's signature right on it. That was all that the police needed. We were again honored guests.

It was a quaint and interesting town. Later when I went to coastal Thailand, I realized that Koh Kong despite its Cambodian officials was in every respect a Thai fishing village. There was no road from this town to the rest of Cambodia, and no boat traffic to the south. The two-story wooden houses were Thai, the temples were Thai, the kids were Thai, the food - thank heaven - was Thai. The French had never been interested in this coast; there were no ancient Khmer monuments in Southwest Cambodia. We had a wonderful meal with cold Thai Singha beer - the fishing boats brought ice from the larger boats offshore - and then a dipper bath on the dock with fresh water and soap. However, we decided to sleep on the boat because we didn't want to leave our clothes and equipment there unguarded- especially the rifle. The boat crew disappeared in town, and came back very late. So again we doused ourselves in mosquito repellent and tried to sleep. Next to the town in the little airless harbor, it was hot and uncomfortable. The previous night anchored off the tropical isle had been much better.

The next day the police offered to take us on a patrol boat to see a new town, called "Khemerak Phouminville," or "army town." The Cambodian military was building this town as the new provincial capital far up one of the rivers. As in the case of the stockaded towns I had seen in Mondulkiri, this effort was also part of Sihanouk's policy of resettling Khmer from the central plains in remote border regions. We boarded a beautiful East German-made patrol boat, at least 45 feet long. It made about 30 knots and soon we were well up a broad estuary. At the town there was a big cleared area with military tents and bulldozers knocking over trees, nothing else. We met the local commander and saw a few development plans. Then we headed back down the river.

Our trip up the estuary confirmed my impression that, despite the development project, Koh Kong and its environs were not really part of Cambodia. Here was yet another world, not related to the obsessions of Phnom Penh. For example, during my two years or so in the capital, scarcely a month passed without the Prince launching a tirade in some speech against Thai border violations, on land and territorial waters, in the Koh Kong area. He railed against Thai fishing boats fishing illegally in Cambodian waters, and Thai loggers crossing the border illegally to cut wood in Cambodian forests.

Well, as we headed back down this broad estuary, the Cambodian police pointed out

several Thai logging operations underway along the shore, which was Cambodian territory. The border ran along the crest of a long ridge pointing out into the sea just behind the estuary. And then we went offshore to watch the various small Thai and Cambodian fishing boats delivering their catch to a large Thai “mother ship” anchored in Cambodian waters just a few miles offshore. The Cambodian police took us onboard the big Thai ship and we watched the fish being iced down and put in the holds. A boom from the “mother ship” would swing over the small ship alongside and picked up a huge basket of fish or squid. It would swing aboard and as it was tipped into a hold, a machine would grind up blocks of ice to spray among the fish. It was all very professional and I was told that the big ship would unload in the Thai port of Trat, just across the border the next morning. Meanwhile the Cambodian police disappeared into the cabin, probably for their payoffs. So much for Sihanouk’s ranting against the Thai, and breaking relations. The fact was, of course, that Thailand was the only market. There was no other place to sell fish between Koh Kong and Sihanoukville, and no other place to get ice to preserve the fish. There was no place to sell logs except Thailand. The Khmer and the French had relinquished this coast to the Thai and Vietnamese for a hundred years. The rulers of ancient Angkor didn’t even know it existed. I was very pleased to find all of this out because now I had something economic to write about. I thought this would please my boss, Mr. Parke.

We were at the end of our police tour and, after buying a case of Singha beer at Koh Kong town, decided to leave. We presumed that since it had only taken a day interrupted by many stops to get to Koh Kong town from Koh Samit, we could make it back easily in an afternoon. We planned to sail direct along the lee shore of Koh Kong Island to avoid the “big water” offshore. So at about 2:00 PM we set off from Koh Kong town curving around a point to head into the bay inshore from Koh Kong Island. Ah, what a mistake. We cruised along for about half an hour, came around another bend in the coast, and there was a Cambodian Army post. A low building, a dock, a Cambodian flag and a sentry on duty, dwarfed by a forest of huge mangrove trees. We had missed this outpost in the wilderness of course when coming north the previous day on the seaward side of Koh Kong Island. We put-putted along quietly hoping not to attract attention but we were spotted immediately. The sentry waved us in and when we didn’t stop, fired a shot a few yards ahead of us. Captain Bruno turned the tiller sharply and soon we tied up at the dock next to a small patrol boat.

There an Army Lieutenant with poor French interrogated us. We told him we had just left Koh Kong town, but he wasn’t interested. I told him we were looking for a place for a big hotel but he wasn’t impressed. I showed them my exequatur with Sihanouk’s signature, and said I was looking for an American citizen lost at sea, but the Cambodian Army people weren’t “buying” that story too much either. They wanted us to spend the night under guard in a small hut until they could get instructions from headquarters, presumably at Khmerak-Phouminville. We offered to go back to Koh Kong town with the Lieutenant so they could verify our bona fides with the police. That didn’t help either. I could see this stretching out for days; they were obviously enjoying exercising control over Westerners. Meanwhile Captain Bruno had been sitting by quietly. Finally he looked at

Elvis, who said something in Khmer to the soldiers. Bruno then suggested that we pay for a "license" to fish. He said: "If they write you out a license, you can go free." We paid, received a hand-written paper in Khmer and were on our way.

We got out of there fast, but by this time it was late afternoon. So we motored down along the inland side of Koh Kong Island. Just as we re-entered open waters the sun went down, it was dark, and waves started splashing onto the deck. We were rolling badly with water coming over the gunwale. We couldn't see anything, it was really dark. At that moment Captain Bruno came forward and asked: "Where do you want to go?" We thought of turning back to anchor inshore from Koh Kong Island but I was nervous that the Cambodian soldiers would come after us again for more questions in the morning.

We suggested returning the island where we had moored two the nights before. Captain Bruno looked at the stars coming out and said it would be easy. Back at the tiller, he turned straight out toward the waves, which were calming down as the sea breeze went down with the sun. He headed out at an angle to the waves for about 45 minutes or an hour. When he got well out to sea some distance, he turned south. The swells were steady but not menacing and we lay out on the deck looking at the brilliant starry night. The boat was pitching up and down and taking some water on deck, but it ran off easily. We knew this whole coastline was just littered with tiny islands and solid reefs near the surface. We had come up this coastline in daytime and steered among the reefs taking soundings in the brilliant clear water. But by now we were well offshore and heading due south, taking the waves on the starboard quarter. Both Jack Stone and Judd Redfield were Navy people and knew how to navigate. So they were pretty comfortable being well offshore and went to sleep.

I stayed nervously awake as we sailed along on a southerly course for about two hours. By this time it was about 9:00 PM. All of a sudden, the boat turned sharply left, in toward the shore. Jack and Judd woke immediately and we thought: "What's going on? He's heading in toward the reefs." Indeed the boat was moving in toward the land with a following sea behind it; Captain Bruno was in the stern, with waves coming in behind him. Some high cloud was moving over, obscuring the stars. We became very nervous about this and couldn't imagine what he was doing. Anyway, he headed toward shore for about 10 or 15 minutes while we tried to get our act together and figure out what to do.

At this point, all of a sudden, we spotted a light on the shore. The boat turned sharply around and headed back out to sea. Then the stars began to come out again. By midnight or so we pulled into calm waters in the lee of a low dark coast to starboard. Captain Bruno said to lower the anchor and can sleep. The next morning, we found we were in the same anchorage off Koh Samit, where we had been two nights earlier, the first night of the trip. It was an astonishing feat of navigation.

Later back at Ream, Bruno told us the secret. He knew that at that point There was a fishermen's shack on the coast, with a man who kept a kerosene lamp on all night so boats fishing at night from his village could find their way back. So he steered in till he saw the

lamp, then knew he was on course. He knew to turn in at that point from the stars and the strength of the waves. So he had found this little island in the dark, on an unmarked coast, steering by the stars and the waves and the speed of the boat, and one reference check.

The next morning we headed for the first time into the Bay of Kompong Som. This is a very difficult place to navigate but it started out pleasantly. Cruising along the northwest shore of the Bay, we came upon a good size village with a row of Chinese shops along one street. We stopped and there was even a restaurant for lunch. This town was very much in contrast to Koh Kong and the places along the shore of the Gulf, which were linked more to Thailand. For the people here, it was a short haul across the bay to Sihanoukville and then on to Phnom Penh. We met a young Chinese man and talked about the area. After we set out again and within a few minutes, we were absolutely enfolded into a sudden thick fog that had come from nowhere. I had heard there were terrible fogs in the Bay of Kompong Som and now we were caught in one. We were sitting there in the fog, sailing around for several hours, and wondering what to do. You could barely see the prow of the boat. Now, you recall I mentioned there was a cutoff mast amidships. It really wasn't a mast, since this was an engine-driven boat. Jack Stone thought this might be a low-level fog, so he helped me shinny up the mast. He was right; I was just tall enough to see over the fog. The top of the fog was about eight feet above the surface of the water. It was beautiful sunshine up above that fog. Jack got out his chart and together we triangulated off some hills marked on the shore. He had a pocket compass and he took the tiller and started across the bay. Within an hour the fog was gone.

At this point we had gotten way up on the northeast side of the Bay of Kompong Som. As we moved along, Captain Bruno kept looking behind him. He had been doing that since the fog lifted. Soon I knew why; he was waiting for a fierce wind to follow the fog. And indeed all of a sudden the wind struck hard. Soon we were being blown steadily toward some mud flats near the mouth of a river. And it was getting to be low tide. In the shallow water the waves were steep and it was much worse than the big swells offshore in the Gulf. We tried to make headway against this wind but it was hopeless. We were taking on water still a ways offshore and suddenly we ran aground. Captain Bruno tried to spin the boat to take the waves on the bow, but it didn't work. We settled parallel to them, heeling over a little.

We were aground on mudflats. The waves were coming up over the side, and we didn't want to spend the night there, with our gunwale parallel with the waves and the tide coming in. The three of us went over the side and managed to rock the boat in rhythm with the waves and got it off the mud flat. Useless came over the side to help push. Elvis ran back and forth across the deck to help rock the boat. In the water we were frightened of sea snakes, especially since we were near the mouth of a river where they typically congregate. But happily within a few minutes the boat pulled away from the mud and made some headway as we continued to push, now up to our necks in water. Soon we were out a ways off the mudbanks and the Captain put out the anchor and it held. We

clambered on board the boat, exhausted.

After dark the wind dropped and we were able to sleep. But the next morning the engine wouldn't start. Somehow when we were thrashing around in the mud something had gotten clogged. The crew had to take the engine apart and clean it, but this was difficult anchored offshore. And we had no way of getting into shore except drifting with the waves, which could put us back on the mud flats. But there was a good breeze and Jack Stone came up with the answer. He ran a line between the tops of the two rudimentary masts and secured our shelter halves and rain ponchos between them to create a makeshift sail. The boat started moving! Then he took the tiller and Judd and I adjusted the "sail" so that he could tack toward a different part of the shore. It took a while but soon we were anchored in a quiet bay and the crew started taking the engine apart. Jack Stone, who was a marine engineer, couldn't believe what Captain Bruno was doing. He completely disassembled this six horsepower engine, laid all the pieces out on the deck, and started cleaning them, using sandpaper and a knife and a little rag to do the job. One of the other crewmen went under the boat and took the propeller off. Then they cleaned out the drive shaft and the water intakes. There were some 50 pieces of this engine all over the boat. Put back together, the engine started again with one pull. Obviously the crew had had to do this many times in the past.

For the rest of that day we cruised along close to the shore of the Bay photographing beaches, going ashore occasionally. Then we were in the Sihanoukville area and did a lot of photography of the port area from well offshore with long lenses. Sihanoukville was Cambodia's main port for goods that do not come up the Mekong River through Vietnam. There was a substantial dockage area built by Soviet Bloc assistance. We rented three tents there and were able to sleep on cots, the first time during this trip that we didn't sleep on the wooden deck of our boat. Also there was a dipper bath.

Then, on the final day of our trip we sailed back into the small port of Ream, surveying the beaches between Sihanoukville and Ream as we cruised. The trip was over, it had taken us much less time than estimated. We had called the Embassy the night before from Sihanoukville and an Attaché car was waiting. We gave big tips to our trusty boatmen who had really made the trip a success and a pleasure to boot. We had seen a magnificent part of Southeast Asia and brought back a wealth of information not hitherto available. I had taken copious notes on all aspects of the trip including talks with Cambodian officials. I was anxious to write a Foreign Service Despatch on the political and economic aspects of this area.

But it never got written. Unfortunately my boss Mr. Parke felt this trip was a total waste of my time. There was no one in that area that could possibly serve as a distributor for American products. "No one will ever read what you write – it will disappear in the bureaucracy." Parke gave me another stern lecture on the importance of commercial work. The Ambassador and the DCM were also a little unhappy at the thought of an FSO submitting a report that represented outright intelligence collection. They were right, of course, and I could see their point, though I wasn't happy about it. I knew it was hopeless

and never wrote a word about southwest Cambodia for forty years. I sent my copious notes to Jack Stone and Judd Redfield in Saigon, and never saw or heard from them again. By the time the NIS section on “Coasts and Landing Beaches of Southwest Cambodia” was issued, if it ever was, I was long since gone from Cambodia. I never saw it.

But those islands were not to disappear from history, at least not the first island we had visited, Koh Rong Sam Lem, the main large island in the bay of Kompong Som. According to “*The Last Battle*,” by Ralph Wetterhahn (Carroll and Graf Publishers, New York, 2001) On May 12, 1975 the American container ship, the Mayaguez, was seized off the island of Poulo Wai by Khmer Rouge forces, which had just taken control of Cambodia. Poulo Wai was about forty miles from the Cambodian coastline, and the Khmer Rouge was patrolling in those waters to prevent its seizure by Viet-Nam, which also claimed it.

As the U.S. prepared to rescue the ship and its crew, the latter were taken by their captors in a fishing trawler first to the Cambodian coast, then to another large island a few miles offshore named as it happens, Koh Rong Sam Lem – unquestionably “our” Koh Rong. The ship, however, was anchored farther out near another island, Koh Tang. Presuming since the ship was there, the crew were also interned at Koh Tang, U.S. forces launched an assault of that island, which was fiercely defended by Khmer Rouge troops. During preparations for the assault, it was found that photographic intelligence of the island was not available, either because of the haste in which the operation was prepared, or because none was in the inventory. Presumably our photography of Koh Rong Sam Lem, where the crew was actually being held in a collection of straw shacks, was never searched for and found either .

After a bloody engagement, U.S. forces withdrew in some disarray from Koh Tang just as the crew was being released and returned to the Mayaguez. Casualties had been heavy, in part because of the lack of intelligence on the terrain of Koh Tang, and partly because of the unexpectedly large number of Khmer Rouge forces and their fighting ability. If the seizure of the Mayaguez had been serendipitous, its rescue was no less so.

In our trip to Southwest Cambodia we had not visited Koh Tang or Poulo Wai – that would have been a voyage in really “big water” as Captain Bruno had called it. But if someone had dug out the NIS we did the work for, they would have found descriptions at least of Koh Rong Sam Lem from 12 years before. So in the end Mr. Parke was right – no one ever did use the results of our wonderful week on a fishing junk off the coast of southwest Cambodia. The final touch was an article in the New York Times travel section on March 4, 2012 describing a newly-built tourist resort on the island of Koh Rong, said to be very popular among wealthy travelers – so at last someone had built a tourist hotel in the area – our “cover story” for surveying the coasts and landing beaches of southwest Cambodia in February, 1963.

Last Days in Phnom Penh

With only a few months left in my tour, I and went back to routine Foreign Service economic reporting. I wrote a few WTDRs and sent in reams of USAID economic statistics, with Mr. Parke spending hours redrafting my transmittal slips. As I mentioned earlier there were provincial troubles and traveling became an issue with the Khmer Government. I decided to sell my Deux Chevaux early before it broke down completely and become worthless. So no more travels; my only remaining trip in Cambodia would be to the airport.

Besides provincial unrest, the whole issue of our relationship with Cambodia in light of its Sihanouk's slide toward the interests of Communist China was coming to a head with the visit of the President of the People's Republic, Liu Shaoqi, in early May of 1963. Marshall Chen Yi, a powerful military figure, accompanied him. Liu was considered very close to Mao at that time and was a power in his own right. Prince Sihanouk was beside himself with excitement and determined to make this the greatest event of all time.

In a way this visit was a true watershed. And a lot of things were happening internally at the same time. Son Ngoc Thanh, the old Democrat Party nemesis of the monarchy, was broadcasting from South Vietnam, calling for overthrow from the right. There was some trouble brewing in the provinces from the left. There had been student riots in Siem Reap earlier in 1962, surprising Sihanouk because he thought of the provinces as containing nothing more than his tame and worshipping peasantry. But corruption in the rice trade was so bad that the farmers were being alienated.

Everything started falling apart in 1963. There were more riots, very serious ones, in Siem Reap, this time fomented by the Pracheachon Party. This was the public front group for what later became the Khmer Rouge – the “Cambodian People's Revolutionary Party.” These were specifically identified as anti-Sihanouk demonstrations. The Prince's internal security henchman, Kou Roun, probably the third most powerful man in the Kingdom after Sihanouk and Army Chief Lon Nol, rounded up and killed a lot of the instigators. Despite all of Sihanouk's slavish courting of the Communist powers, he was merciless in crushing internal dissent, especially leftists. The pseudo-leftists – the ones we saw as the main threat – flattered him and lauded his policies. But the hard-core leaders of what became the Khmer Rouge soon began fleeing to the maquis. We knew nothing about them, nothing. As things got worse even Chau Seng, a pseudo-leftist, eventually fled to France. Incidentally, the powerful Kou Roun later died as a penniless security guard in Paris after he escaped just before the Khmer Rouge take-over.

There was a scare about subversives during the Liu Visit and Sihanouk had agreed to let Chinese Communist intelligence personnel be stationed in the offices of the Cambodian national police. Of course this was not public knowledge, or even anything, which I, as a junior officer in the Consular Section, would have been informed of at the time.

As it so happened, on the first day of the Liu Shaoqi visit, an Embassy Political Officer named Tom Hirschfeld and his wife Hana took a trip up the Mekong and did not return by

late afternoon. They had rented a small boat from the “Cercle Nautique,” the local “yacht club” that rented boats for water skiing. They weren’t skiing; I think Hana simply wanted to get out of the city. She was European in origin and both of them were rather unhappy in Cambodia. Tom was a good friend and I became quite worried when they did not return as scheduled. Towards evening I went to the Cercle Nautique and set off up the Mekong looking for them. I started upriver in a motorboat with a Khmer boatman, and another boat was following close behind. My expectation was that their motor had quit and they were marooned on a sandbar or the riverbank waiting for help. That’s why I had brought the second boat; one would not hold all of us.

We were about ten miles up river when we passed a river steamer going toward Phnom Penh. On deck a foreigner was waving and yelling frantically. Of course it was Tom Hirschfeld, with Hana. They had indeed broken down but he had hitched a ride back on a river steamer. By the time I realized this he was well past my boat, moving rapidly downstream. So I told my boatman to turn and catch up with the riverboat with the hope that we could take him on board. As he turned, the boat following us smashed into the side of our boat. We started taking on water but the other boat was all right. I jumped into the other boat while my ex-boatman headed for shore bailing like mad. By that time of course the riverboat had disappeared. Within an hour the Hirschfelds were safe at the Phnom Penh docks.

Repairing the other boat took some time and it was well after dark when I got back to the Cercle Nautique. The Palace celebration for Liu Shaoqi was going full tilt a few dozen meters away. Fireworks were lighting up the river and there were Khmer police everywhere. At the yacht club I was stopped by the police and made to identify myself. The two boatmen were taken away but I was released after a few questions. The next day I learned at the Embassy that on April 28 Chinese police agents seconded to the Khmer police for the visit had allegedly uncovered a “Taiwan plot” to assassinate Liu. The leftist press claimed that a tunnel had been dug under the highway to the Pochentong Airport to plant explosives to blow up the motorcade.

One day in June Ambassador Sprouse called me into his office. I was sure he finally wanted to ask me about my trip to Southwest Cambodia. But no, he had two purposes. First, he congratulated me on being promoted to FSO-7, a staggering development given my poor relationship with my boss. Even better, he showed me the reply from Ericsson in Personnel to his letter concerning my onward assignment. He was outraged at the answer: it was not Chinese, but rather Indonesian language training! After 10 months at FSI, I would replace an officer named Frank Bennett in the political section of Embassy Jakarta. Ericsson’s letter added that I had been chosen because Bennett’s position encompassed what was called provincial reporting. Bennett had traveled widely in Indonesia for that purpose. Ericsson of course knew I had done a lot of traveling in Cambodia. In fact, we had almost gone over a cliff together at Phnom Den two years earlier. Ambassador Sprouse asked if I wished him to push harder for Chinese language training “at a higher level.” With ill-disguised glee, I thanked him and said I would give Indonesia a try. “It may not be there when you do,” he said. “Some years ago they kicked out all their

Chinese.” I knew my language skills were insufficient for me to learn Chinese, a very difficult language.

So my time in Cambodia was coming to a close. I recall that during the last month I became very sick and stayed with Roy Haverkamp for a week before departing. He took care of me – or his servant did. I had some sort of influenza plus diarrhea. The doctor came to see me; I wasn’t strong enough to go to the Embassy. No one there really seemed to care. Then one day the tour was over. Roy took me to the airport and helped me onto an old four-engine turbo-prop aircraft for Hong Kong. I was so sick I could barely stand. We flew for hours and got into Hong Kong late at night. Again I went to the Peninsula Hotel where I had stayed some two years earlier. And then again in the morning, I looked out the window and there was the same blue-green harbor, the sailing junks and the big steamers and the white buildings on the hills beyond; Hong Kong working its magic. I felt hungry for food for the first time in weeks. Within a few hours I felt much better and was soon on the Star Ferry heading for Chinese food and then some shopping. Cambodia was over, Indonesia was next – after language training. Sometimes I tell people I was “shanghaied” into the Foreign Service in Hong Kong, signed up willingly in Bangkok, and sealed the agreement in Indonesia. I thought again on the ferry that day: whatever they want me to do, I’ll do it if I can just stay in Asia. Needless to say I have never regretted that decision.

Indonesia 1964-68

Language Studies

I returned from Cambodia in July 1963. After home leave I took the train to Washington and found an apartment on the hill not far from the old Foreign Service Institute (FSI). In those years, FSI was still in the basement of the Arlington Towers apartment building in Rosslyn, VA, underneath the parking garage. With all of the exhaust fumes drifting down there, it was difficult to study especially since there were seven of us, counting the instructor, in a tiny, windowless cubicle. We started Indonesian training in late August or early September.

First, I’ll mention the people who took Indonesian training with me. One was Ted Heavner, recently returned from Vietnam. He had previously been assigned to the Vietnam Working Group in the Department. He was scheduled to be Consul in Medan [Sumatra]. Another was Paul Gardner, who was going to Indonesia for his second tour of duty in the Foreign Service. He had previously been in Madagascar. Then there was Malcolm Churchill, also a second tour officer, and his Filipina wife, Anita. They had met in college, actually. I can’t remember where they were previously stationed. She was almost instantaneously fluent in Indonesian, as she was a Tagalog speaker. The grammatical systems in both Indonesian and Tagalog are somewhat similar, though Tagalog is far more complicated than Indonesian. Then we had a genial older officer whose name, was Allan McLean. He was going off to be Consul in Surabaya. He was a fluent Spanish speaker which did not help him in Indonesian pronunciation, and I think

he never tried to use the language afterwards. Finally there was Dale Diefenbach, also headed for Medan to work for Ted Heavner as the No. 2 in the Consulate.

We had two Indonesian instructors: Jijis who was a Sundanese, from West Java, not a Javanese. The other instructor was Andang, a "Raden," --- a title of minor Javanese or Sundanese nobility. They were both excellent teachers. There was also a "Scientific Linguist" assigned to us to teach the structural aspects of the language, which he did not speak or write himself.

Both of our instructors were married to non-diplomatic list employees of the Indonesian Embassy in Washington. This was the period when Sukarno and his pro-Communist outlook and ideology were the dominant influences in Indonesia's international relations. While not formally part of the "Socialist camp," Indonesia was the leader among many other so called non-aligned countries that incessantly inveighed against a putative "imperialist enemy," i.e. the United States. We were all aware that our two instructors were not anti-government "exiles," at odds with the Indonesian regime. I'm sure they disagreed with most of the Sukarno/PKI approach but there was nothing they could do about it except occasionally roll their eyes. But in conversations about politics they mostly presented the Indonesian Government "party line."

We students of course feared that anything we said of a political nature might be repeated at the Indonesian Embassy, and perhaps on to the intelligence people there who were part of Foreign Minister Subandrio's *Badan Pusat Intelijens* (BPI). Theoretically the BPI was keeping dossiers on all foreign diplomats, so when you got to post, they would know all about you. We speculated that the Indonesian intelligence people were probably so inept that none of this really mattered – until someone pointed out the BPI could also be peddling the information to the Soviets. However, there was never any indication of this, and I doubt Jijis and Andang would have been part of that. Anyway like so many conversations with Indonesians then and since, the content was usually bland and inconsequential.

What the language instructors were teaching might have been called "high, (e.g. grammatical, polite) political Indonesian." This is not what the servants speak in Indonesia. My wife later could speak to ordinary Indonesians far better than I did. However, I could interpret in Indonesian and English for Ambassadors and Presidents, or at least I could then. Now there are moments when I have trouble remembering my Indonesian.

Occasionally we had a substitute teacher, Mrs. Mahmoer, who was a Minangkabau from West Sumatra, a strongly Islamic ethnic group which had fought and hated the nominal Muslim Javanese for centuries. That was interesting but not terribly relevant to what was underway in Indonesia at the time. In fact one couldn't get into discussions of politics and no one could be critical of anything. Occasionally, we'd have a "cultural afternoon," when they would talk about aspects of Indonesian culture, i.e. mostly Javanese or Sundanese aspects. Our teachers were afraid to say anything that might imply lack of support for the

Indonesian regime. They feared that somehow it would get back to the Indonesian Embassy, and their spouses would lose their jobs. Nevertheless we all got along pretty well, there were no petty squabbles in class that I remember. Both instructors were excellent and Jijis particularly was a strict and very effective teacher.

But I think, 10 months studying Indonesian is too long to do anything. Six months would be long enough, at the most. Then what the Foreign Service should have done is what Ambassador Phil Sprouse did, when he studied Chinese in the 1930's. He studied Chinese in a classroom for a year, then went to China and traveled through the countryside, sometimes borne around in a palanquin [sedan chair]. To survive, he had to use his Chinese, so he learned it fluently. Of course the State Department no longer has budget or training slots to arrange such "immersion training " even for short periods. It was a tragedy. The best thing about my year of language training was that during briefings at another agency, I met and dated a young woman, later proposed, and we were married in March 1964. She was able to take some Indonesian classes, as I was finishing up the last few months of Indonesian language training. Then we were off to Indonesia together.

Similarly to my training for my first post, Cambodia, I don't recall that there was a very close "inter-face" with the Indonesian desk. We did go there and read some traffic but it was difficult to put it in context because we didn't have the background yet. Perhaps my recollections are different because I was going out to Jakarta as the most junior political officer. I am sure that Ted Heavner, who was going to be Consul in Medan, and Allan McLean, who was going to be Consul in Surabaya, may have gotten better briefings. Paul Gardner was one grade above me. He was an FSO-6, and I was an FSO-7. Mal Churchill was going to go into the Economic Section, and he may have talked to the Economics people in the Department. I remember the names of officers working on the desk – Frank Underhill, Ed Ingraham – but I never really met them until much later. I don't remember anyone telling me to go there for briefings and no one to my knowledge visited the class. I think they were too busy. I had just come from Cambodia and went straight into language class. Afterwards we went straight out to Indonesia.

Getting Settled in Jakarta

In July 1964, my wife and I flew out to Indonesia, where we arrived on July 27. Frank Bennett, the officer I was replacing, and his wife Edith met us at the airport. As we drove in through the streets, there were marching demonstrators in several parts of the city. We went by the USIS Library, where there was a demonstration. Books were on fire in the street. We were put up in the Hotel Indonesia, looking out at the burnt-out hulk of the British Embassy across a circle with a fountain and a statue of two youths on a pylon. The British Embassy had been looted, burned and destroyed on September 18, 1963 by Communist and Muslim mobs, and of course the usual thugs and street-gangs, encouraged by Sukarno and the government to protest the independence of Malaysia declared that day. The confrontation against Malaysia was just a foreign diversion to whip up revolutionary sentiment and create a battlefield in Kalimantan (Borneo) where Sukarno could send much of the military who opposed his plans. At the same time he

tried to ensure that domestic unrest did not become so severe that anti-Communist elements in the Army had an excuse to move against the PKI.

There was no effort by the government to stop the mobs, it was part of the process of using an alleged foreign threat to radicalize domestic politics and stifle dissent. In fact the government-dominated press applauded the mobs. After a few days in the hotel, my wife and I were assigned to a prefab ranch house originally designed for Embassy housing in cool, pleasant Norway, but diverted to Jakarta after Indonesia gained its sovereignty in 1949. There was a line of these houses along a potholed street in a steamy suburb of Jakarta called Kebayoran. The street, Jalan Galuh, was a nighttime hangout for Indonesian transvestites, called "*bancis*," who lurked just beyond the security lights calling loudly to passing cars. There were also thugs in the neighborhood and we hired a night-watchman against that threat.

Our little house was hot and uncomfortable, but at least there was one working air conditioner. For the frequent electricity failures – sometimes several times a night - we had an electricity generator in our yard. It seemed to be powered by an old aircraft engine from World War II. When the power in the regular system went out, we had a "Jaga," or watchman, who started up the generator. He started the generator and also supposedly maintained it. We were about 40 feet from the generator and the roar was insufferable. The Embassy employees living further down at the end of the street could hardly hear it, but whenever the power went out, there we were, all night, with this aircraft engine roaring. We lived there for 15 months until, by chance, the day after the PKI coup attempt, we moved into the city – I'll get to that later.

Bob Martens, the number three in the political section, lived around the corner and we drove to the Embassy together every morning. The main street, Jalan Thamrin, was lined with various anti-American billboards. These generally showed "heroic" figures from the PKI, the Communist Party, impaling U.S. Ambassador Howard Jones on sharpened bamboo spears, with blood and guts coming out. There were all kinds of exhortatory slogans about "crushing the Americans" and Malaysia, because the campaign against Malaysia had started a year earlier. Over one of the canals, used as public toilets, hung a banner, which read, in English, "With the workers in the vanguard and the peasants as the base, Indonesia will never become the butt of the imperialists!!" Since at any given time hundred of "butts" were hanging over the edge of the canal in public view as Indonesians relieved themselves in the only place they could, the sign was funny at one level. But it was also a poignant commentary on Sukarno's disdain for the abjectly poor life of Indonesians who suffered while he pursued his revolutionary vision.

In addition to the lines of "revolutionary" billboards, the PKI [Communist Party] and other, so-called revolutionary groups were endlessly marching in the streets. Life in fact was very cheap. Occasionally one saw a body in the back alleys, someone who may have died of starvation, or perhaps from tuberculosis. The body was left there in the midst of the constant turmoil. Throughout Jakarta there were poor, shambling beggars everywhere, and thousands of other people hopelessly looking for work, a Southeast Asian Calcutta. It

was very different from anywhere else in Southeast Asia – the population pressure was so intense, even though it was only a third what it is today. Still there was never a landscape without a moving human figure, trying to stay alive.

Because of the politics it was exciting to live there – provided you were a well-heeled foreigner, especially with diplomatic status. In some ways the squalor was picturesque – people piled on top of public buses careening through the streets, belching out fumes with horns perpetually going. If you unknowingly passed a police checkpoint without stopping and paying them off, sometimes the officers would fire at you till you stopped. It was like something out of another world, a painting by Hieronymus Bosch. Traveling out in Java, the pot-holed roads were lined on both sides by shuffling migrant workers in rags, looking for work in the rice fields or heading for the towns. Millions lived by what they could scavenge from the trash of the wealthy -- nothing was thrown away, everything was recycled in a desperate effort for sustenance.

Even if government workers had wanted to do something about the situation, their time was taken up with rallies, speeches, sessions to heighten “revolutionary awareness and vigilance against the imperialists.” The few moments of surcease from that propaganda drumbeat were occupied with efforts to keep from being declared “counter-revolutionary” -- which would mean loss of a job. The incendiary rate of inflation wiped out salaries every few weeks so everyone had to have a racket if they were to survive. Government officials who had cars, by virtue of their positions, would work as taxi drivers, trying to get foreign exchange, rather than go to the office for increasingly worthless Indonesian Rupiah.

I’ve read recently that current scholarship depicts the period before Suharto, that is under Sukarno, as a sort of benevolent but slightly messy democracy. Of course these were the same scholars who praised the Stalinist regimes of North Vietnam and North Korea for their anti-American militancy. But that aside, the fact is that no one there at the time would have called it a democracy. The only voice of the people allowed was that of the pro-Communist and pro-Sukarno groups – nothing else was tolerated. Political discourse was reduced to the level of ferreting out and arguing about so-called counter-revolutionary nuances in media outlets and speeches from those not totally sold-out to the “course of the revolution.” There were many political prisoners, the press was utterly muzzled, opposition groups such as the Indonesian Socialist Party and the Masyumi were banned and their leaders jailed. To exist, other non-Communist political groups were rapidly weakening. They were being forced by social and political pressures – and often coercive power - to echo the so-called revolutionary line trumpeted by Sukarno and endlessly repeated by the PKI and its subsidiary front groups. They were also being forced to expel their anti-Communist leaders and replace them with crypto communists or Sukarno sycophants.

And increasingly after 1964, when I arrived, the sanctions against those who would not mindlessly repeat the pro-communist propaganda were being tightened and made more severe. Indonesians were getting very frightened about what was coming but the

propaganda was paralyzing them from speaking out against it. In February 1965, 20 newspapers and several political groups were banned for having implied that one did not have to be pro-PKI to be pro-Sukarno – this was denounced as “using Sukarnoism to destroy Sukarno.” That’s what I mean by symbol-manipulation, and it mattered. It was how Sukarno tried to move the situation along toward his vision of a revolutionary outcome.

The Embassy Front Office

It was a relatively small Embassy and though I was just a junior officer I did see the Ambassador a lot, especially at first. It was clear that while Ambassador Howard Jones was a small man physically, in the Embassy he was a towering figure. No one challenged him to his face; he knew how to rule. At the same time he was pleasant and charming if he liked and trusted you – if he thought you were on his side. He spent some time briefing his views to me, even though I was the most junior officer.

Jones was an enigma. He unquestionably had genuine love and fascination for Indonesia. Earlier he had been the AID Director in Indonesia and had formed a good relationship with Sukarno. Then the PRRI/Permesta [Indonesian rebel movement against Sukarno of 1957-1960] came along. The ethnic groups in north and west Sumatra had rebelled against Sukarno and the Javanese and the US was accused of clandestine involvement with that revolt. The rebel actions called the PRRI and Permesta were in Sumatra and Sulawesi, two other major islands of a more Islamic persuasion than Java, which was Sukarno and the PKI’s base of power. North Sulawesi was Christian and had been very pro-Dutch, another reason to revolt. This had happened when Jones was away from Indonesia. I think that he was AID Director in Taiwan after he was AID Director in Indonesia.

I was told that Jones then persuaded Secretary of State Dulles that, after this "collapse" in our relations with Indonesia, he could patch things back together because he had such a good, personal relationship with Sukarno. Indeed, Jones came back to Indonesia in 1959. As far as the nominal Indonesian relationship with the U.S. went, he more or less brightened the tone. To this day, he is the one U.S. Ambassador remembered with more warmth by Indonesians– now older Indonesians of course – than any other.

His approach was reinforced when Kennedy became U.S. President and U.S. policy began an effort to accommodate to leftist radicals in power in some formerly colonial settings, though remaining firm against communists in countries like Vietnam. This approach enabled Sukarno to use the good offices of the United States to get the Dutch to transfer sovereignty over the western part of New Guinea, which was named West Irian by the Indonesians, and comprised the last remaining part of the Dutch East Indies. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker negotiated that turnover, with Jones providing support, helped by Mike Forrestal who was said to be close to the Kennedy brothers involved in Washington. That settlement was considered a feather in Jones's cap, but once Sukarno had West New Guinea, naturally he needed another foreign threat. So when Malaysia got

it's independence from Great Britain, that's how the "crush Malaysia" campaign started.

Moreover, while this was going on during the period from 1958 through 1963, Sukarno had proclaimed what he called "guided democracy." He had banned the [anti-communist] Indonesian Socialist Party. He had banned the [equally anti-communist] Masyumi Party [moderate Muslim party]. He had raised the prestige and political power of the PKI. He didn't move it into the cabinet at this time, because he knew that the Army would not tolerate a full PKI minister in the cabinet, although two PKI leaders Njoto and Aidit had been made "coordinating Ministers without Portfolio". He had started pushing a whole variety of pro-communist initiatives,, including "People's Commissars" to control the powerful military. The Air Force and Navy, political opponents of the Army and rivals in the struggle for spoils, had moved close to Sukarno and the PKI was busily subverting them. And while all this was going on, under cover of this so to speak, Sukarno would say to visitors: "Oh, yes, I have a very good relationship with Ambassador Howard Jones." And then he'd laugh.

Jones seemed to feel that the structural changes going on in the political sphere - the growing strength of the communist party - were not important. He didn't really understand what was going on, and paid almost no attention to Indonesian domestic politics. For him the single most important factor was his personal relationship with Sukarno. Meanwhile the process of going Communist just kept rolling along, step by step. "A multi-faceted revolution" Sukarno called it. Then, when the Federation of Malaysia was established in 1963, the communists seized on this.

Actually, when it was first announced that Malaysia was going to become independent, the Indonesians welcomed this development because they thought they could make it into an Indonesian satellite. It was only when Sukarno realized that he and the PKI and other leftists could use this event as yet another "foreign threat," to further the process of radicalizing the society, that they changed their tune. They said that Malaysia was a "dagger, pointed at the heart of Indonesia." Well, when you look at the map Malaysia does look something like a dagger, pointed at Indonesia. Pretty facile stuff. Furthermore, Sukarno wanted the oil from Sarawak and Brunei. In those days Indonesia only had discovered modest reserves of oil in Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Java, but no one knew much about the offshore oil which was later discovered. So if Indonesia had been able to get the oil from Malaysia, it would have been in a very strong position.

Sukarno fomented a number of "phony" independence movements in Sarawak, Brunei, and North Kalimantan [also known as Sabah]. One of these phony movements was the North Kalimantan Liberation Front, which started promoting the slogan of "destroying" Malaysia. These bodies were pure fictions, of course. There was no real membership, just a leadership board of Sukarno cronies and PKI sympathizers. Sukarno also used these movements to separate the "real" revolutionaries from the bourgeois nationalists and from the "foot draggers," like the top leaders of the Indonesian Army.

Ambassador Jones was familiar with all of this, because he read our cables, but he did not

agree with the analysis. He seemed to believe that Sukarno was just a "playboy, seduced by the revolutionary jargon and that he pumped up the foreign threat to divert attention from the Indonesian economy which was collapsing. There was a bit of truth in this. Sukarno was bored with economics and in love with the sound of his own voice. However, Jones believed that Sukarno's heart really wasn't in the revolutionary campaign. Jones thought that if, at some point, he could only give Sukarno enough support or enough feeling of support from the Americans, Sukarno would abolish the Communist Party and come back into the nationalist fold. Many in the Embassy thought this was far-fetched, as indeed it proved to be.

Below Ambassador Jones was Francis Galbraith, the DCM, who was really the dean of Indonesia specialists and one of the most decent and capable officers in the Service. He was a major figure in the Embassy and was acquainted with Sukarno going back to revolutionary days. Sukarno called him Frank, and liked him. Everyone liked Frank and looked to him to "keep the Ambassador under control." Of course as a junior officer, I had no idea about DCM's and how difficult their jobs are in the best of circumstances – walking a narrow path between the demands of the Ambassador and the incomprehension of the staff. So at that time, it seemed to me at that time that Frank was kind of lying low. Actually he was holding the place together, as DCMs often must do.

A great deal revolved around the DCM, who was very accessible and easy to relate to. For example, once when Frank was Charge, a Communist-led mob had just destroyed the USIS Library on a corner near the palace. The Embassy had received a cable from the Department demanding a tough line. It instructed the charge to go in and see Sukarno, make a serious protest about what had happened in no uncertain terms, demand compensation for the destruction of the USIS library, and arrange to have the Indonesians rebuild the library. I had gone out to that library with a USIS officer, Jordan Tanner, the night before to try to rescue some of the books but to no avail. The mobs had blocked us, grabbed the books, and threw them into the fire. I should note parenthetically that no American was ever hurt by these mobs even though we were in the thick of them many times.

As Charge d'Affaires at this time Frank had to go over to see Sukarno and carry out the instructions sent by the Department. Frank usually went alone when he saw Sukarno, but he debriefed very honestly. Later Frank told us what had happened. He went over to the Palace and was ushered into Sukarno's presence, in his bedroom. Sukarno was sitting in a chair there, drinking coffee. Behind him was an Indonesian woman wearing only a sarong [wrap-around skirt] and a brassiere. She was standing behind Sukarno, massaging his head. So that's how the Chief of State of Indonesia received the American Charge, a man he'd known since 1948, who was there to present a protest in the context of US-Indonesian relations. Subandrio, the Foreign Minister, was sitting there watching. Frank just started laughing and said that he was still the same old Sukarno. Frank said he then handed over a letter embodying the protest. Sukarno put it aside and said: "Oh, I'll try to keep this thing under control." Then he said: "Frank, does your head itch?" Sukarno said to the girl: "Go over and scratch Frank's head." Frank demurred, thank God, and the

conversation continued, with the two of them talking about the "good old days."

The Political Section

When I arrived the Political Section was headed by Floyd Whittington who was a very nice man and concentrated on running the section and biding his time. He did both fairly well but was not an Indonesia specialist or a trained SEA political officer. Whittington left in September 1964 and Ed Masters arrived soon thereafter to become Political Counselor, about one year before the abortive pro-communist coup d'etat. Masters was very different from Whittington; right or wrong, he was an important player.

The No. 2 in the political section under Whittington and then Masters was Mary Vance Trent, who was one of the great "friend makers" *vis-a-vis* Indonesians. She had good "people skills" with Americans and everyone in the Embassy was fond of her. She was close personally to Ambassador Jones and his wife – they were all Christian Scientists. It was good to have her in the section. During the dark times Mary tried to maintain personal relationships with some Indonesians, and that was good. Unfortunately most of the Indonesians she knew didn't have a clue as to what was really going on. I remember meeting one of her guests at a cocktail who identified himself as her hairdresser, a pathetic commentary on our range of contacts at that time.

It was Mary of course, a decent and proper lady, who became the contact for the famous "Pat," Sukarno's American girlfriend. Pat became the inspiration for the book and movie "The Year of Living Dangerously," which told her story against the background of the last days of the Sukarno regime. The book is all wrong, of course, but it does convey the feeling of that moment in history.

Sukarno met Pat in the bar at a hotel in Cairo in 1964, where he'd gone to attend a "Non-Aligned Summit Meeting." He invited her to Indonesia and she joined him on his Pan Am chartered plane, leaving her mother to go back to the US. As I mentioned Sukarno was a charmer and even at 63, a Southeast Asian dictator as a paramour was more than a young American girl – 20, perhaps – could pass up. In Jakarta he actually ensconced her at the Palace, and she regularly came to the Embassy to describe to the mortified Mary Vance Trent her tales of "Indonesian nights." Of course for Ambassador Jones this was confirmation of his theory that Sukarno was really pro-American and he made a big thing about this connection in his back-channel cables. Soon, however, Pat fell for a young Australian correspondent; Sukarno found out about it, and the two were expelled. She went to Australia for a while, until he was sent to Vietnam on assignment and was killed there, I think by a mine. Then she went back to America, and eventually got married. Presumably now, in her later years, her adventure in Jakarta must be a warm and spicy memory. We all liked her; she was a charmer too.

Another officer in the section, Bob Rich, worked on Indonesia's foreign policy. He was quite facile in writing telegrams on negotiations and the "in's and out's" of bureaucratic matters. I believe he had done some work in the Department on the West Irian

negotiations and the final turnover of West Irian to the Indonesians by the Dutch. Jones liked him very much. Ambassador Jones would express some sort of vague hope and Bob could turn the remark into a negotiating proposal in minutes. This was during the period when Jones was endlessly trying to get Sukarno to go abroad to meetings with other leaders whom we hoped would calm him down. Rich was very good at handling this. For example, during this period Ambassador Jones was trying to come up with a way of getting Sukarno entangled with President Macapagal of the Philippines. It had to do with creating an inchoate organization called "Maphilindo," which we dreamingly thought would be a bulwark a la SEATO to the downward thrust of Communist power into Southeast Asia. We didn't realize that what was happening in Indonesia was an end-run because no one except a handful in the Embassy took Sukarno seriously.

Also involved in the Maphilindo ploy was the Thai Prime Minister, Sarit's successor. They were trying to get Sukarno to agree to attend a Maphilindo meeting with Tunku Abdul Rahman [Prime Minister of Malaysia] with the real aim of defusing the controversy over the formation of Malaysia. There were endless scenarios discussed. Jones was convinced that the alchemy of personal relationships among these common descendants of the great Malayo-Polynesian migration of bygone millennia would take care of what he saw as a petty dispute. He felt that Sukarno had climbed out on a limb and needed a way out. Tokyo was always favored as the locale for these putative gatherings because Jones thought Sukarno would be bemused by the Geishas there and tone down his position. Others, however, felt that this was a total waste of time, that Sukarno had to create a foreign menace to move the country to the left, and if it weren't Malaysia it would be something else.

Well, this ploy came to an end after Sukarno's speech honoring the anniversary of the Indonesian Communist Party. Indonesia, like Japan, has a literary tradition of limericks so to speak, called "*pantuns*," a bit like Japanese *haiku*. After a few derogatory remarks about Malaysia, Sukarno used a clever *pantun* to parody and dismiss the idea of meeting the Malaysia leader in Tokyo.

Meanwhile at the same time Sukarno was also sending troops parachuting into Malaysia, most of whom were captured by the British and the Malaysians almost immediately. Once the Indonesians sent a broken-down landing craft allegedly carrying highly trained troops said to be the "best" commandos that they had, to land in Malaysia. These troops walked ashore in Malaysia. Half an hour later they walked into a village, gave themselves up, and later asked for Malaysian citizenship.

Another officer in the Political Section was Henry Heymann, who had excellent contacts who were quite loyal to him even in the darkest times. He was a very good reporting officer. These were wonderful days when we had six or eight people in a Political Section.

The final officer to mention in the political section was Bob Martens, a strong analyst with great contacts who was an expert on Soviet and other forms of Communism. He had

taught himself to read Indonesian and was one of the best in the Embassy at that. Most importantly Martens had vision; without him no one would have known what was really going on. He had the capacity to weave together a large number of ostensibly unrelated matters into a coherent pattern that enabled him to predict what was going to happen next. He said Sukarno was systematically, if sometimes episodically, eradicating all non-communist opposition in order to install a Communist totalitarian state in Indonesia. This view and Martens himself were really the fulcrum on which all clashes of opinion within the Embassy on Sukarno and his motives were levered. Of course sometimes he overreached but his basic thinking was sound and he was an effective proponent of his views. Within a few weeks of my arrival, I became a strong adherent of the Martens thesis, perhaps partly because of my previous Cambodian experience. I could compare Sihanouk, the playboy Socialist prince, with what Sukarno was saying and doing, and see the difference – Sukarno was for real.

Other Embassy Staff

I should also mention that the Station in Jakarta was unusually close to and supportive of the Political Section. The Station Chief and most of his officers were team players – of course the agency detested Sukarno because of the denouement of the 1958 outer islands revolt, known as the PRRI/PERMESTA affair. They were all excellent officers. Of all the places that I've been stationed or heard about, I have never seen such a close relationship as I saw in Jakarta among the CIA Station, the State contingent, and USIS. The key guy in USIS was a cultural attaché named Hal Schneidman. Along with Bob Martens he taught me how to write airgrams. Hal introduced me to all of his contacts and showed me how to write. Although a USIS officer he was a major asset for the political section because as cultural attaché he still had some contacts. The rest of us had only a handful, virtually none, except for Bob Martens and Henry Heymann. Their contacts were invaluable.

Finally I should mention Colonel George Benson, the MAAG Chief, and Colonel Will Ethel, the Defense Attaché. Both were very close to Indonesian General Nasution, a major player whom Sukarno had kicked upstairs, and to General Yani, the head of the Army. They knew some people around Suharto but were not close to Suharto himself – no one was in fact. Suharto was a Javanese enigma, no one really knew him before the day of the coup attempt. He was still under a cloud for having been removed as Central Java Commander for corruption some years earlier. Nasution had wanted him cashiered, but Sukarno had saved his career.

Anyway, coming into the Political Section at this time were Paul Gardner and myself. We were brand new, junior officers. I had been in the Embassy in Jakarta for about two weeks. I had been watching all of this going on, this incredible turmoil, the street demonstrations, the burnings of buildings, the banning of some political parties, and the creation of new political parties. Happily for me, I had been in Cambodia for the previous two years and had some experience with "nutty," socialist movements, like the one which Prince Sihanouk was trying to put together, but which no one took seriously. The PKI had arisen under the Dutch, and was serious.

So a very important change had occurred in the Embassy when Ed Masters came in September 1964 to replace Whittington as political counselor. Masters was a strong officer and a very important guy in the Embassy, especially after Marshall Green came as Ambassador in the summer of 1965. Masters was able to "bridge the gaps" and keep things under control. I think that Masters never agreed with the Martens thesis on Sukarno as a secret Communist but he let most of the messages that explored this theory go out. Perhaps Masters "watered down" some cables to get them through Ambassador Jones, or he would wait until Galbraith was Charge d'Affaires and send them through Galbraith. Then Galbraith would "take the heat" when Ambassador Jones came back. Ed played a very key role. Actually we sent a lot of stuff in airgrams in those days.

So Ed Masters came out to Jakarta in 1964. We went through the period when Indonesia was withdrawing from the UN. I don't remember very much about the period January-March, 1965, but the situation was getting worse and worse. The Indonesian Government "seized" the Jefferson Library in Yogyakarta, a USIS library. Henry Heymann was sent down there to report on the situation. I think that somebody, a PKI demonstrator, struck Henry. It was really "nip and tuck." I remember that at least a dozen times a message came out from the Department asking if the Embassy wanted to evacuate dependents. Ambassador Jones was opposed to this, and on this he was right. He always said: "Well, I'll go and talk to Sukarno right away." That's what he always said. And he would find Sukarno somewhere, delivering a speech or some place in the Puntjak area [foothills South of Jakarta]. Jones had instant access to Sukarno, who treated him like a puppy dog. There were even posters of Sukarno, patting Jones on the head. A dog in Indonesia is no better than a dog in Saudi Arabia. However, Jones never looked at those posters. He said: "That's just for the PKI so that Sukarno can keep them under control." In fact, Sukarno had them under control. They were doing exactly what he wanted.

Dissent in the Embassy

I think apart from Jones any disagreement in the Embassy over Sukarno's real nature was reactively minimal. Everybody agreed he was a detrimental figure not only for U.S. interests but for those of Indonesia as well. How many really thought Sukarno was a Communist? I think at that time there were only a few. Some could not believe Sukarno was a communist but were convinced that Sukarno was a "very bad guy" and that somebody had to do something about him. Others would say: "How can he be a communist? After all, he chases girls and flies on Pan Am." It was true that he didn't fit the ostensible image of the ascetic Asian Communist leaders like Mao and Ho Chi Minh. Of course now we know that was nonsense – they were both "womanizers" a la Sukarno. In fact that line – the "playboy" Sukarno - was endlessly reprised in defense of a putative non-communist Sukarno. And while these arguments were going on, Ambassador Jones would try to keep down all of this criticism among the staff and especially keep it from reaching Washington.

On December 31, 1964, New Year's Eve, Sukarno gave a speech, during which he

announced that Indonesia would withdraw from the UN, if Malaysia took its seat in the Security Council the next day, January 1, 1965. I attended that speech with Ambassador Howard Jones. I used to translate for him when Sukarno spoke. I wrote up the reporting cable. I headed the cable on this speech with the following subject line: "Indonesia Withdraws from the UN." I did a draft of the telegram, the first line highlighting Sukarno's UN withdrawal threat and its implications. About midnight I gave my draft to Ambassador Jones. He had said that he wanted to see that draft that same night. So I left it for the Ambassador at the residence and went home. It was a reporting cable; nothing classified because he would do the comment and classify the cable accordingly.

On the following morning I went into the Embassy and did my usual work. By the end of the day, I learned that my cable had gone out to the Department in Washington. I hadn't seen it again before it was sent. The next morning I got the "come-back copy." Ambassador Jones had changed the subject line to: "Sukarno Gives New Year's Eve Speech." The first line had been changed to, and I'm not kidding: "In an otherwise uneventful speech, during which he did not attack the United States more than twice, and only made passing reference to Great Britain, Sukarno proposed the possibility that he might go so far as to take Indonesia out of the UN, if Malaysia took its seat in the UN. I urge the Department to do what it can to prevent the Malaysians from taking their seat in the UN until I can see Sukarno and try to work this all out." Malaysia of course took its seat, and Indonesia withdrew from the UN, the only country ever to do so.

The Embassy was not paralyzed by tension and there was some amused give-and-take with Jones despite a good bit of fear about what he might do to people's careers. And he was running the Embassy, after all - I mean no one was disloyal or insubordinate. Then too we were all very busy coping with constant demonstrations. Bob Rich, Paul Gardner, Henry Heymann and I, all language officers, took turns coping with the demonstrators at the front door of the Embassy. We were getting two or three demonstrations at the Embassy in Jakarta per week.

These were real demonstrations. They knocked out the windows of the Embassy with bamboo spears. On one occasion a mob forced its way into the Embassy and Ambassador Jones said: "Let them in, and we'll talk to them." We actually took them to the "Country Team Room" [classified conference room], sat them down and gave them Coca Cola and cookies. Then he came and talked to them and we eventually got them out of the Embassy. They really must have thought we were chumps.

But of course no one wanted to leave the post or threatened to resign – and there were no leaks to the press (what press in those days?) as I recall. Everyone wrote airgrams which went in largely unchanged. Others may have quietly sent letters to the desk trying to undercut the Jones line that things were basically okay in Indonesia and would turn to a pro-US track if the Malaysia issue could just be settled. But even those who didn't believe Sukarno was a Communist believed Indonesia at some point would collapse and the PKI would take over. Thank God for airgrams, in that era, since we could report the truth back in that mode which Jones never paid much attention to. But let me give you

another personal vignette.

Jones had earlier taken me with him when he attended Sukarno speeches and on some of his calls. The last time I accompanied Ambassador Jones to the Palace was on in January 1965, on the night of "*Israk dan Mi'radj*," which was the celebration of the birth, death, and ascension into heaven of the Prophet Mohammed. On this occasion Sukarno gave a speech in a big, dungeon-like hall. Ambassador Jones was sitting in the second row with me. I was still translating for him at that point. Sukarno was up at the podium in front. In the front row, on dinky little seats were D. N. Aidit, the head of the PKI; Subandrio, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister; and the entire "brain trust" of the Indonesian Government. Sukarno had seated all of the leading communists in the front row. The principal Muslim leaders were put back in the 10th row. This was another signal of what was going on. There were constant signals of this kind.

After his speech Sukarno came back to his seat in front of us. Of course, Ambassador Jones popped right up and started talking to him. Sukarno was a gentleman on such occasions and happily chatted away with Jones whom he liked. Then Jones called me up and said: "Oh, I want to introduce one of my new officers. This is Dick Howland." I thought it would be neat to show off my Indonesian so I said: "*Selamat Malam, Paduka Jang Mulia. Saja senang sekali bertemu dengan Bapak.*" [Good evening, Your Excellency. I am very happy to meet you.] I was going to continue in this vein. Sukarno said loudly, in English: "Stop! Where did you learn your Indonesian?" At that all other conversation stopped.

Well, standing right with us were D.N. Aidit, the head of the PKI, and Njono, who headed the Communist-controlled union, SOBSI. Chairul Saleh, a leftist non-PKI leader who was later purged, was there as were a few other top leaders of the PKI standing close to me. But I was an FSO-7 at the time, and I forged on into the minefield. I said: "*Saja belajar bahasa Indonesia di Foreign Service Institute di Washington.*" [I learned Indonesian at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington.] Sukarno said loudly: "No! You are from the CIA." Then he said to the group: "Here is the CIA, right here in the Palace." So Ambassador Jones said: "Oh, no, he's not from the CIA." Sukarno said: "Yes, he is from the CIA." Then Sukarno turned and walked away. Jones then said to me: "Well, I guess that I can't take you to any Sukarno speeches any more."

The Gathering Storm

The Sukarno speech of August 17, 1964, entitled: "The Year of Living Dangerously" had really brought home Sukarno's true intentions to many observers. It was evidently intended to exhort the PKI to do more, to take more chances in the field of land reform, to beat back the conservative, Muslim elements who owned the land, to beat back the Indonesian Army which was supporting the Muslim elements in the countryside, to seize land for the peasants, and to build revolutionary fervor to confiscate more land.

So the purpose of the Sukarno speech on August 17, 1964, was to get this "revolutionary"

process moving faster. At the same time Sukarno started "pumping up" the Malaysia issue. He also wanted to get that process moving faster. Sukarno took Indonesia out of the UN. Some people said that Sukarno and his supporters were "crazy guys." No, they weren't. This was a really symbolic act, because the People's Republic of China was not yet a member of the UN. North Korea was not then in the UN. North Vietnam was not then in the UN. Sukarno also included Sihanouk in his anti-imperialist axis, because Sihanouk would come down to Indonesia and sit at Sukarno's feet, like a lap dog, and try to be a revolutionary. Sukarno began to speak of the Pyongyang, Beijing, Phnom Penh, Hanoi, and Jakarta "Axis." He also created the concepts of the "New Emerging Forces" [NEFO], which were fighting against the "Old Established Forces [OLDEFO]", i.e. the U.S., Britain etc.. He started building a huge complex for conferences for the NEFO's. He was going to band them all together, the UN was going to go "down the drain" with the OLDEFO's, and that was going to be it. Indonesia would run the world. Incredible gall!

Of course, this aligned with communist ideology which postulates that the "rising forces of socialism" would get ever stronger with the workers and the peasants getting together more and more, as capitalism drove them together and mixed them together. Finally, Sukarno thought that capitalism would be overthrown and would fall of its own weight. Sukarno was trying to replicate this theory in his own conceptual language. He saw the "NEFOs" as a paradigm for the workers and peasants, and the "OLDEFOS" were the imperialists in league with local "bureaucratic capitalists", mainly the military who ran the state corporations. Of course those who didn't understand his ideology made fun of all this, said it was just verbiage to keep him in power. True! And verbiage to put the PKI in power after him! And the PKI trusted him to deliver the country to Communism. But because of Army pressure they had never put in place a para - military capability just in case he couldn't deliver the goods. In that "revolutionary" insanity of the age, no one thought that the "OLDEFOS" either in or out of Indonesia could possibly prevail. The so-called revolutionaries were drunk with their own propaganda.

Although Sukarno usually made the right noises, he had contempt for the other members of the so-called Non-aligned movement – the "NAM." He thought they weren't "revolutionary" enough despite their support for the anti-American fulminations of the communist states. It's hard to remember now that forty years ago we were attacked by most of the non-aligned world as the big "imperialists." Now of course we can act like big "imperialists" and there is no one to attack us. It's hard to remember now that back then, when we weren't generally "imperialists," we were maligned. Sukarno of course repeated this line and many of the other "non aligned" countries went along with him. But they never really took the OLDEFO thing seriously. They were never going to pull out of the UN. How could India have pulled out of the UN when its bureaucrats have staffed it for years! None of that was ever, really going to happen.

So this was Sukarno's grandiose idea. Between July 27, 1964, and October 1, 1965, there were almost 200 Sukarno speeches. Either over the radio, or on a public occasion that I attended with one Ambassador or Charge d'Affaires or another, I took notes on virtually all of them. I translated all of those speeches and drafted reporting cables on them. I had a

4 - 4 [Speaking, Fluent; Reading, Fluent] knowledge of Indonesian. In the rhythm of recurrence of the themes, you could see that Sukarno was clearly heading toward a communist state.

He couldn't have cared less about the Indonesian economy. He said on one occasion that he went out, "incognito," in a little, white Volkswagen. He went to a local market. He said that he knew that the Indonesian people were not suffering badly because he couldn't find anyone "frying stones" to eat. That is, "*menggoreng batu*." He said: "When the Javanese have nothing to eat, they say that it's time to 'fry stones'" [*menggoreng batu*]. No one was frying stones, so the fact that the Indonesian economy was going bad, these were just "lies by the imperialists." In short, he said, Indonesia is more prosperous than ever.

But by early 1965 Jones had lost his credibility in Washington. The rewrite of the UN speech and other developments had finally come to haunt him. President Johnson started paying some attention to Indonesia because of our troop commitment in South Vietnam. Some people from the Embassy in Jakarta had been in Washington on home leave, and they told some of the desk officers what was going on. Also, a special Foreign Service Inspection of the Embassy in Jakarta was scheduled. The Foreign Service Inspectors later said, in their inspection report, that the opposition in the Embassy to the policies of Ambassador Jones had reached such a point that it was widely known outside the Embassy in Jakarta.

I am sure that Ambassador Jones may well have been the right person at the right time during the 1959-1961 period to repair the relationship after the PRRI/Permesta affair. But he did not go on from there to understand what Sukarno's real goals were in the relatively final period of his life. Since Sukarno was a young man, he had wanted to create a socialist society in Indonesia, with a communist core. One of the first things that Sukarno wrote for a student newspaper in Bandung, which I later read, was a piece entitled: "How to adapt the lessons of Lenin to the exact conditions of Indonesia?" Of course, this is what Mao Zedong tried to do in China. This is what all of the revolutionary leaders were trying to do. In other words, how could you take the writings of Marx, which had nothing to do with the underdeveloped world or colonial society, and adapt them to the situation there? That is what the revolutionary leaders were all working at. There was Mao, working with the peasants. He had the idea of the villages encircling the cities. Sukarno had all of that written down and fully worked out, even before Mao did.

However, perhaps Ambassador Jones couldn't didn't want to think about anything to do with communism, because it was "atheistic." He simply didn't want to think about it. To the end Jones was firmly committed to the idea that Sukarno was really on our side, if we could only persuade him America was his friend.

Finally, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was sent out to Jakarta in May 1965 by President Johnson to find out what was going on in the Embassy. Johnson was getting so many conflicting signals that he started to mistrust Ambassador Jones. Bunker's arrival was spectacular. He was brought by one of the presidential Air Force 707s – and he came

down the ramp all alone. After we greeted him and got his luggage – one small bag – the aircraft pulled away. Bunker came to the Embassy right away and interviewed virtually all of us and drafted his recommendations. He spent more than two hours with Bob Martens. He told us what they were before he left to return to Washington. As a result both the Peace Corps and the AID Mission were withdrawn from Indonesia. USIS was drawn down to one officer and other non-essentially personnel were withdrawn along with some dependents. Best of all, Ambassador Jones announced his retirement and left soon thereafter, in June 1965. Frank Galbraith became Charge.

Withdrawing the AID Mission and the Peace Corps involved hundreds of people, counting dependants. Neither mission had been able to function for years, but Jones had resisted withdrawing them. Bunker gave the signal, with Presidential authority to back him up. At the working level we were particularly glad to get the Peace Corps volunteers out because most of them were outside Jakarta and were lightning rods for trouble. One was in Semarang, a major town on the north coast of Central Java, teaching sports at a university. He had fallen in love with one of the students, a girl named Maya. As it happened, her father was Chairman of the PKI Committee for Semarang, the Komite Kota or "CK-PKI." Needless to say the father didn't like this much and Bob was being harassed. At one point a mob of PKI hung a portable radio around his neck and marched him through the streets with a sign on his chest that said "US Spy" (mata-mata A.S.). We sent a consular officer there to rescue him and he left Indonesia. As it turned out, he later married Maya, joined USAID, and we were stationed with them later in Laos in 1971-74 and Indonesia again in 1983-87.

Thus as the demonstrations and attacks on the American Embassy proceeded, we were happily down-sized so we could handle them without needing to make arrangements for hordes of people. Moreover no more than one month's accumulation of incoming and outgoing cables was being held. We were in absolute "ready to burn" condition and ready for trouble.

In July 1965, Ambassador Marshall Green came out to Indonesia, having just been Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. Green had previously been Consul General in Hong Kong. So Ambassador Green was familiar with most of the written material on Indonesia, and was a man who read voraciously. He absorbed material wonderfully. I'll never forget when he first arrived in the Embassy in Jakarta. He went around and said hello to everybody. He came into my little cubbyhole and said: "What are you working on?" I said: "I'm working on this report that we do periodically on Indonesian relations with every country in the world. At this point I'm doing the section on Indonesia's relations with the Afro-Asian countries." Ambassador Green said: "Oh, you're in charge of Afro-Asian affairs? Are you also in charge of 'Aphrodisiac' affairs?" So I knew that Ambassador Green was a man who loved puns. Every day I tried to find another pun. Ambassador Green would come down to my office and ask: "All right. What's the pun today?"

Ambassador Green's sense of humor enlivened a brilliant mind and real strength of

character. Although Green may never have reached the same conclusions as Martens in regard to Sukarno on his own, he trusted and supported his staff. He respected Marten's intellect and brought a whole new spirit to the Embassy in Jakarta. The gloom that had submerged the Embassy was gone in a day. Frank Galbraith, the DCM, was a totally changed person. Ed Masters, of course who was a very good Political Counselor, gained considerable influence – he had worked for Green in the Bureau as Country Director for Thailand and Burma. He was a steadying influence in that he knew what the Department would consider far-fetched. He was concerned to maintain our reporting credibility, even though he toned some things down which, in fact, were far-fetched but true.

Most importantly, unlike Jones, Ambassador Green "stood up" to Sukarno publicly, and Sukarno started making the demonstrations worse. He staged one demonstration in front of the Ambassador's residence. The demonstrators chased Ambassador and Mrs. Green to the safe haven in the bedroom upstairs.

Sukarno was afraid of Green, I think. He thought Green had been sent to Indonesia to overthrow him. Some Indonesians speculated that this was the era of the "three greens," or maybe four. Green was an important mystical color in Java. In Sukarno's view, Ambassador *Green* had been Charge d'Affaires when Syngman Rhee was overthrown in South Korea [in 1960]. In the past, those who opposed Sukarno and the PKI included Muslims, whose color was *green* and the Indonesian Army, which wore *green* uniforms. Now the Americans sent Ambassador Marshall *Green* to Indonesia. So there were the "three greens." In Javanese mysticism, "three greens" are very significant. Actually there is a "fourth *green*." The "fourth *green*" is the "Queen of the South Seas," the "Njai Loro Kidul". According to the Javanese tradition, she rules the Indian Ocean and lives in a "green wave." When you see a green wave coming in off the South coast of Java, and you're wearing an item of green clothing, the Queen of the South Seas, the "Njai Loro Kidul" will seize you and drag you off, even if you're just walking the beach. There was a striking painting of Njai Loro Kidul, by Basuki Abdullah, which hung in Sukarno's palace – she was depicted as a beautiful woman meditating in the curl of a green wave.

Then in 1965 Njai Loro Kidul was said to have vented her wrath on a communist representative in Indonesia, the Bulgarian Ambassador. He had had been swimming off the South coast of West Java, near Pelabuhan Ratu – the "Queen's Anchorage" in Indonesian, a very dangerous place because of hidden currents. According to eyewitnesses, and of course the Javanese always see what they want to see, a green wave suddenly curled up and crashed down on him. When his body was found, it was alleged he was wearing a green bathing suit. So that was considered another "green" omen.

I don't want to over emphasize this but just to suggest that for Sukarno and others in Indonesia there were significant motivating factors stemming from Javanese mysticism. The fact that Njai Loro Kidul had seized a Communist was considered an omen for the Javanese "*dukuns*", or spiritual advisers, to ponder. It is possible Sukarno felt that he was being inundated with hostile green forces, real and mystical. I felt, although Bob Martens didn't particularly agree with this, that this perceived threat from the green forces, was

another reason that Sukarno and the PKI acted to pre-empt a putative Army coup by killing the Army leaders on the night of September 30-October 1, 1965. Whether such a coup was being planned was problematical at the least. It is equally possible that Sukarno, whether he believed in the “three greens” or not, may have used them as psywar to justify his actions.

There certainly were signals that something was going to happen. Djakarta was tense all that year, as more and more non-communist elements were banned or driven into quiescence. Then on August 17, 1965, Sukarno's independence day was called: "Standing on One's Own Feet." He said that the "Year of Living Dangerously", the title of the speech for 1964, had been successful. Now it was a matter of "reaching for the stars" – *tjapailah Bintang-Bintang di Langit* is what he shouted in Indonesian. "*Bintang-bintang*" means "stars." Where were the stars? Who wears stars, in today's world? General officers, in every Army in the world. That was a signal that Sukarno was finally going to get the last figures standing in the way, the remaining non – Communist leaders of the Army. Sukarno also said in that speech: "I've given orders for the establishment of a 'People's Commissar System' in the Army, to ensure political alignment. This order has not been carried out. I have given orders to arm the 'Fifth Force.'" The "Fifth Force" was to be composed of the "*Rakjat*," the people, who were to swim the Straits of Malacca and "crush" Malaysia. That order also hadn't been carried out, because the Army was dragging its feet. Sukarno continued, and I remember this now, because I translated every one of those damned speeches, "I say to you now that, even though you may have been a 'revolutionary hero' in 1945, if you are now a capitalist bureaucrat," – this was the PKI term for the Army leaders, and those associated with them, because many had become the directors of state corporations -- "the Revolution will crush you and leave you behind."

I believe Ambassador Marshall Green called on General Achmad Yani [then the senior officer in the Army] soon after that. He took that speech with him. Green understood the implications of the speech because we had been discussing it at the Embassy. He looked over at Yani, who had been laughing and giggling with his wife or perhaps his girlfriend, and tried to get him to focus on the speech. Yani put him off. When Ambassador Green debriefed at the Embassy after this call, we were appalled at Yani's insouciance.

One important aspect of the situation was the difference between Jakarta, where political tension was rife and events were moving sharply in the PKI direction at Sukarno's urging, and the countryside. There was terrible hardship in the countryside because of the Sukarno/PKI push for land-reform, unaccompanied by any of the rural infrastructure – credits, fertilizer, seed distribution, etc – necessary for land reform. Moreover unlike Vietnam farm sizes in Java were minuscule, and land reform was not possible even in theory, let alone practice. Nevertheless major pressures were building which erupted against the PKI – though not Sukarno - after the coup attempt.

East Java Trip

This came home to me on several field trips. I had been working steadily at the Embassy

and except for day-trips in West Java, had not traveled at all. We had had a baby in January and there was so much unrest in the city that I was nervous about leaving my family alone. But in May 1965, another officer named Jim and I decided to make a trip. He and I flew out to Surabaya, borrowed a car from the Consulate, and made a complete circuit of East Java. At the time East Java was said to be a "hot bed" of communist activity, and indeed it was in the cities and major towns. Remember this was over-populated Java where a provincial town and its environs might have close to a million people. There demonstrations were rife. So some Indonesian friends in Jakarta told me: "Don't go there. The communists will kill you." But I replied: "East Java is a strong center of Muslim activity. Madura is the most Muslim area of Java, and I want to see it." So, anyway, Jim and I flew out one morning on Garuda Indonesian Airways in an old Boeing "Stratocruiser."

We got to the Jakarta airport at four am, and sat on the tarmac until eight o'clock when the pilot, who looked like a teenage kid, came out to kick the tires. There were half-dozen passengers on this big plane and I was handcuffed to the diplomatic pouch, so I sat up in the baggage area. There were no functioning radios in the plane, no direction finders, and it was cloudy all the way to Surabaya. I could see up front that the pilot was flying by his compass and reading a newspaper as he did, but I felt very safe. Indeed we landed safely in Surabaya and were soon chatting with Consul Alan McLean (as I mentioned, from my Indonesian language class). He was nervous about our traveling. I recall his saying that things were dicey, because "none of the natives" would "look him in the eye." Nevertheless he finally gave us a car and driver from the Consulate, and we set off the next day, our route serendipitous.

It was a wonderful trip, a real eye-opener. If Jakarta was a "world of its own," East Java was on another planet, a strongly Islamic one. I mentioned how much I enjoyed traveling in Cambodia; Java was even more interesting and beautiful. On that trip first we spent the night in a cottage at a "hill-station" on the side of a volcano south of Surabaya. It was cool and pleasant, with a good restaurant. On the streets outside there were prostitutes everywhere but the gate guard fended them off and we got some sleep. The next day we drove up the side of Mount Bromo, an active volcano, spent the night in a village, and saw the sunrise over the magnificent mountain terrain. To spare you the whole travelogue, we went all the way around East Java. We stopped at Banyuwangi and looked across the Bali Straits at the island of Bali. In the straits the local *prahus* with colored sails and hulls were coursing about fishing. The current was very swift and the ferry that crossed the straits from Java had to head directly into it to get across at all – it sort of went sideways. Beyond the straits you could see a white sand beach and then low blue mountains. We wanted desperately to go to Bali but the driver was nervous. Neither he nor we had authorization from the Consulate to go over there and we thought: "What if something happens? We're not supposed to be over there." Too bad. I'd like to have visited there at this time.

We spoke with many Indonesians, low-level officials as well as ordinary people. We were always treated in a friendly way. Driving into a village on the way to the ancient temple

complex of Mojokerto, the kids ran up shouting “*impala, impala,*” (i.e. a Chevrolet Impala which seemed to be the village word for automobile), and we slept that night in the house of the Lurah, the village Chief. Never were we treated with discourtesy despite the anti-American propaganda of the cities. It was quite a contrast with Djakarta.

For example, we spent one night at a pleasant hill station, about 4,000 ft above sea level, near the town of Jember, East Java. The Dutch had set up a number of these hill stations, or resorts, in the mountains. It was like the hill stations in India, Indochina and elsewhere in the colonial world. There was a beautiful sunset and in front of us in the fading light was a smoking volcano [Gunung Semeru] rising beyond the rice terraces.

While we were sitting out on the veranda, having a Scotch in the early evening we saw two guys walking up the road that led up the hill from the town of Jember. They arrived and took seats at the table next to us. So we invited them to have a beer with us. As we talked it turned out that one of the m was the head of the PKI Komite Sub-Seksi, the Chief of the Sub-Section Committee of the Indonesian Communist Party, for the small village that lay below on the main road toward Jember. The other was his deputy. They must have seen us go up the side – road through the village and had walked up almost 5,000 feet to see what we were doing. The hill-station was just outside Jember, East Java, a strongly Muslim area with large numbers of Madurese transmigrants working in the plantations. We felt pretty safe there and we continued talking to them.

It was all very jocular as always with Javanese. They identified themselves, and we identified ourselves. They said: "You're the imperialists, ha, ha." And we said: "You're the communists, ha, ha." So we started having a lively argument about Malaysia and Vietnam, various other subjects – anything but Indonesia.

Finally, after about an hour of this, the Chief of the KSS/PKI announced that he was not going to sit there with American imperialists any longer and was leaving. He just got up and walked away. But the other guy continued sitting there. After a long silence, we said: "Would you like another beer?" The guy said: "Yes." So we got him another beer. He looked out at the view and suddenly said: "My brother is studying medicine at Johns Hopkins University on a USAID scholarship. Would you take a letter to him, please?"

I said: "Sure." He said: "I'll get it back up here in the morning, but don't tell anyone about it." I said: "How come he's studying there, and you're a member of the Communist Party?" I said: "At least I assume that you're a member of the Communist Party." He replied: "I'm a Christian. This whole province is largely Muslim. They kill Christians out here. They murder them. However, in the Communist Party, we're united. There are many Christians in the party."

In fact, in Indonesia there was the Partai Kristen [Christian Party] which consisted of Protestants, and the Partai Katolik [Catholic Party]. This guy was a Protestant Christian. The Catholics had some protection, because they had a Bishop, the Pope, and relations with Indonesia, all that kind of thing. They were also accepted because many ethnic

Chinese were Catholics, and paid off the Muslims to leave them alone. The members of the Christian Party did not have these safeguards. In the cities they were safe, but in Muslim rural areas there was always danger. So there we were, talking with a couple of Communist Party members, one of whom had a brother at Johns Hopkins University. He had joined the PKI for protection against the Muslims, not for ideological reasons, or so it appeared. Many people had done that in rural areas, not only Christians but the Javanese animists, the so-called *abangan*.

This was a fundamental factor in the sudden collapse of the PKI after the abortive coup attempt despite its claimed membership of millions.

Cutting the Ears

Another indication of this weakness in rural areas cropped up before me a few months later. At that time my son was about eight months old, now sitting up and able to move around a bit. Both my wife and I had been raised on a beach so to speak, and we wanted to take him somewhere to play in the waves. But the Java Sea is quite polluted, the rivers flowing there pure sewage. Moreover we feared the country was in turmoil, and it would be dangerous to drive.

However, one day we heard that there was a little beach at a place called Anyer-Lor on the Sunda Straits [between Java and Sumatra], where the water was clean. There we could let him put his feet in the water, as in America, if only for a few minutes. So we drove there in our little Volkswagen Beetle, about three hours on terrible roads. We got to the beach, which was a dreary black sand beach, a hot smelly place with buffalo and cows wandering around and scaring you. You learn very fast in Southeast Asia that buffalo do not like white-skinned foreigners. But little waves were washing up and the water was clean, since the current in the Sunda Straits runs at eight to ten knots. Offshore we could see the remnants of Krakatau island, which blew up in 1888, killing 40,000 people. Now it was just a low line of gray coast in the distance, with the mountains of Sumatra beyond. It was nice to be out of Jakarta with our newborn son, and seeing the country.

So we let my son Steve sit in the water, and we spread out a blanket to have our lunch. And then, a young Indonesian kid came along with a bamboo stick, with which he was pushing a tin can down the beach. The can had a red star on it. So I said to myself: "I've never seen anything like this before." Then I said to the kid: "Hi, *bikin apa dengan kaleng jang dibintangi itu?*" [Hi, what's up? What are you doing with the can marked with a star?] "Bintang" means star. He said: "I'm going through hazing." He said that he was joining the Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia, a Muslim university students group. We had been unable to get close to them --- they were always on the verge of being "banned" by Sukarno because they were the last overtly anti-communist organization, slightly protected by their large membership and Islamic cast. But basically, they were college kids.

Well, this was remarkable. In the weird politics of that age, "hazing," had been banned by the communists and the Indonesian Government as a bourgeois remnant from the past and

all of that. Yet this kid was being "hazed." How could anyone get away with this, forcing him to do this to get into this organization, which amounted to a kind of fraternity? So I asked him to sit down, and we gave him some of our lunch. Oh, I should mention that he was fascinated by my son's bright red hair. Bright red hair is considered very "lucky" in Indonesia. This kid couldn't keep his hands off my son's hair. He evidently thought that he was getting a lot of good luck by touching my son's hair.

We sat and chatted with him. I invited him to have a beer. He said: "No, I don't want a beer. I'm a Muslim." Then I said: "I thought that I had read in the paper that 'hazing' was outlawed." "Hazing" came out as a word clearly derived from English, like "*meng-haze-kan*." He said: "Hazing has been outlawed by order of the '*Bapak Presiden Panglima Tertinggi, Pemimpin Besar Revolusi*.'" [President and Commander in Chief and the Great Leader of the Revolution] He used all of these honorifics. Indonesians seldom referred to him simply as "Sukarno," without using about 43 titles with his name. It was considered respectful.

Then he said: "But that's just Jakarta stuff." This was September 18, 1965, mind you, about two weeks before the abortive, communist-led coup d'etat, which was actually a Sukarno putsch against the anti-communist Army, with revolutionary fervor at a fever pitch in Jakarta. But he said that this Jakarta stuff didn't apply outside the capital. The kid continued: "But I go to the University of Banten. We don't pay any attention to that Jakarta stuff there." I said: "Well, when you're at the university, with this hazing, don't the local PKI people get concerned about it?" He said: "We just beat them up. If they give us any trouble, we just beat them up." I said: "Really?" He said: "Yes, this is a Muslim area. The communists try to take our land, burn down our mosques. But they don't get away with it outside Jakarta." Just as East Java was another world, it seemed so was the far tip of West Java as well.

Then this kid said: "I'll tell you something. In some parts of Java where the Muslims are strong, there are already cases of cutting the ears off communists." Now, in 1948, during the revolution, the PKI had rebelled at Madiun, East Java. The Army had put down the revolt with West Java's Siliwangi Division, whose officers told anti-PKI people in the area to "bring back communist ears, and you'll be paid for them." So they used to cut the ears off communists. In fact, they probably cut the ears off lots of people who weren't communists. This practice which had happened in 1948 at the time of the last PKI coup attempt perhaps had recurred if this kid was right. Even if he wasn't, the fact that he would talk in those terms, that people were thinking in those terms, was significant. I went back to the Embassy and reported that. There was some discussion that perhaps the PKI had not moved on September 1 because the Muslims were getting their backs up in the countryside.

Bob Martens had predicted that the PKI would move on September 1, based on his theories and the August 17, 1965 speech. He was really looking for evidence of coup d'etat planning by the PKI because he knew they had to move against the Army. But the Station did not seem to have no really reliable sources at high levels in the PKI, although

they did have a few leftists around the fringes. So the only real source for guessing at the intentions of the PKI was what Martens could divine through his analytical dissection of PKI statements and publications. Based on these Bob Martens felt that Sukarno was trying to "set the stage" for a Leninist act of terrorism to create fear and uncertainty in Indonesian society, so that the PKI could be moved into power. As a result, when there would be an act of terror, people would be paralyzed and unable to act against a PKI take-over, a so-called "NASAKOM Cabinet." [NASAKOM was Sukarno's acronym for a supposed coalition of nationalist, religious, and communist parties]. Possibly the move had been deferred because Sukarno fell seriously ill in late August.

The September 30 Affair

In the last week of September, Martens began picking up odd items in "*Harian Rakjat*," [People's Daily], the PKI daily newspaper. One article said: "Jakarta is pregnant with the new society, and the midwife is NASAKOM." Well, you could interpret this as just propagandistic blather. Martens felt, however, that in the context and Sukarno and the PKI's revolutionary "push", the "new society" meant the entry of Indonesia into the socialist stage, leaving the "national democratic stage" behind. After that item appeared, it was repeated in all of the dozens of newspapers controlled by the PKI, With variations on that theme, the message was getting out that the party was getting ready to move, that Indonesia would give birth to a new type of society, a communist state.

But the communist effort was not a coup in the sense that anyone was trying to overthrow Sukarno or change the pro-Communist orientation of his policies. Just the reverse. Sukarno and the PKI had been forging ahead eliminating or neutralizing other centers of political power, preventing these other groups and organizations from combining against them. Now the time had come for an act of terror to eliminate the last major center of anti-Communist strength, non-Communist leaders in the Army, in such way that no one could block the establishment of a Communist state, one in which the traditional organs of government are nominal shells and all state power is held by the Communist party. That was the coup attempt – a coup against the Army and the remainder of the still anti-Communist society. And it almost worked, only through a bit of luck and much Indonesian ineptitude did Sukarno and the PKI fail.

The anti-communist rollback of what amounted to a Sukarno/PKI purge of the non-communist leadership of the Army has been much maligned by the people in the Modern Indonesia Project at Cornell and by other leftist scholars in the U.S., and claimed that the CIA was behind it. I would point out, these scholars were not there, on the scene in Jakarta, at the time at the time of the coup attempt. Moreover, their information came from the left side of the spectrum – the very elements that were disadvantaged by the rollback of the coup attempt. My own feeling is that it was a uniquely Indonesian event, although the Chinese, who were close to the PKI, must have known about it. Although the event was called "the September 30 Movement", most of its actions talk place on October 1 – China's national day.

On that morning I drove in to the Embassy with Bob Martens, starting from Jalan Galuh in Kebayoran and along Jalan Thamrin, the major divided highway linking the southern suburbs like Kebayoran with the Menteng area of Jakarta, the main seat of government. At the north end of Jalan Thamrin was the main square, which was called Medan Merdeka [Freedom Square]. Along the four sides of this square were located virtually every agency of the Indonesian Government which exerted significant state power, plus the U.S. Embassy! Thus we had a ringside seat to what was about to occur. Naturally over the centuries, the Dutch had put the colonial predecessors of these Indonesian agencies around that square, with the Governor General's Palace, now the President's Palace, at the far side from the Embassy. Originally our Consulate General from the Dutch times had been in what became a scruffy neighborhood, and the Embassy had moved to Medan Merdeka in the early fifties.

Located around the square were the National Bank, Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, Istana Merdeka [Freedom Palace] as I mentioned, where Sukarno lived, the Office of the Vice President of Indonesia, the national Telecommunications Building, the Headquarters of the Indonesian Marine Corps, the Army Headquarters, and most important --- the headquarters of the Army's Strategic Command, of "KOSTRAD," which was commanded by Major General Suharto. Next to KOSTRAD was the national headquarters of the Army-controlled national oil monopoly, Pertamina, and more – I can't remember them all. The Dutch of course never thought that they were going to be overthrown, so there was no reason to disperse the elements of power. They were all on the streets around this square, facing it. In the vast open spaces of the square itself, which had been gardens under the Dutch, squatters' colonies had developed during Indonesian times, and there was rusting construction equipment from the building of the national monument and a museum at the center of the square. Most of the square was fields and brush and squatters huts hidden amongst it. Periodically the police burned out the squatter's huts, and then took bribes to let them be rebuilt.

As I mentioned that morning I was driving, and I turned the corner, from Jalan Thamrin to the Embassy street, Medan Merdeka Selatan, passing the Bank Indonesia right there. Normally this was a bustling corner – one of the few traffic lights in Jakarta. But on that morning there was not much traffic and suddenly we saw strange troops everywhere. They were strange to us because they were wearing bright green berets and camouflage uniforms, i.e. combat dress, and carrying weapons. Now, often there were some troops lounging about the square when perhaps Sukarno was going off to a speech somewhere - but then they would be wearing the black berets of the Jakarta territorial command, or the purple berets of the Palace Guards.

The way the Army was organized was the following: each territorial command on Java had ranger or "special forces" - type troops attached which could be called away, usually by KOSTRAD, to be used for special tasks such as the "Crush Malaysia" campaign. They were called "Raiders" and wore green berets. Each Armed Service also had special forces troops, and the Palace Guards, or "Tjakrabirawa," were also specially trained and equipped. They wore purple berets. Finally, there was a unattached Special Forces

regiment called the “RPKAD”. They wore red berets and were attached to KOSTRAD, sort of a national strike force.

West Java’s “Siliwangi” Division, commanded by a pro-Sukarno General named Adjie, of course had a “raider” unit which wore green berets. Sukarno kept the Jakarta garrison command relatively under strength and the balance of military power over the capital was usually held by Siliwangi Division, which had sizable armor units as well as the raiders and the ordinary troops. West Java was the home of the Sundanese people, who were strongly Muslim and relatively anti-PKI compared to the Javanese in Central and East Java. In 1948 it was Siliwangi Division under General Nasution which had crushed a PKI revolt in the East Java town of Madiun. Although Adjie was not a Communist, he was very close to Sukarno and a decent but ambitious man. He didn’t like Suharto.

But what was unusual this morning was the presence of troops there wearing bright, green berets, in and around the “*Gedung Telekom*” (Telecommunications Building). There were at least 60 or 70 soldiers wearing green berets and milling around. Green Berets to me meant Siliwangi, because it did not occur to me (until later, when we found out) that these were actually Ranger units from Central Java and East Java, the so-called “Diponegoro” and “Brawidjaja” raiders. As it turned out, that’s what they were – surreptitiously moved to Jakarta on the ruse of being detailed to march in a parade on Armed Forces Day, celebrated October 6. It was a big celebration, and some troops were always brought in to march in the parade. That was the practice every year on Armed Forces Day. But that parade was always held outside the downtown area of the city, not near the palace. We also noticed that there seemed to be groups of young people in and around the entrance to Telekom, as it was called. I thought at first perhaps Sukarno was going to speak there at some event, but there were no Palace Guards, no “Tjakrabirawa,” and no podium set up.

So we drove on a few dozen yards on Medan Merdeka Selatan, past the Foreign Minister’s office and into the Embassy Compound. There were no Embassy guards, no security, and no barbed wire in those days – just an open gate. We parked in back and walked around the L-shaped building into the Embassy front door. We stopped at the Marine Guard desk to chat with other officers standing there, and at that moment Ambassador Marshall Green walked into the Embassy. Because he lived in another area of Jakarta, we knew that he came from the other direction, so we told him about the troops at Telekom. He said: "Turn on the radio immediately." The Embassy office hours started at 7:30 AM. We had arrived there at about 7:25 AM.

I immediately went upstairs into my office and turned on the radio. A few minutes after 7:30, a special announcement of the “Revolutionary Council,” said to be headed by a Lt. Colonel Untung, who turned out to be a Tjakrabirawa officer and the nominal leader of the coup d’etat. That was the coup announcement and it was broadcast several times. Now, almost fifty years later, I can’t remember all the details. But it was the first word of the coup attempt, the first public evidence of the coup attempt.

The coup itself had actually started at about 2:00 AM, when “death-squads” attacked a

number of senior Army Generals in their homes, ultimately killing several except for the head of the Armed Forces, General Nasution, who escaped. The rest were killed by the military groups and by youth groups connected with the PKI.

As the morning proceeded, other stories and additional details came in. However, as of 7:40 AM, there was just that announcement. At that time we were flabbergasted. Nobody in the American Embassy knew anything about was happening, although later vague reports of shooting around some Generals' houses came to our attention in the course of the morning. And we did not know who was in charge although it was clear that the Raider units controlling the square were not under the leadership of the Army.

The morning of October 1 was a Friday, the day normally scheduled for the "Country Team Meeting" at 8:00 am. By the time I had finished transcribing the "Revolutionary Council" radio announcement, my boss Ed Masters and other senior Embassy officers were already attending the Country Team Meeting. I added a paragraph to my little write-up noting the presence of unknown troops in green berets at the Telekom building. This is where I made a colossal mistake; I assumed because of the green berets that they were Siliwangi Division Raiders. As I mentioned West Java's Siliwangi Division was generally considered anti- or at least non-communist, especially in Washington. Then I went to Bob Martens and Mary Vance Trent and said: "Listen," and I read out the announcement to them. Mary told me to I ought to go to the Country Team Meeting and read this radio announcement.

It was then about 8:05 or 8:10 AM. I knocked on the door of the room and with great trepidation, I walked into the Country Team Meeting. I had never attended a Country Team Meeting in Jakarta before. This was "pretty heavy stuff" for me. I said to Ambassador Green: "Excuse me, sir. You told me to listen to the radio. There was a coup d'etat announcement on the radio." At that everything stopped.

And at that point, if I remember correctly, someone who had been stopped in mid-presentation by my interruption said: "Are we still talking about the school bus funding?" I guess that he hadn't been listening to me. No one replied to him. Ambassador Green said to me: "Read what you have there." So I read the announcement out. He said: "OK, dictate it and prepare it as a cable right away. Do it as a CRTIC [special priority] message and send it." Of course, by this time FBIS [Foreign Broadcast Information Service] in Washington must have had this announcement. However, I added to the text of the announcement that on the way to work we had seen an unusual concentration of troops wearing green Berets in front of the Telecommunications Building, and presumed they were Siliwangi Division.

But then, as that message was being typed, Henry Heymann came in and said: "There are troops with machine guns taking up positions on the other side of Merdeka Selatan Street from the Embassy." As I mentioned Medan Merdeka is the vast field right across the street from the Embassy. Henry said he had gone out and spoken to one of the soldiers in Indonesian, and the soldier had said he was "protecting Bung Karno," i.e. President

Sukarno. Henry also noted the troops were wearing little red ribbons tied to their shoulder straps. So we included that information in the cable I had drafted. I took the cable back to the Country Team room, where there was heavy discussion underway. Ed Masters told me to take it to what we then called the "Code Room," and tell them to send it. So I did; it was pretty exciting. But unfortunately, it was wrong and I am embarrassed about it to this day. These were obviously not Siliwangi troops, but part of the PKI forces.

As it turned out, the cable really baffled Washington because of the reference to Siliwangi division troops around Telekom, and the pro-Communist verbiage of the "Revolutionary Council" announcement. It took until late in the day to sort all that out and correct the misapprehension. Indeed during the course of that Friday, October 1, 1965, we tried to organize ourselves to "get a handle" on what was happening. The station chief and a case officer went out in his little Volkswagen Beetle and drove around Jakarta, trying to find someone to talk to. Colonel William Ethel, the Defense Attaché, also went out to find some military officers. The Ambassador directed the institution of joint "situation reports" ("SITREPs") drawing information from all agencies, to be pulled together by Paul Gardner and submitted through Ed Masters. Neither the Defense Attaché nor the CIA balked at this – it was a time for teamwork if ever.

Finally, in late morning, Colonel Ethel was able to intercept one of the Army Generals en route to a meeting. He learned that the troops in the square were the Diponegoro and Siliwangi raider battalions from Central and East Java, not West Java Siliwangi. These battalions were commanded by pro-Communist officers. He also brought in the news that several senior generals were "missing," that blood was found at Army Commander Yani's residence, and that General Nasution, the Minister Coordinator of Defense, had fled his house and nobody knew where he was. As it turned out, he was hiding in the garden of the Italian Ambassador next door with a broken leg from jumping the garden wall.

Nasution was the most senior general but Sukarno had earlier "kicked him upstairs" to be Minister Coordinator of Defense to take him out of the direct line of command. General Achmad Yani, the senior general with command authority, was in command of the Army. Interestingly enough, one General who was "missing" was the husband of a woman who took English lessons from my wife.

Early in the afternoon, Colonel Will Ethel had brought in some additional information. He said -- and this was the first time that any of us, except for the Army people, had ever heard this name - "General Suharto the KOSTRAD Commander is trying to pull things together. He has some troops under his command. He thinks that a boatload of RPKAD [the Army para-commandos] that were to embark for Borneo, is still in the harbor at Tanjung Priok. They had been scheduled to go up to Kalimantan for the 'Crush Malaysia' campaign, but the boat broke down." On that, the whole future of Indonesia turned, right there. It's very Indonesian to have a broken down boat responsible for a turning point in history. If the RPKAD had been shipped out, Suharto would have had no troops.

All this was unbeknownst to us at the time as we gazed out at the machine guns facing the

Embassy. Suharto started building his forces, as Colonel Ethel put it: “ a squad here, a platoon there.” He got in touch with the Navy and Air Force Headquarters and secured pledges of neutrality, saying what was going on was an Army matter. This of course wasn't true, but he was playing for time. All the while he was talking to the commanders of the two raider battalions, which controlled the square, and with their deputies. Then General Suharto got the RPKAD off the boat.

By 6:00 PM Suharto had negotiated the raider battalion troops away from Medan Merdeka. He did it with the force of his own personality. They fled to Halim Air Force Base, where D. N. Aidit and the senior PKI leaders and Sukarno were located. The missing senior generals had been killed, and their bodies were thrown down a well at a place called Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Hole) at Halim Air Force Base itself. The people involved in the coup fled out there. General Suharto sent a message to Halim advising that “the President should leave the base because I am preparing to attack it.” With that, Sukarno fled to Bogor in an air force aircraft, which afterwards also took Aidit and other communist leaders to Central Java. The troops at Halim Air Force Base then surrendered – the only casualty was a water buffalo shot by mistake. Within a few hours that evening General Suharto had retaken Jakarta.

But we didn't know this at the time. In fact, I got home at about 7:00 PM. I told my wife: "Turn the radio and the tape recorder on. I'm going to take a shower." I had listened to the radio all the way home from the Embassy in my car. We had a radio and a tape recorder at home, which I used to help translate all of Sukarno's speeches. I got out of the shower by about 7 :45 PM. My wife said there had been a long announcement on the radio that didn't sound like Sukarno. I played the tape recording back, and it was an official Army announcement, stating that General Suharto had assumed temporary command of the Army. It called upon the coup-group troops located at Halim AFB to surrender. There was to be a curfew from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM. When I transcribed it, I knew despite the curfew I had to go in to the Embassy. It was the first indication of that the Army seemed to be in charge and I thought they might have missed it .

So, that quiet Friday night I drove back to the Embassy to report. There was no one on the streets, not a soul. It was very unusual. Nothing was moving, although it was then 9:00 PM. Indonesian streets are normally very "*ramai-ramai*," very crowded. But they were empty, not even the ubiquitous peddlers. I drove along Jalan Thamrin as usual and turned at the National Bank and continued to the Telecommunications Building. In the street in front of the Telecommunications Building were a barbed wire barrier and a squad of troops. One of the soldiers stopped me. I identified myself with my diplomatic ID card. I thought that they were wearing red Berets. I was nervous because had been rumors earlier that after the PKI took power they would intern American diplomats.

I stopped and sat, and finally an officer came over and asked where I was going . I looked more carefully at his Beret. It wasn't a green Beret. It was a purplish color Beret, the kind worn by the RPKAD. not the coup troops from Central Java. I told him, in Indonesian that I was going to the American Embassy to report to the Ambassador that Radio

Indonesia said General Suharto had taken control of the situation.) His reply was magical; he said: "*Bagus, Tuan. Madju terus.*" (That's good. Go ahead.)

So I went into the Embassy; no one was there but a communicator. Not another soul. But I knew I'd have to report this somehow and was afraid if I went out again to clear it with the Ambassador or Ed Masters, I'd be stopped again. The telephones, of course, had been out since the morning. So I put all of this information in a cable, exactly what I had heard over the radio and my conversation with the officer. I went to the code room and gave it to the communicator. He wanted the Ambassador's approval, but I told him that was impossible. Happily he sent the cable. Then I drove over to Ambassador Green's residence and told him what I had done. He approved and I made it back through the deserted streets to Kebajuran to the great relief of my wife. The next day I was told that my cable, and of course other indications, had helped put on hold a possible U.S. military move to evacuate the Embassy.

A forcible evacuation, of course, would have been disastrous. An intrusion of U.S. forces in that situation could easily have forestalled the positive outcome that ensued.

The Aftermath at the Embassy

The next morning was Saturday. About a month earlier we had been told we could occupy a new empty house in the city, after some renovations, because we had had a baby. In Jalan Galuh there was only a tiny hot room for the baby, just a closet really, so we had been asking for a larger house. In the wake of the Bunker visit, the Deputy head of USIS [United States Information Service] had left and his house was unoccupied. It was a sturdy old two-story house, on Jalan Jawa, right next door to the house of Sutan Sjahrir, leader of the Indonesian Socialist Party and a long-time opponent of Sukarno, who was in jail. Across the street lived the Minister for Transmigration, a retired Army general with armed guards. It was a chance to move away from the transvestites and thugs that haunted the streets in our present neighborhood. So on the following day, October 2, 1965, we packed all of our worldly goods in an Embassy van and were heading down Jalan Thamrin to go to that house on Jalan Jawa and occupy that house while we could, while the city was in an upheaval.

In the car my son was sort of gurgling happily, and my wife was looking around. She looked back and said to me: "Dear, do you see what's behind us?" I said: "What?" She said: "Tanks." I said: "Oh, that's interesting." So I looked around, and there were 10 big tanks, following about 100 yards right behind us. There was not another car on the street. Nothing was moving in the city. So I looked again, and the tanks were flying black flags, the emblem of the Siliwangi Division. The soldiers on the tanks wore green Berets.

We knew that Gen Ibrahim Adjie, the commander of the Siliwangi Division, was personally very close to Sukarno although he didn't share his communist ideology. Now, the question was whether Gen Adjie was coming to Jakarta to support Sukarno or was he coming to support Suharto and the Army. We didn't know that. Later it turned out that his deputy, a Brigadier General named Dharsono Reksoatmodjo, had moved the tanks. He

was anti-communist and later became one of the “young tiger” generals along with Kemal Idris and Sarwo Edhie Wibowo. More about that later. I got to the Embassy and was able to report this.

For the next seven or eight days, as far as we knew, the situation was all totally chaotic, with no clear indication whether Sukarno and the leftists or the growing anti-communist forces would prevail. Many Indonesian military and politicians were uncertain whether to commit themselves to either side, being basically opportunists at heart. And the economy utterly collapsed. Nevertheless we at the Embassy could see that the situation was improving just in the growing numbers of people willing to comment on the situation.

By about October 9, 1965, things were starting to settle down in Indonesia. The Army had established control by then, the Indonesian Marines and Air Force had kind of "scuttled" away, Jakarta was much quieter, and the anti-Sukarno riots hadn't started as yet. You could see lots of "positive signs." For instance, General Sukendro, who had been a protégé of General Nasution but, when Nasution fell from favor, had shifted back or at least put up a facade of being a Sukarno supporter, suddenly came out with a newspaper, attacking Sukarno. It carried a headline, nine days after the coup: "*Bung Karno Bertanggung-jawab*" [Sukarno is responsible]. Well, Sukarno had been virtually worshiped as a kind of "God-King." Previously, no one would have dared challenge Sukarno so directly. Then Sukendro's paper carried this headline, which was spread all over Jakarta. We saw that development as a tremendously positive kind of thing.

But the Department was concerned about dependants because of the Congo situation in 1964, when innocent civilians had been mistreated. They were thus worried about dependants in Indonesia --- rightly so from the Washington perspective. However, since Ambassador Bunker had "thinned out" the Embassy in May and June, 1965, we had already gone through a limited evacuation of dependents. All of the AID employees and the Peace Corps people had been moved out of Indonesia. So we only had a couple of dozen dependents. After a cable exchange, the Embassy agreed - actually, it was a good thing, although the spouses protested fiercely. But the next morning, on October 10, 1965, I took my wife and the baby out to the airport. A chartered KLM [Dutch airline] Boeing 707 jet had arrived, the dependents all got on it, (except Mrs. Green and a few spouses who worked at the Embassy) and flew off to Singapore. We went back to work, because there was still a 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM curfew in effect. So for many nights after that some of us slept in the Embassy – especially the Ambassador. In a sense it was helpful to us because we didn't have to worry about families but it did send a terrible signal that the country was still insecure despite the Army's efforts.

In retrospect, however, it was probably the right decision because we then went to work very hard, with everyone doing an exceptionally good job. As I think that I mentioned, the coordination between State and CIA was quite intensive. Ambassador Green had called a meeting and said: "You can continue to prepare your reports, but I want everything that goes out to pass through my office. We will get this material and work it into the sitrep. We will have one, unified sitrep, and that sitrep will be the Embassy view of what's going

on." That's what we did and that's how we kept our reporting under control. Senior officers both in Jakarta and Washington clearly had realized that in such a confused situation the Embassy had to speak with one voice. Everyone contributed to the daily sitreps and to any analytical "wrap-up's," done on a weekly basis on what might be coming next. These were correlated, drafted and cleared by Paul Gardner in the Political Section - who deserves enormous credit for doing that.

The Ambassador and DCM had systematically organized the Embassy to cope well with the crisis and maintained morale expertly in its aftermath. Indeed, Ambassador Green spent many nights at the Embassy, sleeping on a cot in his office. As I said everyone contributed to the reports – we were out "scurrying around" during the non-curfew hours trying to collect information, and afterwards sometimes seeing contacts who bravely risked the curfew to talk to us. We read those papers that had not been banned, then the language officers took turns sleeping at the Embassy so we could monitor the radio at night. We wrote cables all the time in addition to the daily sitrep. We kept the Embassy Snack Bar open to get dinner. The Embassy had apparently stockpiled 18 crates of spaghetti in tomato sauce for an emergency months earlier. So we lived on endless spaghetti, day and night. In fact, we proved that man could play bridge and live on spaghetti indefinitely. Every night, that is what we did, with the Radio Indonesia blaring martial music and the occasional announcement in the background. After a while late at night it became possible to doze off during the regular radio coverage and then wake up when some announcement was made. Sometimes those of us who weren't on night duty would be caught by the curfew and race to the nearby Prapattan staff apartments. There we'd talk about the situation into the wee hours and sleep on couches till dawn. Then back to work at 6 the next morning. No one wanted to go home to an empty house. The curfew lasted for several months and then was gradually reduced to a few hours in the middle of the night.

The abortive coup d'état was better described as an attempted palace *putsch* led by Sukarno and carried out by the PKI and sympathetic military elements to eliminate the remaining anti-communist leaders of the Army and usher the way into Indonesia's "socialist stage." This meant there was a real problem in identifying where various leaders and units of the armed forces stood. Normally we would have relied on our Military Attaches and the station to identify what these units were and who the commanders were. But like other Indonesian institutions, the armed forces were highly secretive and sensitive to charges of foreign influence. Conversation with Indonesian military officers man were usually innocuous at best, vapid at worst. The attaches were properly nervous about probing too deeply for fear they'd be shunned by the military thereafter. So we were never totally confident we knew what was going on in the top reaches of the military. Eventually Suharto triumphed but it was a delicate struggle for him to ease out top commanders who had gotten their rank through slavishness to Sukarno, and to put in people he trusted. And Suharto didn't want any of his subordinates becoming too popular for fear of his being sidelined by officers who wanted to go faster against Sukarno than he did. And there were three who filled that bill – Dharsono of the Siliwangi Division, Kemal Idris of the North Sumatra Command, and Sarwo Edhie of the

RPKAD.

Suharto was a master politician, perhaps the best in Southeast Asia for many years. Indeed a lot of the commanders in the military were pro-communist. Some of them secretly belonged to the PKI. This was a very politicized military. Over the years the anti-communist leadership of the Indonesian military, particularly those associated with Nasution, had been eased by Sukarno from access to the command of troops. A number of those still in the chain of command had been murdered, except for Suharto who was overlooked or underestimated. That was a very important aspect. However, once they found the bodies of the murdered generals, which occurred on Monday morning, October 4, 1965, Suharto said: "We've got to punish the people responsible for this."

The struggle between communists and anti-communists took place on many planes. There was the Suharto-Sukarno plane. There were conflicts within the military. There were reverberations throughout society, as pro- and anti-PKI groups and individuals profited from the general chaos to settle old scores. By October 5 or 6, 1965, powerful "weather vanes" in the military, like General Sukendro, had seen that the situation had changed. The ongoing struggle was seen by some Indonesians in terms of Javanese mysticism. Most Javanese were hardly at all concerned with the factual aspects of this struggle. To this day very few Indonesians could accept the thesis that Sukarno was a communist. They tended to see the whole thing as an episode from a "Wajang" [Javanese theater] performance, a puppet show. The "wajang" puppets are part of Javanese culture and contain religious elements. The Javanese religion is the "wajang." It is not really Muslim at all.

They quickly found that, within the vast corpus of wajang stories, taken from the Mahayana and the Mahabharata, that there were two figures which they could bring together and try to understand the situation in terms of the "good" and "evil" dichotomies of the wajang plays. Many saw it as the typical upheaval that accompanies a change of regime in the wayang stories. Everybody was involved in this form of "shadow playing." One general would start up a newspaper for a day or two and kind of "ease along" with a little, anti-Sukarno material to see if he could "get away with it." The anti-Sukarno students came up with a lot of material like this. They were beaten back but would start again. Meanwhile, the communists tried to mount new, propaganda offensives. They couldn't get anywhere, because the Army banned all of their newspapers. The first thing that the Army banned was the communist newspapers. A fantastic struggle was under way.

As I mentioned Paul Gardner was in charge of pulling together the sitrep, which reflected these intangible aspects of the struggle in addition to the more finite considerations of how many guns one faction or the other had – in fact the Army, and later their Muslim allies had the guns. In the hubris of the pre-coup "revolutionary" upheaval, the PKI had made no military provision for a possible insurgency if Sukarno's coup attempt failed. The station and the attaches were the biggest non-State contributors. Everybody's contribution, barring some cataclysmic development, had to be ready for the

sitrep by 5:00 PM every day. The sitrep went out every day at 6:00 or 7:00 PM and it was on the desks of officials in the State Department in Washington by the beginning of their business day, given the 12 hour time difference between Jakarta and Washington.

For example, one day Colonel Will Ethel, the Defense Attaché, reported: "Air Marshal Omar Dani has come back," and he's trying to clean the communists out of the Air Force. We knew this was nonsense. Dani had been helping to radicalize the Indonesian Air Force under Sukarno's influence and had flown out with Sukarno to Bogor when the coup collapsed. In fact, Dani had been pro-PKI and was later jailed. But that report was included in the sitrep, with a caveat and a back channel phone call, because it came from the Defense Attaché. We didn't want to turn too much down for fear they'd start reporting through their own channels. In fact Col. Ethel, an extremely valuable guy because of his military contacts, may also have done some additional reporting through his own channels. But the Washington agencies understood that they should not pay too much attention to what was said in reporting outside the sitreps.

The PKI and other leftist groups eventually faded away after the leaders were rounded up by the Army and jailed. The head of the PKI, D.N. Aidit, had fled to Central Java and was in hiding there. On about October 5 or 6, General Suharto went up to Bogor to see Sukarno, who had taken refuge in his "summer palace" ---the former Dutch Governor General's Palace there. In his dealings with the newly empowered generals Sukarno made a number of initial mistakes. The first was to announce that the temporary commander of the Army would be General Pranoto Reksosamudro. In 1958, when Sukarno had relieved General Suharto as Army commander in Central Java for alleged corruption, he had replaced him with Pranoto. In fact, Pranoto was only a Brigadier General, and not a Major General. This was a slap in the face for Suharto, who went up to Bogor and told Sukarno that the Indonesian Army would not accept Brigadier General Pranoto; that he, General Suharto, was taking temporary command of the Army, and that Sukarno, as President of Indonesia, would be kept "secure" at all times while the Army put down the various forms of unrest.

Sukarno reportedly agreed; he was not a brave, bold man. He had been "forced" to declare Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945, by student "radicals" who kidnapped him. They wouldn't let him go until he declared Indonesian independence. He was frightened to death that the student radicals might kill him. So 20 years later General Suharto similarly "faced down" President Sukarno and then took de facto control of the military forces. The daughter of General Nasution, the coordinating minister of defense, had been killed by the squads who came to Nasution's home to kill him. Nasution was in a state of shock. He buried his daughter and after a period of mourning, tried to re-emerge. But he was never a major player after that. In a perverse way, the fact that he had run away while his daughter was killed was held against him by the political elite, all of whom of course would have done the same thing.

At one point we considered Nasution was a major player, probably because we had good contact with Nasution through MAAG chief, Col. George Benson and perhaps because

we could not – indeed never did – get close to Suharto, a very traditional and reticent Javanese. Nasution was a Batak from Sumatra with a long history of close contacts with the US. But perhaps for that and other reasons, Nasution soon faded from the picture. Indonesia has always been ruled by the Javanese, the dominant ethnic group, and by an Army General, the dominant political power, and still is today.

Indeed most people felt this was an intra-Javanese struggle. It was felt that once General Suharto faced down Sukarno at that meeting in Bogor, that that was like the "battle of brothers" in the wayang story, the "*Brotoyudho Djoyo-Binangun*," and that Sukarno, the "old leader," just drifted away. There is a concept called in Javanese the "*wahju*," which is the mystical "right to rule" in Javanese mythology. It is something like the Chinese concept of the "mantle of heaven." In some mysterious way the "*wahju*" had passed from Sukarno to Suharto on that night in Bogor. After that, Javanese started telling us that Suharto looked "different." They said that he didn't look the way he formerly did. They said that he looked "wiser," and In fact, Suharto was very wise. He was an absolutely brilliant politician.

The period of the intense killings began in October 1965 and lasted until late April, 1966. In November, 1965, the Army found D. N. Aidit, the chairman of the PKI, hiding in a woman's clothes closet in a small house near Solo [Surakarta] in Central Java. The Army killed him immediately and buried him somewhere in an unmarked grave. The Army had rounded up almost all of the members of the Central Committee of the PKI, although a few members were traveling in the People's Republic of China and never returned. The Aidit capture stimulated killings in Central Java as did the deployment of the RPKAD in that province. Most of the killing was done by Muslim groups and reflected age-old animosities as well as the current situation, particularly the anger stemming from the Sukarno/PKI land reform effort.

My recollection is that there was no significant number of PKI members killed until October 22, 1965. There had been a number of clashes between the PKI and the PNI over land reform, the so-called "unilateral actions" (*aksi sepihak*) taken by the PKI to seize land. In Central Java, the Indonesian Nationalist Party, (the PNI) was a rightwing body, although elsewhere in Indonesia, especially Jakarta, it was taken over by crypto-PKI and sympathizers. Battles between PKI and PNI in Central Java had been going on for some time. Thus when the Army started moving through Central Java in a show of force led by General Sarwo Edhie, it was natural for fighting to break out and this time the Army could side openly with the PNI. What seemed to trigger it elsewhere, in my recollection, was the story on October 22 that a mass grave of Muslims was found near Banjuwangi on the Bali Straits at the far eastern tip of Java, beyond Surabaya. The killing of those Muslims, who were reportedly buried in that mass grave, was attributed to the communists, to the PKI.

As I mentioned before, in mid-September 1965, before the coup, I had met a young Muslim boy on the beach near Anjer-Lor on the Sunda Straits, who told me that in some places in East Java communist ears were being cut off by land-owning peasants angry

about the PKI-land reform movement. So there may have already been some fighting there, even before the abortive Sukarno/PKI coup d'etat. The bodies in that mass grave near Banjuwangi may well have stemmed from events before the date of the coup.

Then too, there was much pent-up anger and fear about a PKI take-over stemming from Sukarno's systematic campaign to repress dissent in Indonesia. Sutan Sjahrir [leader of the Indonesian Socialist Party, or PSI], Mochtar Lubis [Indonesian publisher], and dozens of other prominent Indonesians from the political center, the PSI, or the Masyumi [moderate, reformist Muslim political party] had been jailed and kept in camps in Central Java for years on charges they had tried to "overthrow Sukarno."

In contrast to the upheaval in the countryside, In Jakarta the political scene was characterized by typical Indonesian shadow-boxing and things were fairly quiet. In January, 1966, Sukarno decided or felt that the momentum of the anti-communist movement was slowing down. He had been giving speeches, but without any venom in them. Then he decided that he was going to start trying to get back to where he had been. I think that his argument would have been that the PKI had been unjustly maligned and that Indonesia should go back to "normal" and resume fighting against the imperialists and the Americans, in addition to "crushing Malaysia." So, in January and February, 1966, Things heated up at last in Jakarta. Sukarno started doing a lot of maneuvering, promising things to people and trying to return things to the pre-coup status quo. Of course it wasn't going to work, too much had changed, but there were dicey moments. Sukarno paid a lot of criminal elements who mobilized mobs from the docks to cause trouble throughout the city.

On January 15, 1966, there was a big demonstration against the U.S. Embassy, during which the demonstrators broke all of the windows, burned cars, graffiti-ed the buildings, etc. Sukarno continued his attempted "come back." by dismissing the cabinet. It had been full of crypto-communists and "thugs" from the docks. They were basically gangsters. He "fired" General Nasution as Coordinating Minister of Defense. That, if I'm not mistaken, took place on February 22, 1966. There had been student protests of some size up until then. However, Sukarno's actions really triggered the whole denouement of the "wajang" play, which was now under way. Also, a student had been killed at the Presidential Palace. The students now had a "martyr," whose name was Arif Rachman Hakim. So the students formed the "Arif Rachman Hakim Battalion." Then it grew in size and became, first, the "Arif Rachman Hakim Regiment" and then the "Arif Rachman Hakim Division."

That was also the day when the Department of State decided, because it was running out of money, to bring the dependents back. So the dependents had had a nice, two month vacation in the United States, at U.S. Government expense, while virtually nothing was going on in Indonesia. Everybody was just working as usual in the Embassy. However, now, when things started to get bad again, the Department of State realized that it was running out of money and said: "Send the dependents back to Jakarta. We need this money somewhere else." So my wife and son came back. We soon saw soldiers beating up students in the street, the Presidential Palace was cordoned off, and some buildings

were set on fire, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My wife said: "What a wonderful situation to come back to!" I should mention that, through all of this, and it's hard to describe, the whole city was "pulsing" with activity. There were Indonesian Army troops and students everywhere, fires were burning, and the situation was just "delightful for a reporting officer." Things were happening everywhere. No one thought of any danger, however. The panic among foreigners that accompanies these disturbances now was totally absent; we all thought we led charmed lives.

And in fact, the worst thing that happened to any American, and I think probably to any "Westerner," as far as that goes, though not to an Asian foreigner, was that an American woman was hit in the foot by a ricocheting bullet fired from a gun that had been dropped by mistake. She had been driving in her Volkswagen around the fountain in front of the Hotel Indonesia.

In this case the rifle dropped from the hands of a soldier, the gun went off, it ricocheted off the fountain, and it hit the woman's foot. We found the place where the bullet had ricocheted off the fountain. The bullet went through the side of her Volkswagen and hit her right on the side of the foot. She felt some pain and was bleeding. She kept right on driving and went to the Embassy Medical Unit. We were in the Embassy, and, all of a sudden, the word came out: "An American's been shot!" For a moment there was panic since the dependants had just come back. But we looked into the matter and the woman was perfectly relaxed. After treatment, she had a few Band Aids on her foot. Throughout this whole, incredible process of upheaval, perhaps as many as 100,000, and maybe as many as 200,000 Indonesians were killed outside Jakarta, and no foreigner was ever harmed in any way, except for the American woman hit by a ricocheting bullet. When you went out on the street during this upheaval, the Indonesians would just kind of "move around you."

The March 11 Order

Sukarno had been trying to install a new cabinet, but the students completely surrounded the Palace and prevented him from doing so. The students blocked cars headed for the Palace and used "valve pullers" to pull the valves out of the tires, with the result that they went completely flat. Soon the whole city of Jakarta was full of cars with flat tires. No one could travel anywhere. Luckily, I had moved into the city of Jakarta, as I mentioned last time, so I could walk to work at the Embassy. People who lived farther out had to sleep in the Embassy.

On Friday, March 11, as we found out, Sukarno had tried secretly or surreptitiously to inaugurate a new cabinet in office. Sarwo Eddy Wibowo, the commander of the RPKAD, the Army Para-Commando Regiment, had surrounded Independence Palace in Jakarta with troops and had started forcibly disarming the Palace Guard. When Sukarno heard that, he fled outside and got into a helicopter with Subandrio [Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister]. In fact, they moved so fast that Subandrio didn't have his shoes on. He had taken them off when he was attending a meeting at Independence Palace. He left his shoes under the table. When the RPKAD soldiers got in there, they found Subandrio's

shoes.

Whether by accident or design, this had badly frightened Sukarno. That evening, the Army sent three generals up to Bogor: Basuki Rahmat, the Army commander in East Java; the Jakarta Army Commander General Umar Wirahadikusumah and a third general, Andi Jusuf, the Army commander in South Sulawesi. These three generals had not been rabid Sukarno supporters. So they were in the good graces of the Army, but they weren't regarded as being rabidly anti-Sukarno. All three of them had "prospered" under Sukarno. All three of them were decent, apolitical men who had "smooth" manners. They went up to Sukarno, who was in the Summer Palace in Bogor, on the night of March 11, 1966. This was the old Dutch Governor-General's summer palace up there.

They showed Sukarno the text of an order transferring authority to General Suharto and persuaded Sukarno to sign it. The order basically provided that Suharto was in charge "of guaranteeing [Sukarno's] security by taking appropriate measures to restore law and order." It was worded very cleverly. They never went into detail with Sukarno because at that level they generally don't go into detail. They just kind of "sweet talked" Sukarno. The next morning, March 12, as soon as Suharto received the order signed by Sukarno, he banned the PKI and all of its subsidiary organizations. Of course, Sukarno later claimed that he and the three generals had never talked about that. He didn't want the PKI banned.

At the Embassy that night we were unaware of the denouement at Bogor, which effectively ended Sukarno's already eroded power, and were anticipating trouble on the next day, Saturday March 12, 1966. A number of cars parked in front of the Embassy had been burned, and an American woman had been badly frightened at being surrounded by a mob. We were really annoyed that the Department had sent back the dependents at this time. Beginning during the day of March 11, we were starting to burn accumulated Embassy files. We had been told that there was a massive demonstration against the Embassy, to be led by gangs from the docks, scheduled for Saturday. Paul Gardner, Bob Martens, Bob Rich, and I were burning the files. In those days, of course, you burned files in an incinerator. Now you just shred them. Burning the files was hot work.

I was the Biographic Reporting Officer at the time. Martens and I had opposed burning any biographic files, feeling that bio files would be crucial no matter what happened in Indonesia. Luckily at about 7:15 PM on the night of March 11, one of Bob Martens' best contacts got in touch with him. He said that Sukarno had just signed a "*surat perintah*" that transferred power to Suharto. So we did stop burning the files and Col. Will Ethel, the Defense Attaché, went out to get confirmation of this report. Within minutes, he had gotten in touch with a couple of Indonesian generals. They told him three reliable general officers went to Bogor to the Presidential Palace and told Sukarno that they could no longer guarantee his security unless he transferred power to Suharto. Sukarno had signed a document to that effect.

So instead of an anti-American demonstration, at 10:00 AM on March 12, 1966, there was a "victory parade" in Jakarta. The Indonesian Army used the same Armored

Personnel Carriers with which they had carried the remains of the six generals and one warrant officer, killed by the PKI on the night of September 30, 1965 to the cemetery for burial. The students were all over the military vehicles, shouting arm-in-arm with the soldiers. The whole city of Jakarta turned out in absolute joy. I still have photographs of people handing food to the soldiers. This was a tremendously emotional moment, and we – all the Embassy officers – were all there. We were in the streets with the people. By the time of the "March 11 order," that is, the order issued on March 11, 1966, General Suharto, in effect, had taken over the country. Sukarno was still President, but Suharto was in charge. Sukarno still had the title of President but his power was gone, and so was the PKI along with all of the nonsense about the struggle against "neo-colonialism", that had beggared the country. The anti-imperialist billboards were torn down, the city cleaned up, and concern shifted from politics to the economy, which was a shambles of shortages and inflation.

To get started Suharto wisely brought in a team of Indonesian economists from the University of California at Berkeley to start straightening out the economy. Head of the team was Widjojo Nitisastro, a Bandung University professor who had coached Suharto when he attended the Army Command and General Staff school in Bandung in the fifties. The first job was battling hyper-inflation, which was severe.

When we arrived in Indonesia in July, 1964, the rupiah was valued at about 1,500 to US\$1.00. On the eve of the coup of October 1, 1965, the rate was 256,000 rupiah to US\$1.00. By the time Sukarno signed the order transferring power to Suharto, which he signed on March 11, 1966, the Indonesian rupiah had no value whatsoever. Everyone was using Singapore dollars and other hard currencies. The best estimate of the rate of inflation was 6,000-12,000 percent per year. That was the situation in 1966. The inflation had just gone "out of sight." By 1967 the annual rate of inflation was down to about 14 percent. The change in government and new policies had brought the rate of inflation down immediately.

First Trip into the "New" Java

With the March 11 order and the banning of the PKI, Indonesia settled down fast and became somewhat of a boring country to serve in. It was amazing how quickly all of the controversy ended. At last we could travel in the country again and get out of Jakarta. An economic officer, Paul Cleveland and I were the first two Embassy officers to travel after martial law had ended. No Embassy officer had been traveling. Even Henry Heymann, who had been transferred to Surabaya as Consul, hadn't been able to get out of town from the time of the attempted coup d'etat to the end of martial law.

During the first week in April, 1966, we persuaded AID to let us use an old, beat-up Jeep "Wagoneer," not the present model or a fancy one, of course, but about a 1960 model. It was just a piece of junk. However, it worked, we had a driver, and we were going to drive all over Java. So we headed first up toward the Punchak, the mountain pass that was about 4,000 feet above sea level. We went over the Punchak and then we kind of headed

down to the Bandung lake basin. We were driving along over very poor roads. The roads were just a mass of "potholes." You could go 10-20 miles an hour at a maximum. We broke down almost immediately and limped into the hill town of Cianjur, which was the next major town along the main road to the provincial capital of Bandung in West Java.

Cianjur is a center for the production of a delicious variety of rice. Perhaps the best rice in Indonesia comes from Cianjur. There we found a Chinese mechanic who welded the broken drive shaft. He also put some other parts in there, and we said: "Will this get us to Bandung?" This Chinese mechanic looked at me and said: "You could drive to America in it. I just welded the drive shaft." So we paid him a few dollars and got to Bandung by about 3:00 AM. The next morning we decided to push on to Semarang, a really big town farther east on the north coast of Central Java. We said: "Let's see if we can find a garage there, and if the car breaks down again, we'll take a bus." We expected the drive shaft to break again at any time and wanted to get as far as we could. But in fact we drove all over Java with that welded drive shaft. Shortly before I left Indonesia in 1968, I went over to the USAID motor pool and looked for the Jeep. It had the same, welded drive shaft, and it was still working. That Chinese mechanic was so good that, when he fixed it, the drive shaft was probably better than when the original.

Anyway, we then went to Semarang and stayed overnight. We hadn't done much work so far, that is to say no official calls, but we had already learned a lot just from visual observation. The countryside was indeed quiet and peaceful, at least during the day. No one seemed hostile to us, or very concerned when we stopped in little village markets to look at Batik cloth. The food markets seemed abundant and the rice harvest now, toward the end of the rainy season, looked pretty good. The next day we drove south from Semarang to the old, court city of Yogyakarta, the main city in Central Java where the palace of the Sultan is located.

When we arrived in Yogyakarta, strangely enough, in April, almost dry season, it was pouring down rain. We couldn't see anything in the rain and had no idea where the hotels were. We stopped next to a "bechak" [bicycle rickshaw] driver, hunched down with a plastic sheet covering him and his bechak and asked him to lead us to a hotel. After a few unproductive calls on government officials, too nervous to tell us anything, the next day we pushed on to Kediri in East Java.

We were basically trying to get information on the nature and scope of the killings as well as the state of play vis-à-vis Sukarno and Suharto in local politics. Kediri had been the site of what was alleged to be the worst killings of communists. Stan Karnow, who, I think, was a reporter for the "New York Times" or maybe the "Washington Post," at the time, had written articles, saying that there were 30,000 bodies of dead PKI members, choking the Brantas River where it goes through the town of Kediri. I had been there in May 1965 on my East Java trip and I knew that Kediri was the seat of the U.S. Southern Baptist Mission in Indonesia. The Southern Baptists operated a hospital in Kediri. The Baptists were well plugged in to the local situation and would know what was going on. Earlier we had gotten in touch through the Consulate in Surabaya, asking them if we

could spend the night there.

As it turned out they also gave us a lovely dinner with a few local officials present. We had long talks with them afterwards. From what they told us, it was very clear that there hadn't been 30,000 bodies in the Brantas River. They took us to see the Brantas River and they pointed out that where the Brantas River goes through Kediri it is only about two or three feet deep. 30,000 bodies would have caused the worst flood in the history of Kediri! The Baptists told us: "Yes, you could see a body go by once in a while, but you normally see this at any time. People starve to death or fall out of their boats and drown. However, there was nothing exceptional in that."

That was not to say there had been no killing – just not on the scale that the western press reported. The Baptists said that they thought terrible killings took place only one night. That night they had been told by the Indonesian Police and Army to stay in their compound. They said: "We heard gamelans [xylophone type instrument] going all night. We were sure that this was the music that accompanied the killings." The Police said: "Oh, it's a big wayang performance. It's Javanese wayang music, so we didn't want Christians there to see it." The wayang apart from its entertainment aspect was a quasi-sacral event for the Javanese. However, the Baptists thought that actually the killings occurred on that particular night. There were also PKI members in their hospital, who had taken refuge there. On balance, the Baptists said, there were more Muslims being treated. These people had reportedly been hurt in fights, presumably with the PKI, which they talked about. The number of injured PKI from these fights who turned up at the hospital was minimal. After their wounds healed a bit, the police came by to take them away. The Baptists thought they were being sent to camps somewhere.

So we took all of that information on board. We also spoke to local officials, but they were not giving anything away. Remember this was less than a month after the March 11 order, and in Kediri – where Sukarno was born, by the way – the political situation was still unresolved. The next morning we got the names of some people whom the Baptists knew in various villages in the Kediri area. We went to several of these villages. In every village we were told the same thing. People said: "There were no killings here, because we have no PKI people here. We are a good Muslim (or Baptist) village. We have no PKI here. However, in the next village there were a lot of PKI people, and a lot of PKI members were killed." Then we would go on to the next village. There the people would say: "There was no killing of PKI members here, but back in that village there (which we had just passed through), let me tell you, we sent all of our PKI people there, because the people in that village are murderers." It was obvious that a lot of local scores were being settled in addition to those PKI who were killed.

Finally, we then drove up to Malang, East Java, a lovely clean and cool town in the mountains. It had been a large seat of Dutch administration and habitation because of the climate. The surrounding mountains and coffee groves were magnificent. I had a contact there who was the father of a Sino-Indonesian in the Consular Section of the Embassy in Jakarta. The father ran a little shop and we talked to him. He professed to know nothing

of the killings but said: "The person who knows all about this is a Hindu holy man who lives up on the side of Gunung Smeru [Smeru Mountain outside of Malang]. Here's his name. You go up there and see him. Take this note from me so that he'll know that you're OK."

So we drove up along the slopes of Gunung Smeru, the highest volcano in Java, and found this marvelous old guy - not really a Hindu "holy man," but rather a charlatan living off the superstitions of the Javanese villagers. But a very bright guy and very vigorous. In his seventies, he had just fathered his 12th child. He had a number of wives. He told the authorities that his religion permitted him to have as many wives as he wanted, a very "neat" arrangement. We got along with him marvelously well. He gave us a pretty good picture of the killings, where they had occurred, how they had gone about it, and the fact that many PKI members had largely fled from their villages, some into Bali, some to remote areas. The PKI members who were killed were kind of the "hangers on" who didn't know any better. Some local PKI leaders had fled into some very remote country south of Kediri, in the Tulungagung area. There it is limestone, karst terrain that is almost impenetrable. As it turned out, that's where an insurgency broke out in the spring of 1968, which I'll discuss when I reach that point. My contact said that he thought that the few remaining members of the PKI Central Committee had also taken refuge there. However, the larger towns were pretty well clear.

But he also said, "Look nobody knows really how this is going to work out between Sukarno and Suharto, okay. So every Javanese has to be neutral between the contending forces so that he doesn't get in trouble no matter who wins. The one thing everyone knows is that the PKI is finished. Whether the country finally goes to Sukarno or Suharto, the PKI is banned. So how do you stay on the right side? You say you killed some PKI. Well in this village the PKI is gone or they are dead or they fled. Yes, they are all dead. There were only a few of them but they are all dead."

There is a Javanese concept called "etok-etok" which basically means "little white lies." It is important to sense the context before you answer a question. You do not wish to say anything that would get you or your village in trouble, so you lie. Then too, it is important never to say "no" to a request. You always say "not yet," and the requestor knows the answer is "no," but you haven't caused him to lose face. To be Javanese is to understand those things. It is a whole different cultural world. And that culture is opaque to outsiders, who simply say "Javanese always tell you what they think you want to hear." Our source, being a holy man, wasn't bound by these restrictions.

We then drove on to Surabaya, where we spent the night with our Consul. We went out with Henry and made a few calls. We then drove back toward Semarang on the central highway, through Mojokerto, which had been the seat of the old Majapahit Empire. We also passed through Madiun, (East Java), the locale of the 1948 PKI revolt. In the main square, a clock on a tower had been hit by a bullet and had stopped when the Siliwangi Division from West Java crushed the revolt. It was a famous clock for that reason and had never been repaired, almost twenty years later.

Then we decided that we ought to return to Yogyakarta and do a little more thorough investigation of the situation. We got out into the agricultural areas south of the city and talked to a few non-governmental people in the Jogja area, which we hadn't done before. There was no information to be had there. Central Javanese are really clannish and suspicious. After two days in Jogja, we went back up to Semarang, because that was the only way that you could get back to Jakarta. The road through the center of Java was impassible.

The trip was tremendously interesting, not only in terms of the people that we talked to, but because we could see that, despite the upheaval in Jakarta, Java was functioning normally again although there was still great hardship. We found out in Jogja that, after all of the communist activity and the killings things like that, the real issue coming up was a religious one. It appeared that the "santri" or strict Muslims saw this as a chance, finally, to overthrow the religious "hold" of the Palace of the Sultan of Yogyakarta and, therefore, of the true Javanese religion, a kind of animism.

The way that the Muslims had first proselytized in Java was to organize traditional Javanese wayang puppet plays and gamelan (percussive instruments) performances in mosques. To the peasant Javanese, the puppets were the holy spirits of gods and ancestors, and the gamelan performance was the sacred music of the old Hindu gods. So the Muslim proselytizers would build a mosque and then draw the people in to the mosque to see wayang performances. However, that was always considered by the stricter Muslims to be a sort of "sacrilege," since Islam forbids representations of human figures or playing music in mosques. But it had gone on for centuries in Java and become a tradition. Every year the holiest gamelan and the holiest wayang puppets from the "Kraton" or Palace of the Sultan were paraded through the streets of Jogja. The performance was then given in the holiest mosque followed by a big ceremony and a feast. But in 1966 with the PKI gone and the PNI weak, the Muslims decided that they were going to stop that. They announced that the traditional ceremony, involving music and puppets in a mosque would not be held any more. They also began a campaign to cover up women, to forbid their participating in sports, holding certain jobs, etc. These attempts, far more than the communists, the PKI, or anything else, raised the specter of revolt and chaos in Central Java, already disrupted by the change of regime.

We were able to come back and report on all of that, which no one would have known about if we hadn't been out there to talk to our Army and civilian contacts. We got the central government to realize that the whole situation could "blow up" all over again, if they let the Muslims continue. So they "papered it over" and handled it very well in the classic Javanese obfuscatory manner. It was the first dispute between the Muslims and the Java-centric Army, which had been allied against Sukarno and the PKI.

On that trip we also heard rumors that some peasants in villages north of Solo had had some strange illnesses. People were dying of these illnesses. We reported this to our NAMRU [U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit] in Jakarta. There are NAMRU's in the

Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, Zaire, and Costa Rica, among other places. It was one of the most popular institutions in Indonesia. People assigned to the NAMRU were 'embedded' in the Ministry of Health, which could not have functioned without them and their work. Even the PKI never bothered them. So we called NAMRU and reported on that mysterious illness. People from the NAMRU went out and found that this mysterious illness was bubonic plague in a small village near Solo [also known as Surakarta, Central Java]. NAMRU sent a team out there and stopped the bubonic plague. It is a little known fact. No one ever publicized that. The Indonesian military were pretty happy with that and with what the NAMRU was doing.

Two reports came out of that trip. First, Paul Cleveland and I wrote a detailed, deeply analytical, political and economic study of the new Java as we had observed it, the first officers to travel after the attempted coup and the March 11 order. It was replete with deep analysis and profound thought. We sent it off to Washington and never heard anything back about it – no praise, no criticism, no nothing. I don't know whether anybody ever read it. We never heard back. We'd made this trip and "suffered" at times to get the data, but no one in Washington cared enough to read our message about it. Perhaps the writing was a bit turgid and analytical. Nevertheless, someone back in the Department should have commented on it. No one to my knowledge every did.

We also wrote what was intended as a biographic report airgram which was entitled, "Seven Gentlemen of Central Java, Or How Indonesia Has Changed." This report concluded that the "New Order" looked as if it had real, staying power, based on the comments from seven interviews with seven different people, even including the lowly village guard, or "jaga," who worked at a small village on top of the Ijen Plateau. This report set forth just what the respondents talked about, what they thought had happened and was going to happen, flagging for example the gamelons in the mosque issue as being more important than any residual threat from the PKI. That report, more humanized than analytical, drew strong praise.

The "New Order"

By the end of summer, 1966, there were numerous changes in the Embassy as a lot of people had reached the end of their tours. At the same time a whole, new period in Indonesian history was beginning, with the Army gaining control and creating the institutions of Suharto's "new Order" regime. Sukarno had worked to establish his crypto-communist left-wing system since 1945, but in less than a year the whole thing collapsed, and Indonesians told us they felt they were waking from a dream. Some said they couldn't believe they had gone along with the half-baked ideas like the "new emerging forces," that they had acquiesced at Indonesia's withdrawal from the UN. But the fact was they were too scared to protest, and that was what Sukarno and the PKI had counted on.

This period was gone overnight and a new Indonesia was born between 1966 and 1968. In a curious way the "Harian Rakjat" headline was right that Jakarta was pregnant with a new society, but it was Suharto's "New Order," not Sukarno's "entry into the Socialist

stage.” After Bob Martens left I was still sort of following residual leftist parties, but there weren’t any of them anymore hence little for me to do. . I was doing a lot of traveling by then, and with the political crisis over, could spend more time with my wife and new son. So I didn't follow things all that closely – economics became the keyword --and nation building. In Washington the obsession with Vietnam was just beginning. In Indonesia Marshall Green was traveling a lot, looking at rice projects and so forth – and I went along sometimes to interpret. He liked company although he never took junior officers on official calls that I remember. But I never should have agreed to come back to Indonesia for another two years at that point. Nation building is a very boring subject. Chaos is much more interesting. But one last development of interest came along – a little-known mini-attempt at insurgency by remnants of the PKI in East Java.

There was only one feeble attempt by the remnant PKI to try to redress the situation, but it came only three years later. Information on this situation was very vague and hard to pry out of the Army. But in February of '68 reports started coming out of East Java that a remnant communist group, a PKI group, had built a “strategic redoubt” in the limestone hills south of Kediri in the Blitar region. Kediri is a major town there, it was the location of the US Baptist hospital where Paul Cleveland and I had spent the night two years before. There were rumors that they had arms, that some of the left wing Indonesians Marine Corps and Air Force personnel who had gone into hiding after the coup, had joined them. They were said to be 500 or 1,000 strong, and supposedly were preparing a new PKI headed by a former PKI central committee member. I believe it was either Nyono or Nyoto, one of those two. It must have been Nyono, a labor leader, because Njoto I think was executed. They had gotten an area which they controlled, and the villages were frightened. The funniest rumor was that they sat around listening to tapes of Sukarno’s old speeches, out there in the cold and scruffy hills of Blitar. It remains one of the worst and poorest areas of Java – no roads, poor soil, little rice cultivation, people in rags, rampant disease.

Soon after the stories started making the rounds, some Generals from the Indonesian Army came to us and asked for help, specifically gunships and other equipment. Their macabre argument was that with our support they could kill communists in the Blitar region for bargain basement prices. All we had to do was give them some C-130s and choppers so they could lay in the napalm and make all the same mistakes we were making in Vietnam. But Marshall Green, bless his soul, told them to handle the problem by themselves. He was quite that in that period, you never knew which faction in the Army you were dealing with. No one knew what Suharto's real intentions were and he often sent various emissaries on overlapping tasks. So you might deal with one group of Army officers who said they came from Suharto. Did they really? Who knows. They may have come from another group. Maybe they were trying to embarrass Suharto by getting the Americans involved in something. Maybe they were trying to ingratiate themselves with Suharto by getting some goodies from the Americans. Suharto then couldn't say no. There is all this deep Javanese intrigue attached to everything, a minefield for outsiders. For that and many other reasons, Marshall said no.

So the Indonesian army decided they had to handle it themselves. They did a fabulous job. In six months they mopped up an insurgency which, had it spread, could have been quite serious. How did they do it? They did it through superb intelligence techniques and covert action techniques. They sheep dipped their best people and put them into the area as observers of the local scene. First of all, they recruited Javanese NICO's from various services who had originated from that East Java area. They then gave them some intelligence training and covert action training. They put them in civilian clothes and gave them all kinds of identity cards for cover stories. They were buyers for clove cigarette factories. They were looking for a place to start a mechanic shop, all kinds of nifty cover stories, and they sent them in there under cover, riding local transport. Some of them walked in or bicycled in. They talked to the villagers about what was going on until they pinpointed the exact location of where this communist stronghold was, the mountain where it was, and had gotten some idea of how many people were there and had gotten some intelligence.

Then they sent in the RPKAD, the army Para commandos, basically a Java based unit, from Jakarta. They did not use East Java Brawidjaja division troops because they didn't trust them yet, and of course they couldn't send Siliwangi Division troops from West Java without kindling a real fracas. So based on the intelligence from the "agents-in-place" inserted earlier, the RPKAD sealed off this one area of communist villages, and within a matter of a week or two, captured the remaining members of the central committee. They did it all by themselves. We never had said a word except "good job guys." If the Americans had gone in, I shudder to think what the outcome would have been. The Indonesians handled that themselves. I am very happy with it because that was in my area. I was doing left wing stuff, so I got out there a bit and reported, but always from a distance. I had some good sources in the military who told me what was going on.

During that early time it was clear that Suharto was expertly eating away at Sukarno's status and power without giving any potential supporters a cases belly at any time. The students put constant pressure to bring Sukarno to trial but Suharto refused and gradually eased him from attending formal functions to: first, just being in the palace; then, being in the Bogor palace; then, being in a little house under house arrest; then, being in a smaller house in the Puncak, the mountainous area on the way to Bandung. I saw him there once at a popular restaurant sitting alone with a couple of "minders" in plain clothes. Two years later he passed away and was buried in Kediri in East Java, his birthplace. The gravesite is simple and actually very nice, in a grove of bamboo trees. Like many Muslim graves, it does not bear a name.

Ambassador Green had done a superb job handling the situation and running the Embassy, both during the crisis period and the reconstruction of the American presence. I really didn't have a whole lot to do in 1966-68 because the leftists had basically disappeared. At that time Paul Gardner was really the key reporting officer, working on the Army and its effort to create a civilian front, "Golkar" to run in an election and guarantee the military's control of politics and economics. He did a brilliant job as his book on Indonesia testifies. New issues were arising and many of them were internal to

the U.S. Mission rather than to the relationship with Indonesia, although that too was a factor. The internal scene was less absorbing.

The first Mission issue was the size of the mission in the new situation. USAID wanted to bring back the 298 people it had before. Green was not going to do that, and that was where the low profile, the expression “low profile” first started. Ambassador Green sent a personal cable back to the highest levels indicating that Indonesians were doing a fine job rebuilding their country. Deluging the country with Americans officials would be the worst thing that could happen. In its larger concern with Vietnam at the time, Washington liked the “low profile approach. Unfortunately the pre-coup camaraderie in the Embassy gradually evaporated and the usual inter-agency rivalries and animosities came to assert themselves. People started to compare each other’s housing, complaining if someone had something better. As people who had left after the Bunker trip came back from the other agencies, or new replacements came, a split developed between those who were there during the coup, and the new people. Those who went through the coup and its aftermath have remained close over the years, bonded in the fight against Sukarno and then in support of the “new order.” But at the time it was a new Indonesia and a new Embassy. It was time for a new approach to Indonesia. For now, I was looking forward to off to a year of Southeast Asia studies at Yale.

PART THREE: Yale and INR 1968-1971

Yale during the Vietnam War

In 1967, when my tour was almost over in Jakarta, Evelyn Colbert, Deputy Director of the Office of East Asian Affairs of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the Department visited Jakarta in 1967. I was thinking about re-assignment and she pressed me to become the Indonesia analyst in INR. She hinted it was the best way to pick up certain useful clearances and to learn about the role of the CIA vis-à-vis State in foreign affairs. She always worked hard to recruit good officers into her part of INR which unfortunately was often a graveyard of careers – a fact I didn’t know at the time. So I agreed and was supposed to be reassigned to INR as Indonesia analyst, but then the assignment was put on hold for a year when the incumbent extended So they had to park me for a year and I was offered a year of Southeast Asia studies, either at the University of Michigan or at Yale. I opted for Yale because I had been accepted there in 1960 before I joined the Foreign Service, and my acceptance was still valid. As it turned out, I should have gone to Michigan, which would have been more interesting, and I could have gotten a Master’s Degree. The Yale Masters program required two years and the Department absolutely forbade staying that long.

My family and I left Jakarta in July, had some home leave time, and I reported to the Department in late July. I took a three-week economics course – mostly reading Samuelson, which I done as an under-grad – and got to Yale University in New Haven, CT the last day of August, ready for classes. What I should have been ready for was hassle.

The first hassle in a domestic assignment is arranging for shipment and delivery of household goods. It is really a part of the Foreign Service experience that is under covered, because a lot happens, not in the substantive sense, but the administrative sense when you go to Peoria or Texas or someplace like that. The system is geared to Washington and foreign assignments. So you are always nervous that your stuff will be lost but it usually shows up all right. In thirty years we had nothing lost except a daughter's cat, and even she turned up eventually and lived another fifteen years (not a State Department shipment, I hasten to add). But in 1968 there we were in Jakarta, wondering where in New Haven to send our household goods. Of course the Embassy didn't have a clue. Almost at the last minute the Department gave us the name of a company called Beaver Transport in New Haven. That's all, just a name. So we gave that name to the Indonesian packers and off went our beautiful antique Chinese furniture which we had cost practically nothing in Indonesia, but which we cherished. And off we went on home leave and then to Yale on July 28. Actually our household goods were already there, at Beaver Transport, and my wife and father-in-law had found a nice little house in Branford, about a half-hour drive from Yale. So it all worked out – the furniture is still sitting in my dining room now . . .

I was expecting the second hassle. Upon arrival I went to Yale University, found the Southeast Asia department, walked in and found they knew nothing of my assignment there. Professor Mr. Robert Tilman with whom the State Department had dealt was away for the summer. I was told it was . . . "too late to register for courses." So, I called Evelyn Colbert at INR, and she called Hal Saunders, Director of INR and Saunders called Yale and they started to patch it together. After a few days I was called to meet the person looking after the Department for the summer, a sociologist named Hans Dieter Evers, a German sociologist who had spent a lot of time studying in Prague, and was rather a child of the East. He didn't want anything to do with State Department people. He was rather cold and talked a lot about the bombing in Vietnam. I was expecting that too, but as it turned out he was the only one who belabored that issue.

Soon the other professors came back and did get me into their courses. The other SEA students, about thirty of us, met as a group once a week. Otherwise we went to individual seminars. Generally what I did was to go in for a couple of courses in the morning and then spend the afternoon at Sterling Library which is a great and wonderful institution. I had a little carrel up at the top floor looking out the window you know, gargoyles sitting outside of it, wonderful. Then my wife would come and pick me up at five. It was just a workday. I would sometimes have some things to do at home. As you can imagine it was easy for me, having spent two years traveling around Cambodia, four years up to my ears in Indonesian politics and in the last two years quite a bit of traveling, having an academic bent anyway so that I already had three bookshelves full of books on Southeast Asia. So I focused on the class work and the other students, and enjoyed it immensely. I found up with five "As" and, of course, a "B+" from Professor Evers who giggered me for insufficient footnotes on my term paper sources – all of whom were classified anyway.

The atmosphere on campus was calm despite strong feelings about the Vietnam War. If there were demonstrations, I never saw one. Yale was still pretty much an upper class elitist school. Second this was getting in the year where draft dodging was becoming kind of a really dirty word. '68-'69. It was well known that all of these kids had college deferments, that they didn't have to go and their less fortunate young countrymen were over in Vietnam shedding their blood. I am sure there were some demonstrations but not the Kent State type thing at all. Maybe you would see some kids with placards or something like that, but most of them I had the strong impression were laying low. The course work was excellent but the best thing was the relations with the instructors and the other students. I had anticipated all kinds of problems dealing with the firebrand radical kids of the Vietnam era but there was none of that. I never met a kid who said one nasty word to me. In fact, just the opposite. We entertained a lot of them. They were delighted to come out to parties and listen to tales of living and working in Southeast Asia.

Most of the professors, or course, had spent at the most a few months in these countries. The Vietnam scholars had never been to North Vietnam. The Indonesia scholars, especially those with a Cornell background, had largely been kept out of Indonesia after 1965. So I was the only one who could tell the students what it was like in Malang, for example, what it was like in Java now if they were going there. Even more important than that, how they could survive the visa hassles and frustrations of ordinary life. They really were pleased with everything I could tell them about reality in Indonesia, what reality was, what it was like.

For example, some of them had no idea that you couldn't drink the water without getting very sick, perhaps dying. There was no program at Yale to advise graduate students about living overseas but all the SEA students would have to do that to get the credibility that only comes from field experience. Other things like: make sure at the outset that you know where the nearest doctor is, where is the nearest hospital? How can you set up a way of getting medical assistance, because the U.S. Embassy is not going to help you. You can't go to the embassy medical unit. They all thought if they got sick, they could go to the embassy. But of course the Embassy won't treat private citizens unless the Ambassador intercedes for some reason. It is against regulations.

The one big issue was ROTC. I recall there was a vote. They took a vote on ROTC, the graduate school as I recall. The vote came out to something like 1505 to 1504 or some unbelievable close vote. There were two votes in favor of retaining ROTC, but the University decided the vote was so close that they would stop ROTC, so they stopped it. In late June we had a new daughter, moved back to Washington, and bought a house – three new experiences in about three weeks – and I started work at INR.

At INR 1969-71

In the division of Southeast Asian affairs, I covered only Indonesia at a time when everyone was only interested in Vietnam. As a result there was not much for me to do and I worked more for the desk than I really did for INR.

During this time the basic split in INR's Southeast Asia Division – indeed in East Asia as a whole – was between Vietnam and everything else. Originally the Vietnam INR “desk” was basically Evelyn Colbert but as the effort burgeoned and she was promoted to deputy director of the East Asia office, they expanded the Vietnam Division and gave it to Steve Lyne. Lyne was a brilliant officer --, I had served with him in Cambodia 62-63--- but a strong hawk on Vietnam with a PHD from Stanford. It wasn't a case of the tail wagging the dog, but rather Vietnam was the dog with the rest of us in the tail.

That was half the problem. The other half was that there was not much going on in Indonesia, or indeed anywhere in SEA except Indochina. In Indonesia it was the period of army consolidation. The students were being gradually eased out of politics or bought off by Suharto, master politician. Golkar, the infamous Golkar was being formed. This organization was originally called “Golongan Karya” which means “functional group” in Indonesian. It was originally created by Nasution, I believe, to give military officers and retired military officers and other functionaries, civilians that is, a political party to compete with the communists during the Sukarno period. After the abortive communist coup attempt a number of bright Chinese who worked with the Army transformed it into the ruling party. They were named Harry Chan and Lim Bian Kee, and were advising Ali Murtopo, a Suharto henchman who ran the intelligence apparatus, and Benny Moerdani another young Suharto henchman. The Indonesians love acronyms, and they made “Golongan Karya” into “Golkar,” into a political party as the dominant ruling party.

The first election if I recall correctly was in '71, and Golkar took 67% of the vote. Not by strong-arm in those years but by backroom politics. In those years there was still great hatred for the communists, here too. Plus the fact that people don't realize that Suharto was worshiped in those first years. I mean there had been starvation under Sukarno, and Suharto made them self-sufficient in rice. There were political prisons under Sukarno, but none under Suharto in the early years, except for the interned PKI. Everybody hated the PKI and had been afraid they were going to take over under Sukarno. Suharto was considered a savior in those days. Suharto won that first election fair and square, in an Indonesian way of course, through patronage and money. As I have explained, nothing in Indonesia gets done without money.

Happily, the Indonesia desk had a lot of work because Henry Kissinger had just taken over the NSC. I was able to help out a little there. Kissinger appeared to have swamped the Department in paperwork, perhaps so that he could centralize policy on the important issues at the NSC. He sent out innumerable questions to be answered in writing by the State Department on every conceivable subject. I think the Indonesian desk got 212 questions. So first his questions came over with a memo asking are these the right questions. So you had to do a paper going back saying this is the right question; that is the wrong question, so on and so forth. That took four months. He was doing it for all countries. Especially of course, the main thing he was doing it on was China.

After a year or so of contending with not being able to do much I asked for a transfer, but I was told this was impossible until was finished in July 1971. Luckily Ed Masters, the Indonesia Country Director who had served in South Asia before he came to Indonesia had recommended me for an assignment as deputy principal officer in Madras. I was overjoyed with that. A new country, a wonderful country, a really interesting place, hypertensive political situation. My wife wasn't quite so keen, but for me, it was only six months more to stick it out in INR and then off to Madras, new adventure, great fun. I had been promoted in late '69, so I was still a young FSO-4 (same as present FSO-2). I hoped if I could do well in Madras as deputy principal officer, then perhaps go onward to a good job in the political section in Delhi, I would have a career foothold in three important regions : Indochina, Indonesia and India.

Then one day in February a friend and colleague who was special assistant to the east Asia assistant secretary told me that the political counselor at the Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, had had to leave suddenly and the number two in the section chief was too low in rank to replace him. Laos was at war so they needed a quick replacement. Although the job was graded two ranks above my own, they could lower the position classification one rank and of course, I would not have the Counselor title. But still I would be “Chief of the Political Section.” The Ambassador was G. McMurtrie Godley, known as “Mac” Godley and also as the American “Field Marshall” of the war in Laos. It was part of the Vietnam war – the principal focus of US foreign policy at the moment -- and all thoughts of Madras went out of my head. My friend planned to broach idea with Bill Sullivan the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau who largely ran Indochina policy.

That night I went home and told my wife there was a chance we would be going to be stationed in Laos. She pointed out that there was a war in Laos but I replied that there were 2,000 Americans in Laos and a good school. This is a wonderful chance, chief of the political section. After this misery in INR I would go to what had been an (pre-1980) FSO-2 job and if I did a good job perhaps become a DCM somewhere. Ah youth! Of course I was sure I could do a good job. I had never supervised anybody but a local FSN translator, but I was still sure I could do a good job. I had no idea how complicated it was in Laos not only the country situation but the American role and presence, nevertheless I leaped at it. But I didn't think I'd get it.

The next day I went to work and there was a call from Bill Sullivan's secretary. She read a cable Mac Godley which said simply – “send Howland out. He sounds like a hawk.” Classic Mac Godley of course - I thought I would really like working for him, which indeed I did.

Getting Ready for Laos

The key person below Sullivan on Laos was Mark Pratt, the Laos desk officer who was steeped in its history as well as current issues, a dynamic and forceful officer. According to him, the EAP Bureau was trying persuade Godley and the Embassy to move toward a negotiating scenario leading toward a possible cease-fire line with the Pathet Lao and

their North Vietnamese masters somewhere across the Plain of Jars in Northern Laos. Politically it was apparently felt that any progress toward peace in Laos might help take the sting out of the protests in the US over the Vietnam war. As an FSO-4 new to Laos I couldn't imagine playing any role in that regard, especially since I inferred from his remarks that perhaps Godley, as well as the North Vietnamese, was as much a sticking point on these alleged negotiations as the North Vietnamese. I soon came to realize the complexity of the situation I had blithely stumbled into.

The real Laos issues were entwined in American politics and too sensitive to maintain any related papers in EAP so the real policy directives were kept in a secure area in INR. Happily my tour in INR – as Evelyn Colbert had said it would years ago – provided me with the clearances to read those papers. That was the one reason I had gotten the Laos job, I suspect. What had developed in Laos was a dual policy. In the north we established local tribal forces, the so-called Meo, in armed camps proximate to the border with the DRV, to draw in NVN troops and hit them with air power. This would soak up troops which then couldn't be sent to South Vietnam to kill American soldiers. In the southern parts of Laos we were bombing the Ho Chi Minh trail, and launching guerilla troops against it. To politically underpin this we were supporting Souvanna Phouma, who was letting us do this. We protected him against rightist coups in the hope that after the Vietnam war, Laos could revert to its neutralist status under the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962.

It was a delicate balance and neutralism was something of a fig leaf. We were using the Lao, and they were using us. We knew that if the Lao rightists took over, the North Vietnamese would just take the country. The Pathet Lao of course, we couldn't let take over. The delicate balance was overseen by Souvanna Phouma who knew and understood and approved what we were doing, and that was the real policy. It was quite ingenious and was basically the work of Sullivan and Pratt, both brilliant and forceful officers. No one could disagree with it. There was not much evidence that Ambassador Godley was overly concerned with the non-military aspects. His job as he saw it was to generate NVA body counts and report them to Nixon; each dead NVA meant one less to shoot at U.S. troops in South Vietnam. But now, in 1971, things were coming to an end. Nixon had been elected partly on the basis of "a plan to end the war in Vietnam." Sullivan had to prepare for that.

The Department wanted to get Godley engaged negotiating some real or implicit plan to draw a cease fire line across the Plain of Jars in north Laos, and preserve the rest of Laos as a buffer for Thailand, the real prize in mainland Southeast Asia. The Plain of Jars is the only place in Northern Laos where troops can be massed in more than battalion size for a major military engagement. So we wanted to draw a line there across the plain of Jars and get the North Vietnamese to negotiate expanding that line to the rest of northern Laos in preparation for the time when there was a settlement in Vietnam.

All of this briefing got underway in a few days, and I had neglected to tell my office at INR anything about my new assignment. Along with everyone I presumed it would come when my normal tour was up in July. But then it was decided that the Bureau wanted me

out there in about 10 days. Phone calls were made and we started packing and rented the house while I was still being briefed. We got the kids packed up and we sent the household goods off. We didn't arrive in Laos in ten days, but we were gone from Washington in that time. Gone in ten days! In those days, of course, travel was a lot easier. Every bureau had a travel person. You just went to the travel person and they gave you a GTR and they gave you a check. That was your advance, and you went and got your tickets and you left. Afterwards you did your voucher. Bureaucratic life was much easier then. So in ten days we were off -- straight through from Washington to Vientiane, Laos, without even a rest stop, with a son six years old and a daughter not yet two, and what seemed like a hundred bags. My wife handled it all, with never a complaint or a tear. I still can't thank her enough.

START WITH A NEW INSERT HERE PART 3

Q. We were starting to talk about Laos.

HOWLAND: Yes, I was sent to Laos in March 1971 after the previous Political Counselor left the post early. I was an (old-style) FSO-4, two grades under the grade of the position, which was FSO-2. We had been notified of this assignment in early March, and had put our affairs in order (a house and two children) in ten days, thanks to my wife. We arrived in a heap in Laos on March 27, and the first night were off to a dinner in our honor at my boss's residence -- Monty Stearns, DCM, and his wife, Tony.

The Embassy and the War

It is tough to find a place to start so let me say a little about the workings of the Embassy in terms of the real Laos policy and the Ambassadors. That is because both when Bill Sullivan was Ambassador, '64-'68, and Mac Godley was Ambassador '68-'73 I believe, it is really fair to say that everything that went on lay in the shadow of one man, the Ambassador. But there is a question whether, if there had been a different Ambassador -- say, one who took little joy in war fighting -- whether he would have lasted or whether he could have controlled the non -- State agencies at post, who got their real orders from their headquarters in Washington. Both Sullivan and Godley loved running wars, and both were good at it. But it was really a hybrid command situation as far as the military was concerned, and everyone worked hard and collegially to make it work.

In other words, those Ambassadors were sent there because they could do and were doing what the President wanted, which was first and foremost to soak up North Vietnamese army bodies in Northern Laos to keep them out of South Vietnam where American troops were fighting. And second, the President wanted to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail to reduce the flow of NVA troops and materiel to SVN. Everything else -- Lao neutrality, the 1962 agreements, etc -- was window dressing as far as administration policy went. The focus was on Vietnam, and how our activities in Laos advanced our war aims there. This was correct policy, of course -- but in Laos our public stress too had to be on Lao neutrality under the terms of the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos. Restoring Lao

neutrality was the fig leaf behind which we were pursuing the real purpose of using Laos to help defeat North Vietnam. But we did intend to use the 1962 Agreement as the framework for a postwar solution in Laos -- or so we thought at the time. Certainly we never wanted Laos as an ally.

It was clear from the policy that Laos was treated a bit like Cambodia, and properly so, since it was a side-show to Vietnam where American troops were directly engaged in combat. The Lao government was to be jollied along so it would let us do what we wanted – bomb the trail and draw North Vietnamese Army troops into Northern Laos. The State Department was always trying to get into a negotiated peace, to revert to the 1962 agreement, but until October 1972 – Kissinger’s “peace is at hand statement” - not much more than lip service was paid to this at the Embassy, or indeed, by the North Vietnamese. This fact really emerged in the 1973 Vietnam peace negotiations when the legal advisors at State tried to get us to insert into the Laos talks the same provisions we wanted in a Vietnam peace agreement. They weren’t even aware that the US and NVN were not at the table in Laos, and the new agreement was to be based on the 1962 Laos agreement. More about that later.

As did Sullivan, every day except Sunday Mac Godley presided over the OPs [operations] meeting where the morning update briefings went on and the tactical decisions were ostensibly made. Actually more decisions were made in his office with fewer people around, but the OPS meeting was intended to coordinate decisions made there: where to move troops around; how to support them with air power, what to do about refugees Etc. Then every day every briefer specified how many NVA had been killed in his area. A body count, KIA, WIA and so forth. Godley wrote it all down on a pad and added it all up very patiently. Every week he sent those figures to Richard Nixon, President of the United States, in a personal back channel cable. That was what the President was interested in, killing NVA in Laos.

However, Laos on the ground was a far more complicated political situation than just killing NVA. It was a political zoo, an extraordinarily complex political equation, involving communists, rightists, so-called neutralists, tribal peoples, drug smugglers, and crooks and so on. There was also a lot more to it in the sense that in 1962 Averill Harriman and Bill Sullivan had negotiated an agreement for the neutralization of Laos, an attempt which in effect was designed take it out of the cold war. But of course it broke down almost immediately, and then worsened once US troops deployed in Vietnam. It hadn't held up at all; such things never hold up because they don't take into account the real motivations of people on the ground.

Earlier after coups and counter coups, Kong Le's “neutralist” 1958 coup, Phoumi Nosavan's 1960 “rightist” coup and so forth, Laos had drifted back into open warfare because the North Vietnamese had never left Laos. They never withdrew one trooper in response to the '62 agreement. We had pulled all our forces out as we always do. Then we had to put them back in, but under cover of various ruses – hundreds of attaches and CIA case officers leading Lao irregular troops. But because of broader political considerations,

we could not admit publicly -- even though everyone knew it-- that we had troops in Laos. Sullivan feared that if we did, the Soviets and Chinese -- who had signed the 1962 Agreement along with us -- would up the ante and we would have a major war there as well as in Vietnam. Toward the end we also had 30,000 Thai mercenaries fighting - or intermittently running away -- in Laos. We couldn't admit all that either. The North Vietnamese had never admitted they had troops in Laos going back to the 1940's. So there was this kind of strange proxy warfare that went on.

For instance, my political section must have been the largest in the history of the State Department -- but only four were FSO's, plus two FS secretaries and one FSN. The rest were all from another agency, and the biggest percentage of those were leading and training troops in the field. Most of them were stationed in Udorn over on the other side of the Mekong River in Thailand. Every morning they would wake up, kiss their wives good-bye, pick up their brief cases, get on a C-130 and fly up to the middle of Laos somewhere, or the southern part of Laos. There they would pick up their weapons and greet their troops, or go out to their troops, and take care of the troops, start a new operation or continue whatever they operation they were conducting in the field at that moment.

In northern Laos, an area known in the air war as "Barrel Roll," the purpose was to soak up NVA and keep them out of South Vietnam; in south Laos, called "Steel Tiger" the goal was to interdict the trail. But almost everywhere, at the end of the day -- war in Laos usually stopped about four in the afternoon; the Lao troops would start taking off their helmets to use them to cook water for rice --- the CIA guys would get their briefcases back together and get back to the plane and fly back to Udorn to be with their families for the night. That was commuting to the war, marvelous, the distances were so short. The thing about it was, it worked. We got good results for a very small American footprint in Laos, especially compared to Vietnam and Thailand.

This was only possible of course because it was a war of tight geographical rules -- the war was to be fought generally away from the population centers of the Mekong Valley, and away from the near-border areas of North Vietnam. When those rules were violated, as we shall see, there was hell to pay. There was an implicit understanding that eventually the 1962 agreement would be restored in Laos after the South Vietnamese unpleasantness was over. Of course everyone knew what that would mean would be a communist, i.e. North Vietnamese takeover under the guise of their proxies, the Pathet Lao. No one expected the rightists, mainly a congeries of clans and aristocrats, or the so-called neutralists -- associated with Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma -- to withstand the communist machine. And indeed everyone was right -- soon after the North Vietnamese took Saigon in 1975, Laos -- which had been administered under a tripartite government dominated by the Pathet Lao since 1973 -- became a Communist state. And a Vietnamese satellite.

But that was later, and during my time there was the bombing and the field operations and, in the capital, our efforts to forestall various coups. The non-communist Lao were

prone to coups and assassinations, perhaps because they had no other way – judicial, say, or democratic – to settle disputes. Meanwhile at the same time out of airbases in Thailand at Udorn, Korat, Nakhon Phanom (“NKP”), Nakhon Sri Thammarat and from carriers in the South China Sea, U.S fighters and bombers were flying sorties over Laos and North Vietnam all the time. We generally flew at least 300-400 sorties a day. We had to approve some but not all of those strikes at the Embassy. An FSO who was nominally the Consular officer checked the proposed strikes against the so-called “Rules of Engagement” (ROE), and maps showing locations of “active villages” and the Ambassador or DCM (or Charge) approved them. He did a fine job and was quite conscientious about villages despite pressure. However, by this time many parts of eastern Laos had come to look like a big piece of Swiss cheese or the surface of the moon.

Yet the Ho Chi Minh Trail was still operating. The North Vietnamese managed to push enough men and supplies down there between '71 - '75, that they eventually took over South Vietnam without much of a big fight after we withdrew US troops. Many people felt that the trail bombing was pretty much a waste of time. We actually did some tests on bombing that showed that trucks could get through, that men could get through and so forth. We did sort of staged tests in Thailand showing that the trucks and troops and materiel were getting through whatever the level of the bombing, but Godley didn't want to hear about that. All he wanted to hear about was KIA, WIA and so forth.

Q: What about the KIA, WIA figures?.

HOWLAND: If you mean accuracy, I have no idea. It was a mystery to me how they could do a body count flying 750 MPH at 10,000 feet.

Q: You have no idea. I mean so many of these figures are almost made up.

HOWLAND: I think so. We used to have a report called a “BDA”, a “bomb damage assessment.” Our FSO bombing officer had one of his own. It went as follows: “target: foliage; BDA: smoke.” I think there was an awful lot of that in Laos. For example there was a procedure called “IFR drops”, short for dropping bombs while flying in heavy clouds on “instrument flight rules, or ‘IFR’.” If you couldn't find your target, or another viable target to drop your bombs, you just found some jungle somewhere that had been designated for “IFR” – i.e. no “active villages” and then dropped them. It was dangerous to land still carrying the bombs, so the pilots had to get rid of them somewhere and huge areas of the country were designated like that. These areas presumably had no populations.

The Operations (“OPs”) Meeting

Anyway that was sort of the atmosphere of the place. The structure of the mission and its modus operandi had been created by Bill Sullivan and by a couple of good DCMs. It centered on the morning operations meeting, known as “the OPs meeting.” Originally it

was seven days a week; then they phased it down to six days a week. Every morning everybody of any prominent role in the mission would gather in the secure bubble upstairs around a big table. I think Sullivan's OPs meeting was at eight, but Godley liked to sleep later (in fairness, he was out on diplomatic business every night, sometimes well past midnight) so his Ops was at nine o'clock. For an hour or so, you would have the charts on the wall, the military maps and everything. It was all 99.9% military.

Only when some strange issue not related to the war intruded, such as our sudden need in September 1971 to get Laos's vote to block Communist China being seating at the UN, then that got about two minutes. Other than that it was all war. Godley sat at the middle of the table, with DCM Monty Stearns at his right, and myself at his left – symbolizing the State Department responsibility for the war in Laos, although my role was, of course, non-existent. To Monty's right sat the bombing officer, FSO-7, nominally in my section although Monty wrote his EER (efficiency report) and Godley reviewed it. He was a much bigger player on the Laos stage than I, and was assiduously courted by anyone in the mission who needed political clearances to bomb or shoot or whatever. That will be all for now, I think. I'll resume the next time.

HOWLAND: when we finished last time we were talking about the "Ops" Meeting at the Embassy in Laos.

Q: Yes, we are talking about Laos.

HOWLAND: So Sullivan had put together the organization, how the mission was run around this morning OPs meeting. It was something right out of a W.W.II movie. I mentioned the seating arrangement. The table was long and oval shaped. Godley sat in the middle. His DCM, Monty Sterns sat on his right. I sat on his left as the political counselor. The next person to me was DEPCHIEF JUSMAAGTHAI, ostensibly a Deputy to the U.S. Military Aid commander in Thailand, but who was actually in charge of providing all the military support, hardware, materiel and so forth for the war effort -- both for the official rightist-controlled Royal Lao Army, and the Lao Irregular Forces run by the agency. At first, DEPCHIEF did not sit on the country team, but then the US Army objected, and the first officer sat in but said little. He was soon replaced by Col. Jack Vessey, who went on to become a four-star General and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Jack and I were fairly good friends although we both recognized I was not a major player in the same league with the rest of the Country Team members, all of whom represented agencies. Vessey was later replaced by Dick Trefry – by then it had become a Brig Gen billet. Trefry was an artillery officer but a brilliant logistics guy. The DEPCHIEF operation involved tons of munitions and equipment, and billions of dollars.

Q: I knew Vessey as the Commander in Korea.

HOWLAND: yes, Korea, Vessey was a great soldier and a wonderful guy. One of the

many great men that I have met in my life. So he was DEPCHIEF, in effect the MAAG chief for Laos although his HQ and depots were in Thailand. But he flew in for every day's OPS meeting. Down at the end of the table beyond Jack was, at first, Jack Frye, the Defense Attaché, a crusty old colonel with great experience. Afterwards he was replaced by Col. Broadus Bailey, Princeton '54, who became a great friend. Then down in that corner was someone else but I can't remember who that was. I guess that was Buzz Curry the air attaché. Next to him, the station chief. I think you may have interviewed him. Directly opposite Godley you had Charlie Mann, the AID Director, recently passed away as of 2012 now. When I was in Cambodia '61-'63, he was AID director there. I got to Laos in '71, he is AID director again. We didn't get along either time. Then there was the head of USIS, Lou Pate. The next guy who sat over there was a former air force pilot in charge of Air America support, the CIA proprietary airline headquartered in Taiwan which was absolutely vital to our operations in Laos. He was basically the Air America operating officer.

Air America and Continental Airlines were the two "contract" air support companies, supplying not bombers but helicopters and transport aircraft transporting quite a lot of the materiel support to the battlefield areas. Their pilots at great risk ferried in the ammo and ferried out the wounded – Lao, that is, not Americans. When Americans went down the USAF took over.

All this was very costly and the costs were carefully hidden. For example, when two senate investigators came out, Moose and Lowenstein, with a directive from Congress to get the spending in Laos under control, they proposed to get it down to under \$100,000,000. Then they found we were spending about \$3.75 billion a year, including bombing the trail. So they asked where all that money was coming from. Unfortunately no one at post could tell them because the accounts were too highly classified. In fact it was coming from various other accounts in the Pentagon budget, flowing in through various ways and then being spent in Laos. \$3.75 billion. We supported 40,000 Thai troops with everything. Thai troops, who sometimes would flee back into Thailand, sell all their weapons and uniforms and then turn up at the recruiting depot and sign back up again.

As I said, everything revolved around the Ambassador, G. MacMurtrie Godley, a fascinating guy and great leader. Godley was larger than life. A multi-millionaire, he had attended Choate and Yale, was a Marine officer during WWII, came into the Foreign Service and became the French desk officer during the early days of the Indo China war. I think he was very pro-French. In those days the Washington establishment did not make much to understand or accommodate to the new forces sweeping SEA after WWII: Ho Chi Minh, the North Vietnamese, the revolution in Indonesia, and of course in China at that time. Despite the Korean War the focus was in Europe well into the 1960's. In the Department it was feared that if the former colonial powers were weakened in the East before the Marshall Plan began to work, NATO would be undermined and Europe would fall to the Russians. So even though desk officers for Far East areas should have been by rights arguing the Far East bureau case on any given issue, they actually went along with

the European Bureau position which was against decolonization.

I suspect that period formed Godley to a great extent. When the Vietnamese won at Dien Bien Phu - although the Russians and Chinese forced them to take an agreement which was far less than what they had suffered and bled for - when the Vietnamese won in '54, I think Godley took that as a personal insult. Perhaps when he came back to Laos years later, he decided that he would punish them. Or perhaps, he was just doing the job the President wanted, like any good Ambassador. Or both.

I don't have a feeling for where Godley was until about '64. In '64 he was sent to the Congo as Ambassador. We were trying to put Mobutu in power and get rid of the leftist . .

Q: Lumumba.

HOWLAND: Yes, Lumumba. That was the era of the Simbas, remember, the guys who took over Frank Carlucci's consulate out there. Godley was the Ambassador, and he brought his entire Congo country team, to Laos later. His station chief was a guy named Art Devlin, who later came to Laos. Monty Sterns was Political Counselor and became DCM in Laos. Charlie Mann who became AID director in Laos was his AID director. Mac Godley was charismatic, a stamp-collector, a stereotype –as Monty called him -- right out of the old British magazine “Boy’s Life.” A hot temper that happily cooled quickly. On the weekends, his idea of real fun was to fly off in a single engine Pilatus Porter VSTOL aircraft and help push the rice sacks out for a rice drop to friendly troops or villages. If you were a new officer, that was the first thing you had to do was go off with the Ambassador on a rice drop Sunday morning, me – married with two children at that time - tethered to the door of the plane and praying in the wind. Anyway, that was Mac -- great fun to work for as long as you didn’t get crosswise to the policy. I liked him a lot; everyone did. And despite the warrior ethos and an occasional bit of bluster, he was a very canny diplomat.

The Political Section

So the OPS group sat around a table every morning six days a week, unvaried, and ruled on everything. But, 90% of it was the war, so that almost nothing that the State Department wanted to do or get done in Laos ever got addressed at a high level unless it was truly earth shaking stuff, like China getting in the UN. My role in that meeting and the political section's role were indeterminate. It didn't exist really. Basically we had not to interfere with the running of the war. There was little we could do to help. So we did a few airgrams on politics in Vientiane and things like that.

The section had previously had six US personnel, and now it had four. Two officers had been sent into the field, one officer to Pakse in the South, where there was a big American operation and the other officer up to the royal capital in Luang Prabang up in the north. The one sent down to the south, David Pabst, had been a West Point – trained Army

officer and was a very bright guy. He did a very fine job in the south because he had a military background and understood what the war was all about and made a role for himself in Pakse. The other officer sent to Luang Prabang was more of a traditional FSO, happier at a cocktail party than anywhere, and eventually left Laos a year early. The two had been sent out to those posts by the DCM, Monty Stearns, on the proposition that we needed more reporting from the outlying areas, and an independent check on what was going on. Also Monty felt – rightly – there was little for four political officers to do in Vientiane except attend cocktail parties and write memcons. Nevertheless there was a problem with putting them in the field. The CIA and to a lesser extent USAID were in charge of the outlying areas. Of course, all the players were CIA liaison contacts or employees, so nothing that in any way could impinge on the CIA's military program was ever going to clear through of the CIA bases or the station – or the Embassy for that matter. Putting these officers out there didn't do much good from a reporting stand-point.

For example, once Dave Pabst sent in a report from Pakse advocating that, to get at the NVA soldiers hiding in underground tunnels in the wet season, the USAF change the fusing of bombs to a six – ten minute delay and drop them in muddy areas. Then when the troops came out after the raid, the bombs would explode and maybe kill a few. Godley's comment on this was: "Now that is a real political report!!!" and it was sent in to the Department by "immediate" precedence cable. This was quite a waste of a first-rate political officer in my view.

So by the time I arrived there was a five person political section, with two secretaries, an officer named Ed Kelly and me, and a Lao translator-political assistant. Both secretaries were excellent and did a lot of BIO reporting, mainly from our FSN employee, Kongkham Thanasack who was invaluable. The previous chief of the political section, Charlie Rushing, who had left suddenly, was actually an excellent officer and went on to many important jobs. The rumor was that he had attempted on his own to talk to the Pathet Lao representative in Vientiane, Soth Phetrasy, about negotiations. I don't know if that's true – I later dealt with Soth Phetrasy on POW/MIA affairs - fruitlessly of course - and was careful not to undercut Embassy policy or predilections. After the Pathet Lao take-over, Phetrasy, although a loyal Communist, and his wife, were sent to a "re-education camp" in the jungles. Obviously, the party felt he had been contaminated by years in Vientiane – the enemy camp- and was no longer trustworthy or ideologically pure. Neither of them survived the re-education experience.

As sometimes happens, Monty Stearns as DCM became the senior political officer. He was very knowledgeable on military matters – also a former Marine – and a superb political officer as well. He had been with Harriman and Sullivan at the 1962 Geneva Conference and was very policy-smart. And Godley thought he was wonderful. Monty because of his intellect and drafting skills did write a few important pol - mil papers, and also looked after all the non-war stuff, and did a great job. So great that in that war-time environment there was really no need for a political counselor there. That was obvious as soon as I arrived. The political officer had to carve out a kind of different role.

So there I was, the new boy not even the proper rank -- two ranks below what the job called for -- sitting around with all these senior, experienced soldiers in an environment that was like a W.W.II movie. It was like arriving in Cambodia in 1961, my first post, all over again. I had to re-learn the business.

For example, one OPS meeting briefer would report that "Raven FAC called in some DK-82 on LS-259. They fragged in Spookie and the T-28s and the friendlies held for about an hour and a half, but then incoming forced a reposition." Slowly I learned this military jargon, plotted on huge maps which, from the opposite side of the table, were incomprehensible except to the cognoscenti. Once I raised my hand and I said, "Does that mean you guys were bombing targets?" Everyone looked at me in a strange way, and the briefer said, "We really don't use language like that anymore. Basically we were delivering ordinance to pre-selected locations." A war of euphemisms among other things.

So starting out you had to wade through all this miasma of jargon, learn all the military tactical stuff and the ever-changing patterns of war and maneuver of friendly and enemy troops in the field. Under the Ambassador, much of this was controlled by CIA, the "secret war," with advice from the military attaches and support from DEPCHIEFJUSMAAGTHAI who furnished the military supplies and equipment. And also there was the air support, from Thai and offshore bases, and it was all orchestrated at this OPS meeting under the Ambassador.

So . . . what did the political section do? Well, it was difficult for me to figure out what the political section did. Key figures in the parliament were "influenced" by the CIA, so that they wouldn't try to overthrow Souvanna with a motion of no confidence. No point reporting on that -- the CIA had the real story. Any reporting that touched on outlying areas where the agency was operating was not possible unless it was approved by the agency for fear there would be a flap in Washington affecting support for the program. So I was in a bit of a quandary for a while.

Eventually I actually found a niche -- we began doing a lot of research and reporting on the so-called "Pathet Lao" -- a name that was a Western invention like "Viet Cong" and "Khmers Rouges". The Pathet Lao leaders and members actually called themselves the "Neo Lao Hak Xat", a phony "patriotic front" organization actually controlled by the Communist "Lao People's Revolutionary Party", and little more than an arm of the Vietnamese Communist Party. The structure was very complex and shadowy and remains so to this day, as they still control Laos under the tutelage and watchful eyes of the Vietnamese. I found that few in the Embassy truly understand this organization so it was a way we could make a contribution to the effort.

The Bombing and Refugee Flap

Meanwhile, of course, various people in Washington were trying to undercut the whole effort in Laos, as I found immediately upon arrival. For Instance, while the bombing was

going on in northern Laos, large numbers of refugees were streaming out of the north and into Charlie Mann's AID refugee camps. I'm talking about tens of thousands of people. As these refugees were being generated, Teddy Kennedy, chairman of the Senate committee on refugees ---this was during the Nixon period so the Democrats were in opposition --- started making allegations that we had systematically bombed every village in northern Laos to create "free fire zones" where we could "carpet-bomb" the NVA and Pathet Lao. Statements were made that "there were no more villages in Northern Laos" because of the American bombing.

Now, northern Laos is three times the size of New England you know. Even bombing as we were we couldn't have destroyed every little village tucked away in all those gorgeous mountains. But this became headlines and a Republican Congressman named McCloskey --- remember McCloskey?

Q: Paul McCloskey.

HOWLAND: Paul McCloskey, also a former active duty marine, came out there with some staffer three days after I arrived as a brand new political counselor, knowing virtually nothing about Laos, never having worked on the place before... They came down to the political section saying "I want to see all the files you have on refugees. I am a Congressman and here is my ID card". So I said, "Well, sir, I am brand new here. I really don't know what is in the files, so I am starting my way through them and it will take a while."

"Where are your files," he said. "Show them to me."

"We'd better go see my boss," I said. We went off to see Monty Sterns the DCM, but he was home packing. He was going back to Washington for a hearing with Kennedy's refugee committee. Monty told me to take care of it. So I gave McCloskey some unclassified stuff including a USIS report that I thought was innocuous. Then the military took him out on a field trip, and then he left. As it turned out, he took back and introduced into the committee hearing some of the stuff I had given him, including the USIS report.

It turned out that my rating officer, the DCM, was not aware of this one particular document, a study by a USIS officer, a Lao speaker. He had visited some of Charlie Mann's camps asking refugees what had caused them to flee their villages. USIS was fond of doing polls and apparently in the study, every refugee said, "We fled the bombs." Now I was too ignorant at the time to see the implications of this ---three days at post --- so I gave it to McCloskey's staffer because I figured it was just an anodyne study. Well, it wasn't anodyne, it became a big thing. After Monty came back, probably only a month of constantly feigned stupidity saved me from being curtailed like Charlie Rushing. To this day I can't imagine why he was so suspicious -- his role was as secure and irreplaceable as mine was dicey and superfluous. So my first action on the job was to get my rating officer enraged at me over this whole thing -- although Monty was too much the professional to

ever show rage. I think he suspected me of trying to undercut him in some way with McCloskey, which of course was nonsense.

The War in Northern Laos: The Plain of Jars

Anyway that was the kind of atmosphere; that was the climate of the mission. Eventually I did get quite a bit of stuff to do, partly because of the refugees but also partly because the whole climate in the U.S. was changing on Indo China. The war was winding down, people were tired of it, there was an election coming in 1972. Remember we had just had the Cambodian incursion and then the Lam Son 719 incursion where the South Vietnamese went into Laos. That was something of a fiasco. Everything was changing. Marshall Green, a very brave man, was assistant secretary of state. He had been my Ambassador in Indonesia as you know, and he was very anxious to get negotiations started in Laos. DAS Bill Sullivan, whose antennae on Indo China absolutely were superb, was detecting that -- this was in '71 mind you -- that the Vietnamese were getting ready to (A) make a big push, and (B) then make a deal. He wanted to get Laos pacified, since he had drafted the '62 Agreement on Laos. He thought the first move would be in Laos, and he was right. I think Bill hoped to draw a line down the middle of Laos and take it out of the war, keep half in friendly hands north-to-south as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnam. In this he was historically correct. I'll draw a map to explain.

Q: You are looking at something, I mean this is for the record here. It looks kind of like a hand mirror with a handle. The round part of the mirror would be what? What would you call that?

HOWLAND: The northern part was "Barrel Roll." That is the military term for this area. The southern part is "Steel Tiger."

Q: And the handle was called steel tiger.

HOWLAND: Steel Tiger East, Steel Tiger West. Steel Tiger east was the Ho Chi Minh trail. Steel Tiger west was the portion of Laos along the Mekong River. Here in Barrel Roll is the Plain of Jars, here was the CIA launch base for the Meo and Thai irregulars at nearby Long Tieng, and here is Vientiane on the river to the south. The Pathet Lao headquarters was to the far northeast of Barrel Roll in Sam Neua and Phongsali close to the Vietnamese and Chinese borders. The Pathet Lao of course were largely a puppet movement of the North Vietnamese. Just north of the Plain of Jars was a big mountain named Phou Pha Thi, on top of which was a U.S. Air Force outpost maintaining a beacon that guided U.S. aircraft into North Vietnam. It was defended by Meo irregulars and was a terrific thorn in the North Vietnamese side.

Q. Back to the negotiations. . .

Yes. I think Bill Sullivan, sensing the end of the Vietnam war was near, wanted to make sure that -- since he had been associated very strongly with Laos---however Vietnam

came out, the 1962 agreement on Laos would be restored after the War, a “neutralist” settlement with Souvanna Phouma at the head. Laos would revert to its neutrality. We would slip away happily, having preserved part of Laos; the North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao when Vietnam fell would have their buffer on that side, and the Thai would have their buffer on the western side, with a line down through the middle of Laos. I don’t know if Bill really thought it would work, but it also had the value of possibly defraying the critics of the war-fighting policy in Washington.

Since the fall of the Khmer empire in the 13th century, all of Southeast Asian mainland history had reflected the struggle between the Thai and the Vietnamese, the two dominant, most vigorous, most active peoples, most intelligent and capable peoples on the peninsula. It’s true the Burmese got involved in Thailand in the late 18th. Century, but Burma always isolated itself, a strange inward looking culture. Anyway Bill as usual had a brilliant idea but rather far-fetched to expect the Vietnamese would be satisfied with that – anymore than the Indonesians, for instance, were satisfied with letting the Dutch keep West New Guinea. The Vietnamese saw themselves as the successor to the French empire in Indochina, and of course in the end that’s what happened.

Anyway Bill wanted to try -- and Marshall had encouraged him to push on this for Washington political reasons -- to start in the Plain of Jars. The Plain of Jars had been battled over back and forth, we took it; the NVA re-took it; we took it again; they took it back. It was the only place in mountainous Northern Laos where troops could be massed in larger than company-size, so the idea of starting a ceasefire line there also fit in with the policy of soaking up large numbers of NVA troops. The latest idea was to re-take the middle of the Plain and emplace Thai irregulars (mercenaries) in artillery fire bases guarded by screens of Meo (Hmong) infantry, and resupplied by air through dirt runways (“LS-“ or “Landing Strip”).

Now the war in Laos was very different from Vietnam. There too it alternated between dry season offensives and wet season defensives. We attacked in the dry season, they in the wet, we in vehicles and aircraft, they on foot. But it was a very different war in Laos: we moved in the wet season, they in the dry. We had guerrilla troops; they were road-bound in those deep jungles and high mountains. So in that wet season of 1971 - - roughly May to October, the southwest monsoon --- Bill Sullivan wanted to start by drawing a line across the Plain of Jars. They could have the eastern half. We would have the western half. That's where Bill hoped talks would start to resuscitate the neutrality of Laos. From there perhaps some accommodation would spread to the rest of Vietnam and Cambodia. That was his goal, that was the nexus of the plan, starting on the infamous Plain of Jars. Marshall Green was very keen on that because he saw a way to defray criticism of the whole war through this plan – “negotiations were underway, don’t rock the boat!”. So the Department was very keen on having some façade of a negotiation strategy get visibly underway, no matter how far-fetched. There were wheels within wheels on this one.

But Ambassador Godley was not interested in negotiations, which he considered a State

Department issue. He was pursuing a war that he believed was at the wishes of the President as expressed through Dr. Kissinger's NSC and then via the CIA and Defense. He was right in that. He was always concerned with body count – North Vietnamese KIA. The CIA was also unconcerned with negotiations – their orders were to keep the Meo irregulars pushing forward - - the “secret army” up in the north, plus the Lao regular Army (RLA) -- to seize high powered spots, high positions in northern Laos overseeing the Plain of Jars or providing radio beacons to guide US aircraft into bombing targets in North Vietnam itself. This would create an implied threat to North Vietnam forcing it to commit troops which would normally be sent down the Ho Chi Minh trail to South Vietnam. Perhaps even to withdraw troops from the south to head off an implied invasion threat from the West. Plus, of course, the agency deployed other irregulars in South Laos to harass the trail itself.

This was the policy, had been the policy when Sullivan was Ambassador to Laos. It worked fine when we controlled most of Laos, but by 1971 we only had a sliver left, with a few pockets inside NVA-controlled territory.

Charlie Mann, the USAID director, hated to hear that because he had 56 agriculture advisors who were supposed to be helping the Lao people with agriculture, But since we didn't control any of the areas anymore where the Lao grew crops -- most of the rice and other commodities came from Thailand under the CIP -- these guys had nothing to do but sit around and complain. For example, we had soybean specialists although no soybean has ever grown in Laos. We had sorghum experts. Every congressman's pet agricultural area had an advisor in tropical Laos. There were three hundred and fifty six AID people, none of whom except for the refugee workers -- who were terrific -- really ever got out to the field anymore because the other side controlled it. In fairness, it must be noted that many of these USAID “employees” were actually working for other Agencies.

Nevertheless the fiction had to be maintained because it was part of the fiction that we were helping the Lao instead of using them for our war in Vietnam.

Anyway, that was the strategy to send the Meo out on missions in the north, draw the Vietnamese troops in to push them back, and then hit them with the American air support, the “fast movers” i.e. F-4s, and occasionally the B-52s when we could get them. Well, Bill Sullivan wanted to convert this policy into a setting for negotiations starting with the Plain of Jars. So in June of '71, I had been there three months. I had been up on my ritual trip to meet Vang Pao who was the traditional head of the Meo ethnic group, and commander of the CIA-supported Meo forces. Now they are called the Hmong, their own name, but the French miscalled them “Meo” which carried over into my time there, so I will go on using that. Going up to Long Tieng to see Vang Pao was exciting but a mixed blessing, unless you liked bacon-and-eggs with scotch whiskey for breakfast at six am, then landing or taking off on dicey short strips in swirling clouds -- clouds, as the pilots would say, “that have rocks in them.” The scotch always helped.

I must emphasize that although the Meo troops were trained, led and paid by us, they had been fighting the North Vietnamese for their traditional homelands in the Lao mountains for decades, perhaps centuries. They were excellent light infantry, although sometimes, as

the Brits said about the Gurkhas: “they move forward rapidly, but backward even faster.” This said, when their villages were threatened – or Long Tieng, General Vang Pao’s base area – they fought bravely and well. There were three reasons for this: (1) if wounded, they could expect a medevac, usually by Air America chopper; (2) if killed, their families would receive a death benefit payment; and (3) every Friday, they held up their weapon and dog tag, and received their weekly pay. The CIA ensured this, and it magnified the already-existing combat bond between the Meo irregulars and the CIA “case officers” who led them. In contrast, the Royal Lao Army fought poorly if at all because none of these benefits were provided by their officers – the payments were stolen and there was no medevac system.

Back to the Plain for Jars negotiations: Bill Sullivan and then Marshall Green came out to Vientiane to try to get this whole thing started before the end of the wet season. Now, our offensives with the Meo usually got underway in the wet season – as I mentioned, another reason why Laos was different from Vietnam was that in Laos the North Vietnamese were the road bound army. We were the guerrillas. The Meo irregulars – the so called CIA “Secret Army” army -- were the guerrilla forces. This was a very important point which almost no one in Washington understood. Then too, Laos was different because it had a basis for post-war accommodation between the warring parties – Agreements on Laos negotiated by Harriman and Sullivan in Geneva in 1962.

On the battlefield, we had no tanks or and not much road transport in general. We had aircraft, from the U.S. Air Forces, the Royal Lao Air Force, Air America, Continental airways, and the Royal Thai Government (RTG) – all “sheep – dipped”. The Vietnamese had the tanks. We had some heavy artillery, but most of it was overseen by “sheep-dipped” U.S. Army officers in defense of Long Tieng. But the Vietnamese had trucks and had to move a large amount of troops and materiel as well as weapons.

Q. Laos was very different.

In South Vietnam, in the early days, as you know, it had been the Viet Minh guerrillas. After Tet in 1968, the war became a series of main force battles, but from the Vietnamese standpoint in Laos, it was always main force battles. This is where we kind of made our mistake or one mistake. Earlier we had developed these lightly armed Mao guerrillas, figuring we were going to have a similar type of warfare. You know -- use fire to fight fire. But since we were close to the DRV homeland, the Vietnamese would come in with a whole division, a full Vietnamese division into the Plain of Jars. That was the end of our little guys. As I said, like the Gurkhas the Meo moved fast up and down those hills going forward, and twice as fast moving up and down those hills when they were moving backward.

Mobile guerilla warfare was not a formula for drawing an eventual ceasefire line, so in June of '71 we started the scenario by bringing in two Thai firebases with sheep-dipped troops borrowed from the Royal Army of Thailand (RTA). We ferried them up there with CH-53's, one gun after another, 155mm howitzers, put them in two bases right out in the

middle of the Plain of Jars with a screen of Meo infantry in front of them. We put more heavy artillery behind the hills to the south and got a commitment from General Abrams in Saigon that any time we needed fast movers, F-4s, we could have them to provide air support for those bases. . So we did that in June.

You recall I started this account by mentioned Cong. McCloskey, Ted Kennedy and the allegations that we had destroyed every village in Northern Laos to create “free fire zones.” Well, in September of '71, Cong. Jack Kemp came out to see if there were any villages left in Laos. McCloskey had made a big fuss over this, so President Nixon had asked Jack Kemp to go out and defray that story. Kemp was actually a very nice guy, a good hearted guy. In September, '71, USAID Director Charlie Mann and I went down to pick up Kemp at Udorn. He arrived in a military plane and we picked him up in a chopper. We wanted to show him how the situation was, particularly how secure we were on the Plain of Jars, and then show him a few villages in Northern Laos. We flew up to the Plain of Jars, we talked to the Meo troops guarding an LS. Kemp was very congenial and asked a lot of questions, and then we took him in the chopper all around seeing villages. He wrote down the names on the map. Aha, you see, he said, there are villages left in northern Laos. Of course there were many villages that were never bombed and many that were, but it appeared in dealing with Congress it has got to be black and white, very simple.

We had a little mini adventure where we landed in one village and as the chopper landed, it surged forward unaccountably right under a tree. So there is the chopper parked under a tree, perhaps unable to take off, in an area that was a little bit closer to the North Vietnamese. I should point out that all of these areas we visited were within 20 and 60 miles of North Vietnamese main force units. They weren't hundreds of miles away. Somehow the Air America pilot got the chopper turned around, got it out from under the tree and took off. It was great fun, you know all that with Jack Kemp.

So at that point the Plain of Jars (PDJ) was secure, in the wet season. There were a few skirmishes but no serious attacks on the Thai firebases. It was felt the first steps were working. I suppose it was then decided that somebody innocuous, someone that no one will take seriously, should go talk to the Pathet Lao representative in Vientiane to start a dialogue, using the issue of US POWs as the wedge. That was my area, although we had a POW officer who dealt mainly with the American POW wives and politicians involved with them – a more than fulltime job. I suppose the Embassy thought I couldn't do any real harm to the war effort seeing Soth Phetrasy, and they could always disavow me if I messed up.

Talking to the Pathet Lao

Now, as part of the 1962 Laos Agreement, the Pathet Lao had opened a representation in Vientiane, looking toward a time when the tripartite regime of Neutralists, Rightists and Communists might eventually be reconstituted. Of course, the neutralist forces under Prince Souvanna Phouma, or the rightists under a variety of Lao generals and politicians

organized by clans and families, had never gotten a representation up in the Pathet Lao capital of Sam Neua! Nevertheless, from '62 to the-then present, 1971, or nine years, a Pathet Lao representative named Soth Phetrasy, had sat in Vientiane in his house, opposite the morning market, on a closed street, guarded by a handful of Pathet Lao soldiers (he was allowed under the old agreement to have his own guards). Outside his little compound were Royal Lao Army (RLA) guards and occasionally an armored vehicle. The right wing forces of course, would cheerfully have blown the place up, but we prevented them. This had been Soth Phetrasy's house when he was a minister in an earlier coalition government, and since it was next to the morning market people would walk by in the road and watch the Pathet Lao guards glower at them. One of the many anomalies of wartime Laos – there was also a North Vietnamese Embassy, of course.

The only time I had been to Phetrasy's compound – not inside his residence – was on one of the frequent trips to Vientiane by Cong. Sonny Montgomery on the POW/MIA issue. He was from Mississippi and until his death was a key figure in veterans administration, POW-MIA, other issues affecting American servicemen and women. The POW/MIA problem was a huge part of our portfolio in Laos, and the Congressman came out frequently to fulminate against the Pathet Lao, which would not release any information about downed American flyers, involved either in Barrel Roll or Steel Tiger. Soth Phetrasy refused to see him, of course, but I used to take him to his front gate. And he would bang on the door trying to get in. It was a miracle we were never shot. But I had been over there, and actually spoken to the Pathet Lao guards. So it was decided at the Embassy that on the 14th of July, French National Day ...

Q: Bastille Day.

HOWLAND: Yes, July 14, 1971, Bastille Day at the French Embassy reception, I should try to approach Soth Phetrasy, the Pathet Lao representative, and ask for an appointment to discuss the POW-MIA issue. Which I did. It was very interesting. A very interesting moment in my career, in my life. At the reception I had to wait because at first Phetrasy was talking to a North Vietnamese Embassy officer, Nguyen Van Thanh, whom I later got to know. Everyone had an Embassy in Vientiane, North and South Vietnamese, Russians and Chinese of course. Plus the Poles, Indians and Canadians as part of the old Indochina ICC revitalized in Laos under the 1962 Geneva Agreement. They were all on the diplomatic circuit. It came from the old days when Laos was the center of the world, when Kennedy said we were going to save Laos and save mankind and so forth. So they all were there. You had the North Vietnamese at the French party since they had relations with France as you know. We bombed the French Embassy in Hanoi...

Q: We were good at that.

HOWLAND: Yes, but as a matter of international law, if you are in a country at war, you have got to expect your Embassy is going to be in danger. Be that as it may, I kind of edged over, in my white official suit and black tie, idly chatting with everybody I knew. I had already spotted a good place to loiter and watch, talking pleasantly to an Indian wife

of one of the Indian ICC representatives. The Indian wives were very pleasant and talkative at cocktail parties and you can perch with them, size up the crowd, and see who you want to go talk to on business matters. So I waited until Phetrasy sort of broke away from the Vietnamese First Secretary and I walked over and I said, "Good evening sir, my name is Howland from the American Embassy."

Without batting an eye he shook hands and he said, "Yes, I know you. I have seen you around." This was all in my still very rudimentary French of course, which was just barely getting better. We chatted about weather, families, French national day. He was nice enough to say: "Your French is pretty good, do you speak any Lao..." He asked how many children I had, how old are they etc. His children were away in school but his wife was with him but not at the reception (We suspected that his children, of course, were in Hanoi, in effect held as hostages to guard against his defecting to the Vientiane side).

So I said, "I would really like to get together with you and chat about some things." He said, "Oh, the last person who chatted with me, your predecessor, didn't stay in Laos very long after that." I said, "No, I am actually authorized to come and chat with you about some things." He asked what I wanted to talk about and I replied, "Well, the POW-MIA issue." So he said, " Ah, les prisonniers de la guerre."

Then he said, with perfect calm: "if you stop the bombing you can have all your prisoners back." It was said just like that. It was, of course, the PL position that a bombing halt would have to precede any talks on any issues, but had never been phrased as a simple quid pro quo vis-à-vis the POWs.

At that moment, I suddenly realized how conversation elsewhere in the room had quieted, everyone seemed to be watching us. There must have been 200 people you know, at the reception. I was sweating; it was so hot, in my heavy white suit, just dripping with pools of perspiration. Of course Phetrasy was perfectly cool and calm as Southeast Asians are, although in a wool suit, not a bead of perspiration. I was dripping wet. It was kind of nerve wracking. Meanwhile everyone was sort of making a big circle around him trying to see. . . "the Americans are talking to the Pathet Lao. What is going on?" You could see the wheels going round in their minds.

So I said, "This is not the place to talk about this. Let's have a meeting."

"Fine, fine. Call me up and we'll meet," he replied

Talking to the North Vietnamese

So a few days later I had my Lao FSN, Kongkham, call to arrange a meeting at Phetrasy's residence. It took quite a while and before we could meet, as it happened, before I made a formal call on Soth Phetrasy, I happened to be at a cocktail party given by the Canadian representative on the International Control Commission (ICC), John Hamill. The ICC had been set up in 1954 inter alia to monitor the truce in Laos, which of course, only lasted a

few weeks, but had stayed on and was a valuable diplomatic venue.

John Hamill, a wonderful Canadian diplomat and great friend, had seen me talk to Soth Phetrasy, the Pathet Lao rep, a week or two before. Now he came over and said, "Well now that you are seeing the communists, why don't you stop dealing with these Pathet Lao underlings, and talk to a North Vietnamese guy?"

I said, "John, I can't do that." He said, "You can if I drag you over there," and he grabbed me by the arm, and introduced me to Mr. Nguyen Van Thanh, second secretary of the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. (It wasn't a "People's Republic" yet because, following Lenin's formula, it was still in the "national democratic stage," i.e. building socialism.) Before I knew it, we were face to face. I thought, my God, here I am talking to the North Vietnamese, an American. As far as I knew, no American official, except perhaps in Paris with Kissinger ---and I am not even sure Kissinger was talking to them then -- no American had spoken to a North Vietnamese diplomat in years.

Thanh turned out to be a dapper and smooth guy about my age. After a few offhand remarks I decided to just plunge in although I had no instructions to do so. So I said, "You know Northern Laos has suffered greatly because of our quarrel over the southern part of Vietnam. There really isn't a whole lot of reason for Northern Laos to suffer. You have lost a lot of troops there."

"We have no troops in Laos," he replied. I said, "You have lost a lot of troops there and a lot of the ordinary common people have suffered. Don't you think it might be time perhaps to get together and maybe work out some kind of plan to restore the agreement we both signed in 1962 to one part of the country? We could start with one province. We could start with the Plain of Jars."

When I said the Plain of Jars, he replied, "I see you haven't been here very long, and you don't know a great deal about the history of the Plain of Jars." He went on that the Plain of Jars was formerly called the "Plain of Tran Mien" and was centrally controlled by the Vietnamese empire going back to the second century. So it was really Vietnamese and no deal was possible until the US withdrew from Indochina. Sometime in the future the countries involved would decide.

So I said, "Yes I agree that will all be in the future, but a good way to help all of this is if we could just talk about neutralizing again some other area, or the Plain of Jars, for the time being."

As they well knew we had deliberately put our forces out one half of the way across the Plain of Jars and stopped. We could have moved on the rest of the way. We stopped there. I told him, "you know, the Lao army forces are there in the Plain of Jars now." I tried to hint that we could have moved them forward, but we stopped them there to send the signal that we would like to talk about some accommodation to end the fighting in northern Laos.

Nguyen Van Thanh said with utter finality: "There will be no accommodation in Northern Laos. The outcome will be determined by other means."

The conversation then ended as my Russian Embassy counterpart as political counselor, who was also said to be the KGB Resident in Vientiane, Georgi Vorobiev, joined us. With him was his wife, Ludmilla, quite lovely and smart. I felt I had enough for a report and I certainly didn't want to go on talking with the Russians there. I shook hands and moved away.

I hadn't been authorized to talk to the North Vietnamese diplomat so I was pretty nervous about what how my DCM and Ambassador would react. So I left the party, went right to Godley at the residence. I wasn't going to take any chances on this one. Godley's reaction was, "That's wonderful. They don't want to talk. Do a cable." I suspect Godley was secretly pleased although he told me not to talk to the North Vietnamese again unless there was specific authorization --- of course he was right. The intransigent remark, he may have felt, could help Marshall Green off his back about negotiations and he could concentrate on the war. He certainly was not wrong about the NVN attitude toward Northern Laos, as we found out in December 1971.

Despite his words, there were no serious NVA attacks there as I mentioned when in September of '71, I took Jack Kemp up to the Plain of Jars. We began to wonder about the whole thing because they weren't making any moves to come back. We knew where they were. Of course through the "big ears" we could monitor some of their communications. We knew pretty much where their forces were and they weren't sending any big forces in even though the dry season was coming. As I mentioned to you, we moved in the wet season. They took the land back in the dry season when they could move after the roads dried out. That was the alternation and at the Embassy the DCM Monty Sterns wrote two papers, a dry season planning paper which we wrote for the dry season, and a wet season planning paper which laid out what we were to do in each season.

But be that as it may, the dry season was coming on. Now the dry season in Laos is complicated. The dry season down in Thailand and Cambodia, you have the southwest monsoon, a very powerful monsoon, from March through September or October. Soon afterwards that monsoon is weakened. You know how the monsoons work. You have a high over China in one half of the year and a high over Australia the remainder. One part of the year the winds blow from the southwest in one part and the other part they blow from the northeast. Northern Laos being mountainous and up near North Vietnam, the wet season tends to last a little longer, because as the northeast monsoon gets started there are the *Crachins* late in the year. You get sudden rainstorms in northern Laos so it doesn't dry out quite as fast as it does elsewhere. By November in Cambodia, for example, it is like a desert. The rains have stopped; it is dusty and dry, but northern Laos is still beautiful and vernal. So as we drifted on into October and November, it was still raining occasionally. I kept thinking about Nguyen Van Thanh saying there can be no accommodation but Washington may have been thinking: Aha, maybe he reported back

and maybe there is something coming about. Well there was, but it was still long in the future, the following year of course. It was in October of '72 when Kissinger said, "Peace is at hand" But we are still back in '71. We should leave that topic right there because the status quo standoff prevailed on the PDJ until we get into December. Let me talk about China for a while.

The Chinese Road In Northern Laos

In September 1971 the other important thing that happened that affected us in Laos was the entry of the People's Republic of China into the United Nations. This became a real issue for the Embassy in dealing with the Royal Lao Government – a weak little country under the shadow of enormous China to the north.

Now, for some years the Chinese in Laos had been building a road in Northern Laos, a long road from Phongsali way in the north near their border all the way down the Nam Beng valley west of Luang Prabang to a town called Pak Beng right on the Mekong. There was an old agreement to build this road but no ratification of it by the present Lao government, yet the Chinese persisted, in fits and starts. Its purpose was a mystery. The North Vietnamese did not seem to be involved in any way in this road. Why were they doing it? I was anxious to write a report on the road and started to study it.

Across the Mekong from the probable terminus of the Chinese road at Pak Beng was Sayaboury Province of Laos, which bordered on Thailand. There was a minor insurgency underway in northern Thailand at the time, which was supported to a minor extent by the Chinese. So the general thinking was that that road was being built by the Chinese to support the insurgency in northern Thailand. I didn't agree with that after looking at the pictures of the road. I actually flew past Pak Bang at a distance once, and looked at the traffic reports for the sections already completed. I mean we monitored the traffic on that road through overhead photography, through military aircraft plus other classified means. Jim Rhyne, Chief Pilot for Air America, had taken ground while surveilling the road earlier, and managed heroically to fly his aircraft back to Luang Prabang despite a wound that later required amputation of one leg. (He was still Chief Pilot and usually served as pilot for Ambassador Godley).

As far as I could see, very little of importance had crossed the Mekong from Pak Beng; we had people watching across the Mekong, nothing came across the Mekong from that road that was anything more than a man could carry on his back. The Pathet Lao were not active in either of the portions of Laos that were to the west of the Mekong, and in fact, northwest of the Chinese road. So why was it being built?

I suspected the Chinese in their carefully structured diplomacy were creating a fact on the ground. They were signaling something by building that road, but they weren't signaling that they were planning to take over Thailand. Because if they had, they would be sending massive amounts of equipment as they were to the North Vietnamese. They weren't sending down any of that stuff down there. So there was the Chinese road like a dagger

slanting down northeast to southwest through the middle of northern Laos. I came to realize that historically everything to the east of that road had always been heavily influenced by the Vietnamese. To the west of that road, it had been heavily influenced by the Chinese and was populated by the hill tribes who were ethnic Chinese or Tai hill people, a thousand different clans and villages from different, occasionally warring hill tribes. There were even some ethnic Tibeto-Burman people.

That part of Southeast Asia had always been terribly sensitive to the Chinese. They often sent troops down there. They had the French and British colonial powers had come right up to the border of China. It was the soft underbelly of China because the southern part of China at that time was mostly populated by hill people. Tibet, all of that. We had at one point run recon teams up into southern China from hill, tribe villages to the north and west of the road. It was my feeling that with the road the Chinese were demonstrating that they had security interests in Northern Laos that the North Vietnamese and their Russian allies should acknowledge and respect.

At one point the Embassy recommended to Washington that we deploy some “cluster bombs” in that Nam Beng valley just ahead of the road crews, so they would find out we were watching. This was just before Kissinger’s first secret visit to China, and we were instantly told in a special NSC channel to draw “no-bomb lines” around any real or suspected Chinese position in Northern Laos, with no reasons given. The reason only became clear when Kissinger’s secret visit to China was later announced. At that point, the Embassy decided not to do a report on the Chinese road, and I never wrote anything about it until now.

China Joins the UN

So in September 1971 you had the Chinese road being built, and the Chinese making a push to get into the UN, and Kissinger having just been to China. That all happened in '71 -- the secret visit to China, and announcing that in the future sometime, President Nixon was going to make a trip to China. Meanwhile, Bill Rogers, the Secretary of State, was saddled with carrying out the old China policy, that of not letting the PRC into the UN. Taiwan was still the legitimate representative. The whole world was against this relic of the past, but I guess he, and Kissinger – and the President -- decided we had to make a last ditch battle just to show the flag, to do the best we could to keep Mainland China out of the UN.

Now, Laos was planning to abstain, a sensible policy with China glowering over its shoulder – even building a road through its territory without permission. This was in late September 1971, perhaps early October, and we had reported Laos was planning to abstain. Late in the day before the vote we suddenly get a cable ostensibly from the President of the United States directing us to turn the Lao around and vote against China, with a threat of “reviewing our policy,” i.e. perhaps reducing air support for the RLG against the DRV and the Pathet Lao. The implication was the Lao must vote against the PRC replacing Taiwan at the UN or we would stop air support of their troops against

North Vietnam.

Now, there was another complication. Ambassador Godley had left his previous Ambassadorship in the Congo under a cloud, after doing something that offended Mobutu back in '68. I was told the Department gave him Laos as a consolation prize because he had done something to get Mobutu stirred up. I don't know what it was. I heard he had left just before he had been declared *persona non grata*. Godley was worried about the tone of the new cable and Souvanna Phouma's possible reaction. So he was quite unnerved. Normally a DCM handles these things but Monty Stearns was off on home leave at this time. So Godley called me over at 6:00 am in the morning, and showed me the cable. He said, that he had a long standing invitation from General Abrams in Saigon and would be getting on a plane in an hour and going down for the invitation.

"So since I am leaving the country, you are chargé." I, an FSO-4, at the time, would be Charge of one of the largest posts in the world, and would make a demarche to Souvanna on an issue that had prompted a cable said to be from the President. I was now chargé of a mission that was full sized, if you count everyone, say, the Thai troops and Meo irregulars had 80,000 people, 2,000 Americans, another thousand Filipinos. I was chargé. I said: "They want me to go in? They want me, a political counselor?" Godley replied that I was more familiar with the issue than he, and added that because of that it was no big deal. Souvanna would respond better if I carried the message.

Q: An FSO-4 was equivalent to a major about.

HOWLAND: Yes. So of course I said, "Okay." Godley knew Souvanna was always up early, called him (there was a direct line), and said, "I have an important message from Washington. Dick Howland is coming over to talk to you, because I have to go to Saigon to see general Abrams ." I got into Monty's car (as acting DCM) and went over to Souvanna's residence. It was by that time about 7:30 in the morning.

We knew that Souvanna would not change his mind by himself, and that he would probably take refuge in the fact that on the previous day, he had called a cabinet meeting on this issue and gotten the cabinet to agree on abstention. We had duly reported that. We knew that he wouldn't change his mind, since besides the cabinet meeting the previous day, he had also called a rump session of parliament and gotten support. The right wing generals and politicians who were part of the cabinet had not attended; they were out with the troops, or elsewhere, and so he just had the neutralist Interior Minister Pheng Phongsavanh and a few of the more leftist or neutralist guys in that cabinet meeting. That was Souvanna's standard tactic when he felt compelled to do something he knew we wouldn't like.

Godley told me our strategy was to try to get Souvanna to call a new cabinet meeting, and stall at the UN on the vote, until we could track down and fly in all the right wing generals. Then they could press Souvanna to change the Lao vote. I suspected this was hopeless, but said nothing. It was important to make some effort, to show zeal. Godley

had thought this up overnight and had already taken steps. We had sent aircraft to Pakse in the south, a citadel of right-wing factions. I think General Kouprasith, head of the Army, was down in the fleshpots of Bangkok. We would send a jet down to get him out of the fleshpots and bring him back. So we would get all the right wingers in the cabinet to vote against abstention. They would face down Souvanna and Souvanna could cave without losing face. He could say he didn't want a coup or to lose the US air support.

Now, Prime Minister (and Prince) Souvanna Phouma had been the central figure in Lao politics virtually since he had been ten years old, although being from the cadet branch of the royal family he could not inherit the throne. His half-brother was Prince Souphanouvong, the nominal head of the Pathet Lao forces. So there were the two brothers, the red prince and the white prince, battling over and supposedly determining the future of Laos – that was the mystique, but of course Souphanouvong was a powerless figurehead ---the real heads of the Pathet Lao were the leaders of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, and their masters, the North Vietnamese leadership. But Souvanna was clearly a historic figure, and to a certain extent he played that role.

So there I stood at his door, he in a French smoking jacket, me in my white suit and black tie, virtually at dawn. Now, Souvanna Phouma was also a delightful, cordial, and genial guy, a very intelligent man trained as an engineer by the French, and a superb diplomat. "Come in, sit down. Would you like something to drink? Have some coffee, perhaps a brandy." He obviously knew why I was there. I breezed over the terms of the cable and slurred over the threat of withholding air support, and emphasized instead that Ambassador Godley had asked me to come over to explain the importance of the UN China issue to us and our allies. I suspect Souvanna understood that Godley had sent me - - a low-level officer, -- to signal that the issue was not as important as the cable implied. If either the issue or the threat had been serious of course Godley would have made the demarche himself.

Souvanna listened and then said, "Well, okay. If this is what you want to do. If this is what my friend Mac Godley wants to do, certainly I will call a cabinet meeting. We will convene it at 10:00 am. We will have a cabinet meeting. I don't hold out much hope that we will do any different than we did before. I will explain to you why that is. The Americans have supported us here in Laos for a long time. But back in 1968 when you were supporting us in Laos we had a thousand sorties a day. Now we are getting a hundred sorties a day. Back then. . ." and he listed all the things we provided under Ambassador Sullivan when the war was really a big war and contrasted it to the present situation, when it was all obviously winding down.

Then he said, "As you look at the map of Asia..." -- He had an old French colonial map -- he continued "If you look off the coast there, you see the island of Taiwan which is now the representative of China in the United Nations. It has ten or fifteen million people," (however many people it had). "It is nowhere near Laos. But if you look at Laos what do you see? North of Laos is the enormous land mass of China which has 750 million Chinese. And through Laos from China flows the Mekong river. Our capital Vientiane is

right on the Mekong. There it is right there. Now, if every Chinese on Taiwan relieved himself in the ocean, the ocean would not change by so much as a millimeter in its level. But if every Chinese in China relieved himself in the Mekong, Laos would be washed out to the sea and wouldn't exist anymore." So, the Prime Minister concluded: "Now you know why Laos is abstaining on the vote at the UN. But of course, if my friends would like it, we'll convene at ten o'clock and I will let you know."

I was pleased; I had done my job plus I had a cable to report. By this time it was quarter to nine. So I proudly went back to the Embassy and into the OPs meeting in the bubble, at five minutes after nine. I was amazed; Godley was there! He hadn't gone to Saigon after all. But I announced that Souvanna had agreed to reconvene the cabinet at ten o'clock. Godley then said, "They just voted in the UN and China is in." The time difference, of course, had saved us. It was the best of all possible worlds. I said, "Did we get a cable?" He said "No, it came over the BBC radio." He had called Souvanna to tell him while I was on the way to the Embassy.

So I suggested that we do a cable right away so that we can show that we tried. The cable indicated that we had sent out the planes to collect the right-wing faction and that Souvanna had agreed to re-convene the cabinet. That night we received an answer commending our efforts and indicating we were being allocated more air support. Godley was able to pass that on to Souvanna and the flap was over.

The Chinese went on building the road after that, and of course the Chinese are always thinking terms of decades, if not centuries. The road was being built not in terms of not their relationship with Laos per se, but rather because if the Vietnamese had a free hand over all of Indo China, especially supported by the USSR, it would be a threat to southern China. So the Chinese were marking out territory that was sensitive to their southern border. They were telling the Vietnamese this is ours and your people are not coming over here in force.

End Game in the Plain of Jars – December 1971

But back to the war in northern Laos. As we drifted into November and December, everyone was starting to feel even more confident about our position in the Plain of Jars. It is a big open plain surrounded by ridges and hills, wonderful terrain. Napoleon would have loved it. You stand here, the other guy stands there, you move your troops, he moves his, it was like a big chessboard out there. Beautiful stunningly beautiful place.

But with the calm since the Thai fire base had moved there in September, things were getting lax. Troops were sleeping on guard duty, still a little bit of rain going on in the north. Vang Pao's Meo people were planning a big celebration in Long Tieng and at the positions on the PDJ for Meo New Year, December 21. Then one morning in the Ops meeting, I think it was the 16th or 17th of December, Colonel Jack Frye the military attaché, crusty old Jack Frye who had been through innumerable campaigns on the ground as a private soldier, then an NCO, joined by DEPCHIEF Colonel Jack Vessey

both said: "we are very nervous about this position on the Plain of Jars. Nothing has come about as far as the negotiations that have gone on. Sooner or later the Vietnamese are going to take it out. And when they take it out we have most of our forces in northern Laos concentrated in and around that area." Jack added that in areas which could usually be monitored, the NVA forces had gone to radio silence as they would do if they were moving around getting ready to attack.

Monty Sterns, the DCM who was back from home leave by then, and the station chief pooh-poohed the whole thing, and said it was too early in the dry season for a major attack. "They never start the dry season campaign until February. Late January early February, they even push back into March when the rains start again. It always gives us time to regroup, and we never start our wet season campaign until June after a couple of months of rain." That was the consensus.

If I recall, that was the OPs meeting on Monday the 16th. Next day nothing happened. The meeting after that, Wednesday the 18th, Jack Frye said, "As your defense attaché, and as your army attaché, I feel honor bound, Mr. Ambassador, to tell you that, if I was a tactical commander on the Vietnamese side around the Plain of Jars, I would be doing the following things. I would go to intermittent periods of radio silence. I would be stockpiling supplies forward of the present line of battle, the dividing line. I would be reorganizing my order of battle in the following way. I would be moving anti aircraft artillery to high positions," and so on and so forth.

Then he said, "All those things are being done even as we speak."

"But they haven't moved up any heavy troops. They are just starting to move up heavy artillery up the roads to the east ." Monty Sterns said, "They haven't gone anywhere near the Plain of Jars. It is not going to be until January or February." So I said, "This weekend is Meo New Year – good time to attack."

Now, on Meo New Year, the Meo just all get drunk. But someone said: "Not going to happen. They have never attacked on Meo New Year," Later I got a long lecture on the way warfare worked in Laos, the dry-wet season alternation, the fact that the NVA never came too close to the Mekong. We never came too close to the borders of North Vietnam. The PDJ was no-man's - land. This had been the great ritual.

Finally Jack Frye said, "There is going to be an attack within two weeks." He, of course, was right.

The North Vietnamese Army attacked the Thai positions on the Plain of Jars three days later, on the night of Meo New Year, December 21, 1971. In the first half hour they wiped out an entire battalion of Thai, 655 troops. They attacked late at night after the Meo had been drinking for hours. Just as they did at Dien Bien Phu, they had already moved the anti aircraft artillery to all the hills around the Plain of Jars. We sent an F-4. It got shot down. The pilot ejected. We got him back. That was the last F-4 that was going up there.

They wouldn't fly up there, there was too much flak. We sent up the T-28's, trainer aircraft modified to serve as bombers for the Lao Air Force. The Lao bombers got shot down to a fare-thee-well.

Within a day and a half the Vietnamese had taken back the Plain of Jars and were heading for Long Tieng, the firebase south of the Plain of Jars which was the main headquarters of the Vang Pao's so-called secret army. They took Long Tieng but the Meo got it back, all of which is another story. But that was the war in Northern Laos in '71, and the end of this negotiating initiative that Sullivan hoped might resuscitate the 1962 agreement on Laos, and kick-off an "oilspot" effort to broaden cease-fire areas into a reversion to the neutrality of Laos.

The "Military Mind-set"

Q: You know one of the problems with the military, we are talking about the American military, any military, and we have both been up against it is if you give them a job to do, they will say can do and they will do their damndest to accomplish something even if maybe they can't. I mean this is what you want. You don't want a negative attitude particularly if you are in the field.

HOWLAND: Pressure to get with the program.

Q: Did you feel that the military attitude had -- I mean Godley and others had almost absorbed this military attitude so that they were losing sight of how they were doing?

HOWLAND: Yes, very much so. Once Ambassador was furious with me when I suggested at one point that we were going to lose in Indo China and that it was probably preordained going back to the second century B.C. when the Vietnamese first moved into the area, fleeing the Han Chinese. And after the French had taken over, the Vietnamese said we are going to take it all back. But the Ambassador maintained that America had never lost a war and wasn't going to start now. So much for my Yale history course.

But of course it wasn't the American "military mindset" *per se*, since the U.S. military *per se* never fought on the ground in Laos. As I mentioned earlier, Laos was very different than Vietnam. There were no PX's in Laos. There was not this huge incredible panoply of military support facilities in Laos.

Q: Yes, no huge MACV.

HOWLAND: Nothing even close to that. Nothing. Everything was under the Embassy, whether military or CIA, because of the '62 agreements. We could never introduce uniformed troops. So we could fly over and drop bombs; the military did that. Supplies came from the Pentagon of course, the military came with that. We had a very large attaché office and huge bases in northern Thailand. But we didn't have American troops in the field in Laos. The U.S. military was focused on the struggle in Vietnam where there

were still hundreds of thousands of U.S. Troops.

To show what I mean, once Jack Frye's successor, Colonel Broadus Bailey heroically saved the day when an Embassy group erroneously landed in a chopper in what was said to be a friendly village near Luang Prabang, but was not. In the chopper were Ambassador Godley and a few other senior officers. The chopper was fired upon from the village, and surrounded by NVA, and the door gunner, a Thai mercenary, froze with fear. Broadus pushed him aside, grabbed his machine gun and fired on the NVA until the pilot could restart the chopper and get out of there.

The Ambassador wanted to get Broadus a medal because there were bullets zinging all around him. Can you imagine what the capture of an American Ambassador would have meant for the Indochina war? But the Pentagon said absolutely not. Laos was not a war zone for the American military. No one could get a medal. They didn't get combat pay; they didn't get anything, the military there. Foreign Service and other civilian personnel received a hardship differential. Laos was one of the first contract wars – contractors flew Air American planes, Filipino contractors ran hospitals, Thai contractors served as mercenary soldiers, etc. Compared with Vietnam it was done on the cheap, with few American casualties except for the pilots.

The War in Southern Laos – the Ho Chi Minh Trail

I have talked a lot about Northern Laos – the so-called “Barrel Roll” area -- but should also mention the war effort in southern Laos, the so-called “Steel Tiger” area. There the Agency was running operations in on the ground to harass and if possible cut the Ho Chi Minh trail in the areas east of Savannakhet, in Central Laos, and Pakse in the south. Just to the east of Pakse was the Bolovens Plateau, with a major town, a place called Pak Song on the top. A major road went east from Pakse to Pak Song, and up and down that road battles had raged since the French Indochina war. Like the Plain of Jars in the north – but more heavily jungled and in places, farmed -- , the Bolovens Plateau had been won and lost going back 20 years.

The NVA would take it, and we'd take it back and they would re take it and so on and so forth. The boundary line seemed to be Kilometer 21 just where the Pak Song road debouches onto the plain.

The Lao were always very anxious to get the Bolovens Plateau back, the southern Lao elite in particular because strawberries grew up there, and the French had taught them to love strawberries and cream. So they always asked us endlessly during strawberry season to take the Plateau back just so they could get up there and take the strawberries out. True fact. But apart from that we wanted to retake the Bolovens Plateau and use it as a launch base for Lao irregular teams supported and paid by the CIA to go down the eastern side and interdict, or at least harass, the Ho Chi Minh trail area.

Before 1970, the Russians and other Bloc suppliers could bring materiel into the

Cambodian port of Sihanoukville. It would be trans shipped across Cambodia with Sihanouk's complacency and then down the Mekong and the Bassac Rivers to the Vietcong and NVA units in the southern part of Vietnam. But after Sihanouk was overthrown by Lon Nol in 1970, Sihanoukville and the NVA logistics train in Cambodia were lost to the North Vietnamese, and the whole southern Laos area, Attapeu, Saravane, the towns along the Treng river became much more important than it was before. So we wanted to launch an operation against them and for that we needed the high positions along the eastern edge of the Bolovens Plateau.

Remember I said the boundary line between the two sides seemed to be the kilometer 21 marker, the last point on the road from Pakse going east before it turned and went up onto the Bolovens Plateau through a series of narrow gorges.. The NVA contingent on the plateau was the Ninth Regiment, which had been in the Bolovens area off and on since the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1953 when the NVA first came into Laos. Different commanders, but that regiment had stayed.

Interestingly, whenever over the years we had gotten pushed off the plateau, the Ninth Regiment always came down through the narrow gorges and then stopped at kilometer 21 and re-grouped. It did not continue to advance the other 21 kilometers - 15 miles - toward Pakse. If they had, we would have evacuated Pakse in a panic and crossed the river to Thailand. But whoever the commander, he was obviously under orders to advance no further than KM 21. He always stopped there. Because war had been fought there for years, there were no civilian populations along the road or virtually anywhere on the plateau except the main town of Paksong.

So in the fall of '71 we decided to retake the plateau so we could launch another interdiction operation against the trail from and around the high ground there. It started with a probe up onto the plateau, but this time someone had suggested using a B-52 or "arclight" strike against the Ninth Regiment when it came down the Pakse road in riposte.

So the bombing officer designed an "arc light box" -- a square kilometer of terrain for a "time on target" run with B-52s. Each B-52 carries 104 one thousand pound bombs. Three B-52s, called an "arc light cell", judge the timing so that every bomb they drop lands in that one kilometer square and at the same time totally obliterates everything that is in that box. We did exactly that, and we smeared, we hit the ninth regiment. We just blew them to pieces. Within days after we had retaken Pak Song with one "arc light" and a few hundred rag-tag mercenary troops.

I should mention that none of these battles were huge engagements. On the plateau we are talking about 600 on our side and 700 on their side. Our troops were from all over, some Lao, some Thai farmers, some from the worst slums of Bangkok. They had signed up from the money and would just as soon shoot you as look at you. Unlike the Meo, in the south the Lao Theung and other troops were not dedicated people fighting for their country by any means. They were paid mercenaries of the CIA. That was the nature of the war in the south – a lot of "cowboys". In the beginning when Sullivan was there it was a

little more elegant if that is the proper word. I mean the motivations were a little better, but by the time I got there in '71 the motivation was gone. It was all for money. We took Pak Song to put a lot of these teams to disrupt the trail, to disrupt river traffic on the Treng River which ran down into Northeast Cambodia - a no man's land - where the materiel was transshipped to the NVA. That was the main thing that the agency was there for. That is what Godley was there for. Actually they did pretty well but were never more than a nuisance to the NVA.

Atmospherics of the War

I want to talk a bit about the atmosphere of Vientiane and the towns of Laos. It was just kind of like the wild west in the old days, the wild west. The bars, the prostitutes and the years of war had totally undercut any charm that it had during the French period. We used to call it little America on the Mekong. The Lao would have their traditional festivals, but all their festivals had turned nasty. For instance there was "Rocket Day" when they fired rockets from the banks of the Mekong up into make the clouds to start the rainy season. My kids loved it, but you could only watch in the morning. The Lao soldiers would all be drunk by 1:00 in the afternoon and they would start shooting each other over girls and drugs.

Once I happened to be in a dance hall in Luang Prabang, the royal capital – now a major tourist destination - sitting around with some of the CIA guys. As we sat there a Lao officer came over and said, "You had better get out of here; there is going to be trouble." So we skedaddled out of there. As we got into a jeep we heard a grenade go off right there in the dance hall. We later heard some girl had spurned some Lao soldier so he had just come back to his jeep, got a grenade, and flipped it into the dance hall.

That was what it was pretty much like. It wasn't really a very normal war to say the least. One of the reasons we lost and lost so badly was that the military forces we had to work with on our side, except for the Meo and other hill tribes, were unmotivated and poorly led by feckless Lao army officers who stole from them. So the Royal Lao Army was pretty worthless as a fighting force. Some Pathet Lao units had a Vietnamese officer or NCO with them, and the Lao army sometimes monitored their communications with our help. So if a platoon of Pathet Lao, say, came along the road leading west toward Vang Vieng in central Laos, and a Vietnamese officer was heard on the tactical radio, the Lao troops defending the position would simply leave, afraid they would have to fight the Vietnamese. Often the Lao army would simply stop whatever they were doing at four pm, and start looked for water to boil the evening rice.

In contrast, the Meo fought very well unless they got in big trouble. They fought well for a number of reasons, even though they were very young by this time and most of their families had been pulled back into refugee camps. They fought because the agency paid them, USAID took care of their families, and everything was guaranteed. Every Friday, every Meo soldier got his pay handed to him by a case officer. The regular Lao army soldiers almost never got that kind of pay, and often had to go to an officer and beg for

money to buy food. The Meo got food. They got paid by an American. They held up their dog tags and an AK-47 or M-16, and they got their pay. That was the first reason they fought. They knew they would get their pay. The second reason was that the agency guaranteed them medevac. If they were hurt, they would be medevaced out by Air America or Continental the agency contractors. They flew choppers into the teeth of some of the worst battles you could imagine up there in the mountains in the worst weather, but when a Meo or Lao Theung soldier in the Lao Irregular Forces was hurt, generally he got out if it was humanly possible.

And if they died, their family would get a death benefit which included money, perhaps land on the other side of the Mekong and implements to farm. They would be out of the war. They would be in a safe place on the other side of the Mekong. That was why they fought. We could never get the Royal Lao Army to understand that.

The Pathet Lao were probably not much better, but they were under the iron discipline and watchful eye of the NVA and their political officers. In contrast, for instance, in the NVA Ninth Regiment on the Bolovens plateau, when we retook it in '71 after the B-52 strike I described earlier, we found NVA soldiers chained to their weapons. Immediately Ambassador Godley speculated whether their discipline was breaking down since perhaps the officers had to handcuff their troops to their weapons. But that wasn't the reason. They did it to themselves, to demonstrate their zeal in battle. So they would never lose their weapons.

Our troops – particularly the Thai irregulars – often would sell their weapons. The minute they would get a new weapon, they would go down to the market to see if they could find somebody to buy it. It didn't undercut the justice of our cause because communism in Laos has been an absolute unmitigated disaster. If we had won, Laos would have been far better off. Nevertheless they were fighting for their own reasons rather than for our reasons.

In contrast to the cruelty and misery of the war was life in Vientiane - It was really a "Little America on the Mekong." My wife was very happy in Laos, our children were very happy in Laos, everyone was. The vast American compounds, the magnificent American school built by AID with a swimming pool out at KM-6 on the Luang Prabang road outside town which, later, by the way, became Pathet Lao headquarters. There were trips to Thailand. Although my wife and I never went. The flights twice a week to Bangkok to the commissary and the PX were free, courtesy of Air America. In general, for instance, if you wanted to go somewhere and check out the situation, Air America almost always had a plane going there – there was a regular "milk run" from Bangkok to Vientiane to Luang Prabang to Ban Houei Sai, and back again, every day.

It was a time when, as in most wars, money was no object and morale was important – family morale in this case, since it was basically a war fought from an American suburb. Then too the military had enormous resources. One U.S. General who came from Saigon to Vientiane forgot his golf clubs – there was a golf course near the Vientiane airport –

and sent his plane back to get them. Kids were transported all over Southeast Asia to play in little league games at other bases. Want to spend the week-end at the beach? Hop on the daily USAF flight from Udorn across the river in Thailand, down to the logistics port of Sattahip, or the air base at Utapao in southern Thailand, the main U.S. air force base in Thailand. Just 30 or 40 miles north of Utapao was Pattaya, the Thai seaside resort where there was a big JUSMAAGTHAI R and R facility. So if you worked it right, got up at 4:00 in the morning, you could catch one of the Air America planes over to Udorn, transfer right on to the C-130, the Air Force plane, and in an hour you were in Utapao, then catch a taxi to Pattaya. About 2-1/2 hours from leaving the war zones in Laos you were sitting on a tropical beach. The JUSMAAG facility had nice air conditioned rooms at \$2.10 a night. This facility also rented motorboats. You could go out to the islands and go snorkeling. You could go out to the islands and buy fresh crab and have them boiled on the beach as you sat there and had lunch of crab and cold beer. It was the upside of the war.

That was one reason that, as it was all closing down, as the Pathet Lao was moving in, it was so difficult for people to break free especially the AID people who had been there with long tours. For the military and the state Department, we had our regular tours. I mean maybe someone stayed four years. I stayed 3-1/2 years but some AID people had been there for eight or ten years. There were for instance the AID agriculture people who no longer could do any work on agriculture because we no longer controlled the country. They fought tooth and nail against leaving – good pay, good schools, no taxes. As we tried to phase down the mission after the peace agreement in February 1973, we looked at AID which was the biggest non-military component – the military of course, and the case officers, would all be leaving. In AID we found soybean specialists. We found tree bark specialists. We found that AID had 164 agriculture people, with absolutely nothing to do. The AID compound was immense, kind of like a White Flint Mall, with a commissary and PX, a theater, a restaurant and nightclub, everything brought in duty-free and cheap. There were no controls whatsoever on anything sold anywhere. You could go into the nightclub and buy your ten bottles of scotch for three bucks apiece, then take them out on the street and sell them for \$100 apiece.

At one point before the Pathet Lao take-over we had a standard State Department inspection. One inspector was actually a coin collector, as I - old basically worthless French Indochina coins. All the valuable coins –mainly Chinese and Vietnamese – were long gone. But the inspector wanted to go to a coin-shop. I pointed him toward a little Vietnamese shop, actually right around the corner from the Embassy, but warned him that the proprietor was probably a North Vietnamese spy."

The inspector came back and said, "He asked me to pay in dollars but the dollar isn't the national currency of Laos." I said, "No, you do have some kip and can use the kip to buy small items in the morning market ---vegetables from the countryside--- but everything else is done in dollars." The Inspectors said that, of course, was wrong. We pointed out it had been thus pretty much since the French left in 1954. But because of the war no one had ever asked the Department for permission. But in the end, when they saw

Ambassador Godley, he suggested that they all go to see the Prime Minister about establishing an exchange rate. The inspectors demurred at that, and of course soon afterwards with the peace agreement and the Pathet Lao in town, the issue became moot.

A Coup Averted?

Another facet of life in Vientiane was the always imminent prospect of a right-wing coup. The rightists, mostly from old clans and families from various regions of Laos, did not like Souvanna Phouma or neutralism. Neither did the Thai or the Vietnamese. They were all afraid in the end he would give the country to his brother, the Pathet Lao “Red Prince” Souphanouvong. Of course they were right, but not for the right reasons. So over the years various types of people had tried to pull coups. After the 1962 agreement generally we had blocked them, but coup plotting and coup attempts were sort of par for the course in Laos. Let me give you an example – I will have another one later on.

Every New Years Eve, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma gave a New Years Eve ball. This, in fact, was standard practice pretty much throughout Southeast Asia -- in Indonesia the president gives it. The Laos ball was held at the PM’s residence on the Mekong River, a beautiful spot. Now at the time of the New Years Eve ball in 1971 – 72, Mac Godley was still Ambassador, Monty Stearns was DCM, the station chief had been there for a long while – in fact had been in Southeast Asia during World War II. So everyone knew the issue.

So there we were en masse at this New Years Eve event. The Lao generals, of course, were all getting drunk. In the traditional toast, however, the Prime Minister for some reasons did not refer in the usual glowing terms to the “” meaning the right-wing Royal Lao Army. Instead he mostly talked about was the importance of getting negotiations started, having a settlement in Laos, resuming the neutralization of Laos and so forth.

The generals were incensed, so they all went back to the bar. I happened to be sitting at the bar. Monty Stearns was sitting at a table outside and Godley at another table. These generals started arguing among themselves and slamming the bar and throwing drinks around. I could see that their wives were laughing and making fun of them. It was all in Lao. I couldn't understand Lao, but it was very clear there was something going on – the talk was loud and angry. So I went out to Monty and said, "You might wish to look into the bar because the generals are really carrying on in there. I suspect it is about Souvanna's speech." Monty went in and he immediately spotted what was going on. General Kouprasith from the far south, General Oudone Sananikone, from another powerful family, and their colleagues and aides began storming out to their cars. They were heading for Army headquarters.

Now we had some of our Mission Guard Force personnel out there in the parking lot because the Ambassador always traveled with mission guards. So Monty went out very calmly and told our mission guards to move cars in front of the Generals Mercedes limos so they couldn't get out onto the road. That was done. Then he went in and informed

Ambassador Godley who told the prime minister. The prime minister professed to be unconcerned – he had been through this sort of thing several times before. Then they went out and calmed down the Generals. I suspect Godley issued a few reminders of all the support we were giving them, which of course would disappear if there were a coup. Within another ten minutes they were all back in the bar, then a few of them went out to chat with Souvanna. The wives were also chatting away as if nothing had ever happened. To this day I wonder if I hadn't spotted this coming, if Monty hadn't been such an able diplomat, and Godley had not known the right thing to do and say. . . but that tells you a little bit about diplomatic life in Laos and the nature of the Lao government.

Q: Well, we will stop at this point. Eventually you were up to 1972.

HOWLAND: The beginning of '72.

Q: The beginning of '72 and you covered, well you have notes on what you have covered before, so we will know where to start in 1972 on our next go around.

Q. Today is 27 July 1999. Okay, Dick, we are 1972 in Laos.

Narcotics Issues

HOWLAND: I actually have to go back to '71 a little bit to talk about some of our other operations in Laos, narcotics control and then the POW/MIA issue.

We were under a lot of pressure in '71 to do something about the flood of heroin, opium base too but mainly heroin, refined heroin too, that was coming down from Laos into South Vietnam and endangering our troops. We weren't really up to our ears in Cambodia at the time, and we never had a massive number of troops in Cambodia. So it wasn't really an issue for Cambodia except that as the flow continued, it started being smuggled into Phnom Penh to be smuggled then over into South Vietnam. But the bigger market was the American GI's in South Vietnam. Now, the agency contractors were flying back and forth, and there were allegations drugs were being shipped on those planes.

Q: You are talking about CIA.

HOWLAND: CIA. The agency contract planes were flying back and forth, the military was flying back and forth all the time between Saigon and Vientiane. Aircraft were coming up to re provision Long Tieng, the launch base up near the Plain de Jars. Ban Houei Sai on the Mekong border with Thailand, all of the bases up there. There was another one way even farther north than Ban Houei Sai village. It was called something like Muong Meung where the agency had hollowed out a mountain and had built a fantastic fortress like installation. We are talking about way up in the north.

Q: We are talking about practically in the thumb that sticks into China up there right on the Chinese border.

HOWLAND: Exactly. That is exactly what it was used for. We were running small groups of people in there, Chinese hill tribe people to collect intelligence on China and so forth. God knows what it was ever used for. We were never going to attack China or anything. But that is what we were doing up there. The planes had to fly in, and of course those are great opium growing areas. It was right across the Burmese border where the former Kuomintang Army remnants and various hill tribes were growing and processing lots of opium.

Q: In Laos at this time, it would seem that the CIA was in the middle of drug country. I mean Laos was a CIA country from sort of an administrative way. They were out in force.

HOWLAND: That's a given, but we only controlled 10% of Laos. In the 10% of Laos we controlled the CIA was a major power.

Q: But you must have known about any group. Were they sticking completely clear of this?

HOWLAND: They did do some drug raids. We smashed two or three heroin refineries up in Bang Houei Sai. The situation was very complicated because the Meo, the Lao Theung hill peoples could only get money to buy things by growing opium. The terrain and the rainfall and the soils were perfect for this crop, and that's why it had been raised there for thousands of years. The KMT...

Q: Kuomintang.

HOWLAND: Yes, KMT remnant – mostly bandit – forces – which were still in touch with Taiwan elements had been in Laos for years, mostly up near Burma in the far north. Across the river was the Shan Independence Army which cooperated with them, and Burmese officials who could easily be bribed. There were Thai-Chinese warlords up there that we had tried to catch for so long without success. Anyway, so the KMT was another conduit there. A lot of the opium was grown in Burma and was brought by mule train to a place called Tachilek up on the Thai border with Burma. It was little more than a town of refineries. From there it was either trucked down to Chiang Mai and down through Bangkok, or brought further over into Laos to Ban Houei Sai, floated down the Mekong or flown out of Ban Houei Sai.

Now who was flying in and out of Ban Houei Sai? The Lao air force of course, and the Lao airline, Royal Air Laos, also an airline controlled by Prince Boun Oum , who was the infamous traditional ruler of southern Laos, which we facetiously called "Air Opium." Lao General Ouane Rattikone reportedly ran a heroin refinery for the King, Savang Vatthana up there somewhere, and we had General Ouan retired from the Lao Army. So all those people were flying in and out of there.

Now the allegation was constantly being made that either the air America pilots were running this stuff down themselves, or the Meo and the various tribal peoples, those who were hired by the U.S. up there, our so called mercenary armies who were doing it. Or if someone would put a package on the plane and say deliver this to so and so. But if you ask do I know for a fact that a CIA contract aircraft or pilot, or any CIA officer was ever involved in the movement or profited from narcotics, I do not know of a single case. We were always looking for cases. It was being watched, there is no question about it. The agency would occasionally go out and cut down poppy fields several times but not a lot of that – the terrain was formidable and you could grow it under trees. Where we could identify a refinery, raids were done and the refineries were knocked out. But what was a refinery? A bunch of kettles, a square shack in the jungle, a little smoke coming out, and the most important thing, a chemist. That was the single most important thing. As soon as we burned one out, they built a new one somewhere, just as in South America.

Finally people started to realize that if you could start tracking down the chemists and shooting them and making it scary for someone to become a chemist out there, then that was another way to approach it. But on the other hand in Burma it was wide open. We couldn't go into Burma. We did a few raids into Burma later in '81-'83 when I was country director for Thailand, but it didn't stop anything. And everyone knew that it was having a terrible impact in Vietnam . A lot of guys GIs got terribly addicted. Lives were destroyed by this thing.

All that was in the press and a very good book called “The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia”, and that brought a lot of pressure from Washington. So the Ambassador agreed to take on a “Narcotics Attaché” from what is now called DEA, but then was the Justice Department’s Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the “BNDD”. Soon a BNDD officer arrived, a nice guy who spoke French perhaps because he was previously stationed in Marseille. I believe his name was Tony, and he was from Detroit.

So here he is dropped in the middle of Laos all alone to stop the terrible flow of heroin, and attached to my political section. The agency didn't want to go anywhere near him because they were the ones who were being accused of involvement . So Tony arrived in Vientiane and was totally nonplussed. I guess he was picked because he spoke French. At my request Tony got my previous house in Salakoktane – I had been moved closer to the Embassy some months before – a great big house, where he lived all alone. His wife, I think, joined him after three or four months, stayed for a month and then went back to Detroit.

Tony really had no idea what to do. So he started drawing up an action plan and soon decided that the real threats were in Vientiane, that almost any place behind a fence might be a heroin factory. In one case right down the street from my new house, on a quasi main street, there was a typical slovenly looking Southeast Asian commercial installation with corrugated iron fences around it, a corrugated iron roof on the top. It was maybe 20 yards by 30 yards square, had a courtyard, some other shacks, all sealed in by a big iron gate

with smoke coming out from the roof, white smoke. Tony suspected it of being a heroin refinery and one day I noticed him surreptitiously observing it from a nearby copse of woods. When I asked him about it, he said he was on the verge of moving in to make arrests with some Lao police. Luckily I knew what it was – a rubber sandal factory – and suggested my FSN Kongkham could take him there to meet the owner and inspect it personally. Tony demurred.

Next, Tony started working the airport because of strange Americans coming in, Americans going out. Now, anyone who hadn't served in Laos saw the average Lao as a race of flower children, good Buddhists who would never kill anything. This was still the take on the Lao well after they were in the French war in the early '50s, and we certainly taught them enough about war in the '60s and '70s, so it was a society that was quite brutalized by then. Some of the best fighters we had out there were fervent Lao Buddhists and Thai Buddhists. And in Laos there was never a means for settling disputes – the courts were corrupt and there is a tradition of ritual politeness in which nothing unpleasant is openly discussed - so often quarrels were settled violently with weapons, as in the grenade incident I witnessed at the dance hall in Luang Prabang. The Lao could be quite dangerous.

So off goes Tony to work the airport customs desk with Lao customs officers and a dog. He brought in a drug dog. There was a crowd because a lot of aircraft are coming in, especially military aircraft. Vientiane airport was one of the busiest in the world in those years, lots of people going through the customs room. Meanwhile there are lots of troops sitting around with their weapons waiting to get on a helicopter and go off to fight. And along comes a suitcase along the carrousel. The dog goes up and sniffs it and starts barking. Immediately, Tony --who was kind of lurking over at the -- leaps to his feet, goes over to the carrousel, pulls out his pistol, grabs this suitcase and stands there with it. Everything stops, and there is total silence. He walks out into the waiting room and holds up this suitcase and says, "Whose suitcase is this?" Immediately several troops stood up with their weapons pointed at Tony, and the customs officer asked Tony to put the suitcase back on the carrousel, which he did. That was the end of that.

Meanwhile bureaucracy ground on at the Embassy; we were writing innumerable drug control "action "program papers, the drafts then being sent to Washington where they would be criticized, rewritten and sent back. You know the term: bureaucratic isometrics. Then the drafts ("second iteration, etc.") would come back to the Embassy and we would re-write them. That was the kind of thing that was going on, until the summer of 1972 a year later when this was becoming such an issue in the United States.

Concerned that the narcotics issue was undermining the Vietnam war effort, President Nixon in mid-1972 convened a worldwide drug conference. The idea was to bring back one person - the State Department narcotics coordinator - from each post to come to Washington for a Presidential speech on how we had to get the drug problem under control. For some reason the USAID Director was supposed to go but since I hadn't been back in a long time, The Ambassador said I should go. I wanted anyway to get back to the

States and see my mom, who was ill in New Jersey. Also I wanted a week of consultation at the desk because I knew the new DCM, John Gunther Dean, was there getting briefed at the time. He was replacing Monty Stearns that month; Monty was off to a year at Harvard, awaiting an Embassy somewhere. So off I went to the States in September of '72 on this trip. I did see my mom. And then had a week of consultation in the Department and met the new DCM, It was very fortuitous that I met him there. I was the first person he had met really from Vientiane. We talked about three hours and went over everything very frankly about the problems with the relationship between the political counselor and the DCM, and the tendency of the latter to operate as the “real” political officer.

Q: That's endemic in our business.

HOWLAND: John Gunther Dean absolutely agreed. He said the last thing on earth he would ever do is behave like that. Of course, what happened when he arrived? The first thing he did was become a political officer, exactly. Be that as it may, the other thing we agreed was that something had to be done about this drug thing. So he and I went over to BNDD and sort of quietly said Tony is just not the person first of all. Tony was a nice man and not a wild guy. He just wanted to do his job and he had no idea how to do it in a place like Vientiane. Second of all you have got to send two or three people out, and you have got to have liaison with Bangkok. This is bigger than just Laos and the Vietnam connection.

What ultimately happened was BNDD set up a kind of drug control center in Bangkok which made a lot of sense, under a very sharp guy whose name I can't remember. He came up from time to time, and we ran the anti-drug program reporting to BNDD and asking for help when we needed it. We took out several real heroin refineries up near Ban Houei Sai, but of course never made a dent in the trade, which flourishes to this day.

Another interesting vignette from that trip was my call on Bill Sullivan, during which I mentioned that the Thai Irregular Forces in Laos –who had been replaced after the December 1971 debacle on the Plain of Jars, were really doing very poorly, and the Lao wanted them out. Bill had a talent for turning away difficult questions with an anecdote. He said that back in China during the late days of the Chiang regime, a Norwegian sea captain had come into Canton and went ashore to change money into the local currency to buy something. He went to a Chinese money changer and handed over his Norwegian kroner and the guy gave him a stack of sardine tins. The captain said that's wonderful. I am a Norwegian; I love sardines. So he took off the little key on the tin and peeled back the cover. Of course the sardines had been lying around in China for years, and a terrible aroma of rotten fish filled the room. So the Norwegian said to the Chinese money lender: these sardines are rotten! You can't eat them. They are worthless. The Chinese said, “Ah you don't understand. These are not eating sardines. These are trading sardines.”

Bill continued, "That is what you have to understand about the Thai battalions. The Thai battalions are not fighting battalions, they are trading battalions. When the time comes to get the North Vietnamese to withdraw, we have to have something to withdraw. We can't

withdraw the Meo. The only way you can bargain and have a legitimate bargain is to say unless you withdraw your troops, we won't withdraw our troops.” That was Bill's theory.

Q: What would you say was the attitude there of the Ambassador towards the anti-narcotics effort?

HOWLAND: Good question. Mac, I think I mentioned to you he sat in the OP's meeting every morning and he wrote down the number of dead Vietnamese so he could send his cable to the President on how the war was going. Because that is what the President sent him out there to do. Mac was totally focused on the war. Anything that had nothing to do with the war, he wanted it taken care of somehow, so it wouldn't endanger the war effort. That's what the president wanted him to do, and he did it.

So that was what Mac was focused on, the war. The political side, the protocol side, all of that stuff was my responsibility. Again you see that it left no role for the DCM, so that the DCM automatically had to slide into the political sphere. There was nothing else he could coordinate. All the agencies were involved in fighting the war and the Ambassador oversaw that. AID was just a huge refugee support operation, so that the refugees were safe and the Meo kids could go out and fight the war. Earlier I think I told you the three reasons key things the CIA-supported Lao Irregulars were so good. One, the troops would hold up their dog tags and rifle and get paid every Friday, without fail they would get paid. Two, if they were wounded in action, they were guaranteed medevac by Air America. They would be medevaced to a hospital and taken care of. Three, if they were killed their parents would get a death benefit. An agency officer would see that that was properly paid.

USAID under Charlie Mann had almost 100,000 Mao, in refugee camps which were too far away from the battlefield, because there was always fear that one of these troops would desert and go back and see his family, and not too close so as to be endangered by an unexpected NVA attack. Then the whole thing would fall apart. So the camps were constantly being moved around because the front lines were always changing, and new refugees were generated by the fighting. So that was what Mac was focused on, and the drug thing did not get a whole lot of real attention. It was like the refugee thing. It was a damage control, damage limiting operation as you got on with the main business of fighting the war.

Q: Did the White House have a different view?

HOWLAND: Oh yes, very different. Before I get to him, John Dean came first. John Gunther Dean who has a lot of faults, many faults. His ego is gigantic. But he really did more than anyone to convert the whole “war-fighting mindset” into an exercise in determining what kind of a peace we were going to get out of this thing, what was it going to be like afterwards for U.S. interests. Before I get into that in detail because it is very interesting, I want to talk a little bit about the POW/MIA issues because I haven't mentioned my meeting with the Pathet Lao Rep Soth Phetrasy in Vientiane on that very

issue, which was as much a dominant factor in Washington and in the US - probably even more – as the drug problem.

The POW/MIA Issue

As the Vietnam War progressed after the real upsurge in American presence in '65 and with the bombing of the north and the tremendous heavy bombing of Laos, the number of POW's - of course we didn't know they were POW's - so let's say the number of MIA's increased.

Q: MIA's being...

HOWLAND: U. S. personal who were considered missing in action. We had no idea how many were actually POW's. The other side would never release their names, holding any info for use as an eventually bargaining chip. That of course was the subject of my meeting with Soth Phetrasy.

Q: We are talking about Americans. Mostly pilots at this point.

HOWLAND: Americans, mostly pilots. In fact as far as I know, I don't know of any US military or CIA case officers in Laos who were ever taken prisoner. I told you the case officers who trained and led the Lao Irregular Forces were basically ex-military or long-time agency personnel from the paramilitary contingent in CIA. Most of them flew out of Udorn with their little briefcases and weapons in the morning, out to the battle areas, fought all day and went back to their little wives and kiddies at night. So there was no one lost on the ground. Some were killed but I don't know of anyone who was MIA. So it was mostly pilots, and Air America pilots as well as U.S. Air Force pilots went down over Laos. A large number of U.S. pilots were missing, 1200, something like that.

This became, as you know, a considerable political issue in the States, and generated tremendous pressure. Apart from Kissinger and his Vietnam negotiations, it became the dominating issue for the American public, the POW-MIA issue. Roger Shields, if I have that name right, was made a deputy assistant secretary of POW-MIA affairs in ISA in the Pentagon. Another officer had a similar position in the State Department. The agency had a whole task force on POW-MIA's. I should emphasize that all this was quite proper and necessary because the North Vietnamese were treating the issue as propaganda and bargaining tool, against the rules of the Geneva Convention.

When the DCM, Monty Sterns, went back to the States in March 1971 to testify at Ted Kennedy's refugee committee hearings, while he was there he recruited a consular officer to handle POW-MIA matters in Laos. A POW/MIA wives group, the wives of missing, was politically active and frequently came to Laos. Dick Rand was in charge of that and did a good job - you could, in fact, see it as a Consular responsibility in a way. The Ambassador, frankly, didn't handle it well because he would start out talking about POW-MIAs and wind up talking about the war. But Dick was excellent in dealing with them,

not just wives but fathers and mothers and people seriously and properly concerned about the missing Americans. That he did superbly well. He wrote quite well, and we got along very well. He was sort of quasi - attached to the section like the bombing officer, but not really sitting in there doing work for me. They both worked for the DCM. That was the DCMs part of the political section. We also had endless congressional delegations coming out. I think I mentioned Sonny Montgomery, Congressman of Mississippi, came out and beat on the Pathet Lao rep, Soth Phetrasy's door on POWs. Phetrasy would never see him.

Earlier I mentioned my meeting with Soth Phetrasy at the French Embassy on Bastille Day in 1971 about this issue, and my authorization to talk to him about POWs. Despite many phone-calls, it took seven or eight months before Phetrasy agreed to see me. I don't remember the exact date. It would have been in early '72, sometime the first six months of '72 before the new DCM John Gunther Dean arrived. Once Dean arrived, no one else did anything with the Pathet Lao except Dean, so I know it was before he arrived. But at this earlier stage we wanted everyone to know that we were pressing the Pathet Lao about POW/MIA affairs.

Soth Phetrasy's little villa was right next to the morning market. I think I described the bare dirt street in front of it, the guards, the Pathet Lao guards on one side, the Lao army guards on the other and all the hustle and bustle of the morning market opposite across the street. I drove over in an Embassy car and was met at the gate by some Pathet Lao flunky in his little green suit and green hat with a little red star so I was expected... The gates were opened and I was taken in and up the stairs. It was a very small place with a little sitting room in the front. It was all unbelievably dirty, unbelievably shabby. Then off to the right was a little office with an air conditioner. In there was Soth Phetrasy dressed in a black suit and nondescript tie and white shirt. He was dressed perfectly well. So we shook hands and started speaking in French. My French has never been great, but I kind of struggle along on it. We chatted away on one thing or another.

He started with the party line about the professed nobility of the Pathet Lao, and said that the only reason he agreed to speak to me was to make their position clear that the bombing had to stop before they could do any negotiations with the right wing side, that is what they called it, with Souvanna Phouma's side. The bombing had to stop because you couldn't negotiate while you were being bombed. Out of the question, he said. Of course the leadership of the Pathet Lao, which was just a North Vietnamese front organization in Laos, was believed to be living in caves far in the north away from the war, in Sam Neua and Phongsali, or in Hanoi. They weren't being bombed, at the Prime Minister's request, because his younger half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, was the nominal leader of the Pathet Lao. Souvanna cherished the idea that someday he and his brother would patch up their quarrel and rule Laos together. So we weren't bombing those places.

We were bombing the trail to impede the NVA. It was the NVA who wanted the bombing to stop so they could go on pushing stuff through which they were doing anyway to South

Vietnam. The bombing wasn't hurting them that badly, but they wanted the bombing stopped. So that was the big issue for them, stop the bombing, and naturally for their puppets in Laos, it was as well. So I decided to take a chance and suggested that, in order to set a positive tone for anything the Embassy might try to do to stop the bombing, suppose the Pathet Lao released a list of prisoners first. I did not say release the prisoners, just a list of them.

"We can't do that until you stop the bombing."

"If we stop the bombing would you release the list?"

"First you have to stop the bombing. Then we talk about what comes next."

This went on for about two hours, with some diplomatic small-talk and the arrival of tea in between. Obviously we were going nowhere – in fact, I was sure the Pathet Lao had turned any POWs they captured over the North Vietnamese and they had been taken to Hanoi. And Soth Phetrasy knew nothing about it but the party line.

But then there was a funny moment when he looked at me said, "If I were to go back to Sam Neua and tell them to give you a list, what would you do for me?" So I said, "What would we do? Well we might consider a bombing halt." He said, "No, you didn't understand. What will you do for me?"

I said: "I have no instructions on anything like that. I am very sorry."

So he sort of smiled and said, "Well thank you very much. That is all we have to talk about." The meeting was over, and we never talked again.

Only much later did I wonder if he was angling for something, perhaps to defect. He must have known he had no future in a Pathet-Lao controlled Laos. He had been in Vientiane as the Pathet Lao representative ten years, since the '62 agreements, living in the capitalist luxury while his comrades were in the jungles. Soth had always lived there and had been a petty government bureaucrat from the Pathet Lao side after the 1962 coalition government was formed. Then it broke down and he was trapped there. So he had become the Pathet Lao rep in Vientiane by default. The Pathet Lao wanted to maintain the fiction, as we were, that someday the 1962 Accords would be reinstated. The right-wing Lao still surrounded his house, but he was allowed to travel and did go back and forth with messages from Souvanna Phouma to his brother Souphanouvong. To our knowledge the latter never answered.

Soth hadn't anything else to do except to go to diplomatic functions, otherwise he hadn't been out of that house in ten years. When the new Laos agreement was signed a year later, and the Pathet Lao came to Vientiane, we wondered whether at last Soth might be revealed as the real head of the Pathet Lao or something like that. This just betrayed our lack of knowledge about Communist parties. In fact, no one ever saw him again. He was

out of there in five minutes, went back to wherever he went back to, and was never heard from again. He had been in there with the capitalists for ten years, and under party ideology had been “corrupted.”

God knows what the cold-blooded rulers in Hanoi suspected he might be giving away to the enemy. So in effect he and his wife disappeared after the take-over, and perhaps that was why he had asked, “What will you do for me?” Perhaps he wanted to get out. Now he couldn't have gotten a list of POWs, unless he might have had a list. You never know. He did fly back to Sam Neua for instructions, we knew things like that. It was always a big thing because naturally we had to make a corridor, and sort of stand down the air war. Then he would come back. He would fly on the ICC plane. Remember the ICC plane used to circulate among Saigon, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, and Hanoi.

Q: This was the International Control Commission.

HOWLAND: Yes. There was an ICC rep in each one of those cities. Not of much importance in Phnom Penh. In Hanoi, he would talk to his Vietnamese masters, but the fiction was that he would then go by Vietnamese road to San Neua to see the Pathet Lao, but obviously he was told what to do while he was up in Hanoi. He would go out for sometimes a month at a time. Anyway, I felt pretty sure that his children were probably in Hanoi as de facto hostages.

Perhaps he was really asking me about his own fate , and I still wonder if I had only known what to say to say to him whether we could have gotten a list and got him out. But it would have poisoned everything else – Kissinger’s secret Paris negotiations – so it’s probably good I bobbed the moment and had nothing to say. If we had only thought of this possibility beforehand, but the terrible thing is that Americans go into that sort of meetings with clear instructions and have great difficulty putting ourselves in the mind of the other person, in the mind of one's adversary. We work so hard to get our position coordinated among all the diverse interests that we have on our side, that we forget about the other person.

It was a great lesson to me later when I was negotiating with other groups. So you really do have to put yourself their position in because the interests are very clear on both sides. You have to put yourself in so that you can think: ‘ I wonder if he is more interested in this than he is in that. Would he really bargain this and give away that?’ If I had sat back before the meeting and thought now I wonder what as a person, as a human being, I wonder what his interests are’ I wonder if I had said to him after this is all over, you know, what are you thinking of doing. Do you think you will become a minister or something like that? But I don't know. I was so programmed to state my position which was we wanted a list and we are not going to stop the bombing , that I really missed that funny little opening. I have never forgotten that. I don't think I have ever spoken of it until this minute. Of course I told the Ambassador wrote was a cable and all of that, but that was that thing that sticks in my mind.

I am dwelling on a lot of this because I want to get on record how we moved heaven and earth whenever there was the most ephemeral bit of intelligence that might have related to an American prisoner somewhere, or an American gravesite, or an American set of bones somewhere. Everything came to a halt. Everything stopped as we tried to figure out was this the real thing. Should we launch a search and rescue mission (SAR). I mean just a vague piece of intelligence that might have referred to someone that could, perhaps some Vietnamese phrase that could have referred to a U.S. prisoner, round eyes, long nose, something like that. Just to see that in a message and bells would go off through the whole theater. Everything else would stop. From Bangkok to Phnom Penh and so on and orders were issued saying there is a POW out there, to go out and rescue that POW..

We were always pressing the ICC to help on POW/MIA's. The ICC had three members, the Poles, the Indians, and the Canadians. We were pressing them a lot. Roger Shields would come in and talk to them. Since they went back and forth and had some relationships with the other side, they could go up to Hanoi to bring the heat on the Vietnamese to release names of POW's. That was the main thing we wanted – to get the names of POW's. You recall that in the talks, of course the Vietnamese were holding out a list of names because it was a bargaining chip in the talks. Not until after January 27, 1973, was a list released, and then you had the prisoner release in March, sixty days later. But a lot of the demarches were made through the ICC. The Canadian ICC commissioner was then John Hamill, a very fine Canadian Foreign Service officer, a really super guy. He was doing his best to be on the Poles and the Indians and on the Pathet Lao and on the North Vietnamese on the prisoner of war thing. But they knew that was one of their main bargaining chips.

That is about it I had to say on the POW thing. I just wanted to make it clear that toward the end it became the absolute centerpiece of our efforts. I mean we really gave up in Laos worrying about who controlled which terrain where. Instead there was enormous concentration on the POW thing, on MIA crash sites and things.

The End Game : Laos Peace Negotiations

I should start with the arrival of John Gunther Dean, the new DCM, in September 1972, and how from the moment he got there he started working to convert the kind of war-fighting atmosphere and impetus and ethos of the mission into one that, without being defeatist, could get the best deal out of the inevitable political settlement that lay ahead. In this his main obstacle at the outset was Ambassador Godley and the cumulative other war-fighting components of the mission and those in Washington.

John Gunther Dean had actually been in Vientiane in 1953 as an economic administrator. He helped open and set up the post there after the French had left. Dean had a very interesting sort of background. His parents had come to the United States from Germany but John spoke beautiful French, was married to a wonderful French woman named Martine, a lovely, friendly and genuine woman with a monied and aristocratic heritage. Now John was also a very good Foreign Service officer. He graduated from Harvard in

the late 1940's and had several degrees from elsewhere. He went to work for the Marshall Plan in Paris because of his good French. Then he was assigned to Indochina because of the French background. He went to Laos. He had some wonderful stories from that period, '53-'54 as you can imagine which I won't go into. But he met everyone. He met Souvanna, he knew everybody. In 1954 he joined the Foreign Service and spent a long period in Africa.

He was also in Cambodia in the early years and knew everybody from Cambodia. In 1969 he became the senior State Department advisor in MR-I in Vietnam, up there in I Corps in the north. . He was the senior advisor there when the NVA made a big push in I Corps and did some very heroic things. Although wounded, he got all of his people out safely, the civilian personnel. The bombing officer in the Embassy had worked with him there and recommended him. John came over for an interview with the Ambassador and did very well. John came in his best hawkish mode and was hired as DCM. Mac liked him personally as well as respected him professionally. John was a very able manager as well as a diplomat.

When he arrived in September 1972, there was no question he was the right DCM in the right place at the right time. Because as much as Mac Godley feared losing the war, it was obviously coming to an end. Dean built on this with the Ambassador, gradually converting him to the idea that we needed to preserve what we could in a peace settlement, and that meant changing a number of things at the mission. Dean really did that. Of course he had a good bit of external help because as this was unfolding, the secret talks were underway in Paris, and Kissinger had paved the way with the Chinese. More than anything, I think that factor may have been important in the Vietnamese deciding the time had come to make a deal, not only in Vietnam but of course in Laos - though not in Cambodia where the fighting never stopped.

The Pathet Lao Delegation Arrives on Vientiane

Bill Sullivan said once that when the first sign came that the North Vietnamese were ready to make a deal, it would come in Laos. The Pathet Lao would be the first to come to the table. And he was right. You recall I described my meetings with the North Vietnamese diplomat Nguyen Van Thanh in 1971, and with the Pathet Lao Rep Soth Phetrasy in 1972, and they were very hard-line on the issue of a bombing halt before negotiations. That was about to change.

Suddenly, within a week or two after John Dean arrived and unrelated to him of course, Soth Phetrasy, the Pathet Lao rep, called the Prime Minister's office and asked for an audience with Souvanna Phouma. He told Souvanna that the Pathet Lao would send a delegation to Vientiane to begin negotiations for the restoration of the 1962 Laos Agreement before a bombing halt. A total reversal of the long-standing position. Why had they done this? Well, obviously because the North Vietnamese had come to the conclusion that they were going to start making a settlement. Who knows how that decision came about? But now in Laos they wanted a settlement to go parallel because

Kissinger had been pushing for that in the secret Paris talks, a settlement that would encompass all Indochina.

But interestingly enough, nothing ever developed on Cambodia at that time. Why was that? I suspect the Khmer Rouge down there, and Sihanouk, who was in North Korea at the time, who were not really in the Vietnamese pocket. But in Laos we knew that the Pathet Lao had been created by the Vietnamese, was totally controlled by them. Virtually every senior official of the Pathet Lao was either Vietnamese himself and had grown up in Laos, or either a parent had been a Vietnamese. So the so-called Pathet Lao was a phony Vietnamese front organization in Laos and developments there would evolve parallel with those in Vietnam. Cambodia was another matter.

I mentioned the last time the Vietnamese had taken back the Plain of Jars in December 1971, their forces had surged down the valleys to Long Tieng, and started into the Long Tieng valley, seizing a house maintained for visits by King Savanna Vattana (who never came). The Meo regrouped and fought back, and were able to drive the Vietnamese tanks back along a ridge called "Skyline" on the other side of the Long Tieng valley. Then while the NVA rested one night, by luck we put a B-52 strike in and wiped out a regiment up there, and then they pulled back. All of a sudden they pulled back. We knew that Giap had come down to the Plain of Jars to direct that whole campaign. They were putting a well armed finger down into Laos.

Q: Giap being the...

HOWLAND: Vo Nguyen Giap, the commander in chief of the North Vietnamese forces, and Minister of Defense if I am not mistaken. There were signs that he had come down into Laos, and we were able to follow him through the usual means. But when the NVA forces were not able to get over Skyline, seize the airstrip and take the artillery base on the other side of the valley, all of a sudden they pulled back. In March of 1972 they started pulling back. They pulled back to the Plain of Jars, and out of the Long Tieng valley. We got back into the Long Tieng valley, but nobody knew why. At almost the same time the North Vietnamese were starting another big push in the Vietnamese highlands in '72. Not the one in '75, but the earlier one in '72. In hind sight they may have been accumulating troops from Laos and other places to set the stage for a ceasefire agreement in South Vietnam which would give them a dominant position on the ground. And Laos was important to that, so everything had to start there. And it all came about because Kissinger went to China.

So In early October, 1972, Soth went to Souvanna Phouma in Vientiane and asked to send a delegation. Souvanna immediately agreed and assigned Pheng Phongsavanh, the Neutralist Interior Minister, a leftist who had once had close Pathet Lao connections after the 1962 Agreement, to be the negotiator on the Lao government side. Pheng, by the way, was an old and very good friend of John Gunther Dean from his earlier days in Laos. He was also anathema to the rightist group in Vientiane, which trusted him even less than they did Souvanna. He stayed on after the full Pathet Lao take-over and later died in a re-

education camp. So much for leftist sympathies.

Q: This is tape eight, side one with Dick Howland.

HOWLAND: So that is part of the background to the famous statement on October 21, 1972, a few weeks before the U.S. election by Kissinger at a press conference that "Peace is at hand. Peace is at hand in Vietnam." Within days a Pathet Lao delegation, led by a party official named Phoumi Vongvichit arrived in town amidst enormous security arrangements.

At the first weekly meetings of the two sides, the first issues, of course, were the shape of the table, who was going to sit where, what people are going to be there, what people aren't going to be there. A big issue was what each side would call themselves. The Pathet Lao called itself the Lao Patriotic Front. We called them the Pathet Lao; they called themselves the Lao Patriotic Front. The Communist Party that was behind or underneath the Lao Patriotic Front was the Lao People's Revolutionary party, the LPRP; Of course the Vietnamese had created that whole structure. On the government side, the delegation called itself the Royal Government of Laos, but the Pathet Lao would not accept that. The Pathet Lao said it was an illegitimate government.

So then the Prime Minister, Souvanna, so desperate for peace, made a great concession. He announced that, since the Royal Government of the Kingdom of Laos was located in Vientiane and since people had commonly used the term the government in Vientiane, the Lao government side was willing to call itself the "Vientiane Government." That was a real concession because of the implication that it was only the government of Vientiane, not the government of the whole country, a very bad thing to give away. But it got the talks started.

Souvanna was so desperate to have these negotiations be successful -- he, too, saw the handwriting on the wall. For him the name of the delegation was unimportant, but it set a tone of Pathet Lao dominance for the whole negotiation. Souvanna felt the war coming to an end in Vietnam and his main goal in life was to resume his relationship with his brother Souphanouvong, the nominal head of the Pathet Lao. Souvanna wanted to see his brother again. Souvanna felt that whatever the Lao government side might give up in the negotiations didn't matter, whatever anyone might say, once he and his brother got back together again. They were both from the Cadet or lesser branch of the royal family, and could not inherit the throne. The old king, Savang Vatthana, was dying and the son was probably a drug addict. His only son was incapable of ruling. Then there was no one except children left in that side of the royal family. Perhaps he and his brother could serve as sort of regents overseeing a coalition neutralist government until a new king was found. He felt that as soon as he and Souphanouvong - whom he hadn't seen in 20 years - - sat down together over a couple of glasses of brandy and cigars and spoke French together, the "red prince" could be weaned away from the "reds." Then the Americans would be gone, the bombing would be over, the Vietnam War would be over, and Laos would be saved. The Vietnamese would go away, and the Pathet Lao would become good

Lao again.

I think Souvanna really believed that. He shouldn't have believed it. He should have been much smarter than that, but he believed it. He was 72 years old by this time and had been fighting all this stuff a long time. I mean as a boy, when he was a boy, Laos was the little exotic kingdom. He grew up in the Palace, then went off to France for schooling, trained as an engineer. Now after almost 40 years of war, he could finally get to his brother and straighten things out. So he constantly was pushing Pheng the negotiator to determine what the Pathet Lao wanted in negotiations, and then to come up with some clever wording to give that to them. He wanted a settlement. Even Pheng, a neutralist who tended to favor the Pathet Lao because he was against the extreme right wing side of the Vientiane government, the right wing generals, even Pheng wasn't happy with how much Souvanna wanted to give away. Souvanna had no idea what Communist parties were really like, about the concept of "objective" or "class" guilt. He would find out when the Pathet Lao arrived in town.

The Pathet Lao had positions and proposals – demands, I should say, and the Lao government side, the Vientiane government when it started the talks had nothing, no policy, no paper, no positions. What they did have they just reflected Souvanna's vague hopes for peace, that "if I just get together with my brother everything will be fine." For years the Lao government had been based on patronage, corruption, clan infighting, and we had basically run the country apart from that. They had nothing. Of course being good, organizational, hard-nosed communists driven by their North Vietnamese overlords, the Pathet Lao side had come in with all kinds of demands, policy papers, position papers, endless drafts, reams of paper. They were following the first principle of negotiations: he who controls the draft controls the outcome, controls the final agreement. So right away the whole Lao Government modus operandi for the talks became an attempt to revise a Pathet Lao draft agreement, trying to get the Pathet Lao to give up what it called its 73 irrefutable points. So this went on and on week after week.

In the middle of all of this was John Gunther Dean. He spoke beautiful French; he wrote beautiful French, he knew the people and the background to everything in Laos. Soon after the talks began he would go out at night in his Mercedes with the cogent Embassy files in the trunk and meet Pheng Phongsavanh and one other guy from the Lao government delegation in their Mercedes, parked by the river. They talked secretly, because what went on in the talks was supposed to be secret. They would talk about what had gone on in the talks that day and what had to be done for the talks the next day. They would talk for two or three nights each week and then adjourn and talk again like that. Then John would come back to the Embassy where I was waiting and we would do a cable to Washington together. It was heady stuff for me; I loved it. Or, we would sit up all night writing a position paper for the government side to put forward at the talks the next day. The Lao side was incapable of responding intelligently to the Pathet Lao positions, especially because its right-wing members tried to block or delay everything. John would put the paper into French and smuggle it over to Pheng just before the talks that day. Whether they ever used the papers is unknown -- probably not, because we always put

something in about releasing POW's and looking for MIA's.

Meanwhile John was the phone with Kissinger to clear the whole thing, or with Sullivan or with Mike Reeves who was the country director for Laos at the time. So we were doing all this kind of exciting stuff in the middle of the night, and then we had to put in a whole work day. It just went on and on like this for months, great times for me, though not for the family. So the talks listlessly proceeded, largely occupied with typical Communist posturing and propaganda by the Pathet Lao side. Some meetings would be little more than a four-hour Pathet Lao tirade. Some of the right-wing Lao would just walk out – I don't blame them. Every week they would have a day or two of that. Meanwhile the talks in Paris went on at the same time. We all knew everything hinged on the talks on Vietnam. As the situation in Vietnam changed so that affected the situation in Laos.

While the talks proceeded in this manner, Dean would be lobbying Ambassador Godley about changes that would need to be made in the mission in preparation for an agreement which would unquestionably require a mass evacuation of the US presence in Laos. I used to overhear him sometimes, talking endlessly until Mac finally agreed just to get John out of his office. Of course he couldn't kick out his DCM, so he had to agree. So at the same time the talks were going on, Dean had the job of reconfiguring not only the American mission to operate in a peacetime setting, but changing the attitudes of the people there and in Washington to the way we would have to operate in a peacetime setting.

Q: I would think that the influence of the DCM on the CIA war that was going on would be minor.

HOWLAND: Not so; I'll tell you how he did it. He did a very good job. He persuaded the Ambassador that we had to explore questions. He was very French. John was very Cartesian and he framed it in terms of "exploring the most important questions." Not that we were going to make up any new policies or change anything right away. For some reason he fixed on a process of developing the 18-20 most important burning questions for reconfiguring the mission to operate in a peacetime Laos. John said, "Peace is coming. Kissinger had said peace is at hand. How will we look in Washington if we are not ready, and what are we going to have to do for instance if the new agreements say no foreign troops in Laos?"

Now, at that time the attaché office was 300-400 officers and other personnel. "What number of military officers are we going to be permitted by the peace agreements?" There wasn't even anything in the Pathet Lao agreement about that, about whether the Americans would still have a military contingent there. What about the attaché office the defense attaché and so forth? How many military should we have? So he persuaded the Ambassador to let him form a task force of mission component heads to address this problem for all of us.

The first thing we did was ask everyone come up with the 18 most important questions from their own agency viewpoint. CIA, the military components, USAID, USIS, etc. It

was then the political section's responsibility to take the sets of 18 questions each – i.e. now 256 questions in total, identify those questions which were identical, then boil them all down into an overall mission-wide 18 key questions for the post-conflict Laos. A lot of it was boilerplate, but a lot of them were very good. So I submitted a thing, it was like a tennis match. One hundred twenty eight, and then you had the first round you are down to 56 or whatever half of 128 is. Gradually you get down to the round of the real 18 crowd pleasers, the most important 18 questions. Then we reconvened the group. No one had taken the process seriously at first. But when they saw the outcome practically everyone objected and several went off to complain to the Ambassador. Particularly in the military, roles and missions, i.e. staffing issues, were the lifeblood of a unit and here was some State Department guy trying to change them. No way!

They found out that except where it impinged on actually war-fighting, the Ambassador, through all of this, supported Dean fully. We all heard him say, "John Dean is in charge of this. I am not going to get involved at all. I am going to do my job which has always to run the war. I am going to go on running the war. Dean is going to take care of peace time. I want all of you to do what he says."

That was very big of Godley because he was one of these guys who always wanted to get involved in everything if it had anything to do with the war. I mean even down to the littlest aspects – he once asked a Meo cannoneer if he was using a bore brush properly to clean a 155mm howitzer... So Dean was able to put together his 18 questions. Then we started meeting to answer the questions -- meetings which became quite contentious, even on very small points – such as, for instance, should the attaché officer retain a civilian Psywar specialist who had been there forever dropping useless leaflets on the Ho Chi Minh trail. At that point no one knew what the outcome of any of the peace talks would be. Very few read the Embassy cables on the subject. Nevertheless at a meeting each agency had a position for which they would fight to the death in arguments that would last up to four hours over these things. They were living in a dream world, as if the war would go on forever.

Then John said, "Probably we ought to let the department know what we are thinking. So let's do a paper and send it in." In that way we could not only condition our components to the end of the war, and what needed to be done, but get Washington involved as well. Without Dean, the whole End Game in Laos would have been even more of a shambles than it eventually was – it would have been like Saigon and Phnom Penh. Dean kept us in Laos. He should have gotten a medal for that.

He would say: "We just talked about three questions. We have got some little policy papers that will address each of those issues, questions, issue papers. Let's just send them in and ask for comment." Many things were like quite important such as what we were going to do with the Meo and their families who had fought against the North Vietnamese? Where are we going to put them? If we can have could not have put them anywhere near the Pathet Lao. We are all presuming at that stage that there would be a cease fire line drawn down the middle of Laos. We can't put them anywhere near that. We

have got to put them in a more secure place perhaps on the other side of the Mekong in Sayaboury Province, a relatively empty but fertile place. Sayaboury was one secure place on the other side of the Mekong, a little slice of land there that belongs to Laos instead of Thailand. Vang Pao had looked longingly at it for years as a place of refuge for his families. The rest of the Mekong River is the border of course between two countries. So there is another big issue. We fought that one out. AID had big interests in what happened to the Meo refugees which they were supporting. CIA had a big interest although as it turned out in the end CIA just washed its hands of all that and went on its way in typical CIA fashion. In the end nothing could be done for most of the Meo and they are suffering -- some still in camps in Thailand 40 years later -- to this day.

So those questions became the subjects of issue papers. And then it was natural to begin sending these papers in. The first issue paper that went in by cable concerned disposition of the enormous amount of guns, munitions, hardware, equipment and so forth that we had strewn all over this country? Jack Vessey had been replaced as the head of military logistics by Brigadier General Dick Trefry, an enormously capable but highly political guy. Anyway what are we going to do with all this junk we brought in? I mean we have got tens of millions if not billions of dollars of equipment and guns and bullets and stuff all over the country. Are we going to get it out? Are we going to leave it here, so on and so forth. Should we start taking it out now? So we sent back cables saying we think it is a good idea to do this and that with all this stuff.

Meanwhile the U.S. military and the CIA's position was we still don't have an agreement in Vietnam yet, therefore we have got to keep the pressure on the North Vietnamese, so we have to go on bombing the trail and sending in these the interdiction teams from Laos and so forth to interdict the trail, not worrying about what eventually would happen to the settlement in Laos, what it would be like in Laos.

It was very difficult bridging all these different contradictory things, as we found out almost within hours when we got an answer, a cable which became infamous as "State 60,000." By chance that was the number of the cable but it had the unmistakable ring of Kissinger drafting to it. The cable read: "You will not in any way degrade the military capability of the Lao forces until you are instructed to do so by the Department," or something like that. At any rate, what it really said was: "Keep the pressure on. Don't in any way reduce the military effort."

Well, our military side and the station, those who believed fervently in the war, were gratified, and the cable put a terrible crimp at the outset into Dean's efforts there, during this time, Dean and I were arguing that the whole configuration of the Laos military struggle should change, and the whole purpose of the struggle should change from helping with Vietnam to become politically relevant to the negotiations and our desired outcome in Laos. So he persevered on other proposals that were less controversial. And in the end he succeeded.

By the way I should emphasize that we were all great friends -- a "hardy band of brothers"

as Godley's successor, Charlie Whitehouse, called us... There were no real animosities or hatreds. That was one of the really nifty things about my three years there, I think perhaps because the stakes were so big as they always are in a war. Usually these bitter personal feuds and hatreds developed when the stakes are small. But the stakes were so big; what we were doing there was so enormous and so important that people realized they had to work together on this thing. You just didn't get people who stalked out of meetings or refused to attend a meeting, that kind of behavior at least not until the war was ended. None of that, everybody worked together. But we had good strong arguments. In the end it kind of all went back to the Ambassador and his leadership.

Bless his soul, I think Godley had come to the realization that he was going to be leaving in four or five months anyway, that it was over for him there. He may have known beforehand that he was going to be nominated as the next Assistant Secretary for EA, following Marshall Green who was going as Ambassador to Australia. As it turned out, Godley was the only assistant secretary nominee ever not confirmed, turned down by the Senate. It was a great blow to him. In the end he went as Ambassador to Beirut, then developed throat cancer, cancer of the larynx, fought it successfully, but retired.

Godley never tried to exploit the message, State 60,000, to expand his concept of the war. He did ask for a few more B-52 strikes and got them. Yes, that cable was a reflection of Kissinger's desire to keep the heat on the enemy to make them talk on Vietnam, but it was also a bargaining ploy by elements who wanted the war to continue, both in the NSC and out. So Godley said that will only hold right up until the point when the agreement is signed – after that they will want to stop right away. So he knew that we had better make the plans now and we went on, one issue paper after another reconfiguring the mission on the one hand. On the other hand in terms of the talks, John went on seeing the Pathet Lao and seeing the Vientiane government side at night and pushing forward there. As I recall in Early December the talks in Paris broke up for some reason – I guess Nguyen Van Thieu and the South Vietnamese side were balking. The North Vietnamese then backed away, we did the Christmas bombing in the north and we mined the harbor in Haiphong. That was John Negroponte's idea by the way.

Q: Let's end here as usual. We have got the Pathet Lao signing an agreement...

HOWLAND: No, first came the Vietnamese agreement.

Q: The Vietnamese signing an agreement.

HOWLAND: They did it in Paris. It was signed in Paris on January 27, 1973. There were still negotiations going on in Laos at that time in Vientiane leading to an agreement there in late February. When I come back I will take up what happened in Laos after the Paris agreement was signed and the circumstances leading to the signing of the Laos agreement.

Q: One thing I want to ask you, but I will put it here, how much were you all with John

Gunther Dean in his Mercedes calling the shots as far as the negotiations were concerned and where were you getting your ideas for this? I mean were we pushing the government in Laos to be much tougher than it would have been and all that?

HOWLAND: No, except on POW/MIA stuff – which they never paid any attention to. Remember the issues that concerned the Lao had to do with resuscitating the 1962 agreements which provided for a tripartite coalition government, and the neutralization of Laos. Now that meant the Pathet Lao would come back to Vientiane and Pathet Lao ministers would sit in the government. So among some of the issues were --- and you are asking a very good question --- were who would get which ministries?. Where would the Pathet Lao zones of control be? What powers would the government have over the Pathet Lao zone? The Pathet Lao refused to give up, refused to let any right wing troops, any so called Vientiane government troops into their controlled areas – they could with the NVA there of course. When Souvanna agreed to that, of course he gave away the Vientiane government, he gave away the whole ball game. Because they could say Vientiane government troops could not go into the liberated zone, you see, the Pathet Lao. But Pathet Lao forces could come to Vientiane and Luang Prabang to protect their Ministers, and function as part of a Joint Police Force with the right-wing side. So those were some of the issues for the Lao, and we were kept out of those by Pheng Phongsavanh, the RLG negotiator.

What we were pressing on was POW-MIA stuff. We wanted a provision in there that the Pathet Lao recognized they had the obligation to help our side look for crash sites, to turn over prisoners and that. We would try to get this under the aegis of the ICC. I wrote about a 20 page paper on the subject of course. Another issue for us was supervision and control, what would the ICC do and what wouldn't it do? The agreement had several sections like this. In the case of those sections that affected Vietnam, or broader U.S. interests -- in other words where Kissinger would jump up and down if he had been told - - John would call back and consult with him. Of course we briefed the Ambassador every day but his eyes were glazed over on this stuff.

So we were pressing the Lao Government delegation on that, on the American interests after we sorted out what they were. Washington was no help at all on that. The American interest was keeping a sliver of land on the other side of the Mekong between Thailand, our protégé and ally if you will, and the Vietnamese. After all, I think as I mentioned very early on, the whole history of mainland Southeast Asia after the fall of the Khmer empire was the history of the contending Thai and Vietnamese, battles fought in the lands that lie between them. We wanted to keep that buffer. Kissinger wanted to draw a cease fire line right down the middle of Laos, the North Vietnamese would have the east side, we would have the west.

In contrast, Souvanna wanted to reconstitute the unity of the Kingdom of Laos to be run by him and his brother. That was an important point which did not hit home with Kissinger no matter how many times we pointed it out. So you had that kind of real distinction between the U.S. position and that of the RLG. John Dean wanted to

reconstitute the joint right-wing – neutralist -- Pathet Lao government under Savanna Phouma which the 1962 agreements had set up. I suspect in the back of his mind, he hoped to use it as a model for Cambodia, where he hoped to go as Ambassador and set up a similar arrangement there, and then bring back Prince Sihanouk to run it. He did go to Cambodia but the outcome was very different unfortunately. Neither Dr. Kissinger, nor the Khmers Rouges, would have favored such an outcome.

Q: We will stop here and pick this up at January of '73 on the talks.

Today is 13 August 1999. Dick we are at January 1973.

HOWLAND: Right. We stopped in January '73 at the last time because the Vietnam cease fire agreement was signed on the 27th although the U.S. January and the prisoners of course, a big part of the cease fire from our standpoint, were not to be released until 60 or 90 days later. But with the signing of the Vietnam agreement of course, what was going to happen in Laos became very crucial because part of the Vietnam agreement addressed the presence of foreign troops in Laos. It also addressed Cambodia but since I was not working on Cambodia I knew and know nothing much about that.

Now as the months unfolded between October 22, 1972 when Kissinger said, "Peace is at hand," and the signing of the Laos agreement in February 1973, , we were also trying to make sure the Vietnam negotiating issues did not affect the Laos negotiating process. Some of the issues were very different and we were constantly trying to make it clear there were two different situations. We were endlessly trying to keep the negotiators on Vietnam from sticking something in their document – which they could control directly unlike us --- that would impinge on what Souvanna and we were trying to do in Laos – to create a genuine neutralist government.

Of course this was a pipe dream for both of us. Souvanna hoped against reality that if he could wean Souphanouvong away from the Vietnamese, he could then retire and his brother would take over running the government. Keeping that goal implicit but unspoken was how he hoped to inveigle the Pathet Lao into an agreement that was maybe a little bit detrimental to their interest at the outset. Of course this was hopeless. Souphanouvong was just a puppet of the Vietnamese. His wife was Vietnamese. He had been a puppet, a figurehead of the Vietnamese for 25 years or however long. He had joined the Indo Chinese communist party in the 1940s and was simply a minion, a loyal party worker, not a true leader. But Souvanna still had this sort of magical confidence in his own ability to wean his brother away, a very key point.

With the signing of the Vietnam accords, as I said, the efforts to negotiate a Laos accord redoubled under great pressure from Washington. We received a cable indicating that President Nixon had determined that an agreement in Laos had to be signed within 30 days of that in Vietnam, i.e. by February 26. But the talks in Vientiane were stalled on a

number of key points.

Among them were, as I mentioned earlier, were first, the division of ministerial seats and sub-ministerial seats within the coalition government. A related aspect was the actual implementation of the agreement, the physical timing for the formation and functioning of the new coalition government. Second, the functions and military capabilities the new “neutralist government forces” which at the outset, of course, would be all the rightist Army and Vang Pao’s Meo forces. Eventually the Pathet Lao forces were to be blended into a single armed force: how and when would that take place? And third, as I said, the ability of non-Pathet Lao troops to go into Pathet Lao-controlled areas which in fact, were controlled by the North Vietnamese army.

Since the Vietnam agreement had not provided for the toppling of the Saigon government of Nguyen Van Thieu, there was no way on earth that the North Vietnamese were going to allow non-Pathet Lao troops into the areas of Laos it still needed to complete the eventual conquest of and reunification with South Vietnam. So they of course stalled completely on that; they said no one could enter those zones because of the danger of espionage from the Americans. The geographic issues were particularly thorny and the non-communist Lao simply could not come to grips with them. I think I mentioned that Kissinger was hoping for a line sort of drawn down through Laos from top to bottom with some right-wing strength in the areas close to the Mekong River along the border with Thailand. A complication was that the Chinese had carved out an area, I think I talked about the Chinese road before, in northern Laos, down that spike of a road coming down the Nam Beng river valley to end at the Mekong. Moreover the whole eastern part of the country had been under North Vietnamese control for decades. We had been bombing it for decades there were unexploded bombs and mines everywhere. So where would you draw the line?

Thus the issue of where that line would go was totally finessed, as was the issue of how and when the Pathet Lao forces and the Pathet Lao ministers would come back into Vientiane to be integrated and participate in the government of the country. Those issues were really finessed in the first set of negotiations, that is the ones we are talking about now. There was a later set of talks on what was called “the Protocol to Implement the Peace Agreement in Laos” which I will get into later. But no teams ever went out to draw a ceasefire line in Laos and no means was set up to monitor one.

How did the signing of the Laos agreement, done on February 22, 1973, really come about? The key event was a dinner party at Ambassador Godley’s residence on February 15, following an earlier trip by Kissinger through Vientiane on his way to Hanoi.

In the Vietnam talks there was apparently an agreement for the American side, that is to say Dr. Kissinger, to fly to Hanoi after the signing and negotiate some kind of “aid arrangement” with the North Vietnamese – that is what we called it --- “aid.” This was in connection with trying to get some means to search for soldiers and airmen missing in action – the MIA’s. The agreement specified that the POWs were to be exchanged and

released on a set date in March. That was all in the agreement. But the US also wanted to get some kind of agreement to look for MIAs, inspect crash sites and things like that. So Kissinger was going up there to offer however many millions of dollars in aid to facilitate that.

When they reached Hanoi the Vietnamese took the position that "aid" would be insulting and humiliating. They weren't taking any aid from the Americans. What they demanded was reparations. They said they deserved reparations. The Americans committed terrible atrocities, invaded their country and so forth. Of course we couldn't call any payments to the North Vietnamese "reparations." Yes, we bombed North Vietnam but we hadn't invaded North Vietnam. We strictly avoided that. We had sent troops into South Vietnam at the request of a legitimate government of South Vietnam and therefore no reparations were appropriate. The Hanoi talks soon broke down and nothing was done.

But en route to Hanoi, Dr. Kissinger stopped in Vientiane to tidy up the Laos situation and to try to provoke a settlement in the dilatory talks which I have described. Kissinger showed up, I believe, on February 9. He came with a big group which included Tom Pickering who was playing a key part in the Department for Kissinger. Second was Bill Sullivan, the DAS in the East Asia Bureau who was totally responsible for Indo China. Another was Colonel Richard Kennedy who at the time was the officer who oversaw the disposition of B-52 strikes at the National Security Council. John Negroponte, Winston Lord, a few other staffers were along.

The top people all stayed at the residence, and the rest were farmed out to other homes for one night. It was decided they would meet with a few Embassy officers at six pm for drinks and a chat, and then at 7:30 Kissinger was going off to see Souvanna Phouma to talk to him about the Vietnam settlement. Dean called and asked me to come to the residence at six. As I was coming in the door with John Dean, he said, "Ah we have to introduce you to Kissinger. It will be good for your career." He led me over to Kissinger, on the couch, and said: "And this is Dick Howland the political counselor who has written all the wrap-ups on negotiations," i.e. the weekly cables.

Kissinger looked up at me and said, "Ah yes. I have read your wrap ups on the negotiations. They contained many interesting insights of which my own staff was unaware." So everyone sort of laughed at that, while Lord and Negroponte sort of glowered at me. It was all for show, just Kissinger's style. He embarrassed his staff. Then he asked a few innocuous questions to which I gave innocuous answers, and after talking to others, at 7:30 he went off to see Souvanna.

I was not at that meeting but Dean took notes. Kissinger basically told Souvanna at that time -- not in so many words, however -- that Souvanna could not count on the air support any longer, on the bombing anywhere in Laos. He said that, while it was unmentioned in the Vietnam agreement, the sides had agreed that the war would be over in 30 days in Laos, and in 60 days in Cambodia. As I think I mentioned, that was a pipe dream in Cambodia, because there you had the Khmers Rouges who were not under the

control of the North Vietnamese as were the Lao. Souvanna Phouma said very little on this. After as I recall thinking back, when came back he said, "We didn't even get a telegram out of that one." So I hope my memory is good. After Kissinger came back we all sat around the pool. By this time it was around 9:00 or 9:15, with some drinks and snacks.

Q: Dean was Chargé at this point.

HOWLAND: No. Ambassador Godley was still there. He left in March after the so-called ceasefire.

Q: Oh I see.

HOWLAND: But Godley just wanted the war to go on. Dean was trying to bridge that whole thing by arguing that the war in Laos should go on until we got a better agreement. What he was thinking was that in the end the Pathet Lao would come around to Souvanna's view and re-unify the country. But he couldn't argue that with Kissinger. Kissinger basically wanted a cease fire line drawn down the middle of Laos which would give the Vietnamese whatever they thought would protect their interests on the east, and protect the Thai on the west. Because he didn't want the outcome of this agreement to be the collapse of Thailand or the conversion of Thailand into a neutralist government. This was supposed to block the dominos from falling. Of course that was all geo-political claptrap to begin with.

So we argued with Kissinger not on the basis that we should reunify Laos – I'm sure Kissinger would have been horrified at the thought that Laos might be reunified under a neutralist, pro-communist government because of the implications for Thailand. Instead we argued that we could get a better deal on MIA's if we pressed a little bit harder, that the Pathet Lao seemed to be coming around to the possibility that the ICC, the international control commission for Laos might be a vehicle for investigation of MIA sites. I think that too was all a pipe dream. It never would have come about, at least not for decades. Well, Kissinger was totally unresponsive to that. I am not saying he attacked it, he just didn't react to it. In fact what he was mainly thinking about was the fact that the next day, he was leaving to go to Hanoi to continue talks with his old adversary, Le Duc Tho, whose nickname among the cognoscenti was "Ducky."

So Kissinger had a very jocular evening. Everybody was joking about one thing or another. We were sitting around the pool, a pool which had been rather controversial because the inspectors had been out to investigate how this pool got built with USAID cement that was supposed to be used for a runway somewhere. It was justified on security grounds so that the Ambassador could get some exercise. Be that as it may, we were pressing Kissinger, knowing what had been said with Souvanna, to continue the air strikes. Our argument was that he could get a better deal on MIAs when he went to Hanoi if we kept the pressure on the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese in Laos. Well, this was kind of appealing to Kissinger, air strikes not having anything to do with the Lao

situation, but instead related to his talks in Hanoi.

So at one point, I believe Kissinger called over Dick Kennedy and said, "I have decided to give Ambassador Godley three arc- lights immediately." An arc light cell, as you recall, was three B-52 bombers each with 104 thousand-pound bombs, dropping them all in what was called a "time on target run", so they would all explode in a box one kilometer square at the same time. Kennedy asked where to put them, and Godley replied, "We'll put them down in MR3, MR4."

Q: Where were these military regions?

HOWLAND: In Central Laos east of Savannakhet, because that is where the Lao were having some problems straightening the line, getting back into a town called Kengkok which was the seat of a major right-wing clan and considered vital to the right wing political position.

But Kissinger said he didn't want to put them there. He wanted to put them in the north up close to the border of North Vietnam where Le Duc Tho would pay attention to them. We pointed out the only targets up there were the headquarters of the Pathet Lao at Sam Neua and installations at Phongsali. But at this step of the Laos negotiations, if we started bombing Pathet Lao headquarters there would be all hell to pay. Then Kissinger said, "When you go to negotiate with Ducky it's good to hear the sound of bombs rumbling in the background." So we finally agreed to put them in the Plain of Jars. Then he turned to Kennedy and said, "Call Abe in Saigon, give Mac three more arc lights. They are to go in wherever we just agreed." The next morning at the airport I recall Kissinger shaking hands with us all there, and he said to me and John - because we had argued to have the arc lights down in the south -- "When I get off the plane in one hour and Ducky greets me, I will say to him: I just give Mac Godley more B-52s. Now let's talk."

Denouement at Dinner – The End of the Laos War

In fact the talks in Hanoi led to no agreement on "aid" or the MIA's, as I mentioned earlier. After two or three days of talks in Hanoi, Kissinger went to Saigon to talk to Nguyen Van Thieu about the whole settlement and what the talks had been in Hanoi . But Bill Sullivan came back to Vientiane to brief the Lao government on the talks in Hanoi and basically to end the war. That was, if I am not mistaken the 15th of February, six days after he had gone up to Hanoi with Kissinger. Bill came back to tell the Lao – and Godley most importantly – that it was all over and they had to settle now. Bill apparently wanted to do this with everybody present at a dinner at the residence. That was very much his style, one the Lao appreciated. They didn't like office meetings. So Godley set up a dinner with a number of the most politically prominent and important Lao in the kingdom including the Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna. They all came of course. It was probably the most important diplomatic event in the history of the Laos war.

And Sullivan – whom the Lao saw as almost a godlike figure – Sullivan , as you know,

had been in on the whole Laos situation from the beginning. He was Averill Harriman's special assistant at the 1962 talks in Geneva on Laos, the talks that had produced the neutralization agreement on Laos. Averill Harriman at the time had been the Assistant Secretary for East Asia, so of course couldn't spend months at the talk. He had been very impressed by Sullivan, at the time an (old-style) FSO-3. Over the objections of the department and everybody else, he made Sullivan the number two on his delegation, so that when he left, Sullivan would conduct the talks for the United States. I suppose at the time Bill was quite young, perhaps late thirties? Soon after the conclusion of the negotiations, Bill was made Ambassador to Laos in '64 to be Ambassador to Laos. He was there when the '62 agreements broke down, and then as we became more involved in Vietnam the air war started in Laos, and the build-up of the Lao irregular forces as well. Bill was an ex-navy guy, and he pushed to use navy fighters and bombers from a carrier off Vietnam to start bombing Laos in the mid-'60s. Ambassador Godley who was often criticized for all the bombing and had certainly continued it, but most of the heaviest bombing had been from '66-'68. They were flying just thousands of sorties a day. In Godley's time they flew at the most a couple of hundred.

Before the dinner, Godley and Sullivan went upstairs aside to his private personal quarters, where there was a little library with the map of the disposition of forces in Laos. It was there so if anything came up in the middle of the night, Godley would have had a map right there and could approve air strikes, moving troops, moving artillery, things like that. Godley wanted to show Bill that things weren't really so bad in Laos. But Bill, as he looked at this map, had two comments. The map showed the Pathet Lao/ North Vietnamese areas with red designations, you know little flags that they use, pins and things for troop concentrations, and for our landing sites – the “LS's.” But Bill said that, when the war was started back in '64-'68, we were flying air support out of sites called LS-3 and LS-4, right up against the Vietnamese border and nine-tenths of Laos had blue pins in it. Now we were flying out of sites called LS-257 and LS-316 and Site 192, which were way over by the Mekong river. And now, most of Laos had little red pins all over it. It was over and it was time to move on. Godley got the message. We were pulling out and the Lao could sink or swim – in fact many of them did swim. They swim the Mekong and became refugees in Thailand. But that was later.

Then the two Ambassadors went back downstairs because by this time the Lao were arriving. Most important of course was Souvanna the prime minister, then Sisouk na Champassak, Minister of Defense, and a scion of the Champassak clan which ruled the Pakse area of South Laos. Then Kouprasith Abhay, head of the Army from the Abhay family which ruled the far south, based on Khong Island in the Mekong. His brother Nouhak Abhay, I believe he was foreign minister at the time, was also there. There was Ngon Sananikone, Minister of Public Works, and his brother Oudone, Chief of Staff of the Army. Their clan ruled the Vientiane provincial area. Finally the leader of the clan from Central Laos, the Savannakhet area, Leuam Insisiengmay. Vang Pao was not there, nor anyone else from the north. The group was complete with Pheng Phongsavanh, Minister of Interior and principal Lao government negotiator at the Laos talks.

Then on our side, the American side there was of course, Bill Sullivan, Mac Godley, John Gunther Dean, the station chief, Charlie Mann the AID director, and Lou Pate, the USIS Director, and finally Colonel Broadus Bailey, the defense attaché. I was the most junior person at the table.

As protocol officer I had to properly organize the table. I put of course Souvanna sitting at the middle of the table, which was then the place of honor, and Sullivan sitting directly across from him at the other side in the middle of the table, the second place of honor. Mac Godley was at Souvanna's left, meaning he was honoring Souvanna because Souvanna was on his right. Next to Mac Godley was Pheng Phongsavanh, because next to him was John Gunther Dean, the DCM, who wanted to talk to him. Then at the end of the table, myself as the most junior person. To my left were Charlie Mann, and then Nong Sananikone since Charlie dealt mostly with Nong on the AID program. The station chief was down at the far end on the other side and then Sisouk and Kouprasith – old allies—and finally, Broadus Bailey, Leuam and Lou Pate. Bill cleared the seating plan and was pleased with it. The dress was black tie – as always with the Prime Minister - though Sullivan was in a business suit.

I must point out at the outset that this event was a friendly amicable get together. Nothing the Lao enjoy more than a party, and everyone at this gathering had been friends for a long time. Bill always handled himself flawlessly. He was a superb diplomat. The party actually started earlier with drinks, and was mostly conducted in French. As we proceeded to the table, Bill came up to me and said out of the corner of his mouth, "Please take notes." Happily in my tuxedo I found a few pieces of yellow paper stashed there to make notes at previous events. I borrowed a pen from Charlie Mann, and all through the time I was taking notes Charlie kept saying, "Don't forget to give me back my pen." After the meal, about 10:00 P.M. the real talks started. I began frantically trying to hear everything down at the far end of this table, and scribbling notes. Of course I ran out of paper and started using napkins. Then the head house-boy, Nong, brought me a yellow pad from upstairs.

Q: You are talking about 20 feet.

HOWLAND: Yes, over this big table you know, I was trying to follow it all from maybe 15 feet anyway. I was trying to listen to Souvanna, who generally spoke quietly and Bill who spoke very quiet measured French, frantically trying to get notes. Well, Dean's French of course was much better than mine and he started checking what I was writing, and started telling me what to write. Meanwhile Charlie Mann was saying don't lose my pen. I want my pen back. You know, it was one of these expensive Cross pens or something. I was drenched with perspiration. The pen kept falling out of my hand. That is how it went on, the process of taking the notes.

Bill noted finally that he had been connected with Laos for a pretty long time and sort of reviewed all that happened in that period. He noted that he had taken some steps over the years, the air war and the other efforts against the North Vietnamese which, while they

were primarily relevant to the struggle in Vietnam, were also designed to create a situation which would make it easier to negotiate the Vietnamese out of Laos.

He emphasized that he had brought in the Thai mercenary troops, called the Thai Special Guerrilla Units, or "SGUs." They were to back up the Lao Irregular Forces in the highlands, the Meo and Lao Theung, to keep the war away from the Mekong River valley. This had been largely successful and the main population centers of Laos had not suffered from the war. Unfortunately the Thai didn't fight very well. But we brought them in to ease the pain on the Lao. At that point one of the Lao said, I forget who, agreed that the Thai didn't fight very well. In fact, they kept throwing away their weapons. They would take their weapons back to Thailand and sell them and then get issued new weapons. All this was true. Every time there was a serious North Vietnamese NVA attack, the Thai would just run away, and it was left for the Meo to try to block them.

Obviously the Lao had coordinated their position. Sisouk, the Defense Minister, then began making a big appeal for more air support. He said that right now the draft agreement, the draft they had been arguing over in the Lao negotiations, was heavily weighted in favor of the PL and North Vietnamese. He said he could not foresee the right-wing side successfully functioning in a tripartite government where the Pathet Lao would have all the key ministries and still control vast areas of Laos with no guarantee that the North Vietnamese would ever withdraw. So Sisouk made this kind of impassioned plea for renewed heavier bombing and other tactical air support.

Souvanna was significantly quiet through this. Once in a while Pheng would put something in about the negotiations; Souvanna would kind of nod. So the talk went around the table. Finally Souvanna Phouma put up his hand and he said in English, "Bill, how much more air support can you guarantee?" So Sullivan started going on again about how we were now at the end of a very long road. The agreement had been signed in Vietnam. It provided for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Laos. The position of the United States was that we should proceed to a settlement in Laos and Cambodia as soon as possible. That is to say, within 30 days.

So Souvanna asked him again, "Can you guarantee air support until the Laos agreement is signed if it takes longer?" Bill said he could not. And added: "I think the agreement should be signed as soon as possible." That sort of hung there in the air, the definitive statement of the U.S. government. The agreement should be signed as soon as possible. What he was saying was whatever the U.S. interests, whatever your interests are, the overwhelming goal now was to get some kind of an agreement.

Godley interjected at that point -- trying to rescue the situation -- that by moving about some artillery pieces on the road to Luang Prabang, Vientiane could be made more secure until the agreement was signed. That would take the place of air support he said. As long as Vientiane was secure, then the good guys could go on negotiating, and it wouldn't come to an end where the Vietnamese would be able to put so much military pressure on that they would have to give up. Souvanna Phouma looked quite visibly annoyed at that.

He said something to Godley in French that I couldn't catch. Dean later said he was admonishing Godley, but I didn't hear that, and I don't know what he was saying to Godley.

What I do know is after he finished speaking to Godley, the Prime Minister leaned forward around Godley and in a loud voice, which I heard clearly, said to Pheng Phongsavanh, the principal negotiator: "The agreement will be signed within one week. Is there anything I should do?" Pheng replied there was not.

Everyone at the table was stunned because basically Bill Sullivan and Souvanna Phouma had said the war was over, and the ceasefire would be signed within a week. None of the rightists really trusted Pheng but no one else said anything. There were no arguments, no screams. After a few more drinks and some chit-chat, the Lao and the Americans left. That dinner meeting was really probably the single most important thing in the whole negotiation, in the whole outcome of Laos. We had said that Vietnam was over and we weren't going to do anything more for Laos. It is kind of strange that in the end we came out with a better position on Laos, that is, we retained our Embassy there which we hadn't in Vietnam or of course in Cambodia.

Q: What was your reaction to this?

HOWLAND: Well, my reaction was undoubtedly a sense of relief that it was going to be over. But I had more important things to do because I had to get home, find a typewriter and type up those notes. Sullivan was leaving at 6:00 A.M. in the morning, and he wanted those notes to go with him. It was kind of pointless for me to send the notes off two or three days later. That wasn't the way Bill Sullivan operated.

So I went home, stayed up until 4:00 in the morning typing up these notes, trying to reconcile what was on my napkin and my yellow pieces of paper and my scribbles on my shirt-cuff and everything like that. To the extent that to this day, and I did not keep another copy of the notes. So the next morning I went by the residence, picked up Bill at about quarter to six and drove with him out to the airport. He was flying on an Air America Volpar down to Bangkok to brief the king of Thailand, and the Thai cabinet and military on the outcome in Laos and the Kissinger talks in Hanoi. So I gave him the notes which I typed up. I said, "I haven't had a chance to make a copy of these." He said, "Don't make any copies, just give them to me." So I said, "Yes sir, here they are." He said to me, "I am going to put these in my file to defend myself against the accusation that I lost Laos."

That is exactly what he said. It has never come up again as far as I know, but I know Bill. He has got those notes somewhere in his file just in case. So then he turned to Jim Rhyne, the legendary senior Air America pilot who always flew U.S. Ambassadors around in Laos when they flew on Air America. He had flown Bill from 1964 – 68. Jim had lost his leg when he was hit on a recon mission over the Chinese road in northern Laos in 1971. Holding a tourniquet around his leg, he flew all the way back to Vientiane and landed the

plane. He was taken off to a hospital and his leg was immediately amputated. But he was still flying; they had fixed up a plane so that he could still fly with a prosthesis. He went on in the aviation business until 2012, when I believe he passed away in North Carolina.

But I remember Sullivan turning to Jim Rhyne saying, "Have you got the football?" The football was an Air America bag with an ice chest of "sustenance" in it that Bill always traveled with. So Jim said, "Yes Mr. Ambassador." Then Bill turned to me and said, "I am going to need a couple of those so I won't fall asleep with the King of Thailand, who always puts me to sleep." Bill shook hands, got in the plane and went to Thailand. It was the last time I ever saw him.

Q: Did you return the pen?

HOWLAND: To Charlie Mann? I'm sure I did. In any case, within one week, the agreement was signed, and on the next day February 22, 1973, the ceasefire – in – place was to begin. It was a Friday. The day before we were called by Pheng and told it was going to be signed. At the time of the cease fire, all the U.S. bombing of Laos would stop, and we agreed to that. We stopped bombing Laos on that day. On the same day, the North Vietnamese recaptured Pak Song on the Bolovens Plateau, and the threat of CIA guerrillas harassing the Ho Chi Minh trail was over. Hanoi got everything it wanted out of the Laos war and we managed to keep our Embassy. That was it.

The Aftermath – the Protocol Implementing the Agreement

In the Embassy my first task was a cable describing and analyzing the agreement, and predicting what came next. It came to 37 pages single- spaced, summing up all the provisions of the agreement and its implications for the United States. I worked all weekend on it, Saturday and Sunday. Dean signed off on it because Ambassador Godley was busy packing. I'm not sure he ever read it, and he left soon thereafter. So did the station chief and many others.

I should say that in my opinion the right-wing Lao were right. Both we and they could have gotten a better agreement in the end game, that is to say the negotiations between the Pathet Lao and the Souvanna Phouma government that led to the Vientiane agreement of February 22, 1973. If the pressure from the White House hadn't been so great to get an agreement a month after the agreement in Vietnam, and to set up for an agreement in Cambodia -- which in turn was part of the whole Watergate crisis back home -- If we had gone another week or two, if we had the bombing in Laos a little bit longer, I think something could have been worked out on looking for MIAs. I think we could have worked through the ICC to inspect or to look for crash sites, MIA's and things like that in 1972 rather than 15 or 18 years later when actually, it started to be done. We just threw in the towel to get the best agreement we could. It was a disaster but at least we never had to flee as we did in Vietnam. I couldn't put that in my cable, of course – Dean would have scrubbed it.

Meanwhile there were a couple of incidents after the date of the cease fire, but nothing serious. Everyone was flabbergasted at how well the discipline was on both sides since some heavy fighting was still going on in Vietnam. There were a few shootings here and there, but the whole thing calmed down quickly. In the end I think the issue of where the cease fire line was totally finessed. We had drawn lots of maps for the RLG but I don't remember anyone agreeing on it. Gradually the shooting stopped and road-blocks were set up along roads and trails where the two sides operated. The Vietnamese and Pathet Lao controlled everything but the populated areas of the Mekong Valley, Long Tieng and a few pockets in the Meo areas of northern Laos, and the northwest areas demarcated by the Chinese road. More about the Chinese role in this later.

Barely was the ink dry, and the ceasefire relatively effective, before the Pathet Lao started demanding a new agreement, one to spell out the details of the process whereby they were to be integrated in the new coalition government, and how their troops were to assume joint responsibility with the RLG forces for security and order in the royal and administrative capitals – Luang Prabang and Vientiane. This was called the “Protocol to Implement the Agreement,” and as usual the Pathet Lao had a draft all ready, and the non-communist side had nothing.

As I mentioned Godley had left in March, 1973. John Gunther Dean was now Charge, awaiting nomination of a new Ambassador, Charles S. Whitehouse then serving as Deputy Ambassador in South Vietnam. The POWs, including nine prisoners from Laos, were exchanged in Hanoi in March, but the negotiations on the new Laos agreement did not stop although without US air support, the RLG had virtually no bargaining position left. The most important issues to be negotiated during this period was how the Pathet Lao would come to the capitals, how the Pathet Lao leaders would assume their participation in the restored coalition government provided for and slightly modified in the new Laos agreement. The Pathet Lao called the new agreement an “implementing protocol” and so did we. As details always are, it was tougher to negotiate the Protocol than the overall February 1973 agreement which had deliberately been left very vague. So that the talks on the modalities of the Pathet Lao coming in, the weapons they would bring to them, the timing of arrivals of different government officials, military units, etc., coming in became just the absolute obsession of Dean and all of us.

For instance, the Pathet Lao negotiators were still at the time in Vientiane, and of course they could not agree to anything that would infringe on the security of the party leadership back in Sam Neua... When the real leader of the Pathet Lao, Kaysone Phomvihane, --- who just passed away a short time ago -- and of course Prince Souphanouvong, Souvanna Phouma's brother, came to Vientiane, their security had to be iron clad. That was the Pathet Lao position. Therefore, they demanded that 10 to 15 Pathet Lao battalions had to be in Vientiane before these leaders would be secure enough to come back, and they had to have barracks and rights and their own positions in addition to the and joint patrols. They had to do joint patrols with the so-called Vientiane government forces. There would be curfews, checkpoints --- all this stuff had to be negotiated with, of course, a recalcitrant rightist military trying to preserve the last vestiges of their patronage and

power. .

Phasing Down the Mission

Apart from the new talks, the most important next step for the Embassy was to implement Dean's earlier effort to re configure the mission to meet the new situation. There were still lots of things to do. However, as I mentioned earlier, we had received this cable, State 60,000, which told us under no circumstances to degrade our military capability until Kissinger said so. Since we had just seen Kissinger and the war was over, we tried to send him a message suggesting it was time to rescind that message. We never got an answer on that.

The military and the CIA were very loathe to begin phasing out the Lao irregular forces, the so-called "secret army." They were afraid all the Meo would just pack up and flee to Vientiane. The whole question of what we were going to do with all these Meo, whom we had supported since 1954 after the French left, was up in the air. In the end, we had to leave them behind, we abandoned them and they became refugees to Thailand. It was a very tragic and sad thing, but there was no way to bring them out through what was now NVA-controlled territory. Plus many of them wanted to stay and fight.

Whatever the case, the working group on reconfiguring the mission -- we who had formulated DCM Dean's so-called "18 questions" -- didn't focus on what to do about the Meo. Instead we focused on things like how many people would there be in the military attaché's office. The Laos agreements had specified there would be no military personnel in Laos whatsoever. There was no provision in there -- although we tried to get Pheng Phongsavanh to put one in -- for a defense attaché office with a limit of 30 military and civilian personnel. We had proposed that in a paper to Pheng, which he probably never read. Although unspecified, we took that proposal as a working hypothesis and tried to shrink our military contingent to fit it.

The relatively easy part was moving out the hundreds of CIA employees tucked away under USAID, advisors in the RLG, case officers who had been leading troops in the field tucked away under the political section and also under AID, dozens of air support people, the contract airlines Air America and Continental Airlines. All that had to be phased out. The station chief had left to take charge in Thailand, and a new CIA officer was brought in to phase down the station. It was no an enviable job and had to be handled in a word, brutally, but in the end it went very well. Nobody wanted to go, but events drove them out as the Pathet Lao increasingly took over, and the process was handled very well. They were a disciplined bunch.

The military was a lot more difficult because the military as you know, is always squabbling over roles and missions, i.e. positions for the different services or, as they called them, billets. The issue was which service was going to get which billet of the 30 positions we planned for the defense attaché office. In the end after the full Pathet Lao take-over there wouldn't be any positions in the defense attaché office, but for to squeeze

hundreds of jobs down into those hypothetical 30 positions – number which had been negotiated with Washington, not the Pathet Lao. Some of these jobs were held by civilians who had been in the country for years. The military officers weren't really bleating about going; it was the civilians, the GS-12s the GS-9s, the GS-11s, the civilians who had been doing various types of classified support, such as “Psywar.”

Q: Psy war means...

HOWLAND: Psychological warfare, mainly dropping leaflets. Our Psywar GS-13 had strewn more toilet paper over the NVA units. Laos and Vietnam would never need toilet paper again. We must have dropped a trillion leaflets in Laos. Virtually every day the bombing officer cleared another Psywar flight dropping hundreds of millions of these damn things all over the place. The Vietnamese must have loved it. I don't recall any time in Laos during the war period when more than two or three defectors ever came in bringing a leaflet. They were always some Pathet Lao defectors, especially during the dry season in south Laos because there was no food out in the hills and jungles, so they would come in and get the food in RLG camps. Then they would redefect during the rainy seasons because they would have to go out and work on the farms in their controlled areas. That happened in the south a lot.

But this guy had spread leaflets. Well, he didn't want to give up his job. He had been there 12 years or whatever, and he didn't want to give up his job as the psywar guy in Laos. That one issue, what are we going to do with that one psywar guy, whether he would be kept on or not became the central obsessive issue of ending the war in Laos. It finally had to go into the “tank,” where the joint chiefs get together and argue out the really important issues, among which were . . . roles and missions, i.e. billets.

Q: This is in the Pentagon.

HOWLAND: The Pentagon, yes, that's where it was settled. We were unable to resolve that in the Embassy. Finally John Dean set up a “murder board” type of operation where he got the Ambassador to agree that he would make the decisions on who would go and who would stay. He called in every AID person. This was very typical Dean, operating sort of like a European court judge. Each supervisor in USAID had to come in and explain to him, John Dean, exactly what his personnel were doing there. Charlie Mann fought on every position and dragged his heels successfully. But in the end our meetings and arguments didn't matter after the Protocol was negotiated and the Pathet Lao and their troops arrived in Luang Prabang and Vientiane in the fall of 1973. Then it was just a question of time before virtually everyone would have to leave.

But before then, the Embassy had the problem of phasing out our mission guard force. We had a 650-person armed mission guard force, most of them retired or retreated wounded Meo guerrillas and Lao soldiers. After being wounded often those who survived would apply for and receive a position on the Mission Guard Force. They were armed and wore uniforms; they had their vehicles. They were very well trained, very effective. It was

quite the best mission guard force I have ever seen. Of course we had to get rid of them. Under the agreement no Embassy could maintain a “private militia” and here was a visible U.S. Embassy military troop. The Pathet Lao kept raising the issue at the protocol talks. We in turn feared that when the Pathet Lao troops came to the government, came back into the city, there would be some incident with a mission guard. Then the fat would be in the fire.

Now at this time the Department had ordered all other missions worldwide to privatize their mission guard forces by letting contracts to private companies who would then run them. We suggested that if our guard force were run by a private company, they would not then be military forces in Laos. We wanted it to be a change in name only but of course, the Pathet Lao wouldn't agree to that, so Pheng Phongsavanh stated that the guards would not carry weapons anymore. This was not opposed by the Pathet Lao so we presumed it would carry.

So now here you had a situation with the heavily-armed Pathet Lao coming in, and the Embassy would have a guard force with billy clubs. There was one Pathet Lao facility, as it turned out, right next to the Embassy. Nothing we could do about it. But the mission guards were very happy they would still have work with this program and agreed to privatization. We chose the lowest bid American company; I think it was Brown and Root from Vietnam, one of the private companies that handled the logistic support for the Vietnam war. I can't remember who took it up. Of course the new manager had to make money despite his low bid, so the first thing he wanted to do was get rid of half the guards and lower the salaries of the rest That was unfolding at the same time as the new negotiation. I give all this history for a purpose, as you will soon see.

Q: Something here, you are talking about an end to the Laotian war. It seems like the United States was playing the predominant role in this thing. I mean where was the Laotian government?

HOWLAND: Yes, well, the Laotian government was a creature of our own concoction. We basically did everything in the parts of Laos not controlled by the Communist side -- actually that is a good thing to talk about. As we were looking into what had to be done in reconfiguring the mission, we found that the U.S. government had totally taken over virtually all functions of the Lao government in those parts of Laos that we still controlled. For example, in military region 2 which was up in the north where the Meo were fighting, not a dollar, not a “kip” of Lao government money had been spent there in 20 years. Everything was financed by the U.S. government. We paid the salaries of the police forces, of the local government officials, of the schoolteachers because we guaranteed the Meo kids an education. We delivered the rice. We did everything. Along with Vang Pao we functioned as the government in MR-2. In many of the other areas the U.S. Government role was less prominent and in some nothing was done even though it was nominally under RLG control. I mean it had been reduced to utter subsistence. But basically the Lao government had broken down to a collection feuding factional rivals within the capital, each faction's based on one of the great Lao clans.

Under the French Laos had originally been a feudal state, each element of the state ruled by a clan, the Abhays from Khong, the Sananikones, the Insisiengmais, the Na Champassaks, etc. This was less true in the north where the royal family still held some sway, represented in the RLG by Souvanna Phouma of course. Face-to-face they all got along with ritual Lao politesse, but under the surface the little duck feet were always moving. That is why at the Sullivan dinner party we didn't have a representative sample of the government, we had the leaders of the clans sitting at that table. In addition, the Americans over the years who went to Laos were great empire builders. It was very easy because the Laos would say my, my, you want to do that? Go right ahead. And we would move in and do it unless it endangered some of the venal stuff they had going on. As we started to figure out ways to get the United States out of these functions in Laos, it was of course impossible to get the Lao government in. It had had scholarships and trained people; it had aid and all this stuff, but it did not function as a government. We were non-plussed, for example, to find that when we stopped the money being paid to Vang Pao in MR-2, the Meo areas, we had "the revolt of the schoolteachers" -- from all over northern Laos they almost marched on the Embassy to try to regain their salaries, which we had unknowingly been paying to educate the Meo children.

The Aborted Coup of August, 1973

As negotiations went on with the Pathet Lao about bringing their forces in, I went on home leave in the summer of 1973. Dean wanted me to go then because he would be leaving in the fall when the new Ambassador, Charles Whitehouse, was scheduled to arrive. I was to be the continuity guy. But while I was on home leave in August -- it was August 23, 1973 -- a renegade Lao pilot named Thao Ma, who had been exiled to Thailand, flew in and tried to recruit other military for a coup, and started bombing various installations. He was connected with General Phoumi Nosavan, the former ruler of Laos who had been ousted by the neutralists under in '62. The effort was intended to block the whole process, the implementation of the agreement in Laos which the Thai were against of course. The Thai were never happy with that.

I was away, and the political section was headed by a very capable officer named Jerry Hoganson, serving as acting DCM at the time. Since I wasn't there, I'll only mention the high points as Jerry briefed me on them. The first thing Dean did was to go to Souvanna's residence and wake up Souvanna, then take him in his own car to the Ambassador's residence which was unused at the time. Meanwhile, this renegade Lao pilot bombed Lao Army headquarters, then landed at the military side of the Vientiane airport, and easily persuaded a half dozen other pilots there to join him in trying to block the implementation of the Laos agreement. Dean then called three or four other embassies, the Brits, the French, the Thai, the Russian, the Soviet Embassy, to try to build diplomatic support for stopping this coup attempt. This attempt was far more serious than it sounded because the military and the right wing were not happy with all this stuff going on. If they would knock off Souvanna, and one faction in the military could dominate, there was a good chance that they would have this problem solved. Abrogate the agreement and back to the

good old days in Laos. In the end they thought the United States would be supportive.

Q: This is side one tape nine with Dick Howland.

HOWLAND: Dean then drove out to the ministry of defense. He got every Lao general and he sat them down in the conference room and he chewed them up one side and down the other. He told them the U.S. would not only not support a coup, he would stop all aid to Laos. The U.S. would break relations with any government that overthrew Souvanna. I mean Dean could see his world collapsing around his ears. Then he got the generals to say nothing. He told them you don't have to say anything against this, but you are not to say or do anything in support. They just sat there; they didn't say anything. But he knew, he felt he had them cowed by moving so quickly.

He then drove out to Wattay Airport. Thao Ma had landed again and had convinced some of the other pilots to start getting the ground crews to load ordnance onto the T-28's so they could go off and do some more bombing. He had already dropped a few bombs at the big military camp out at Chinaimo. It was just like classic Laos in the old days, when any junior officer could attempt a coup and sometimes get away with it. This one didn't. Dean warned him not to take off, that loyal forces were gathering at the end of the runway. Thao Ma took off, reached the end of the runway, was fired on and the T-28 crashed. It was the end of the coup. Those are my recollections from Jerry's briefing and the events have been covered in several books, including John Dean's memoirs. Dean, by the way, got a handwritten note from President Nixon for having put down the coup. Nixon later nominated him as Ambassador to Cambodia.

Implementation of the Protocol

After this abortive coup attempt was put down by John Dean, the right wing side knew its power to block what became known as the Laos protocol implementing the Laos agreement was non-existent. In mid-September, the Laos Protocol was signed. Ambassador Whitehouse arrived within a day or two of the signing of that protocol. I think he had been holding off his arrival until that protocol was signed because he didn't want to arrive, have to present credentials before then. Of course when Dean was military region 1 advisor in South Vietnam, Charlie Whitehouse, the new Ambassador, had been then advisor in MR-3. They had known each other for many years. So they were comfortable with each other. But of course every new Ambassador wants to bring in his own DCM, his own team, and wants to change things, wants to reorder the universe.

So he went about it in a very sophisticated but firm manner. He was quite a sophisticated but a firm man, strong, decent and very competent with remarkable experience in government. He was quite witty, socially talented, and likeable. He was one of these people who went into the CIA after getting out of Yale. As others went into the State Department, he went into the CIA. He had been station chief in Cambodia but his wife refused to stay there and Charlie left the agency and went to work for Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon, a family friend, in the United States. He later joined the Foreign Service,

and went out as DCM in Guinea, then rose very rapidly as one would expect. He is another guy you ought to get an interview because he is one of the great gentlemen, very funny guy, wonderful guy. I mean all the exquisite social graces, but beneath all that a real hard core good guy. I don't now if you ever met him.

Q: I have met him. We have a rather short interview. I would really like to get more.

HOWLAND: Oh, yes, he is down in Middleburg I believe (as of 2012, he had recently passed away). So Charlie came in and he had to establish his credibility. The first thing he did was stop the daily OPs meetings. Hurray, no more six days a week OPs meetings at 8:00 in the morning. Instead he was going to have a kind of staff meeting everybody sitting around his office, and he would decide who was going to that staff meeting, who wouldn't go to the staff meeting. All Ambassadors do this as you know. I was very unhappy because I had a feeling that I was going to be shunted out of the staff meeting, but John Dean as one of his last acts persuaded him to leave me in there. Basically Charlie wanted to rule through his AID director, his defense attaché, and his station chief and his DCM. That was the "excom" of his staff meeting, which many Ambassadors prefer. So much for me as the continuity factor. But I'm glad Dean managed to get me included in this elite group.

As we started to phase down the mission to meet the terms of the Protocol to the Laos Agreement, most important was cutting the military component to 30 positions as I mentioned. Although we didn't even know if we could get away with as many as 30 positions. At the same time the Pathet Lao were coming to town – and at the same time we had a mission guard crisis. More about that in a minute.

The Pathet Lao Troops Arrive in Vientiane . . .

Now, the Pathet Lao could not enter Vientiane or Luang Prabang on the ground, marching through areas held by Vang Pao and/or the rightist army. They'd get shot at. They had to fly in. They had no aircraft, of course, so the Russians agreed to bring them into Vientiane. They would come in first into Vientiane and then into Luang Prabang, the royal capital. Luang Prabang was up the Mekong River near that Chinese road I talked about earlier. So the Chinese announced they would bring them into Luang Prabang, sort of confirming my whole theory that the Chinese Road was meant to demarcate those areas they considered within their zone of influence. Chinese and Russian AN-12's, modeled after the C-130, and an assortment of other aircraft brought them into the two capitals.

We thought they were coming with light side-arms because the original contingent was supposed to be at the most 100, maybe 200. It was supposed to be 200 who would go on the joint patrols in Vientiane with the right-wing side. We hoped that, being Lao, slowly they would get to know each other and get along. Well, those were dreams, you know, totally nonsense and dreams. We went out to the airport to watch this going on, the troops arriving. And you could see, as they got off the plane, the general dread growing among

the Lao standing there, because they didn't seem to be Lao. They didn't look like Lao. They didn't act like Lao. They looked like hill tribes, like the Thai, the Nung, the people that the Vietnamese had trained as we had trained the Meo. Perhaps some of them were Vietnamese trained in Lao – who knew since they wouldn't talk to anybody.

They got off the planes and started unloading heavy weapons; they got into some vehicles they already had available and were taken to the barracks. Those guys came off those planes like storm-troopers wheeling machine guns and mortars and two-inch guns and three-inch guns and so forth. They were rolling out these funny-looking Soviet guns, with the metal-spoked wheels that looked like something from World War I, old Russian stuff. So a big issue became what was a heavy weapon. We were afraid they would have small tanks tucked away somewhere. They immediately started setting up weapons at their barracks. The rightists protested to Souvanna that the Pathet Lao had brought heavy weapons with them but it didn't do any good. So they ensconced themselves in Vientiane. And all through the streets, I'll never forget the people were standing out there looking at these guys, you know. There was just dread. There was total silence among the population. If a Lao army truck went by they would cheer; the Lao are a light-hearted people. But these guys were not Lao. To this day I will never believe they were Lao. And the population knew what was coming when they took over.

As it happened, Charlie Whitehouse had earlier decided that he would put windows in the Embassy, which at the time was basically a concrete bunker with foot-thick concrete walls. Each of us had a little cell and the Ambassador's was the largest, perhaps 20 by 15 feet or so, with a couch, a bathroom and solid walls. Anyway, Charlie decided he was going to knock out the top half of the wall facing the parking lot and put in a window. He said, "I can't work without a window." This was his first Ambassadorial post and it was pretty grim. Security was furious about this because everybody's security of course was affected. Moreover, as this was going on, we were trying to install this new privately – run mission guard force. There was lots of trouble because the new manager wanted to cut the salaries. But finally Charlie just said, "Look, when I come in here Monday morning, there is going to be a window in my office or else!" So in came GSO with jack hammers and blasted out the wall, put in a nice typical Southeast Asian glass window. Ambassador Whitehouse came in Monday morning and he had his window.

Of course the Pathet Lao had come to town over that weekend, and they had been given a facility right next to the U.S. Embassy with a flat roof overlooking our compound. So when Charlie came into his office and looked out his new window, he found that the Pathet Lao had set up a machine gun on top of that flat roof. If you looked out of his window that direction, you were looking about 20 feet into the muzzle of a Pathet Lao machine gun with three troopers sitting there, one of them holding the belts of ammunition in case they had to shoot into the American Embassy compound. I think we put in some Venetian blinds and security glass. I emphasize that Charlie and the mission took all this with good humor. He was a very likeable man and even when he was yelling at you about something absurd – I had misspelled "augur" on an important message, for instance -- it was not unpleasant, I liked him very much.

... And Guard the Embassy!

Two or three weeks later, a real mission security crisis arose. The joint patrols had started with the Pathet Lao/Royal Lao Army contingents circulating through the city. The city had been broken up into zones, and in our particular zone a Pathet Lao-led contingent had responsibility for responding to civil emergencies. Then the salary issue and the firings came to a head with our mission guards, and they went on strike. They staged protests and started picketing the U.S. Embassy, picketing in our courtyard and the other mission locations, such as the USAID compound. There was a fracas and somebody called the local police. We were afraid the mission guards would break into the Embassy . . . and somebody called the local police. So to make a long story short, we wound up with a Pathet Lao guard standing in my office, another one in the hallway, and another one down at the Ambassador/DCM's corridor, guarding our Embassy and its classified files against rampaging ex-U.S. mission guards. The Marines, bless their souls, did not start a fire-fight in the halls of the Embassy, and the Pathet Lao did not deploy upstairs into the sensitive areas of the mission. But how their leaders must have laughed!

Q: Good God!

HOWLAND: That went on for several days. No one could do any work of course. Finally we got them out of there. In the end the salaries were maintained, the mission guards resumed work and everything went back to business as usual. Even the machine gun was removed. Then Dean left, and an old Lao hand named Chris Chapman replaced him.

Q: I know Chris, yes.

HOWLAND: Chris Chapman, who had resigned as Lao desk officer when Souvanna was overthrown in 1960, came back. Charlie had brought him back because of his previous experience with neutralism, to be the DCM. I got along very well with Chris. But I think he was wrong on a lot of things, be that as it may.

Q: Today is 19 August 1999. Dick, you know where we are?

HOWLAND: Yes I do, thank you. We are starting with the changes that occurred in the mission after the signing of the Laos Agreement in February, and then the signing of the Protocol. I think I mentioned the abortive coup attempt of August 1973. In the fall two things happened. One, there was a tremendous turnover in the U.S. mission. Godley had left much earlier and John Gunther Dean the DCM had been Charge for about five or six months. In late September or October I believe around then, Charlie Whitehouse the new Ambassador arrived. Then too, Jack Vessey who had been in charge of all military aid as DEPCHIEFJUSMAAGTHAI was replaced by Dick Trefry. Now Trefry was a very different person than Vessey. Vessey was an enormously competent and very brilliant guy but a field soldier at heart. He flew his own helicopter. Vessey, for instance, invented a simple device whereby the Meo gunners in the mountains could determine the firing

location of NVA incoming, and help launch effective counter-battery fire. Vang Pao loved him. He was a field soldier.

Q: Came up from the ranks I think.

HOWLAND: Vessey had come up from the ranks. I believe he had an Anzio battlefield commission and had served in every rank including private E-1 in the army.

Trefry was a West Pointer and an artillery officer. Vessey had been an infantryman, paratrooper, helicopter pilot. Trefry had a wonderful picture of a battlefield totally destroyed, and there is a guy standing next to a cannon who says, "Artillery lends elegance to an otherwise untidy war." He kind of had this kind of blend of elegance and toughness, a delightful guy to work with. He was a very interesting guy and a very good bureaucratic warrior. One of the things about Laos was even though we made a lot of mistakes there, very good people were assigned there at crucial times.

Trefry was an entirely different person, but we were fortunate to have him during a difficult bureaucratic time, when the whole military structure had to be cut back and reorganized. He was a genius at that. The third new officer who arrived was the new station chief – also chosen because of his bureaucratic skills and rather ruthless nature. All of them had the same job, to cut away everything relevant to war fighting, and get the U.S. mission sized down to a small post in a small country that really didn't matter to anybody very much anymore. So that was the job, but of course there was a lot of kicking and screaming by those who were to be downsized. Chris kind of floated above all that, but Whitehouse, Trefry and the new station chief did it very well.

The new station chief and Whitehouse did have some terrible battles over a few things. The former felt that Whitehouse was not standing up enough for U.S. interests in the area. Whitehouse got so furious at him during one meeting that the station chief walked out – a first for the Ops meeting -- but later apologized. As it happened, Charlie later asked for him as station chief in his next assignment as Ambassador to Thailand – also a place where lots of cuts were needed with the wind-down of the Laos war.! But that was the kind of atmosphere, everyone fighting against getting their position cut, but still getting along afterwards.

Now at the same time Chris Chapman arrived, Charlie Mann was still there. Mann was still there making mistakes right to the end. Did we actually think the Pathet Lao would accept a USAID program? But Chris did not push him hard into cutting people extensively. So as a result when the crunch came, there were too many people to evacuate efficiently. Some USAID families were forced to flee, basically, with scarcely more than the clothes on their backs. Many lost all their household effects. My guess was that Chapman's previous service on the desk – he had resigned over the Phoumi Nosavan coup of 1960 -- and his favoritism toward neutralism in the late '50s and early '60s affected his current view of Laos. He tended to support Souvanna's view that something could be arranged with the Pathet Lao, that the Pathet Lao could be weaned away from

the North Vietnamese, that Souvanna could influence his brother, Souphanouvong, and that their branch of the royal family would regain their suzerainty over Laos. Perhaps he shared Souvanna's forlorn hope that with the Vietnam War over, the Americans would go away eventually the Vietnamese would turn to unifying with the South, and Laos would be at peace.

No one seemed to understand how important Laos still was in the struggle for South Vietnam, and the Vietnamese need for hegemony in Indochina. Of course Chris knew the long history of Vietnamese wars and conquests in Indochina. Centuries earlier the Hanoi rulers had conquered the indigenous peoples of the peninsula, the Chams, Cambodians and Lao, and thrown off the Chinese yoke in the 10th century. Then they butted up against the Thai, a powerful state in those years, and a vague *modus vivendi* evolved whereby fighting between them always took place in Cambodia or Laos, never their homelands. And then the French took Indo China taken away from them, and the Americans kept it away for a while, but now they were going to get all of it back. They were going to get it back not only for the Vietnamese nationalist reasons but to advance Vietnamese communism, what their ideology maintained was the inevitable triumph for socialism. Moreover, they had always considered the Lao and the Cambodian to be inferior peoples, and still see the purpose of Laos and Cambodia being to separate them from the Thai so that there would be no danger to them from the Thai.

I think Chris never accepted that. I mean Whitehouse saw that; we all saw it, but Chris still felt that there was something that could be done. So that after awhile -- we all liked him by the way -- but after a while, Chris did not assume the strong, forceful role that John Gunther Dean had played in the mission. He never really mixed it up on the issues. Mann emerged as the sort of a dominant figure, just as he had been when I was in Cambodia '61-'63 when he was AID director there. He wanted to hang on to everything in AID as long as possible, and Chris couldn't fight him on that.

I remember once they had a long meeting on the AID mission, a rare Saturday morning meeting. Whitehouse called the meeting on short notice, but that Saturday morning Chris was out riding. They had some stables somewhere and he liked to ride. But we got the message out to him somehow that the Ambassador wanted to meet at 11:00, and Chris came right in from the stables, from his horse. He wore a riding habit, a kind of white silk shirt, jodhpurs and riding boots, carrying a riding crop and a little helmet. So he walked into the meeting in that outfit Saturday morning, where we were all sitting around arguing dressed in sport shirts and blue jeans and whatever. Whitehouse looked up and said: "Ah, Prince Rupert of Transylvania, I believe." His exact words; I have never forgotten that. Everyone laughed and it was kind of funny. Chris didn't laugh. It was not a very nice thing to do to your DCM.

Prince Souphanouvong Arrives in Vientiane

Finally sometime in the fall of 1973, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese determined that the security was sufficient for Prince Souphanouvong, the nominal head of the Pathet

Lao and Souvanna Phouma's brother, to come to Vientiane to assume the position that had been prescribed for him in the Laos agreement, as President of the Council for National Reconciliation, Peace, and so forth --- the usual communist jargon. But by this time not enough buildings and facilities had been taken over and readied for Pathet Lao senior officials. So for the time being, it was decided that Souphanouvong at the outset would stay in Soth Phetrasy's house right next to the morning market. Soth had left Vientiane soon after the Pathet Lao troops arrived, never to be heard from again.

Then Souvanna, to impress his brother, decided to have a crash project carried out in Vientiane to string the power lines from the Nam Ngum Dam farther north right through the middle of the city. That project was designed by USAID as part of the multi-national Mekong Project, and was intended to generate foreign exchange by supplying power to north-east Thailand. The power lines were originally going to run 30 miles west of the city but Souvanna changed all that. He wanted those power lines to run right through the middle of Vientiane, so the Pathet Lao leaders couldn't arrive and claim that he had done nothing to develop Laos. So the engineers redid the plans and started erecting big ugly metal pylons to carry the heavy duty wires through the city.

In the course of this construction, they cut down all the beautiful old flame trees in Vientiane, which the French called "les flamboyants". These were hundreds of trees that the French had planted in the late 19th century, some of which now were eight feet thick and grew everywhere, especially the banks of the Mekong where the old French colonial buildings still nestled. They bloomed in the hot season, just before the rains started, and had helped give the city the last of its fast-fading charm. But now all those trees were cut down and replaced with great concrete and steel pylons with looping black wires. Souvanna wanted one skein of wires to be looped right over the top of the morning market so Souphanouvong could see it from his intended house (actually he never stayed there). Of course, the Nam Ngum dam power wasn't going to flow for another three or four years. They still had to put in the generators and turbines. But never mind, it looked like was development.

Souphanouvong flew into Wattay Airport in a Soviet AN-12 in early 1974. We had had lots of discussions in the Embassy about who should go out. The diplomatic corps would be there; Whitehouse did not want to go out and didn't feel the DCM should go out either. So I was sent out to sort of stand in the crowd, rather than as a representative there. People would see the American Embassy had somebody there, but not standing with the Russian, Chinese and Vietnamese Ambassadors. That would have been pretty unseemly.

As soon as the news of Souphanouvong's arrival in Vientiane had been announced, of course, the "glam" value was great. The world press had forgotten about Laos, of course but now at last the "red prince" and the "white prince," the two brothers, were going to meet for the first time since 1962 before the previous Laos agreement fell apart. Souphanouvong had fled the next year in fear for his safety. It had been more than ten years since they had spoken together. So every reporter for 1000 miles around, every cameraman, every photographer for 1000 miles around flooded into the city.

The diplomats were all lined up, Souvanna and the government lined up, there was a red carpet. The plane pulled up. Souvanna walked out on the red carpet as the door was opening and suddenly at least 100 newsmen and photographers broke from where they had been, hurtled pell-mell through the diplomats, breaking their way through to surround Souvanna as he moved forward. One of them almost pushed him down, each one desperate to get the picture of Souvanna embracing his brother for the first time in 10 years. It was a big event in Southeast Asia but this was appalling. One newsman practically climbed up his back -- and Souvanna a man of 72 or 73 years old and very dignified. This was absolutely unbelievable. Lao Government troops rushed out there; they were trying to keep these guys back. They couldn't shoot anybody, of course. If one shot rang out, with all the Pathet Lao guards around, God knows what would have happened.

Souvanna walked up to his brother, hoping to give him an embrace but Souphanouvong just stood there very stiffly, very formally in a light grey suit, a white shirt, a kind of pale grey tie with a little pearl stickpin in it. Souphanouvong still looked very young, his hair was very slicked back, he had a little mustache. He looked like a clothing salesman, the kind that might throw in a tie if you bought the suit he was selling. Souvanna walked up and they shook hands -- no embrace, not even a Lao "Wai". Meanwhile this crowd of newsmen and photographers were still rampaging all over. Souvanna managed to get his brother back into the VIP room in the airport but they couldn't talk there. It was glassed in and Wattay was a crummy airport as you can imagine. I was on the other side of the glass watching everything from the passenger waiting room, not being an official representative. All the ministers were in there, of course the Pathet Lao negotiators, who had been in the city for over a year by that time, and the diplomats, they were all in there. Souvanna was talking to his brother, and the usual little tea and cookies, which no one ever touched, were placed on tables. This lasted for maybe five minutes at most.

Then, with all the hubbub going on -- I am not totally clear on whether Souphanouvong then went to rest somewhere first, and then went to see Souvanna, or whether they went right out together to Souvanna's residence in the late afternoon for a talk and a dinner. That was the last we really saw of Souphanouvong, the last I remember seeing him. He disappeared into the Pathet Lao contingent, not to re-emerge until long after I had left. There was no inaugural meeting of his "Council", no reception for the Diplomatic Corps, nothing.

Of course Souvanna had never been close to his younger brother -- he had always been a Francophile and his younger brother had fought the French, and then become a communist starting in 1940s. It was no surprise to learn from Souvanna in the next few days that he was terribly crushed to find that his brother was just a wooden figure as well as a figurehead. Souvanna told me that: "It was like trying to have a conversation with a Pathet Lao radio broadcast." In reply to everything Souvanna said, Souphanouvong would just spout whatever the Pathet Lao propaganda was at the time. Since they met, surrounded by other Pathet Lao figures, Souvanna tried to get his brother away for a

private chat in a side room on a pretext, but it wasn't any better. Souphanouvong had arrived as the figurehead and pretext for the takeover of Laos by communism. It was as simple as that. Souvanna was very crushed, very depressed, very disappointed after that. You could see quite a change in him after this had happened.

Souvanna's Heart Attack

For awhile we thought that Souvanna may have still tried to step back to give his brother the limelight, in terms of the succession scenario he had apparently envisaged, but Souphanouvong stayed in seclusion. But it seemed he was ill. Within a few months, the Prime Minister suffered had a heart attack or stroke – unclear what exactly it was. Now we were still there, the United States. We were phasing out the big mission, but there had been no talk by the Pathet Lao of breaking relations with the U.S. It was accepted that the U.S. Embassy would remain whatever the outcome in Vietnam. Perhaps this reflected just a little Pathet Lao independence from the Vietnamese? Who knows? I am sure the Pathet Lao felt that the U.S. should provide “reparations” as they would have called it. Of course we weren't allowed outside of the city anymore to administer aid, but I am sure they wanted U.S. aid dollars. I went over to the foreign ministry, which had been taken over by the Pathet Lao, several times with demarches. It was a waste of time of course.

Anyway, Souvanna had his heart attack. We and his Lao doctors, and of course the right wing ministers in the government, were frightened to death that if Souvanna died, Souphanouvong would become Prime Minister and they would have to flee before they had fully disposed of their assets. For example, the Sananikones hadn't sold their bowling alley or nightclubs and gambling joints. So the RLG asked us to bring in medical support and perhaps even take Souvanna to America for treatment.

Well, from an army medical facility at Clark Air Base, in the Philippines, we brought in an airborne medical team in a Boeing 727. It was stationed there in case some general had a heart attack, I suppose. It was a 30 – person team and in addition the ranking cardiologist in the U.S. Army flew into Vientiane with it. The idea was to take Souvanna to the airplane and treat him there, then to Clark or the US. But Souvanna didn't want to go to the airplane. He was afraid it would impugn his neutrality and provoke a Pathet Lao coup. He wanted to be treated at his house, his residence. With the arrival of our team, of course, the Russians and Chinese brought in teams. The French brought in some doctors from Tahiti and maybe the Japanese sent in some. We stationed Dick Rand, the consular officer, who was in charge of visiting Americans, on the front porch to monitor things. Other Embassies had their people there too. Sometimes I went and sat on Souvanna's front porch, so I could find out what his condition was that day and what they were doing with him. In the end about 16 doctors were treating Souvanna Phouma's relatively mild heart attack. At his age I suppose you never know what complications would set in.

Souvanna was in a back room. The way it worked was that the doctors each examined him every day, one by one, and then at 5:00 pm they all gathered around a big table in his living room with interpreters. In the middle of the table was a Merck manual, a big thick

manual that Merck put out giving the names of diseases and medicines in various languages and things like that. They all discussed and came up with a consensus diagnosis and treatment for the day. Well, Souvanna despite years of smoking cigars and drinking brandy, standing on his feet at parties, and playing bridge until the wee hours, with no exercise at all, had a magnificent constitution. Despite these factors and the disputes of the doctors, he not only managed to survive, in a few weeks he was thriving again. But this further changed him and it was clear the whole thing was very clearly winding down. Souvanna went off to Paris for further treatment and a rest. I sincerely hoped he would never come back, and would live out his life in comfort and safety. But he eventually returned, after I had left, and died in Luang Prabang in 1980.

New Assignment Time

With the political situation calming down, I was looking forward to doing a little traveling in places I had never been, but of course the Pathet Lao would never let you travel in the back country. But you sort of had hopes that you would have a normal settled existence for a while. My wife and I visited Chiang Mai in Thailand, and went to the beach at Pattaya with the children and our beloved Lao maid, Mai. We had wanted to take her with us when we left, since having worked for Americans, she had no future in the new Laos. But soon afterwards Mai fell in love and got married, so we could not. (Years later she swam the Mekong and escaped - she is now in Orlando).

For my part, my three years were almost up, more than three years. I had been there since March of '71. We were now getting to March-April of '74. I didn't have an assignment and had just been promoted to (old style) FSO-3. The whole bidding thing was just so very new in the early '70s, and I'd always been asked for by people, so I never put in any bids. That was really dumb . . . So luckily, or maybe unluckily, the personnel officer for the East Asia Bureau in Personnel, Bob Flanagan, showed up on a swing through the area. I think you must know Bob.

Q: No.

HOWLAND: I believe there are some oral history interviews on his tours in Indonesia in the '50s. So Flanagan showed up and we were talking about assignments. He said, "I have got just the place for you. You speak great Indonesian; it is a good job – Principal Officer in the Consulate in Surabaya, Indonesia." I demurred and said I had just talked to Marshall Bremont, who was going to Moscow as Political Counselor, about a position there. Flanagan said nothing further but two weeks later I get orders for Surabaya. I hadn't asked for it, I was against it, but this was the old days you know. You saluted and marched, or so I thought. But anyway, in July we went off to visit friends in Malaysia en route to...

Q: July of '74.

HOWLAND: In July of '74 we packed all our stuff. As it turned out we barely got out of

Laos in time. Ambassador Whitehouse wasn't there very long before being reassigned as Ambassador to Bangkok. And even though he and the station chief went at it tooth and nail in Laos, he took him along as his station chief in Thailand. I had left in July just as the whole thing began to fall apart, as the Pathet Lao then took over the whole country, started killing the Meo, and the rightists fled. Chris was left as Chargé with Charlie Mann still there. So the AID people were told to stay on, were told they couldn't pack their household goods because Charlie Mann didn't want to phase down the AID mission. Then suddenly there were Pathet Lao soldiers moving into their houses, roughing them up. Two dear friends from earlier days in Indonesia, Bob and Maya Dakan, barely escaped with their lives (we were stationed together in Indonesia again in 1983-87). People had to flee across the Mekong in boats. Chris Chapman never really, in my opinion, was able to cope either with reconfiguring the mission or fending off the Pathet Lao. Probably no one really could have – it happened too fast. There was a tendency to hope for the best. So that is what happened in the U.S. mission and that is the end of my story. I really shouldn't comment on what happened after I left.

If it were fiction, no one could believe this funny little place that had had such an incredible checkered history, where the Americans were so embedded. Barbara Tuchman wrote in conclusion to "Stillwell and the American Experience in China" that "In the end China went its own way as if the Americans had never come." It was the same with Laos; we left, and afterwards everything collapsed. There were a lot of residual problems left, the Meo and so forth, but within a year I guess, after the takeover, even though we still had an Embassy there, it was as if the Americans had never come. Next time we will talk about Surabaya. As it turned out, although we dreaded going, we had two delightful years there, founded the American School and had lots of adventures. For example, I was one of only two accredited Consuls in 100 years to visit Portuguese Timor (the other was Jack Lydman in 1958). A year later, the Indonesians invaded and seized it with US military aid ships and equipment. More about that next time.

Part IV Surabaya, Army War College

SURABAYA, INDONESIA – 1974-76

Q: Well, you were saying that Surabaya was in your regard somewhat of a parenthesis in your career. Could you talk about when you arrived, your impression of Ambassador Newsom and then about the difference in the political situation by the time you got there as compared to how it had been before? You were there from 1974...

HOWLAND: To 1976. Yes, Surabaya was a parenthesis but a pleasant one, and we were quite happy to leave Laos in July of 1974, a year before the Pathet Lao take-over. We left on direct transfer since we had already been on home leave in 1973, so we had to proceed directly from Vientiane to Surabaya. I had hurt my back doing something, I think jogging, trying to get in better shape. After three years of war and peace negotiations, I was just a wreck. I must have weighed 215 pounds (now I'm 180). I hadn't had any exercise in years. I had been working 12 hours a day, including diplomatic events almost every night.

The houseboys had just been pouring the drinks into me, as they do to work the bottles down so they can steal the rest.

My wife was not totally happy about this transfer, i.e. going back to Indonesia so soon – neither was I -- but being a good Foreign Service partner, she soldiered on in her wonderful way. We did stop en route in Kuala Lumpur and spent the night with Al and Ann La Porta, Political Counselor there at the time (he is now Ambassador to Mongolia as we speak). We had been stationed together in '64-'68 in Indonesia. Then we went on to an east coast beach in Malaysia for a few days, staying at the Merlin Hotel right on the beach in Kuantan, an interesting traditional Malay town. But I couldn't swim or snorkel because my back was killing me. My wife scraped her knee on some coral and the cut got infected. My son too had some health problems, so the stopover wasn't a big success.

Meeting the Ambassador

We arrived at Jakarta late on a day in July, 1974 and because we were going right out the next day to Surabaya, we were put up for the night at the DCM's house. Don Toussaint was the DCM, a Sri Lanka expert, later appointed Ambassador to Colombo. He was a very affable and decent man who has now passed away, I believe.

We would have been happy just to collapse in bed, but Ambassador Newsom had invited the entire family over to the residence for dinner, which in theory was a very nice thing for him to do. But we were all exhausted from the trip and sick with various ailments. My family consisted at that time, in 1974, of my son nine years old, my middle daughter who was five, and youngest daughter who was just two and still in diapers. They were justifiably cranky after two days of traveling, as one would imagine. We tried to beg off, but in typical Foreign Service style Ambassador Newsom had insisted everybody had to come to the Residence. Also we couldn't get a nanny – a “*babu anak*” in Indonesian -- in such a short time.

So we got to the dinner there at about eight pm. Ambassador Newsom talked about his recent arrival in Indonesia and his philosophy of dealing with the Indonesians. We dutifully sat there and listened to this. I wondered what my kids were thinking. He pointed out that he was a Middle Eastern expert. I think he had been Ambassador to Libya during the overthrow of King Idris and just before the onset of Qadhafi. He said he was surprised that more Indonesians didn't speak good Arabic, that he had tried to speak Arabic to Mohammad Roem, the venerated former head of the long-expired Mashumi Party who was jailed by Sukarno in the 1960's. Newsom said Roem seemed dismayed by this approach and he wondered why. The Ambassador had apparently gotten the impression that the Mashumi had been a kind of eastern branch of the Wahabi sect, which of course was just the opposite. It had actually been considered a reform force in comparison with the main Islamic party, the Nahdlatul Ulama. The Islamic political parties were sui generis their nature to Indonesia, a modern Islamic country controlled by the Army that had fought long battles against Islamic insurgents.

David Newsom seemed to be transplanting all kinds of Middle Eastern Islamic lore into Indonesia because Indonesia was said to be 90% Muslim and there were mosques everywhere. He didn't understand Indonesia at that time was not a Muslim country, not an Islamic state. Now as of 2012 much has changed but it is still a fiercely nationalistic country. The dominant political influence then as now was exerted by nominally-Muslim Javanese, and the main power was held by the often anti-Muslim Army. I wondered why his staff had not briefed him better, but of course neither Toussaint nor the Political Counselor, John Monjo, was an Indonesia specialist with previous service in the country. However, there were many good books on religion in Indonesia, most by Clifford Geertz, that he might have read. Only such ethnic groups as the Buginese in South Sulawesi and Kalimantan, and the Acehnese, were different - they didn't even want to be part of Indonesia.

Q: Aceh being the northern tip of Sumatra.

HOWLAND: Sumatra, yes – the easternmost province of Saudi Arabia, it is sometimes called, because of its religious orthodoxy. So I tried to explain to Newsom that overall, Indonesia wasn't really a strict Muslim country, and Java especially was full of fierce and sensitive nationalists who happened to go to the Mosque on Friday. Well he got a little peeved at that, you know, my preaching to the Ambassador about Islam. I was probably too didactic for a new boy. Much later he thanked me and said I was right. But at the outset, we just didn't hit it off.

Then at about 10:00 pm, I tried to explain to the Ambassador that we were all just exhausted and had to leave. The kids had just gotten off an airplane after being driven the previous day from the beach to Kuala Lumpur, then to Singapore overnight, then by air to Jakarta, so they were very cranky. My wife had a big band - aid on her knee and during the course of dinner her coral infection started bleeding. I could barely move around because of my back. It was quite a scene. The Ambassador was visibly unhappy, but we really had to get the kids in bed; they were just falling asleep on their chairs. The event had been a shambles. Why Newsom insisted on having us all, I have no idea. I think he was just being nice - - his wife, Jean was quite understanding. But our relationship didn't start well and indeed got worse, for a while. He seemed very intent on his prerogatives. I should mention that on later trips we made together, we had a good time together and to this day I appreciate his attending my swearing-in ceremony as Ambassador to Suriname in 1987.

As a final touch the Ambassador mentioned that he had decided to visit Surabaya within a week to attend the inauguration of some project by President Suharto, and would stay at the Consular residence. I think he sometimes got bored in Jakarta and liked to travel – which was great. More Embassy officers should have done that, as I did later as DCM. I think he had the idea that Surabaya was a citadel of Islam because, of the nine great Islamic prophets of Java -- the wali songo as they were called in Javanese -- three were interred in nearby towns. The nine walis were legendary figures who supposedly had brought Islam to Java, and he wanted to see one of their tombs.

Arriving in Surabaya

So next day we landed, and were met at the Surabaya airport by Bob Randolph, the outgoing Consul, who had served an unhappy year away from his family and was leaving in a week. Second in rank was Gene Christy, a very top - notch young Foreign Service officer serving as Economic and Consular officer, and Bill Pierce, the administrative officer, both capable and personable. There was also a USIS officer, and an agency person, listed as the political officer. We were taken to the residence which was quite nice except there were room problems which I'll discuss below. Then I went to the Consulate to meet the Indonesian employees. A wonderful bunch of Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) as long as you watched some of them carefully. The two women among them were terrific: Hartati, the Consular assistant, and Hartiti, my secretary and receptionist.

Q: This is tape ten side one with Dick Howland.

HOWLAND: The other FSNs were Suki, the Budget and Fiscal FSN; and Max, a Filipino who had been at the Consulate for many years, who served as assistant to the GSO, Bill Pierce. He was assisted by a Javanese contractor, known as Pete, a very helpful guy. He was a high-born Javanese, a court attendant as a young man from the Sultanate of Solo (Surakarta) in Central Java, and a terrific guy. The Solo court had fallen on hard times and he needed to work, luckily for me – he taught me a lot about Central and East Java, the most important areas of the Consular district. He and Max may have been getting kickbacks from Consulate contractors, but I was never able to catch them. There was also a very good USIS local employee, an FSN who had terrific contacts in the city and was very helpful to me. USIS had a small branch post in South Sulawesi, part of the Consular district. Finally there was Saileh, who became our loyal and beloved driver. My kids loved him, rightly so.

On my first work day I decided to change two things right away. I found there were two bathrooms in the Consulate building. By tradition, one had been used by Indonesians, both men and women, and the other by Americans of both genders. I changed that immediately to normal Western usage – “MEN” and “WOMEN” signs were placed on the doors. No one liked that except the two female FSN's and the CIA base chief's wife, who worked as his secretary.

Second, I found there was one contract employee – a relative of an FSN -- whose only responsibility as far as I could see was to bring the Consular officers and FSN's cups of coffee or tea. Each day he came into my office, bowed deeply and said, “kulo nuwun, Tuan.” which was basically Javanese for: “May I enter, Lord?” and put down the coffee cup. Well, after I talked to him, it turned out he was actually an educated man who spoke perfect Indonesian as well as Javanese. Of course, I wanted to rebuild my Indonesian and learn a little Javanese. So I suggested to Bill Pierce, the admin officer, to stop the coffee service and try him as a language instructor. It worked well for the American staff and spouses but didn't sit well with my secretary, Hartiti. She didn't like to make her own

coffee out in back where he had worked – admittedly an unpleasant area. A few weeks later, she quit, and from then on I did my own typing. I still think it was the right move.

Ambassador Newsom's Visit

But before I could do anything else, we had to get ready for Ambassador Newsom's visit. The first and most important thing was for me to call on the Governor of East Java, Mohammed Noer. He was a remarkable figure, originally from the strongly Islamic island of Madura across the straits from Surabaya, one of the great figures in East Java. He had been an Interior Ministry bureaucrat, and was then assigned as one of the few non-military Governors by President Suharto, basically to keep the Muslims in East Java under control.

Noer was very much a President Suharto man, a President Suharto adherent, and a good administrator and forceful leader. He had his finger on every pulse in the province and liked it that way. As a Madurese, not a Central Javanese or a military officer, he could never be in the President Suharto inner circle. But he had done an unbelievable job with the family planning program in East Java, one of the major policies under the President Suharto government. President Suharto is still praised for the success of that program, but it never worked anywhere except East Java and Bali, where the civilian governors were energetic and capable. So I managed to get in to see him, told him the Ambassador was coming in so many days, and we had a nice chat. I had sent him flowers before the visit, and brought him an interesting book, which he appreciated. He had already met Ambassador Newsom, of course, and it seemed they liked each other.

I mentioned we had an impressive residence, a nice old Dutch villa. But unlike Laos, where we had one small non-representational room available as a kind of a "family room," what might have been used for that in the Surabaya residence was reserved for use by Ambassador David Newsom. In fact, this room had earlier been the foyer of the house, which now had to be entered through French doors into the large salon. Newsom had had it converted to a guestroom for himself. I could see his point – he couldn't stay at a hotel, of course, and didn't want to sleep in the upstairs family quarters and displace a child. But he could have waited a few weeks to visit until we got settled. So while I am still trying to figure out who is doing what in the Consulate, the Ambassador is coming in a week and we have to make sure his room is okay and that we could entertain him. As usual the main burden fell on my wife.

I remember Newsom's first visit was not exceptional in any way. He lectured me on the UN when I said it hadn't helped us much in Laos, but otherwise we seemed to get along pretty well. He was a very smart, witty and charming person but he was also impatient and liked to drive very fast. I think he was worried we would arrive at the event after the President. At one point we were hurtling along the road and my driver, Saileh was worried. He didn't like to drive that fast, and Newsom was just egging him on along the narrow roads, crowded with people, chickens, ducks flying off in all directions. At one point, Newsom said, "I can't imagine which has less road sense, the Javanese peasant or

the Javanese chicken." Well, Saileh understood a little bit of English and Newsom said this in a loud voice. I thought it was a bit unprofessional.

Tomb of the Wali in Gresik

The next day I took Ambassador Newsom to visit one of the *wali songo* tombs in Gresik, a very old Islamic seaport, but now an industrial town. It had been controlled by the Communists during the Sukarno period and was the site of a lot of killing there in the 1965-66 upheaval, which I talked about in an earlier interview. The Wali of Gresik was one of the earliest prophets in Java – they all came on the trade routes and Gresik was a busy seaport in that era. He had reputedly come from the Middle East to preach in Gresik sometime between 1289 and 1354, during the time that the Hinduized Majapahit Empire, which still ruled interior East Java at that time, was beginning to collapse. Its remnants later fled the Muslim influence spreading from the port cities and took refuge in Hindu Bali in the 15th century.

The truth of these prophets' legends was lost in the mists of time. Nobody really knows if they even existed. I tried to explain to Newsom that they weren't really missionaries who had come out from the Middle East. Maybe some of them were, you just didn't know. The fact was that Indonesia was Islamicized not from the Middle East, but by Sufi Islamic traders and seaman from Gujarat in India -- one reason that Islam there is so different. Myths abounded. For instance one wali, called the "*Kali Jaga*," allegedly met the prophet Mohammed in a vision while fishing on the bank of a stream one day. Mohammed supposedly said to him: "Guard this stream and preach Islam until I come back." So, Kali Jaga, whose name means "guardian of the stream" sat down next to it for hundreds of years, and preached. Trees grew up around him. Generations were born and passed away, becoming Muslims in the process. His beard grew long. Finally he died, and now everyone came to see his tomb in Cepara, in Central Java. Well, you can get a sense from this typical legend of the transition from the Hinduized period of Java to the Islamic period, i.e. the old Hindu guru becomes an Islamic holy man, and can be worshipped as both.

In front of this wali's tomb was a very typical older Javanese mosque, not with a Middle Eastern dome and minarets, but rather like a stepped-roof Balinese temple. It basically resembled a Chinese Buddhist pagoda, except that it was a mosque (later the Saudi Embassy paid millions to have many of these beautiful old Javanese mosques torn down and replaced with garish Middle East-style horrors – only the really small towns escaped). Inside was a green tile floor for prayer before the *mihrab*, the false portal that faced Mecca and the *mimbar*, or pulpit, where the imam gave the sermon.

But off to one side was a strange and beautifully - carved ornate wooden door -- some of the carvings rather suggestive, if you know what I mean. We were told it was the tomb of this Wali. That door no longer opened and we had to go outside to enter the tomb through a small shed-like structure behind the mosque. In the shed, the tomb was clearly a Hindu crypt, with carved "*Makara*," or dragons, on the walls to carry the deceased to heaven. I

suppose one might find similar crypts in Madras or elsewhere in south India. In the center was a Muslim-type coffin, and behind it was still the little pedestal where the bronze figure of a Hindu god, or perhaps the Lingga, a symbol of Shiva, would have been venerated in the earlier centuries. Obviously what had happened was Islam had imposed itself on this holy site. Then it had been used to entomb a Hindu holy man, who by legend had been converted to Islam and preached to others. It was a great example of the syncretism of Java, and the nature of its religion.

History of the Surabaya Consulate

As long as I am doing historical antecedents I would like to get on the record some of the interesting history of the Surabaya Consulate. Established in 1867, it was one of the first U.S. Consulates anywhere, underscoring the importance of Surabaya as a commercial center. It was closed for a number of years in the early part of the century and then reopened after World War I. In the B and F safe were the “log-books” of the Consuls during the 1920s and 1930s. These were fascinating to read in terms of the history of the American Foreign Service.

In those years the malaria was still so bad in Surabaya that the Western population took every chance to travel up to the hill-stations in the volcanic areas, some of which were at 6,000 feet, cool and pleasant when it wasn't raining. No mosquitoes at that altitude. Otherwise they drenched themselves in mosquito repellent and slept in the heat under mosquito netting every night, in Surabaya. The Dutch had gone a long way in wiping it out, but it was still very severe. Various Consuls had written this all up in the logbook it was absolutely fascinating.

For instance the Consul, before the 1924 Act, once recruited an American who was just passing through to serve as his assistant, in effect Deputy Principal Officer. He wrote back to the Department saying he needed the help, and requested a commission for the man. The Department sent the commission but said he, the Consul, would have to pay his assistant's salary out of his own money. He did it for a while but tried for five or six years to get the Department to pay the assistant's salary, so he could save money to go on home leave. That's why he wanted a number two so he could go on home leave. He was suffering from malaria. Finally the Department agreed to pay his way and he left, apparently. There was no indication he ever came back to Surabaya.

During the war the Japanese Navy controlled Surabaya and the Budget and Fiscal FSN, an ethnic Chinese, at the Consulate had hidden all these log books, kept them safe while he had himself gone into hiding in a village. The Japanese had used the building for a *kempetai* (secret police) post. After the war, this FSN popped up with his log books and almost single handedly had put the Consulate back together again.

The final tale I'll tell started when I was sitting at my desk in Surabaya one morning and in walked an American past the guards, a heavyset man, say, perhaps your age or mine now, probably in his sixties. He said, “Hi, I just wanted to see this place again. I saw it in

1941.”

I gulped and said, “When?”

He said, “It was December 1941.”

I said, “How could you have seen it in December? Were you a *kempetai* prisoner here?”

He said, “No, I just missed being a prisoner here by a hair.”

I said, “Really? Tell me about it.”

He told me he had been a US Army Air Force pilot stationed at Clark Field in the Philippines. On the day after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Air Force attacked the field and caught most of the aircraft on the tarmac. Clark was evacuated on December 24 and he and his crew had flown their B-17 bomber to the Dutch air base in Malang, south of Surabaya, before running out of fuel. They needed avgas of course and there was none available at Malang. He and his crew hopped on a local Dutch bus and went into Surabaya, where he had been before on previous flights. They wound up staying for weeks at the Oranje Hotel, the old Dutch hotel which is still there, now renamed the Hotel Majapahit. By the way, the hotel still had its old registers from the 19th century, and among the names signed there was that of Joseph Conrad, who had used Surabaya as the setting for several novels of the East.

The Japanese had invaded Sumatra from Malaya, but had not gotten to East Java just yet. The pilot finally got some fuel from the Dutch Naval base, where most of the allied fleet was sheltering, including a US cruiser. They re-fueled the bomber in Malang and were ready to fly on, but were ordered to stay in Malang in case they were needed for naval battles. Moreover they hadn't brought any aerial maps of the Dutch East Indies with them. It was rainy season, in late December, the worst part of the real southwest monsoon, difficult flying weather. They felt fairly comfortable since the Dutch were still in control of Java.. But after the allied fleet was virtually destroyed in the battle of the Java Sea at the end of February, Japanese forces landed in West and Central Java, and took Bali without resistance. By March 6 they had reached the outskirts of Surabaya.

As he told it, one morning in early March, the pilot was standing on the front porch of the Oranje Hotel and he saw Japanese troops with weapons coming along the street. They had just landed at the harbor after and were moving along the main street of Surabaya. The pilot ran to the back of the hotel, where a Dutch milkman was delivering milk to the hotel. He told the Dutchman that the Japanese were coming up to the front of the hotel he needed to escape. The Dutchman could see he was an American pilot and volunteered to take him to Malang in his truck. They went via the back roads, got up to Malang and got him back up to his plane.

So he was there with the plane, his crew and the avgas, but they still didn't know where

to fly. Just then, an Australian bomber from Malaya, badly shot up and limping in, crash-landed in Malang airfield with several wounded evacuees. The Australians saw the American plane there, and of course come over carrying their wounded. The Americans said, "Do you know how to fly us to Darwin?" The answer was: "Sure we do, mate." They all hopped in. The now over-loaded aircraft lumbered aloft because Malang is at 6,000 feet of altitude, difficult to get aloft in the cool mountain air. They didn't want to use too much gas taking off for fear they'd run out and crash in the sea en route. Even the Australians didn't know where to land between Malang and Darwin.

Navigating overnight, at 120 knots airspeed, but luckily with a southwest tailwind at that time of year, they made it to Darwin. The next morning as the sun rose ahead of them, as the engines sputtered on fumes, the Australian and American pilots sitting side by side at the controls somehow brought the B-24 into a glide path and touched down on the Darwin airport strip, which is very long. They rolled off the end of the strip, but by that point they didn't care and they were safe.

Q: Incredible.

HOWLAND: Yes, I asked if he had gotten a medal, but he never got anything. He brought the bomber back but it was unusable and he was soon shipped back to the United States and off to Europe for the air war there.

I took him to see the Oranje Hotel, now the Hotel Majapahit. Under the Japanese it had been re-named Hotel Yamato after the famous Japanese admiral. He asked why the name was not changed back to Oranje so I told him the story – which I will admit is somewhat apocryphal.

When the Indonesian revolution started in early August, 1945, Surabaya, having been a harbor town, an industrial center, was very communist, very red. There was heavy fighting against the Dutch and British forces detailed to occupy Java and repatriate Japanese prisoners. At the height of one battle, one of the Indonesians climbed up on top of the Oranje Hotel, which the Dutch military had made that a BOQ, and where there was a flagpole with a Dutch flag. This Indonesian – supposedly a member of the Indonesian Communist Party named Bung Tomo -- climbed up the flagpole, tore the Dutch flag off the mast, and brought it back down.

The Indonesians were besieging the place at this time and the rebel stood out there in the courtyard with the Dutch flag, in front of the hotel windows, and tore off the blue part of the Dutch flag, which was red, white and blue on the bottom. You see, the Dutch had come to Indonesia by sea. For the Indonesians, the blue part was the symbol of the Dutch coming by sea. Actually it represented the Dutch aristocracy when the flag was adopted.

A few days later a red and white banner was raised when Sukarno proclaimed independence in Jakarta on August 17, 1945. So that's what became the Indonesian flag, "*sang merah putih*," the "holy red-and-white" as the Indonesians call it. Of course, a red-

and-white *panji* banner was also used as a battle pennant during the Majapahit Empire, 11th – 15th century, and for that reason the name of the Hotel was changed again to Majapahit.

Q: My God.

HOWLAND: But there's more: after 1945 there was also a big flag issue then in Surabaya between the Muslims and the communists. The communists also wanted to tear off the white part meaning Islam and adopt a red flag like other communist countries. The Muslims of course wanted to tear away the red part, and put up the white flag with the same Arabic phrase as on the Saudi flag. That battle to this day persists in Indonesia, symbolizing the struggle between secular forces and Islamic believers, with the Army maintaining the balance reflected by the flag.

* * *

Q: Today is 27 August 1999. Dick you are on your way, managing the American Consulate in Surabaya. What did it do?

Consulate Responsibilities

HOWLAND: The American Consular representation in Surabaya is now a Consulate General, but then it was a Consulate. Consular work, especially in Bali, and reporting and representation in Central and East Java were the main responsibilities. We also had responsibility for all of the various islands of Sulawesi, for the islands further out east in Indonesia, and especially for the lesser Sunda isles which ran to the east from Java, encompassing Bali, Lombok, Sumba, Sumbawa, East and West Timor, and Flores and scads of others. All in all, there are a total of 13,677 islands in Indonesia, but actually most are tiny and only relatively few are heavily populated. About half of them – and perhaps half the population of Indonesia, because of Central and East Java, were in the Surabaya Consular district. But not West Irian or Kalimantan (Borneo) – those places were in the Embassy's district because it was difficult to get to them from Surabaya. Jakarta went on handling Kalimantan, Borneo, and West Irian, and Consulate Medan took care of Sumatra.

I mentioned East Timor because in those years it was Portuguese Timor, as of July of 1974. It had not yet received its independence from its European colonial masters. We wound up being rather involved in that whole independence issue. I will leave that for the time being, because later I want to dwell on the trip Bill Pierce and I later made there.

Theoretically we were supposed to do reporting and representation for the whole vast far-flung eastern part of the archipelago, Sulawesi, Ambon, the many archipelagos. We were supposed to do everything else to the east. But unfortunately it was almost impossible to travel out there. The Indonesian national airline, Garuda, was totally unreliable in those years.

You could always get out there all right, because the plane was flying out of Surabaya or somewhere. But when you get out there, you never knew if or when you would get back, because a Garuda flight might not show up, or the local officials – or a group of other passengers -- might bribe the Garuda office to take all the seats on the plane. So even though you had a confirmed reservation and confirmed ticket, you couldn't get on the plane unless you were going to override their bribes in some way. These were generally small planes, and it was really a nightmare. For a while a former Air America pilot from Laos operated a private airline with one C-47 in the lesser Sunda islands but that soon folded. I will illustrate this point later when I talk about my trip out to Portuguese Timor, how difficult it was to get back from anywhere in the “great East” as the Dutch called it. So I didn't travel that much, unfortunately, to East Indonesia except to Lombok, the next island from Bali, and out to Portuguese Timor. There was too much work to do in Java and Bali.

Embassy - Consulate Relations

I found soon after arrival that Surabaya was not a sleepy little post, that in fact it's tough to run a Consulate with other agencies attached, or operating in the Consular district. This is because there is no country team meeting and no Chief of Mission letter to keep them in line. Embassies will seldom back you up, and are also sensitive about being upstaged -- especially if there are lots of activities by Mission components such as USAID in the areas concerned. Finally, as you know but many others do not – there is no diplomatic immunity for employees at a Consulate – only Consular immunity which strictly applies to performance of Consular responsibilities.

The Consulate in Surabaya had many important functions but I think some in the Embassy really saw it as unnecessary at best and a nuisance at worst (Later, when I was DCM in Jakarta, I tried to change this persistent attitude and delegate more authority to the Consuls, but never really succeeded). Moreover, there was competition – and poor coordination -- in political and economic reporting both then and later. Finally, it had always been resented that Bali was in the Surabaya Consular district and not that of the Embassy – so Embassy officers could not routinely travel there for business reasons, i.e. on per diem and a GTR. Bali was the only place most Embassy families wanted to visit in Indonesia.

Frankly, everyone at the Consulate dreaded having anything to do with the Embassy. You couldn't get a straight answer out of the people there, especially asking for administrative support. So, the final touch came when we had an inspection in early 1976 I think it was and everybody at the Consulate, myself included unloaded for the inspectors on the Embassy which we really saw as a place of tremendous problems. I think Medan did pretty much the same thing. So, what was a very enjoyable tour for me in dealing with the problems and the people in East Java and Timor and the other islands I visited out there was really kind of spoiled by the fact that we never had had a good relationship with the Embassy. My predecessor too had not had a good relationship. They fired him and eventually I was fired too, my tour shortened from three to two years.

The Consulate and its relations with the Embassy and other components of the Mission – AID, CIA, Defense Attaché, and the MAAG, were issues that frequently arose in the early days of my tour. The main Problem was that officers from various components of the mission in Jakarta would visit the Consular district, let's say to check on an AID project for instance, and would never let the Consulate know. But afterwards the Indonesian project manager would report that visit to Governor Noer, and he would call and chew me out for not notifying him. Sometimes USAID would invite him and not me, and he would ask me why I hadn't been there. It was very embarrassing. He, of course, feared some USAID report would go to the Indonesian Government agency in Jakarta responsible for the project, and then perhaps to the President, who would call him about it, and he would have been blind-sided --- just as I was.

In one specific instance involving a huge water development project in Kediri in the south, the Director of USAID suddenly turned up at the Consulate with the relevant government officials from Jakarta and wanted me to provide transportation so he could go to see this project. Naturally I had to do it. But no one had told the Governor and there was no Indonesian Government mechanism for informing him. I couldn't suddenly call and get him to change his schedule. Then two weeks later Noer found out all this had gone on and nobody had told him anything about it. So he called and in his courteous way, chewed me out. I sent him flowers and we were friends again. But when I complained to the USAID Director, he got huffy and threatened to tell the Ambassador I was pushing him around. So I had to back off.

There were numerous cases like that, with USIS as well as USAID. But no matter how often I protested to the Embassy, nothing was ever done. The front office didn't want to bruise its relations with the agency heads there. They didn't want to hear about it. The Embassy had its way of dealing with the Consuls; once a quarter you went to Jakarta and sat in the country team meeting, gave a little spiel about what was going on and went to see a few people about needs and problems. Then you scampered back to your burrow, and were forgotten for another quarter.

The second issue was, as I mentioned earlier, there was virtually no supervisory authority by the principal officer over other mission components attached to the Consulate – i.e. USIS, the agency, and a small U.S. naval detachment supporting and advising the Indonesian Navy. Surabaya was the biggest navy base in Indonesia, inherited from the Dutch and the Japanese, both of whom controlled the far-flung Indonesian islands from there. During the heyday of Dutch colonialism, Jakarta was basically a government small-town with perhaps 150,000 people, while Surabaya was a city of 3,000,000. It was the big trading port for all the riches – mainly spices, sandalwood, and coffee, of eastern Indonesia. So there was a big naval base there. The Indonesian navy had its real headquarters in Jakarta, but the Indonesian fleet, the muscle of the navy, was moored in Surabaya and headed by Admiral Rudy Purnama, a dynamic Sundanese Admiral from West Java. I got to know Admiral Rudy pretty well. Rudy controlled East Indonesia (as the Japanese Navy had during the war) and most military officers out there saluted and

obeyed.

Our small naval detachment attached to the Consulate looked after some aging destroyers we had provided to the navy under the military assistance program. Maintenance was not an Indonesian strong suit and we helped keep them in shape, advising and indeed performing the maintenance required by US law. We also generally handled the shipment of spare parts for the fleet because of the proximity of Bali and its airport. Suppose a naval ship in Surabaya needed some relatively minimal spare part, let's say a gyroscope bracket or something. If they ordered it through the Indonesian navy headquarters in Jakarta, and the order went back to the United States, and was filled and sent out to Indonesian Navy headquarters, the item would simply disappear. There was no way on earth Rudy's fleet guys could get that part all the way down to Surabaya. So what did they do?

CINCPAC in Hawaii had a huge supply big store of various kinds of naval parts and things like that. The head of the U.S. naval mission in Surabaya, a Lt. Commander, would go to Bali, take a plane from Bali to Hawaii, go to the CINCPAC shops in Pearl Harbor, find the part, sign for it, get it all approved, put it in his air freight and fly back to Bali where he got it through customs with an order from Admiral Rudy. Then he would fly to Surabaya and his technician would install it in the destroyer. Now big parts were another matter, but big parts tended not to get lost in Jakarta. It was just the little things, the little nutsy-boltsy type things that you can't sail a ship without, that tended to get "lost" i.e. stolen and sold in Jakarta. The Lt. Commander was a pretty good tennis player, a nice and smart officer. He needed Consulate support for his staff, and he reciprocated by letting us show films from the military recreation program for representation purposes. We traveled together to Madura and a number of places.

So with one exception we had a very good crew at the Consulate. Gene Christy, the economic officer, also served as Deputy Principal Officer and supervised the Consular FSN Hartati, and the Consulate secretary and receptionist Hartiti. But there was a problem with the USIS branch director, who was considered rather arrogant and made a lot of demands on Consulate services, ordering FSNs about. There were frequent clashes between him and the other officers.

For example, he argued that because he had a large staff and program, and outranked Gene Christy, he should be designated Deputy Principal Officer and run the post in my absence. I refused because I had high regard for Gene Christy, an extremely able junior officer. My decision on that permanently ended any cooperation with USIS for the first year of my tour. As it happened the troublesome USIS officer left after a year for medical reasons and was replaced by a capable and pleasant woman officer who got along with everyone and was a terrific help with our bicentennial Independence Day celebration in 1976. From then on we had very good very amicable arrangement in the Consulate. Everybody did their job very well. I did a lot of traveling. I enjoyed my time there. It was not as uneventful as I thought it would be.

The problem of who would serve as Deputy Principal Officer had actually arisen very abruptly soon after my arrival, after my not having done any Consular work since 1962 in Cambodia. Now it was 1974, twelve years later, and I had forgotten almost everything. Moreover, I arrived in the summer at a time when the Embassy's Consular business was at its height with lots of student visa applicants and tourists as well as citizenship and protection work. So the Embassy had been in the practice of raiding the Consulates at that time, usually taking a Consular officer from Consulate Medan in Sumatra, or from Surabaya, to fill in at the Embassy, for two weeks each. This meant the Consulates were unable to do any real Consular work -- no travels to missionary areas, no protection work in Bali for example -- except what the FSNs could do. And I, as a brand new Consul there, would have been required to fill in for Gene Christy not only in his Consular responsibilities but also as economic officer, and as political officer since the latter was a cover position. Those I could handle, but not Consular work.

Moreover Christy had had to fill in at the Embassy for a month the previous summer, and it had led to some family problems for him. His wife, Becky, was a lovely person and an artist, who specialized in interior decoration, in some way. They had one child, a boy. She was understandably bored in Surabaya and wanted to go back to the States to work. Christy was concerned that she would do so if he was dragged off to Jakarta again. So I thought of this brilliant idea: that I would go since I had just arrived. I would go, learn about Consular work by spending the two weeks in Jakarta in the Consular section. I knew I needed that background, especially since Christy was leaving in a year.

Q: Training with all the people that really knew the trade.

HOWLAND: Exactly, but the Embassy was very unhappy -- they wanted Christy because he knew the business, since he had gone through the Consular course before being assigned. After that, I never really had much traction at the Embassy, but I still think it was the right thing to do. For instance, later when I was suddenly called upon in April 1975 to go to Bali to issue visas to the fleeing Cambodian President Lon Nol and his entourage, I knew what to do.

So there was a lot of work to do in all regards in Surabaya, but there was always a danger that the post was going to be abolished in the latest wave of post closings (I have an item on that at the end of this interview series). Jakarta had added Central Java to Surabaya's responsibility to forestall that -- and it also wanted to transfer Bali to its own Consular district so that people from the Embassy could fly down to Bali on business. They took the position that it was more difficult for them to drive to Central Java than to fly to Bali. That was not true -- to begin with, you could easily fly to Jogja or Semarang in Central Java from Jakarta, and anywhere else was only a short drive from those cities. We took the position whenever this arose that we were constantly on the scene in Bali and well known there. We were dealing with Bali all the time, and we could get to the provincial capital, Denpasar, in less than an hour door-to-door from Surabaya. There were six flights a day.

For a long time, this disagreement over Bali simmered a bit between the Embassy and the Consulate. It was mainly a welfare and protection responsibility because there were always Americans getting in minor trouble there, mostly for nudity on the beach, sometimes for drugs. The police picked them up to get bribes, and we had to go out and find them, and if possible get them released without paying bribes. We had very good relations with Balinese officialdom and usually succeeded. This good relationship partly stemmed from a tragic accident. A few months earlier, in December 1973, an American airliner, a Pan Am 707, had crashed in Bali coming in too low for the Bali's mountainous spine, crashed just below the summit. It was suspected that the airport beam was faulty but nothing was ever proved. Gene Christy had gone out there to supervise disposition of the remains and console the American families who came out after the tragedy. He had done a great job and the Balinese officials had come to rely on the Consulate whenever there was a problem involving Americans.

Fortuitously, the Embassy started having grave trouble bringing in airfreight through the airport in Jakarta, which was controlled by the Air Force and a corrupt mess in those years. We had good relations with the airport authorities in Bali and shipped a lot of materiel into and out of there – such as spare parts for the four destroyers we had given to the Indonesian fleet under the military aid program as I mentioned earlier. So we offered to start facilitating the entry of Embassy air freight, official and personal (HHE) through the airport in Bali. Our GSO FSN Max, or his contractor Pete, would take a truck to Bali and get the freight cleared in a 20-minute operation. Then he would load it on our truck, take it to Surabaya and put it on the train to go to Jakarta. That was faster than having it sit in the airport in Jakarta for nine weeks, which was what was typically happening there.

When we started doing that, and a few other things, such as clearing input of AID cargo for projects in Central Java though the port in Surabaya, the Embassy dropped the idea of taking Bali away from us. Plus, the Ambassador was able to get down to Bali pretty frequently, not always on official business, and naturally we provided car and driver. We always sent an officer along to make sure he had no problems. So once all that was arranged, then the pressure was off for us to give up Bali which was a good thing. The key point was that we had a much better insight into Balinese politics, and there was no Consular agent in Bali at that time. That was part of our responsibilities and we could do a better job.

Government in East Java

Yes, there was a lot to do in East Java at the outset, specifically starting out with calls. Noer insisted I call on all his district chiefs (*bupati*), and I did. This took time. I had to make a lot of calls – these were mandatory. Number one was keeping in touch with the governor; I already mentioned that. In the early days I saw him a lot, and he was very nice to me. We talked a lot about establishing a Consulate school, about family planning, about development. I got to know Mohammed Noer pretty well. I traveled with him a few times – for instance he took me to the traditional “Bull Races” in Madura, the centerpiece of the Madurese ritual year, and we talked all the way. He was endlessly annoyed at

USAID for doing stuff in east Java without telling him anything about it.

Noer was another great product of the USIS “leader grant,” or international visitor program. He had been chosen 10-12 years earlier as an international visitor as the bupati for Madura Island and said he had had a glorious time in the United States. Actually loved it. When he became governor, and a US Consul or Ambassador came to see him, he stopped everything he was doing and would concentrate on you (in a similar way, the military Governor of Portuguese Timor had attended CGS Leavenworth on the Defense Department’s IMET [program and was an instant friend upon my arrival there.]

In a curious way the Governor’s management situation was somewhat similar to mine. We were both victims of Jakarta-centrism. He had a provincial staff meeting, but did not directly supervise its members. The Indonesian government in the provinces is not organized as a federal structure, but is more centralized – let’s say, like France. Everything is connected to the center, the “pusat.” That is to say, the governor does not have his own education chief, his own public health chief, his own police chief, etc. The Governor too is an official of the Ministry of Home Affairs (“dalam negeri”). Like him, his staff comprises officials assigned and directed from Jakarta who happen to be sitting in Surabaya and must coordinate with the Governor but not necessarily obey him.

For instance, take the customs service in Surabaya. Mohammed Noer was endlessly fuming about his lack of control over the customs service, and having to bribe them to bring in AID stuff that he wanted for his family planning project. Customs would not release it without a bribe. AID of course could not pay bribes so I would have to go down to customs and assert that it was diplomatic property. Sometimes that would work, but often the Governor would have to complain to the Indonesian government agency concerned in Jakarta, and they would take it up with Customs there. We went around and around on stuff like this. Of course he can influence them but must rely on the force of his personality and his clout in Jakarta to exert control. He could fire them but only if he went through Jakarta to do so. In a sense the ultimate power was held by the military commanders of each region, and the civilian governors relied on them for enforcement. Now in reality Governor Noer had great power and prestige because of the Javanese tendency to go limp in the face of any authority and because of his clout as a prominent - indeed, charismatic -- Madurese (I’ll give you an example of this in regard to the family planning program in a minute). During the Dutch period, the Madurese were fierce warriors and pirates, and remain a vigorous, hard-working, orthodox Muslim people unlike the more languorous Javanese. So the Dutch systematically depopulated Madura to generate plantation workers for the more fertile areas of East Java, which is now largely Madurese. Madurese are still sought after as watchmen (*jaga*) because of their fighting ability and loyalty to employers. For some provinces, the Army felt that a prestigious local figure could best maintain control over potentially recalcitrant groups, such as the Madurese. Plus, Noer was persuasive - - he could either bully or charm you out of your sox if he wanted them. However, for some reason, toward the end of my tour, he was replaced by a retired Army General, who was a total dud. Noer was hoping to be the leading candidate for Minister of Home Affairs, but we both knew that position was a

military billet, and he was unlikely to get it.

As I recall at that time, in our district only Mohammed Noer and the governors in Bali and the islands to the east, called Nusa Tenggara Timur, were civil service officials. Elsewhere the governors were often seconded army officers, mostly Javanese or trusted Bataks from north Sumatra, so that they didn't have any indigenous roots in the province they controlled. Seldom were military officers originating from a specific province stationed there – for fear they might attempt a coup, as in 1958. Governorships could be lucrative for faithful commanders, and President Suharto was a master of patronage. Someone told me once he “knew every man’s price,” whether it was a Minister in Jakarta or a Second Lieutenant in West Irian (West New Guinea). Now, as the President Suharto era evolved more comfortably after 1974, the central government got more relaxed about this. There was more devolution of local authority.

Q: Why don't we pick up next time with how you saw the political situation? Had things changed?

HOWLAND: You asked last time about changes in the political system since my previous tour 1964-68. One of them was that military officers were deployed throughout the civilian bureaucracy, state corporations and political parties. Political power was centralized under President Suharto and a small coterie around him in Jakarta. What linked together military and civilian officials, and thus the population under them, was an Army-dominated political party. From 1966-74, the Army had consolidated its power by re-creating the Golongan Karya, or the “Functional Group” to which military and civil and civil servants had to belong, as its political arm. “GOLKAR”, as it was called, won elections generally by 75-90%. This was particularly remarkable for instance in a staunch Muslim area like East Java, the home of the major Muslim party, the Nahdlatul Ulama. Other parties were allowed to exist but were kept under tight control. Such political powers as the student organizations in 1964-68 were dispersed and subsumed under GOLKAR. The whole system was lubricated by corruption. A good example of how politics worked now was an incident I call the fish factory crisis which showed the divergent views of the Embassy and the Consulate about political developments in Java. I call it:

The Embassy and the Fish Factory Crisis

I mentioned earlier that there was competition and poor coordination between the Embassy and the Consulates on reporting. I think the Embassy was so anxious to avoid depicting Indonesia as an Army-dominated state that they looked for more dissension in the system than there was. The Embassy never could quite understand that when the Army and the Muslims wiped out the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965-68 (I spoke about this in an earlier interview), it was gone forever.

For instance, some in the Embassy saw trouble ahead – Bob Pringle, an Embassy officer at that time and a brilliant historian who has written books about Indonesia, did an airgram entitled “Java – The Wrath to Come.” This airgram postulated that the

increasingly mechanized agriculture in Java as the President Suharto regime created large rice – growing estates would displace so many peasants that they would flood the cities and eventually stimulate a revolution of the landless proletariat. It was a Marxism-based analysis and of course it never happened, but the paper was brilliantly written and set the tone for the way the Embassy and the Indonesia desk viewed Java. It also colored the relationship between the Embassy and the Consulate. Basically if they had traveled more, as we did, in the calm and peace and growing prosperity of those years in the Javanese countryside, they would have modified their outlook.

An example of this difference in perspective occurred very soon after my arrival with a fishermen’s riot and the destruction of several fish canneries owned by ethnic Chinese in the East Java town of Banyuwangi, on the straits of Bali. The Embassy and Department suddenly became quite concerned because this riot occurred on September 30, 1974 – nine years to the day from the aborted PKI/Sukarno putsch against the Army leadership, the famous “September 30th Movement” of 1965. Now it is true that a nine-year anniversary is important in Java, where the indigenous numbering system is based on nine, not ten, and mystical numerology plays an important part in decision making in Java as it does in many East Asian countries. So, nine years to the day from the so-called PKI coup attempt and its roll back by the army, a fisherman’s riot on that morning burned down two or three fish canneries owned by Chinese and a couple of people were killed. I think maybe a policeman was killed.

The Embassy never understood how much more slowly information moves in the provinces than in Jakarta, especially something like a riot which was potentially embarrassing to the provincial government. Naturally it did not appear in the provincial newspapers but the Embassy and the Department had learned of it from other sources. John Monjo, the political counselor, called me the next day. Apparently the Embassy was unhappy that I wasn’t already down there on the scene, because they (and the Department) were worried that it could have something to do with the PKI, and fit into the Pringle thesis on “the wrath to come.” It seems they had viewed the event as downtrodden fisherman rioting against capitalist cannery owners, exactly nine years to the day from the PKI coup attempt. I told John Monjo that I would certainly look into it but any PKI connection was unlikely. The PKI had been utterly devastated in East Java by the Army and Muslims, especially in areas around Banyuwangi which were settled by strongly anti-PKI Madurese and Balinese migrants. I suspected it was a dispute over fish prices.

So I immediately called Governor Noer who said, it was nothing, just a fishermen’s dispute. I said, well, you know, this happened on the 30th of September. He said, no, there’s no connection whatsoever with the 1965 coup attempt. The incident had been contained and over and was purely based on economic factors which were being redressed. I sent a cable to the Embassy reporting his words and they still felt I should go to Banyuwangi to look into it.

Well, the last person who might find out anything about an incident like that is a U.S.

Consul visiting the scene of the crime in an official car with a driver. I mean are you kidding? Now, Indonesians generally – and, particularly the Javanese -- won't tell an outsider, especially a foreigner much about what is really going beneath the placid surface of events. Little white lies – *etok-etok*” in Javanese -- are acceptable facets of conversation to protect their real feelings. They chatter away on unimportant stuff but do not willingly reveal information about, say, who is really in charge, or what is the military commander's view on this or that, or why did something happen? It takes a long time to get almost anyone to do that. Even Mohammed Noer would never get into the real ins-and-outs of how he got his way and got things done in east Java because it meant revealing the endless payoffs, endless bullying, needed to placate political foes and forces. They don't talk to outsiders about that.

But I went back to the Governor and explained that the Embassy was concerned. I said I would like to go there and make calls, and deliver some school-books to the local school – part of a USIS program which he liked. So he agreed I could visit Banyuwangi to call on local officials and would send one of his staffers with me. While in Banjuwangi I met the wali kota, or mayor, of the town, and his staff of officials – police, military, the fisheries chief, all of them together. When I asked about any recent troubles, of course they had all been prepped. There was no trouble here, there has never been any trouble here, what trouble? I said, well, there was something in the papers in Jakarta. Well, why do you read the papers from Jakarta? There was nothing in the papers in Surabaya, you should read them. No, there's no trouble. Exactly what I expected.

Luckily, I had another source, and a very good one. In Malang, a large town in East Java, there was a Southeast Asia scholar from the University of Wisconsin named Don Emmerson, who spoke excellent Javanese and Indonesian. He was on a Fulbright grant conducting research and teaching administration at a local college. He lived with an Indonesian family and had integrated himself with local officialdom as a foreign diplomat could never do. We forwarded his mail and papers, and got him teaching materials through the Consulate, and saw him all the time. The Indonesians liked and trusted him and he was well plugged in.

Q: Any relation to John?

HOWLAND: Yes, Don is his son.

Q: John Emmerson is a famous Foreign Service Officer with a Japanese background.

HOWLAND: Right, exactly, John Emmerson. His son was a wonderful guy and I knew him well. As of 2012 he is Dean Emeritus at Stanford. Since I'd been at Southeast Asia studies at Yale, we had a few mutual academic friends, and I had a bit more background than your average Consul out there, and spoke Indonesian which my predecessor had not. So, Don and I got along very well and I called and asked him to dinner. Of course he knew about the fisherman's riot, and said it was a very interesting case study. He said he was waiting for the dust to settle and then would get in touch with some friends out there,

and would find out what really went on.

A couple of months later he showed up again. He brought me a paper he wrote about the incident, but he also talked me through the paper and he said, you know, if you classify this I'm sure there will be concerns since this happened on the 30th of September, that it had something to do with communists coming back. I said, yes, not by me. I said I would send it in classified to protect him, but would specify in a covering airgram there was no PKI connection.

It's a fascinating story as it turns out, yet another classic Indonesian corruption story. Here's what happened. There are several different ethnic groups involved in fishing in the Straits of Bali, a rich fishing ground where the waters of the Indian Ocean pour into the Java sea. The Madurese, Balinese and the Javanese all fish there and thus are in competition. Each had their own traditional kind of boats, and equipment. They would usually sail out on dark, moonless nights, because they'd put up lanterns so the light on the water would attract the fish. When the moon was out the fish are not attracted to the other lights. Most fishermen would use simple casting nets and pull the fish in, but there were some haul-nets because some boats had dilapidated old outboard engines. It was all pretty primitive and they probably still do it now, although I have heard that now there is also excellent deep-sea sport fishing operating out of Banjuwangi, and a luxury hotel there.

Now what had changed things in 1974 was that some ethnic Chinese cannery owners, anxious to get more fish faster so they could dominate the wholesale market, had subsidized one group of fishermen, probably Balinese, with technological improvements. They gave them nylon fishing nets and fast outboard motors which enabled them to go out and fish more quickly at night. The nylon nets could be gotten in and out of the water much more quickly than the old cotton nets that the others had, which were wired together and repaired a hundred times. Nylon nets didn't break. They're very light. The favored fishermen pulled them in fast and got their fish out fast and turned on their new fast motors and before dawn were back there at the cannery. No need to wait for tides and winds. They turned over the catch at the best prices, and off the fish went into cans and then trucks. The Chinese cannery owners had very cleverly forced these other fishing groups into penury so they would have a neat little monopoly in the trade. They paid off the police and everybody else as is always done, and it was even rumored that the outboard motors had been obtained from the Indonesian military.

So as I suspected, it had nothing to do with a resurgent PKI or "the wrath to come." – Just a typical predatory Chinese tactic abetted by local officialdom. It was supposedly caused when an Indonesian fisherman was insulted on a Muslim holy day by a Chinese, who sneered at him or something like that. Then the disadvantaged fishermen rioted, and destroyed their rivals' boats, nets and stole the motors, and burned down the canneries – thus depriving themselves among other things of a livelihood for at least a year. They also burned a few Chinese dwellings in the town. That was what it was all about. It had nothing to do with communism, and the peasants weren't displaced. Instead it was caused

by typical aggressive predatory capitalism, usually practiced by exogenous ethnic groups like Indians, Chinese, or westerners. That sort of thing had been going on for hundreds of years in Southeast Asia and it's still continuing as we speak, of course.

I then sent in Emmerson's paper on the incident to the Department as an airgram enclosure, pointing out that those who thought that this had something to do with communism were obviously mistaken. Well, the Embassy was very unhappy about that my saying that. The desk was very unhappy too because they had raised the red flag of resurgent communism at high levels. I think INR had done a paper exploring the PKI implications and now INR had to retract it. The Embassy which had also jumped too soon on the issue was not happy with my paper, and said henceforth all my reporting should be submitted through them. Later when Ambassador Newsom got to know Don Emmerson - I'm sure Newsom knew his father -- then of course it was different. But coming at the outset my tour, it kind of set a bad tone to my relations with the Embassy. I learned the one thing a Consul doesn't want to be is right when the Embassy is wrong.

Q: Did you ever see people run amok? Is that what happened at the fish factory?

HOWLAND: Yes, perhaps. That is a much misunderstood and sensationalized thing in the west. It doesn't happen very often, but yes there was the occasional story in the press about someone running amok -- "beramuk" in Indonesian. Of course Indonesian demonstrators, when they are furious, will burn things down, beat up people, like demonstrators everywhere. But amuk is a different, kind of individual reaction; when an Indonesian gets to the end of his tether in some insoluble situation, there are instances when he might grab a knife, and just go out and start stabbing people indiscriminately. It almost always starts with an insult, real or perceived, and often involves another ethnic group. It is not a common thing but it happens.

Other Consular Issues in East Java

Q: Was Noer also the governor of Bali?

HOWLAND: No, just East Java, a vast province with 30 million people. I had altogether in my Consular district over 100 million Indonesians, of which East Java had 22 million when I was there. As of 2001, it had 58 million. I can't conceive of that many people, because even way back in 1964 it was terribly crowded. People trudged along both sides of the road almost anywhere you drove, landless peasants looking for farm work. Even later in 1974 you couldn't find a landscape that didn't have a hundred people moving in it. God knows what it is like now. It was worse in the '80s, and I am sure it is awful now.

Of course I had to call on all the military commanders, the marine corps commander, the navy commander, the army chief, the various guys who ran the ship yards, the military commander who ran the ship repair yards, a terrific guy named Admiral Harto. A few other military commanders plus I always cultivated the police commander, a very important guy you know, for a Consulate. Police were really crucial for the Consulate's

operations, and especially its protection.

This was 1974 and there was the Arab oil embargo in those years and all kinds of problems in the Middle East. Indonesia stayed aloof from that but East Java was very staunchly Moslem. Every once in awhile there would be a demonstration at the Consulate by pro-Palestinian Indonesians, mainly Muslims from Madura. We had to have police protection against that, and they did very well. It never developed into anything really serious, but one other unfortunate event related to Palestine did happen, and it was an interesting story.

There was a small Jewish community in Surabaya, and also one in Bali, but only a handful. The owner of the biggest department store in Surabaya was a Jewish gentleman named Mr. Solomons, a lovely man whose family had been there for generations. He was very well-connected and made all the appropriate “gifts” to officialdom. People liked him. But one day there was a demonstration against his department store by a handful of Indonesians, led by someone who was the soccer coach of a local high school. He apparently insulted and in some way brutalized Solomons, pushed him down and knocked him around in front of everyone. No Javanese liked to see things like that; it was “durung jowo,” or “lacking in Javanese-ness” you might say. So a week later the guy that pushed this Jewish fellow was found floating face down in the Kali Mas, the main canal flowing through the city. No Jew had done that --- it was just the way Javanese took care of embarrassing things. The Governor told me about it but of course it never got in the press. Soon thereafter Solomons sold his store to an expatriate Indian and left the country.

As I said I also traveled quite a lot around East Java, calling on Noer’s county chiefs. Now, a province in Indonesia is made up of what are called Kabupatens, counties in effect. Each Kabupaten was headed by a Bupati. The bupati worked for the governor. That meant going out in your suit and tie and sitting in some hot little government office, trying to make conversation with people whose world revolved around their little kabupaten, and who wouldn’t say anything for fear there would be retaliation. They worked for the governor, yet again, in their Kabupatens, the heads of the various government services are directed by the provincial service chiefs, who report to a ministry in Jakarta. Only among the Javanese, who all seem to have gone to school together and have a system of personal relationships based on politeness, tolerance and corruption, could this possibly have worked. East Java was terribly corrupt in every regard. So while these officials were alternately sharing or squabbling over the potential spoils of their positions, right down to the lowest levels, in personal dealings with them all was calm, civility and friendliness – at least on the surface.

The Family Planning Miracle

Despite all that, when there was leadership remarkable things got done, and Governor Noer was an effective leader in many regards. For example, he was primarily responsible for the success of the family planning program in east Java which was an astounding success. President Suharto had called him in personally and ordered him to take charge,

and issued a formal order of authority. However, in fervently Islamic East Java, much more was needed.

Noer had built local support for the program in a very clever way, a typical Indonesian way. He told me about it at length. The main problem was that the local religious leaders, the “Ulamas” as they were called, were opposed to family planning. They preached in the Friday sermons that anything having to do with the female reproductive system could not be addressed by men, that the Koran absolutely forbids that. The thought of some male doctor inserting a loop in the female reproductive system, or handing another birth control device or pills or something like that to a woman was anathema to the Koran. Sound familiar? This was nonsense of course – condoms were for sale everywhere, and Indonesia had not become over-populated because it was a nation of religious prudes. But Noer knew he had to get the *ulama* on his side.

So Mohammed Noer just waited until the budget planning cycle came around. This was one thing he could control. First he went to the provincial representative of the Ministry of Religion and said that he had talked to President Suharto about increasing the allocation of funds to East Java for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. This funding was big bucks, and a tremendous source of graft for religion and Mosque officials all over Indonesia. The President had said that would be a possibility if the religion chief guy in East Java went along with the president's family planning program, according to Noer. Who knew if it was true -- but, needless to say, the guy went along. That year Surabaya was added to the list of provincial capitals from which an American charter airline took thousands of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

With the head guy on board, Noer then called in all the religious scholars, the *ulamas*, along with village leaders. He sat them all down and provided a copy of the Koran. He asked them to find the place in the holy book that indicated no man may give a birth control device to a woman. Well, of course, the Koran was written in the 7th century so it is not spelled out there, but it could be inferred from other passages. So he then said he had just approved the budget for mosque construction and renovation for the forthcoming year – another source of graft at the village level. He noted that the budget was very generous at the moment, and added that he was sure that would continue if the *Ulamas* could find some place in the Koran that says that birth control is permitted by God. As he told it, they found it in “Sura” (chapter) so-and-so very quickly, and afterwards never complained about the birth control program.

I am not that familiar with Islamic countries, but the program was so successful that in the villages, women would proudly put up a sign on their house as to what birth control method they were using. If the sign went up, various benefits flowed to that household from Noer’s administration. Can you imagine that in a middle eastern Islamic country?

Q: I lived for 2 1/2 years in Wahabi country in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Women were under strict control there.

HOWLAND: Yes. Well, it is much more open in Indonesia. The reason for the Indonesian government emphasis on family planning in East Java was that President Suharto thought, that if the Madurese population there -- the most staunchly Islamic population of the three Javanese provinces -- could be won over, there might be a spill-over effect elsewhere in Java, and in other strong Islamic areas like Aceh, Borneo and Sumatra. But in fact it never worked as well in Central or West Java, even. In East Java and Bali the population increase attributable to the birth rate went down to 1.8 percent from 4.6 percent in three years.

So Noer was very good at that. He was very good at all kinds of development projects. He worked very hard. He had hoped to become a cabinet minister. As I said that didn't pan out, and he was actually nominated during the last six months of my time in Surabaya as Ambassador to France, a posting which he liked very much as it turned out. There was no French Consul in Surabaya, so I offered him my old French books and tapes from FSI to study the language. But, like Ambassadors, Governors seldom admit they need help in anything.

The American Consulate School

Overall I had developed a very good relationship with Mohammed Noer, and the big thing that he was helpful on was the school. When we arrived, there were eight American school-age kids at the Consulate, including two of mine. We had to do something to regularize the situation of the little missionary-run school there, which was in violation of Indonesian regulations. As usual, the Embassy wouldn't help at all.

The missionary school in Surabaya was taught by a Baptist missionary named Barbara Cole, a very determined and capable woman. The Baptists had an excellent hospital in Kediri, East Java, and maintained little missions spread out throughout Eastern Indonesia as far away as West Irian. They could not run schools there, so the children were sent to the Surabaya missionary school and stayed with Baptist families there during the school year. The Surabaya school had been started by missionary wives with education degrees to teach kids of various ages surreptitiously in people's living rooms, going from one house to another. It was quite illegal but largely left alone by the Indonesian officials.

Then, since the school also taught Consulate children, my predecessor had managed to get a grant from the State Department to rent a pretty good - sized house with several large rooms on a side street, to make into a school. Everyone worked on it, FSNs from the Consulate were painting, installing desks, etc. to convert the house into a school with classrooms and a play area out back. We provided school supplies and imported books and teaching materials though the pouch, on the grounds that it was a Consulate school for, among others, Consulate kids.

But, since the Indonesian government had a ban on foreign schools except for the international diplomatic school in Jakarta, JIS, it was very difficult to open a formal school anywhere else. The regulations stemmed from the abortive 1965 communist coup

attempt; before then when the Chinese had run their own schools in Indonesia, and allegedly taught communist dogma there. All foreign schools were now banned—even the one in Jakarta was having trouble, but luckily they taught a lot of kids whose parents worked for foreign oil companies and Pertamina, the Indonesian national oil enterprise, interceded for them with the education bureaucracy..

Outside Jakarta a foreign school had to be sub rosa. Now, all the officials in Surabaya knew that the missionary school was there, but as long as there was no hassle for them, they could turn a blind eye. The missionaries had been there for decades and were accepted – the Kediri hospital treated many officials. But with the new building, the school needed water and electricity and would have to pay the bills in the name of the school. It would have to deal with health inspectors, building inspectors, etc. all of whom of course wanted pay-offs. The school had hired some excellent Indonesian contract teachers, and paid them far more than their colleagues teaching in Indonesian government schools. The Education Ministry didn't like that. They would also have to inspect the curriculum because it was claimed that the Baptist teachers were proselytizing the children.

The new school building also gave local officialdom a lot of problems because they were afraid that as soon as bills and reports beginning filtering up to Jakarta with a foreign school mentioned on them, they would get criticized for permitting it to function against the law. So the Education Ministry officials in Surabaya periodically sent police to close it, and I periodically interceded with the Governor to keep it open. Then one day they turned off the electricity and water, and the Education Ministry chief in Surabaya insisted that only with his approval would those services be restored. I managed to get that done, but the situation was clearly intolerable and had to be regularized.

First, I went to the Embassy but they had their own problems and were no help whatsoever. The diplomatic and foreign business community there was trying to get a charter for its own “Jakarta International School” (JIS) which would give them legitimacy and enable them to buy land for a large school in the Jakarta suburbs (which my kids attended in 1983-87). The Indonesian oil company Pertamina was going to build them a big facility, and they didn't want our problems to impinge on their situation. The Department was quite different – the office that looked after overseas schools there was extremely helpful and never turned down a single request as I recall. The Department realized how difficult it would be to staff the post without a school. It was supportive of what we were trying to do.

So we had to do it all without any help from Jakarta. Luckily at this time, Chevron was beginning to explore a potential oil field in the Java Sea just offshore the island of Madura, and planned to build its base on the island itself. As I mentioned before, Madura was Noer's home base and also a traditional orthodox Muslim stronghold. Noer in fact had told me before we went to Madura together that “the three things you must never ask about are politics, religion and women.” Even Indonesian beer was hard to find there. An oil field base with unmarried or unaccompanied American workers on Madura posed

serious potential problems for relationships with the volatile and sensitive Madurese.

So I went to the governor and pointed this out – that he and I would have far less trouble if there were more married oil field workers and for that there had to be a foreign school. He agreed that he wanted to attract foreign investment and saw the point, and thought that he could get President Suharto to agree. But he could only place a school under his personal authority if it were called the “American Consulate School” and have its charter framed in terms of the need to attract foreign investors to promote development. I didn't have a clue as to whether we could call it that but naturally I agreed; Jakarta and the Department did too. So we started out calling it the American Consulate School and the charter request was sent to Jakarta for approval, never to reappear during my time in Surabaya. But the whole issue died out and we could function.

I became the chairman of the school board. Barbara Cole, whom I mentioned earlier, the wife of a Baptist missionary, became the principal. GSO handled its maintenance and Suki in B and F taught them to keep financial records. My wife was the librarian. I think two or three people in the Consulate were on the school board. We found all kinds of teachers here and there. We found for instance a part-timer from the U.S. naval mission in Surabaya who taught math. Another was an Australian Embassy naval attaché assigned as an adviser at the Indonesian navy base, who was a drama buff and lectured on Shakespeare.

Despite the Governor's support, every week we had to convene a school board meeting because every week there was yet another petty hassle with officialdom. Endlessly they tried to rip off the school for something or other. For instance the traffic police would arrive and demand that we paint white lines on the curbs. If not, we had to pay a weekly “fine” i.e. their weekly bribe. It was just endless. Surabaya was just this incredible mess of bribery and corruption. But we got the school started thanks to Mohammed Noer, and eventually one of my successors even got a charter as an international school, based on the precedent set in Jakarta. Eventually Medan and several other centers of foreign investment - even Bali -- were also allowed to set up “foreign investor” schools. With charters, they were better protected from the rapaciousness of the local authorities.

I'm proud to say that when I visited Surabaya as DCM in the 1983-87 period, what had become the “Surabaya International School” had 257 kids, a huge physical plant, with a gym, swimming pool and tennis courts and all the proper stuff. But it really started in a little villa on a side-street in 1974, thanks to Governor Noer, and I'm still very proud of our part in it.

The Last US visit to Portuguese Timor

The island of Timor lies over 1000 miles east from Java and was first discovered by the Portuguese in 1509. A few decades later Portuguese Catholics opened a mission and began proselytizing among the indigenous peoples, who were proto - Malay, somewhat akin to the Papuans in New Guinea. Later the Dutch also settled the western part of the

Island. In 1765 a treaty created the borders between Indonesian Timor in the west of the Island, and what is now, in 2012, the independent nation of Timor-Leste in the East. But when I arrived in Surabaya in 1974, the eastern end of Timor and a small enclave in western Timor named Oecussi had basically been Portuguese possessions for over 400 years. It was listed as “an overseas province of Portugal” – as French Guiana is for the French – but it was a neglected colony full of downtrodden natives of no importance to Lisbon. A very minor tribal insurgency had smoldered there for centuries.

Over those years Chinese traders had settled and dominated trade in the capital, Dili, and some Indonesians of Malay origin had moved into the far western stretches. During earlier centuries Portuguese Timor had exported sandalwood, prized in Asia, and then Portuguese colonists had founded large scale coffee plantations. Their workers were little more than serfs. The average Timorese native was indeed grindingly poor, but now wealthy descendants of Portuguese inter-marriage with Timorese, known as the “colons,” controlled the economy, in league with Chinese businessmen in the capital. There was a Portuguese military battalion stationed there and its commander served as Governor.

Portuguese Timor was a little unknown place on a map. I was basically unaware that the colony was in the Consular district until I looked carefully at my Consular commission. Then I happened to be perusing an old “log-book” in the files that recorded Consulate activities in Surabaya, going back to 1867 when it had been founded there. From the log-book, it appeared there had been occasional Consular visits there until the year the Consulate was closed in 1939 because of World War II. It was reopened in 1946 during the Indonesian revolution, and the Consul stationed there in 1958, Jack Lydman (later DCM in Jakarta and Ambassador to Malaysia), had visited Dili that year. I had heard that in 1969 Ambassador Marshall Green had touched down in the Attaché plane to refuel at the Dili airport on his way to West Irian. In addition, Harriet Isom from the Embassy political section had gone out to (Indonesian) West Timor and written a short airgram on her travels and travails there, and Bill Pierce from the Consulate had made a tourism trip the year before. Neither of them had been on official business in Portuguese Timor, and no accredited Consul had been there for a long time.

There was an Australian Consul in Dili, so I asked Keith Jordan, the Australian adviser to the Indonesian naval base, about the island’s more recent history. He made me aware how important Portuguese Timor was, geopolitically and emotionally, to Australians. There had been an Australian battalion stationed in Portuguese Timor in 1942 when invading Japanese troops arrived. Dili has an excellent harbor and the Japanese wanted to use it, along with New Guinea, as the springboard for the invasion of Australia. But with the help of Timorese militia that battalion had been able to pin down 21,000 Japanese troops in Dili, the capital. They harassed the Japanese day and night, and evaded capture. Finally after four or five months, it became impossible to resupply the unit, and there was an incredible heroic rescue at sea. The south coast of Timor is very rugged, basically sheer limestone cliffs everywhere. The battalion got down the cliffs and every Australian got out, sort of a Timorese Dunkirk. During this whole period, there were no Australian casualties from combat. No Australian was so much as wounded or captured by the

Japanese because of the guerrilla-style warfare they conducted with the help of the Timorese people -- fierce, tribal fighters by the way.

Following the evacuation, the Japanese had taken revenge on the Timorese people and the Australians have never forgotten that, according to Jordan. The Australians have always felt a tremendous responsibility and gratitude toward the Timorese because without their resistance the Japanese could have developed Timor into an invasion base to move on to Darwin. It was a dicey time for the Australians in those days, before we had rebuilt the Pacific fleet and won the battle of the Coral Sea. So they really felt strongly about Timor.

Finally, in April 1974, the long-time Portuguese dictator Salazar was ousted by a leftist group of army officers, the so-called "Sinta group" from the army barracks at Sinta north of Lisbon. The Salazar government collapsed and the young officers seized power. Some were communists, and the army installed a "socialist" government in Lisbon which began discarding the Portuguese colonies where native revolts had bogged down Portuguese forces for years. Mozambique and Angola went first, then Equatorial Guinea and Guinea – Bissau. You know the Portuguese did all this very badly with all of these places. They did almost everything very badly, including Portuguese Timor.

Q: Goa had already been picked up.

HOWLAND: Yes, the Indians had already taken over Goa. The Cape Verde Islands went next. They hung onto Macau, a money-maker, but Portuguese Timor was clearly on the list for decolonizing. So the new government had reportedly sent some army officers out to Dili, presumably leftist army officers to begin the process of moving the Timorese toward independence. There was a report in the Indonesian press of the arrival of a new governor, a military officer.

Getting Prepared for Portuguese Timor

So I began to think about making an official Consular visit to Portuguese Timor with an exequatur that would enable me to meet the appropriate officials and find out what was going on.

You recall from an earlier interview that in February 1963, I and two navy attaches had visited the southwest coast of Cambodia on a small Indochinese fishing boat, the first Americans to see those islands since World War II. A trip to Timor was an equally challenging and exciting prospect – one of the last colonies in the East. There were also good reporting reasons to visit the colony because of the revolution in Portugal, but clearly it had to be an authorized visit with careful preparations and all bases touched.

So first I checked with the Embassy in Jakarta. Ambassador Newsom and the DCM, Don Toussaint, had no problems, I mean they were delighted. They said they would notify the Indonesian desk about it. I went to Jakarta and called personally at the Foreign Ministry in Jakarta. They thought it was a wonderful idea for me to visit and, in their view, witness

how the Timorese people were yearning to become part of Indonesia, joined to West Timor. The Indonesians were sure in their mono-centric way that I would find that everyone in Timor was pro-Indonesian. They gave me the name of the Indonesian Consul General in Dili, and said he would give a reception for my visit so I could meet the allegedly yearning Timorese.

I also called on the Portuguese Consul General in Jakarta – it was the same diplomat who had arrived when the two countries resumed relations in 1968, and I had met him then (later I met him again while inspecting Guinea-Bissau in 1978, where he was Ambassador). He also liked the idea of the visit and said he would notify Lisbon. Then I checked the Foreign Service list to see who political counselor at our Embassy in Lisbon was. It turned out to be Charles Thomas, whom I had met in 1970 when I was in INR. I had been asked at that time to serve as a “big brother” for an A-100 junior officer class having their off-site week in Front Royal, and he was the A-100 course coordinator. So that is how I knew Charles Thomas. He was also at one point Ambassador to Romania and I think has recently passed away -- a very young man.

Q: Yes, recently . . . It was at the start of this interview when he died.

HOWLAND: So I sent off a cable to Charles Thomas mentioning that my commission indicated I was supposed to be Consul for Portuguese Timor, and asking his views on the possibility of my visiting there. I also asked if the Portuguese government would issue me an exequatur and give permission for a Consular visit. Well, he thought that was a nifty idea, and so did the Portuguese Government because, according to Charles, they felt it would help hold off the Indonesians until they could figure out what to do with the colony. I sent him a copy of my commission in the pouch and an exequatur arrived months later, a parchment of unbelievable beauty which unfortunately I have lost.

It appeared that no one in the Department objected to my visit. I think the Indonesia desk officer was Ed Ingraham at the time, and Bill Gleysteen was the principal deputy assistant secretary (DAS). Nobody had any problems with my going out on a routine Consular visit. Bill was going to come with me again at his request to look after the admin details, since he'd been there before. At no point did the Department or Embassy tell me that it was a bad idea, that I shouldn't go. I even asked our de facto representation in Taiwan to notify them, since Portugal still had relations with the Republic of China, not Beijing. I thought I had everything covered, but as you will see later, I missed the most important base --- I should have asked specific permission from Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State.

Time passed while I waited for the exequatur, and the southwest monsoon began. The heavy rains took more time to reach the islands farthest to the east, like Timor, but when they did, flash floods would turn the roads in the interior into raging stream-beds. We had to get there while dry season conditions still prevailed. So finally I wrote the new governor of Portuguese Timor, Colonel Mario Lemos-Pires, through the international mails, mentioning my proposed visit and the date. I added the usual flowery diplomatic

language mentioning my hope to have the privilege and honor of calling on him and his staff, meeting with local leaders etc. I had no idea he would get the letter but presumed we could make our way around with the Portuguese exequatur. Aware of colonial dress and etiquette from my tours in Cambodia and Laos, I even found and packed my old white linen suit, black tie and belt and shoes to wear in case of social events.

Stop-over in Kupang (Indonesian Timor)

On December 7, 1974, Bill and I set off on this great adventure into the unknown. I say “unknown” because we had never heard any reply from the Portuguese, either in Lisbon, or Dili, about the dates of the visit. We flew to Bali and changed planes to a Canadian-made “Twin-Otter,” a VSTOL high-wing aircraft that could land anywhere, flown of course by Garuda Airlines. We took off for Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara.

East of Java, the Sunda archipelago is divided into West Nusa Tenggara, governed from Denpasar in Bali, and the remainder of the islands governed from Kupang located on the western tip of the island of Timor. As I mentioned Timor was split down the middle by the Dutch and Portuguese. The eastern half is Portuguese; the western half is Indonesian, with a little non-contiguous Portuguese enclave called Oecussi buried along the shore in the midst of West Timor.

Along with Ambon, Manado and Makassar, Kupang is one of the few big towns in East Indonesia. It is also supposed to be one of the most shark-infested harbors in the world. You can easily see the sharks. You can see them from the air, or look off the seawall and see them patrolling back and forth. Apparently it is a big fishing port, and the seamen throw the fish entrails overboard, so the sharks just gather there. You don't want to stick your toe in that water. It was also made famous in history by Captain Bligh and “Mutiny on the Bounty,” when his chief mate Fletcher Christian set Bligh and a few of his men adrift in a small boat way off to the other side of Australia somewhere. Bligh sailed by dead reckoning by the stars, through perilous seas and hostile islands, almost 3000 miles to reach the Dutch fort at Kupang on Timor.

Q: I think it was considered one of the epic sea stories, essentially a heavily overloaded lifeboat.

HOWLAND: He sailed into the harbor at Kupang and the Dutch residents greeted him with amazement and got him a ship back to England. It was a very grueling long flight, about 1200 miles from Bali in an airplane going about 200 miles an hour, and we just droned on and on in this little Twin-Otter. Finally when we got to Kupang, the pilot buzzed the airstrip, made a big circle, then came around and landed. I wondered at the time why he did that. Why didn't he just land? Later I would find out.

Well, happily before leaving Surabaya I had asked Governor Noer in Surabaya to send a message to the governor of East Nusa Tenggara. So the governor of East Nusa Tenggara had a car waiting at the airport, which took us to the local police guest house. I had stayed

in many of them, but this guest house was one of the hottest places I have ever slept in my life, including Timbuktu in Mali. It was an old colonial structure right across the street from the harbor and took the full brunt of the humidity and the late afternoon sun. Kupang is virtually right on the equator and there was no air conditioning of course. There were no windows in my room, and the temperature must have been 110 degrees.

Luckily, Bill Pierce had warned me of this, so I had brought along in my bag a little 220-volt portable fan my wife found at the Surabaya market. Thank God for that fan, because I was able to get up every few hours, go to the bathroom and spill water all over myself from a dipper-bath, then sit in front of the fan and briefly cool off. Next morning we called on the Governor, who was very cordial, and then went out to see a development project. I was very insistent on seeing something on the Indonesian side as well as the Portuguese side. It was an AID-financed education project and we toured the school and gave them a few books, which they appreciated.

Neither Garuda nor any private Indonesian airline flew to Dili, so we tried to hook up with the Portuguese airline TAP, Transport Avianca Portuguese. TAP operated out of Dili and flew a couple of 12-seater de Havilland Doves back and forth between Darwin, Dili and Kupang. The flights were mainly used by “hippies” (actually drug-smugglers) from Australia taking a cheap route to Bali. So you could fly from Darwin on TAP to Dili, then after a few days catch another TAP flight from Dili to Kupang. In Kupang you could bribe your way onto a cheap Merpati Indonesian airways C-47 cargo flight to Bali. At each stop it usually took a week to arrange the onward flight. If you didn't mind spending 30 days doing that, you could get to Bali for \$54 from Australia. The other reason for the flights back and forth was that the pilots would smuggle the delicious coffee out of Portuguese Timor, sell it in Kupang or Darwin, and make a nice living for themselves. Apparently the soil in Timor produced wonderful coffee.

There was a little TAP office somewhere in Kupang. We didn't know where it was, but the governor assured us that he had arranged with them for our transport onward to Dili. After another stifling night we headed out to the airport. It was so hot I just put on an old pair of khakis and a T-shirt, expecting a long wait at the hot airport. But sure enough, in came this de Havilland Dove almost immediately. It too made a “buzz” pass over the runway and then turned and landed. We chopped out of immigration and customs and got in the de Havilland Dove. We were the only passengers. I wondered if the Portuguese administration had sent it for us and soon found out that was the case. At least it suggested they were aware of the visit.

An Unexpected Arrival Ceremony

Bill and I were chatting in the front seats with our luggage in the empty next row. Soon we were over Dili, and the pilot banked and we looked down. We were about 500 feet up so we could see the area clearly. Beside the runway was a battalion of soldiers drawn up in white uniforms, and what appeared to be three large white Mercedes Benz vehicles parked on the tarmac . So I asked the pilot, "Are you expecting some military visitor?" He

said, "No, they are expecting you, the Consul from Surabaya." So there I was in my T-shirt and khakis – I certainly could not take a salute dressed like that. I told the pilot: "Fly around until I change my clothes." It was certainly lucky that I had brought the old colonial outfit from Cambodia. I wrestled it out of the bag, got into my old white suit, put on a black tie, white shirt, and black belt. I was drenched with perspiration but now dressed properly.

Bill Pierce, in his jeans and t-shirt, said, "I'll just hang around. I'll stay in the plane until you go off and then I'll hitch a ride in ..." I said, "No, no, you are coming along." So he found a tie somewhere and put it on over a sport shirt. We landed and went down the steps, and this magnificently bemedaled, very trim young Portuguese army officer came up, saluted and said in perfect English, "My name is Colonel Mario Lemos-Pires. I am the governor of Portuguese Timor. I was trained at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in your Command and General Staff school, and my daughters both went to the American high school." That is exactly what he said, and he continued, "You are very welcome here. This is your home as well as mine. We will do everything we can to facilitate the visit."

Well, I already had lots of reasons to thank the US military from my time in Laos, and here was another: the International Military Education and Training program, the IMET. His time in the US just made him an immediate friend and transformed what might have been an uncomfortable and suspicious situation into a remarkably informative one. He said he would put a vehicle and driver at our disposal, and suggested a few calls on local officials. We sat at the tiny airport office with a cool drink for a few minutes, and talked. He said, "How would you like to do your visit here? Everyone in the entire province" -- as I said it was considered a province of Portugal -- "is aware of your visit."

Well, indeed they were, including The Wall Street Journal's Hong Kong correspondent, Bob Keeley, who had come to Dili from Darwin. He was writing a feature article about the "hippie" drug-smuggling route. Dili was a great drug haven when I visited there; it was a transit place for all the Australian hippies who financed their trips to Bali and elsewhere by smuggling drugs back and forth. There was a hostel down by the river called the "Heroin Hilton" because it was where they all stayed. The Portuguese knew this was going on, but they kept them under rigid control and then shipped them off to Bali. They couldn't care less what was happening in Bali. It was sort of your classic little sleepy colony.

Well, Keeley was writing about that and then he heard that the U.S. Consul was coming so he turned up at my hotel that night – a delightful air-conditioned little "posada" with good food, by the way. I chatted with him and emphasized it was a purely routine Consular visit. I asked him not to write about it, but unfortunately he wrote it up. He was struck with the colonial atmosphere, sort of like the movie "Casablanca" complete with sleepy, bumbling officials. A visiting U.S. Consul enhanced the picture.

Q: Claude Rains.

HOWLAND: Ha, no Claude Rains, but the whole place seemed to date back at least to the 19th century. Anyway, I begged Keeley, whom I had met in Laos years earlier, not to write anything about the visit, but he did put in a few lines in his article.

Meeting with the Governor

Well, my first task was a formal call on the Governor, and I found him astonishingly frank and out-spoken. By the way, he later became Portugal's military representative to NATO. After that I lost track of him. He told me to be careful of what I said to various officials who were nominally on his staff, but were really agents of the different factions contending in Portugal, and in the colony. In fact, the Governor said, the whole province was rife with political turmoil. For instance the new head of the intelligence staff in the colony – the infamous “PIDE” -- had just been changed and was a leftist, perhaps actually a communist army officer, who was working to make sure that local communists could take over the colony after independence. Only a few did not have a secret agenda -- the long-term civil servants for instance were in league with the “Colon” party, the UDT, who were mostly coffee plantation owners and their allies. The Governor said it would be best for me to meet the colonial officials informally at a reception at his residence, which he would give the last night of the visit. If I made calls they would have to make official reports to Lisbon.

The Indonesians of course were trying to create a popular movement in Timor to build support for joining Portuguese Timor to Indonesia. Indonesia's traditional position was that any ex-colonial territory within its boundaries came under its sovereignty. That is why they fought long and hard to get West New Guinea away from the Dutch to set a precedent as inheritor of all ex-colonies in their area. Then too, they were afraid that if Timor became independent and could go it alone, especially with their enemies, let's say the Russians or Chinese, might start running aid programs into an independent, Marxist state in the middle of the archipelago. That would set a terrible example for other parts of Indonesia: North Sulawesi, Aceh, and West Irian which were also very unhappy with Javanese overlordship of their regions. The Indonesian-sponsored fledgling political group was called the “APODETI.” It was the smallest political faction but said to be the best-financed, and seemed to operate out of the Indonesian Consulate General in Dili.

So there was one small faction that wanted to remain a Portuguese colony, another that purported to want integration with Indonesia, and of course a third and pro- independence group, the leftist movement called the “Fretilin,” the “Timor Liberation Front .” That faction included tribal leaders and others who had fought, mostly secretly, for independence for years. Like many such groups they had adopted Marxism and said they wanted to create a little Marxist state. The ones I met all proudly said they had read Mao’s writings, the so-called “Little Red Book.” They thought it was wonderful.

In the middle of this were the vast bulk of the Timorese people, an originally fierce but now child-like and friendly people who were from dozens of different tribes and linguistic groups. The only commonalty among them was the Catholic Church,

subjugation to the Portuguese administration, and the Portuguese language. Oh, there was also a native lingua franca spoken there; I forget the name. And, they wove wonderful “ikat” native textiles which later became very valuable. The ones I bought there I later donated to the Textile Museum in Washington.

I asked the governor for his advice on how to proceed to meet some of the political leaders as well as the Australian, Taiwan and Indonesian Consuls. Portugal still had relations with Taiwan, not Communist China, so there was a Taiwan Consul there. The Australian and Taiwan Consuls only visited intermittently and were away, so that took care of that. The governor pressed me to take some trips, out to Liquisa on the north coast, up in the mountains to Ermara, which was the coffee plantation growing area, and farther east. In turn

I continued pressing to make calls on the emerging political leaders. Finally he suggested that, every evening at five, I should have a late afternoon drink in front of my hotel, the Pension Labat. He would let it be known to the political aspirants that I would be available to chat informally with them at that time. "What I am afraid of," I replied, "is that since the Indonesian side is so weak here that if you don't let it be known that I am going to call on them, it will be a bit uncomfortable for me when I get back." So he agreed I could seek out the APODETI leader through the Indonesian Consul General.

Meeting the Political Leaders

So the first people to show up that night were Jose Ramos-Horta -- who later shared the Nobel Peace Prize with a local priest, Monsignor Belo -- and a few other Fretilin adherents, including one with bone earrings. They showed me a copy of Mao's “little red book,” and said although they were “communists,” they wanted American aid, tourism and investment. It turned out they hadn't a clue about communism and all they really wanted was to run the place after the Portuguese left, and keep out the Indonesians. They were in league of course, with the leftist army officers who had come out from Lisbon basically to turn over the colony to them. So that was Fretilin. It was the best organized, but kind of naive.

The party of the center, the “colon” party UDT , was led by Mario Carrascalao, who much later was appointed Governor of Timor by Jakarta after the Indonesian take-over. He told me the UDT basically wanted a sort of quasi - autonomous situation within Indonesia. They knew they didn't want Fretilin and the leftists to take over because they were afraid of losing their plantations under land reform. The UDT was allied with the Catholic Church, which was centrist and very powerful, since virtually every Timorese was a staunch Catholic. There was a split in the church and Belo has sided with the Independence group, Fretilin. There were no Moslems whatsoever, unlike the rest of Indonesia. Many UDT figures had Portuguese passports but knew they could not make a living there, and hoped to stave off independence as long as possible.

But the leaders of the pro-Indonesian faction, the APODETI, never showed up. So I

called on the Indonesian Consul General and asked if he could help me meet its leader. I pointed out it would be uncomfortable for me in Indonesia if I had not talked to him. He said, "Well it is very hard to find these people. They are busy talking to supporters." Of course, the fact was they didn't exist. But he was giving a reception for me and said the leader would come there and meet me. But again he didn't show up. Finally toward the end of the visit I was getting nervous that I wouldn't meet any Indonesian party leaders. So I went to see the governor, who then called and said they were coming to his office. When he called, our driver was missing so we took a pedi-cab through the town to get there.

When we arrived the Governor introduced the head of the APODETI party, who turned out to be our driver! He was a low-level administrator in the western part of the colony, and knew very little about the politics of the capital. He had been chosen to drive for us because he spoke Indonesian, and the Governor presumed rightly that we could communicate with him. We exchanged a few pleasantries but he was so embarrassed. He said the Indonesian Consul General didn't know he was chosen to drive for us and he asked us not to tell him. He was getting a small "comisi" from the Consul General for serving as the head of APODETI and didn't want to lose that. I suspect as a civil servant he was also reporting to the PIDE. So that was the Indonesian pro-integration party, a sham as one would expect, or "sandiwara" (a shadow-play) as it would be called in Javanese.

Travels in Portuguese Timor

On our travels we quickly found that the Portuguese had done nothing for Timor in 400 years, except build a pleasant little capital with a statue of Henry the Navigator, king of Portugal when Timor was discovered, in the main square. Dili was nice, hot like Kupang, but a clean well-swept colonial town with 5-6,000 people right on the north coast. A lovely harbor, beautiful beaches. In Dili there were 10 doctors, all practicing in the capital, and they only treated Portuguese citizens. For the rest, the entire population of some 600,000 people, there were no doctors, no dentists, no clinics, no health service, there was nothing. The Portuguese had done nothing. The roads were just a disgrace, just stream beds ranging from unusable to non-existent, even those leading to the coffee plantations. Perhaps the Portuguese had kept them that way, as Mobutu destroyed the roads in Zaire, so no large rebel forces could use them to attack the capital -- even so there were a number of rebellions against the capital and the native populations had been terrorized and slaughtered. As I mentioned there were no infirmaries, and were virtually no schools. There was one high school in Dili, and I was told that in all the centuries only five Timorese had been sent to Lisbon for onward schooling in anything but religion. The five were medical students, and they all came back and became rebels in Fretilin.

We drove west along the north coast on a terrible but passable road, heading for the town of Liquisa but interrupted every few miles by wide outwash streambeds right across the middle of the road. These streambeds drain off the rains up in the mountains, which come down come down as a flash flood. Luckily the rains had held off, as we had hoped. Timor

is all rock. There is very little arable land until you get up in the plateaus where the coffee is grown. The north coast is solid bedrock. I don't think there was a bridge along the entire road. But the shoreline was interesting, mountains to the south rising up from the plain. In the mountains it was a beautiful country physically, very lovely.

There was nothing in Liquisa besides a few colonial offices and an orphanage. After a while we went back to Dili and made a circle around the harbor. The next day we set off for the coffee plantations in Ermara, but the roads were just too bad and we never made it all the way. We stopped at a few little Portuguese villages in the mountains, which were close to Dili so they weren't traditional. I had seen a lot of pictures of magnificently carved and decorated traditional structures, Timorese long-houses and clan homes farther to the east. Australian tourists did come in from time to time. But we never got out there unfortunately. What we saw near Dili were just huts.

One of the most vivid things was that in each village graveyard, the only stone markers were at plots for departed village chiefs. The other Timorese, the ordinary people, were interred in traditional sarcophagi somewhere else. But each village had a small, western-style graveyard where its village chiefs, over the years had been buried with gravestones, each inscribed with the same phrase. In Portuguese, it gave the chief's name, and title, his dates in office, let's say 1807-1823, and then there was this stock phrase: "He died for Portugal in a far off land."

Well, of course, he was a native Timorese and didn't die in a far off land. He was a Timorese head man in his own village, and the Portuguese came and put a uniform on him, made him a Portuguese official, and then treated him and his people like serfs. They died for Portugal, all right, but the graves were all kind of a sad commentary on the fact that Portugal had done nothing for them over the years of rule.

Q: This is tape eleven, side one with Dick Howland. Yes?

HOWLAND: Tape eleven already? The last night before we left the governor gave a big banquet for us at his residence on the hills overlooking Dili, a beautiful residence at about 3,000 feet high. A winding road went up to it and the hospital was there too. It was cool and pleasant and delightful, a scene out of the colonial period from many years ago. Everyone dressed in white formal wear, the women all in ball gowns -- in fact there was an orchestra, but I didn't dance. A table just covered with food, lobster, wonderful lobster out there, pork and everything you might find at a buffet event in Lisbon, I suppose. I met all the officials and the Governor graciously translated when it was needed.

It was a perfect step back into time, but I had just spent three days touring the grinding, unbelievable poverty of this place. At one point at the farewell reception, I asked the Army officer who headed the PIDE: "If you guys have been here for 400 years, how come you haven't done anything for Portuguese Timor?" He replied, "We haven't done anything for Portugal in 400 years." Perhaps that was why he had become a communist. Yes, they had done nothing for it and here I was eating all this food with all the colonial civil

servants who were doing nothing for the country except lining their own pockets by stealing things. It was a totally unreal experience, and when I made my farewell call on the governor the next day he said he had put it on to show what life had been like for the privileged classes all these years. Now they were moving the place toward independence, these colonials would all be leaving, and the Timorese would have a chance to build a country if the Indonesians would leave them alone. The implication was that if Indonesia took over, its officials would simply inherit the role and privileges of the Portuguese elite. As it turned out later, of course, he was exactly right.

The Flight from Timor

The next day Bill and I went down to the airport. The Portuguese government, as it turned out, had paid for the plane that picked us up in Kupang. But once the visit was over and I'd made my farewell call, of course they weren't going to pay for the plane flight out. There was no regular flight on the day we wanted to go, so we had to charter a plane to get out. It would have been prohibitive to pay for the flight ourselves. It was a 12 - seat plane, again a de Havilland Dove, plus of course the co-pilot's seat.

So, Bill Pierce went over to the "heroin Hilton" over there. He recruited 11 Australian hippies, got them each to pay 30 bucks which came to \$330. The plane flight cost \$600 or something like that. Bill and I ponied up the rest of the money. The pilot wanted dollars. We had some dollars, which we gave him and it came to the right amount of money. We went out, everybody was there, they all paid their money, and we got in the plane. I sat up in the co-pilot's seat. Bill sat in the back with all the hippies and we took off. I looked over at the pilot and it was not the same pilot we had when we came out. This one looked drunk. We took off and he was kind of flying with tail dragging, it was a heavy - loaded plane. Everybody had luggage. One guy was lying down in the aisle. We're flying between the mountains and it's all very exciting, but scary.

Then the pilot started yawning and he says, "Did you ever fly an airplane?"

So, I said, "No."

He said, "Oh, it's very easy, I'm going to show you how to do it."

I said, "No, I don't think I want to do it."

He said, "I'm very sleepy, I'm falling asleep. You just put it here on the compass and if anything happens you just nudge me and wake me up."

I said, "No, I'm not gong to do it."

"Oh, come on, I'm really getting sleepy, I want to go to sleep."

I said, "No."

By the time we finished arguing we were approaching Kupang. As with Garuda earlier, he first buzzed the airstrip. I asked him why every plane did that before landing. He said, "Because about a year ago, there was somebody who didn't do it and they shot him down." He continued that "Maybe you're from Java where things are all right, but let me tell you the Indonesians are not under anybody's control around here. They're not under Jakarta's control. Wait to breathe easy until you get back to Bali. Good luck on getting out of Kupang."

Trying to Escape from Kupang

We landed and I found he was absolutely right. We went into Indonesian customs and there we sat at the airport for five hours trying to get our bags into Indonesia with our diplomatic ID cards and passports. They agreed to waive an inspection but insisted we had to pay a "landing fee" Then we went into Kupang and we tried to stay at the police guesthouse again. Well, that was only for official visitors, and our official visit was over a week earlier, so we couldn't stay at the police guesthouse anymore. We were told to go to the hotel in town. The hotel in town was so bad, I would have slept in the street rather than that hotel. Back to the police guesthouse. Well, maybe if you pay something, we'll let you in. So, we had to pay there. Luckily we had a lot of money.

The minute we got to the police guesthouse, two plainclothes policemen – "minders" as they're called elsewhere, were attached to us, and they wanted to eat all the time, and wanted us to pay. There was actually a good Chinese restaurant in town but they wouldn't let us go there; they had to bring the food up to the guest house. It went on like that all day. The next morning we had reservations on Garuda for Bali, but when we got to the airport what seemed like hundreds of people were screaming and trying to bribe clerks and police officials to get on board and our reservations were not honored. Back for another night at the police guest house.

The next morning I managed to get an appointment with the Governor and threw ourselves on his mercy. He told us that later that morning there was supposed to be a Merpati Nusantara flight, a smaller airplane, not a Garuda jet. One of President Suharto's kids had founded the airline with the national oil company, Pertamina. The governor said he would call the Merpati agent and get us two reservations, and send us to the airport in his own car with the flags flying. After that, he said, you are on your own.

When we got there it was the same incredible mob scene as the day before, even though it turned out to be four hours before the plane arrived. Merpati had a separate waiting area which turned out to be a kind of caged - in, fenced - in enclosure with benches in the full tropical sun. There you sat while you were waiting for someone to do something with your passport even though you were traveling within Indonesia. There was no way you were going to get out of town without showing your passport to somebody.

Finally, the plane arrived and Bill Pierce went in to the Merpati office and somehow got

our passports and boarding passes. I never asked how he did it but I practically kissed him. Once you had that boarding pass with its little seat sticker on it, you could get on the plane. Then we sat in our outdoor cage sweating hard and scared for another two hours, waiting for the pilots to come back from lunch or whatever. Like the TAP pilots, the Indonesian airline pilots were also in the Timorese coffee shipment business, and their cargo had to be loaded. Then it turned out that, after the experience of fighting for seats on this plane -- a Lockheed Electra with 50 seats -- I don't think there were more than ten other passengers. The plane was half -- empty. In other words, the other would be flyers didn't have enough money for the bribes. Never mind, we took off. As we left Kupang, we said a little prayer of gratitude that we weren't going to spend any more miserable nights in the police guesthouse in Kupang.

We flew a long time and then landed in Bali. Well, all the time we had been out in Timor, that whole Eastern portion of the Sunda Islands had been bone dry. Out there the rains all come at once, last six weeks, the water runs off to the sea, and then the rains stop. The mountains hold some moisture but the rest is bone - dry. But, in Bali, in December it was raining heavily, an early rainy season.

From the air we could see the monsoonal rain-cells coming from the southwest, one after another. We got out of the plane and walked out on the tarmac and rain was pouring down as Bill and I just stood there, looking at the lush greenery, enjoying being soaked. We decided to go to the Bali Beach Hotel and I called my wife, and then we had gin-and-tonics or something, and two hamburgers each in the hotel coffee shop. Looking off the terrace there, you could see the waves breaking over the reef just offshore. Farther out there were painted Balinese outriggers darting like dragon-flies across the deep-blue straits between Bali and the island of Lombok -- the so-called "Wallace Line" runs down those straits. To the north, the great sacred Balinese mountain Gunung Agung towered over the seas, to the east Gunung Rinjani did the same, a misty mirage in the distance.

We were back in Bali, back into the real Indonesia; we were out of Timor and needed a rest. We spent the next two days writing our report next to the pool, an idyllic end to a grueling but fascinating trip. To this day I'm glad I did it.

Q: Well, we'll pick this up at the next time.

Q: Oh, yes, here we are. You're at the Bali Beach Hotel writing your cable.

Aftermath of the Visit

HOWLAND: Right, we'd both made notes and we did our reporting cable, a long cable cleared with the Embassy which sent it on to the Department. It was a good report I thought. It certainly covered the political situation in Timor, because, as I mentioned earlier I had talked to every politician, I mean every significant political actor in Timor, and had long talks with the Governor. Well, it turned out that Dr. Henry Kissinger, the Secretary, was furious about the cable .

First of all, no one had told him that an American officer was going out to Timor even though it had been cleared with the Embassy, with the Bureau, with the Portuguese, with the Indonesians, and with Taiwan, which had a representation on the island. Dr. Kissinger had just fired the Assistant Secretary for Africa for going somewhere without his permission, and here was another case. Second, my reporting cable meant that if the Indonesians moved on Timor, the Department could not play dumb. Now they knew about the situation out there, and would have to take a position. And third, we had touched base with Taiwan at a time when relations with Beijing were sensitive. Dr. Kissinger, who had praised my reporting cables from Laos, hated this one. He called the East Asia Bureau and spoke to the principal deputy, Bill Gleysteen, who has probably done interviews with you.

Q: He certainly has. He was my Ambassador in South Korea.

HOWLAND: So Bill called Ambassador Newsom who called to chew me out. When I mentioned I had gotten everyone's permission to go, he said I shouldn't have written a report. He explained about Kissinger's call to Gleysteen, and asked me not to do anything further on Timor since the issue had been raised to a very high level. Of course there was nothing further I would have done.

Probably Dr. Kissinger was right, but it was painful for Bill Pierce and me to remember what we had gone through in traveling out there to write a good report, and now we were being blamed for it. However, the report was classified and would not be released for many years if ever.

Anyway, the Indonesians did invade Timor. One year later practically to the day, they invaded in early December of 1975. It was just after the President had made a state visit to Indonesia, at which time I presume the Indonesians had told Kissinger they were going to do it and he hadn't demurred in any way. I presume he warned them that we would remonstrate about the use of our military aid, particularly the destroyers, which we did. Afterwards Timor disappeared from world attention except in Australia, where it was a live issue for many years. But Bill Gleysteen never forgot, and for years afterwards whenever I'd see him in the hall, he'd ask if I had "started any wars in Indonesia lately."

You know, by coincidence when I took Public Administration at GWU years earlier in Washington, there was a case in the textbook about a young Consular officer detailed by the Consulate General in Batavia to go to the Surabaya Consulate during the revolution in 1947, and report on the situation there. It was very different in Surabaya than in the capital, where the Dutch were in control, and there was heavy fighting in the interior. The young officer reported his conclusion that the Indonesians were going to win in their revolution and oust the Dutch from the Indies. Now, at that time the principal officer at the Consulate General in Batavia was a strong supporter of the local Dutch administration, and was furious. He had persisted in reporting to the Department that the Dutch, our allies, would easily regain control of the colony. The young officer was

removed and sent back to Washington. Of course, in the end, we threatened to hold up Marshall Plan aid to pressure the Dutch to release Indonesia. They did three years later in 1950 with the transfer of sovereignty over all of the Indies except West New Guinea.

In my own case, I suspect but can't be sure, that I was passed over for a job at the East Asia Bureau despite my background in Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia and the fact that jobs were open on those desks. Who knows, but there was nowhere I could turn after Surabaya except first the Army War College, then the Inspection Corps, and finally Personnel. I was set adrift for doing a good reporting job on Portuguese Timor, I think. That's enough whining, but it took me five years to get back in the Bureau, thanks only to the kindness of John Negroponte.

Q: This is, we're starting again, this is tape thirteen and we're going back now some other thoughts on Surabaya. Dick, it's all yours.

HOWLAND: Yes, thank you. This is the conclusion really of Surabaya and it may take a little while. Checking my notes I would like to make sure I cover a consular event there that is not very well known, and there should be some historical record of it. That is the flight of Lon Nol and his minions to Hawaii, via Bali, where I issued his and the others' US visas. As to when it was, I remember the date of April 30, 1975 when Saigon fell, and Phnom Penh fell something like 12 days before it. So the Lon Nol episode in Bali must have occurred in early April. John Gunther Dean was the Ambassador in Phnom Penh, and I knew him very well; indeed I had worked for him. Paul Gardner, a very close friend, was political counselor there at the time.

Issuing Visas to Lon Nol in Bali

In the last five or six days of the nightmare in Phnom Penn, the Embassy had finally persuaded Lon Nol in effect to abdicate. He would go and live in Hawaii, someone else would be named chief of state. Dean thought I suppose that by doing this, there might be a chance of making some kind of deal. Of course no one could have thought the Khmer Rouge would make any kind of a deal when they were on the outskirts of Phnom Penh and about to take over. For whatever reason, Lon Nol and a number of his confidants, his family, his children, etc. were to be gotten out of Phnom Penh -- frantically. The Department, however, didn't want to fly him directly from Cambodia to Hawaii on a USG aircraft. They wanted to have him stop somewhere en route, so that he could relinquish his Chief of State position there, and then fly onward as a private citizen on an American aircraft. So there had to be a stop, and the place chosen was Bali. It was announced he was going there at President Suharto's invitation for a rest.

Now, in the rush of getting this put together and underway in Phnom Penh, there was no time to issue US visas to a number of his people, and not even to Lon Nol itself. Normally he wouldn't need a visa as the chief of state, but when arriving in the United States he would be just another government official or a private citizen and so would need a visa. So late one night in early April, John Monjo, the political counselor in

Jakarta, called and told me that Lon Nol and a sizable party were coming to Bali. They would stay there three or four days and they needed US visas for onward travel to Hawaii. He said the Embassy did not want to send someone down into our Consular district to issue visas, but he, John would be coming down to welcome the group as political counselor. He couldn't issue visas because he didn't have a Consular commission, so they wanted me to do the visas. The Indonesian airline would fly them from Phnom Penh so that it could look like he was off for a few days vacation in Bali.

Well, I thought it ironic that I hadn't signed a visa since being stationed in Cambodia in 1962, and now the first visas 13 years later in Indonesia were again to Cambodians leaving their country. Moreover, I had first met Lon Nol when I played volley ball on the MAAG team in Phnom Penh, as I mentioned in an earlier interview. John said to get down there right away, i.e. by the next day. Well, I called the airlines but then realized I better have my own car. At about 4:00 in the morning I got a hold of our motor pool FSN, Max, who woke my driver, Saileh. So we set off for Bali, getting there about 4:00 in the afternoon.

Q: How do you get there?

HOWLAND: Through East Java you take the north coast road to just a bit north of Banjuwangi, at the easternmost tip of Java. There's a ferry across the Straits of Bali, and then a long drive on a terrible road along the southwest coast and then along east coast of Bali to get to where they were. Of course Lon Nol and his party stayed in Ubud at the government guesthouse, which was very nice and in a beautiful spot. I'm trying to remember where I stayed. I guess I stayed at the Bali Beach Hotel, which was on the east coast and not far from Ubud.

So, I checked in that afternoon and then drove to the guesthouse and there were all the Cambodians. It was like being back in Phnom Penh again. A couple of them I remembered; they didn't remember me, but I remembered them. I arrived there that night, and chatted and presented my courtesies to Lon Nol. The Indonesians had sent some foreign ministry protocol people from Jakarta, but the official who was really putting it all together was General Benny Moerdani, the military intelligence chief. He was one of President Suharto's closest confidants and a main operative for sensitive matters. (Moerdani eventually became minister of defense and chief of staff of the armed forces). I knew him from my tour in Jakarta in 1964-68, but I hadn't seen him on this tour because I had been in Surabaya, not in Jakarta. He hadn't arrived yet.

The next morning I got their passports and I entered the visas and did the entire necessary visa stuff. John Monjo showed up from Jakarta, having come on the same flight with Benny Moerdani. He was pleased that the visa problem was resolved properly. To give the Cambodians something to do, the protocol officials arranged a trip up into a resort area in a huge caldera next to the sacred volcano, Gunung Agung. In the caldera are a beautiful lake, and a small active cinder cone, quite a magnificent sight. There was an excellent restaurant right alongside of the road, built out over the chasm of the crater. It's

quite a place. Monjo and I sat together with the Cambodians and had a very convivial lunch with Moerdani.

In the course of the conversation we learned that some of the Cambodian cabinet ministers who had come to Bali with Lon Nol were actually planning to return to Phnom Penh. Benny, John and I were absolutely flabbergasted at this. We pointed out that the Khmer Rouge would probably take Phnom Penh within a few days. "That's all right," they said. "You Americans will be gone then. The Khmer Rouge is only mad at the Americans. Once you Americans are gone, we'll all be Cambodians again. We'll all speak the same language. We're all Buddhists. Khmer Rouge will become Buddhists and everything will be fine." I recall later talking to John Gunther Dean; he said many Cambodians had said exactly the same thing to him. The Lao had said the same thing about the Pathet Lao. I said nothing, but remember looking at Benny, who was shaking his head. Afterwards he said: They're out of their minds. They'll all be killed and indeed all of them were. Some were killed in their offices as they rose to welcome their Khmer Rouge compatriots.

The next day we went to the airport to see the Lon Nol party off, getting on a US Air Force 707 I believe. At some point I understand it was made known to him that when he arrived in Hawaii he would be a private citizen. I don't know what he answered to that, but it was the end of our long association with Lon Nol, which dated back to a time long before I arrived in Cambodia in '61. It was the end of all the problems we had had with him, and with his scheming brothers. That was the penultimate act in the Cambodian drama, until of course the Khmer Rouge took over. It was ironic that I had served my first tour in Cambodia – and then issued the visas at the end of the saga.

Q: A question on this.

HOWLAND: Yes.

Q: How did the fall of Vietnam and Cambodia play in your Consular district to your Indonesian contacts?

HOWLAND: The only impact I remember was Governor Noer saying well, actually this is beneficial because now you're with a winner, i.e. Indonesia. You're not with those losers. The only impact of Vietnam on Indonesia had come earlier, during the 1965 PKI/Sukarno coup attempt when our stance in Vietnam may have stiffened Indonesian backbones in their subsequent crushing of the communists. In addition one of the military commanders I knew in Java saw the fall of Indochina as a plot to get Indonesia, and launched a pitch for more military aid. I didn't take that argument seriously.

Q: I do want to ask you after we finish this whole episode as a former Consular officer myself I'd like to ask about the problems that Americans got into in Bali and how you dealt with it and all that. We'll talk about that. I'm going to stop here.

HOWLAND: Good. Right.

Q: A lot of Americans went there.

HOWLAND: Not a lot of Americans in those years, but a lot of problem Americans. Frankly, most of the problems in Bali were caused by Australians because they could get there very easily in the '70s through Timor, as I described earlier. You could get from Darwin to Bali for about 50 bucks if you were willing to spend a lot of time in doing it. Some were drug-users, others sold drugs –mainly heroin – which they got easily in Dili, and then smuggle it to Bali and happily sit on the beach and smoke heroin or whatever they were doing with it.

Anyway, connected to this Australian drug culture were a few Americans and Consular problems cropped up with them in Bali at least once every two or three weeks. Either Gene Christy, who was my Consular officer, or I would go down there. Now any excuse to go to Bali is usually not a bad excuse. You work in the morning, because all of official Bali stops work at noon. So, in the afternoon you would be able to make a few calls, on a local businessman for instance, and then in the late afternoon have a swim and an hour at the beach before dinner. It was not an unpleasant way to make a living and as I mentioned when I talked about my time in Cambodia, I enjoyed Consular work. It's one of those things where you get to meet and deal with real people with real problems, not just push paper from one file to another.

There were a couple of specific cases which, as a Consular officer, you might be interested in. The first involved the nephew of a very prominent Senator.

Q: So, we're talking about a big gun.

HOWLAND: Absolutely. A very fine Senator, but his nephew was arrested in Bali for possessing and selling drugs. Now I should say Bali's police and government establishment was as corrupt, perhaps even more corrupt than East Java because there were more foreigners to victimize. They loved arresting Americans, or anyone they thought had any money at all, and bringing them before a magistrate who would prescribe a stiff sentence and then a lawyer could arrange a bribe. This was during a period when the nude bathing thing was just sort of becoming a worldwide tourist fad. Here were these gorgeous beaches in Bali and in those years in the back-country the Balinese women still went topless. Not on the main roads, or in the main towns, but still in the back-country. So the kids drew the wrong conclusions from that about the beach.

Many of these kids would stay in a village near the beach for a pittance, and then come to the beach with no clothing on at all. Soon a policeman would arrest them and throw them in jail. The police would go to the village and find their clothes, which would have minute amounts of marijuana. That would be a drug offense. We were beating on the Indonesians at that time about drugs because of Australia, and now here's the nephew of a prominent American official arrested for drug possession and nude bathing. The Embassy

sent me to Bali to do something about it, to get him out obviously and on his way. I really felt like a hypocrite. I had just been down there telling the Governor in Denpasar he should crack down on tourists with drugs and now I had to tell him, oh but not this guy, he is one of ours, you've got to let him go. I think the Embassy turned to President Suharto for help, hinting at danger to the aid program, so the word came from Jakarta and he was released before charges and deported. It was not as a result of my representation, but he was let go. That was the first case.

The second case was a reporter who had been a staffer for a widely circulated news magazine, who had gone down hill in the Middle East because of drinking. His marriage too apparently had difficulties and he had been let go by the magazine, then had wandered around and wound up in Bali drunk, perennially drunk. I think he lived with a succession of different women in Bali, and then one day after a few drinks he decided to go down to Kuta Beach. the big Australian hangout, the big nudist beach. He took off all his clothes and threw them in the water, but forgot that his passport was in his pocket, so off went his passport into the waves. He started yelling about that and the Indonesian beach guards immediately collared him and called the police who came to pick him up. Then he did a really dumb thing, but as it turned out, maybe a smart thing: he slugged the policeman. He slugged an armed Indonesian policeman.

Now, anybody who has had some experience in the country knows you do not mess around with armed Indonesians. They have a tendency to shoot you. There were notorious cases in the 1960s where people would continue driving down a road when a policeman wanted them to stop. The American would just go through, and the policeman would pull out his weapon and fire 20 shots at the back of the disappearing car, just like that. If he was a good shot, you were dead. So you do not mess around with any armed official in Indonesia, a really important rule. But he slugged this policeman, happily without too much injury. Instead of killing him, the police said, this man must be a lunatic and they took him to the local insane asylum, thank heavens. They manacled him naked to the wall of the insane asylum. Then someone in Bali called the Embassy, and said he was a U.S. citizen and a reporter, and had been thrown into jail.

The Embassy called me and I went immediately went down there, and of course he was no longer working for the magazine. By this time they'd gotten some clothes on him and the magistrate had held him over, probably give him a life sentence for slugging a policeman. I went and talked to him and he was just in a surly hangover and demanded that I get him released. I went to the police chief, whom I knew pretty well by this time and mentioned that this guy was a magazine reporter. I suggested that the incident would be very embarrassing to both our countries, but that approach didn't cut any ice at all. So then I went to see the governor, who as it turned out was a pretty good guy, and tried the magazine approach on him, i.e. a possible impact on tourism. He understood that, but he said that unfortunately by this time the prosecutor had already charged the man with what amounts to an indictment. Under the system they inherited from the Dutch, once there's an indictment it is 99.9% certain he's going to be convicted. There is no trial by jury. Well, you probably know this better than I having served in European countries. The

indictment means the magistrate is convinced of guilt. It's just a matter then of doing the paperwork.

The governor indicated, though, that there was an insanity defense possible under the law, and advised me to have a doctor talk to him and perhaps try that route. I finally found a doctor who was willing to go and examine him. Thank heavens the man was ranting and raving at the time and the doctor was willing to certify that this guy was a mental case. I then called on the magistrate and argued that, rather than place this individual as a burden on the Indonesian medical system for years and years, why not just put him on the next plane and get him out of here. So, they agreed, and he was released to my custody with a few cops to watch him.

Then I went in the Consulate car and got him out of the asylum, and we booked him a seat on the next flight out. I did all of this. I got him out of the asylum; I signed for him. I took him back to my hotel room and got him bathed and properly dressed. He wanted to go to his place to pick up some stuff. I talked to the police in Indonesian and they said, don't let him do that. They feared he would just get out of the car and flee into some village in Bali. At first he refused to get on the plane. I said to him, you know, I'm probably saving you from a lifetime of being incarcerated in mental institutions and jails in Bali. His answer was, and I quote: "I'm going to get even with you for this." Then he walked up the ramp and got on the plane and they closed the door. He was going to get even with me for saving him. I'm sure you've had similar experiences.

The Sugar Mill Equipment Trade Show

The next thing I would like to mention has to do with trade shows for the Department of Commerce. Do you remember when McNamara was head of the World Bank?

Q: No, but go ahead, I'm just listening.

HOWLAND: In its benighted wisdom, I suppose you have to say, the World Bank in '75 decided it had to do something about the sugar industry worldwide. It had been beat over the head, should I be talking or . . . ?

Q: Yes, go on.

HOWLAND: Okay. It had been beat over the head, I guess, about propping up governments but not doing much for the little peasants in Southeast Asia. For some reason they didn't want to get into rice estates because rice -- particularly in places like Thailand -- is so wrapped up in politics. Sugar is, too, in the Philippines of course. Well, the most ailing sugar industry in the world probably at that time was Java, which had been the major sugar producer of the world before World War II. More sugar was grown in East Java than anywhere else, and the equipment had never been renovated since the Dutch. It was all falling apart and Javanese sugar couldn't compete any more; Java was even importing sugar. President Suharto was very unhappy about that.

So the World Bank sponsored a sugar mill equipment show as part of a big trade fair in Jakarta, which the Department of Commerce and of course the Embassy thought was wonderful. Several U.S. manufacturers of sugar mill equipment signed up to show off their machinery to potential buyers, mainly the state-owned sugar plantations which had been seized from the Dutch during the Sukarno period, and were languishing. When I heard about this, I suggested that since the seat of the Javanese sugar industry was Surabaya, and most of the refineries, sugar mills, were in East Java, there should be some concurrent event held here. My main purpose was to maintain my very good relationship with Governor Mohammed Noer. I didn't want him to complain that I hadn't brought any U.S. businessmen to Surabaya to look at investment possibilities. Gene Christy suggested a catalog show at a local hall, and I really pushed on the Embassy to do it. They finally agreed we could do what was called a catalog show in East Java.

Now, in Jakarta another trade show was sort of "ho - hum," not a reason to skip a cocktail reception even, but for us in East Java, this was a really big deal.

Q. Country mouse and city mouse.

HOWLAND: Right. In Surabaya with sugar, the World Bank, the growth, the development and so forth, it was a huge deal. The governor would speak at our show. President Suharto wouldn't speak at the one in Jakarta, but our governor would certainly speak at ours. In fact, he even gave us a free hall. Gene Christy ran the show, did a great job. I gave a talk. The representatives who came were mostly Filipino or Asian representatives of American companies, and they got along well with the Javanese. We sold two and a half million dollars in sugar mill equipment on the floor, a sizable amount in 1976, and really pretty good for a little Consulate out in the middle of nowhere.

Unfortunately, however, Jakarta didn't make a sale. Nobody bought anything on the floor at the Jakarta trade fair. So, here I was again kind of showing them up out there. I didn't make a big deal out of it. They had "fostered commercial relations" at their show, which was important, but nobody signed on the dotted line. Out in East Java a mill manager had liked something, had wanted some specific equipment, had asked us to have that catalog there, knew all about it and took the opportunity to buy on the floor. He had the funding, everything, and the deal went through. I suspect the Embassy was furious. The new DCM, Mike Reeves, never mentioned in on my OER – I had to put it in, which of course never counts.

The Move to Close the Consulate

Just one more word on the checkered history of the American Consulate in Surabaya. In 1979 there was an economy move in the Department to close small posts. Ambassador Newsom by that time was Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, and they asked him which constituent post in Indonesia should be closed: Medan or Surabaya. According to my EAP source, he said that he "never understood why we had those posts out there

anyway.” Supposedly his exact words. So they decided to close Surabaya since there were two posts in Java and only one, Medan, in Sumatra.

Well, that was nutty because the post in Surabaya was very busy and relieved the Embassy of doing a lot of work that would have burdened it tremendously, particularly on the Consular side. Medan in contrast was very quiet, even later in 1982-83. But also by this time there was a Consular agent in Bali, not a very good one, but they argued he could do Surabaya’s work. Anyway, they went ahead and sold the Consulate building and the beautiful principal officer’s residence for peanuts. The Department probably spent \$2 million moving equipment, moving FSNs to Jakarta in order to save their jobs. It was a typical FBO operation. Then at the last minute, with six hours to go, the congress would not agree for some reason, and said reopen the post. So then they reopened the Consulate. It cost another \$2 million. They got the principal officer’s house and the Consulate building back, but it was an absolute nutty mistake that really stemmed from the fact that no one in the Embassy fought to keep it open after Newsom gave the death warrant. Then, amazingly, in the 1990’s it was made into a Consulate General and expanded.

That’s about it for Surabaya. After the Independence Day event – the Bicentennial of course – we left for home leave and then assignment as a student at the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, PA.

Q: Okay, well that’s great.

ARMY WAR COLLEGE 1976-77

Q: This is tape twelve, side one with Dick Howland. My note at this point we’re starting a new tape. Today is the 23rd of January, 2002. We’re ready to pick up after you left Surabaya, is that right?

HOWLAND: Right, and then I left Surabaya and went to the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA from July 1976 to July of 1977. The best part about it was living on the base. One reason I didn’t want to go to the National War College was that I wanted to live with the officers and it was worth it. We were jammed into in a little two bed-room split-level; the girls slept in the attic, but it was fun. My father-in-law was a retired major general, and he used to come down and see us all the time. Also Dan O’Donohue had gone there, and I had great respect for Dan. At that time, I was an (old-style) FSO-3.

Q: That was about the colonel level.

HOWLAND: Yes, that was about the colonel level, but not in the same numerical grade system in the army. In the Army a colonel is an 06. On the class of 77 membership roster I was listed as FS0 - 3, and no one could understand why someone who was, to them, the equivalent of a captain, was chosen to attend this prestigious institution. This muddied the waters for a long time – some saw it as a sign of State Department contempt for the

military. So, I had to explain things every time I met someone new, which was pretty often because the social life was actually great fun after they got over the rank problem. We went out and had a few beers every once in a while at the officers club, and played a lot tennis together. I received a temporary membership at the Officers' Club which was transferable to the one at the National War College, a nice perk I never took advantage of because it was too far way.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the Army War College. This is not too long after we left in some haste from Vietnam and did you find what happened. Could you talk a little about your impression about the officer corps that you were working with at that time, after the sort of the collapse of Vietnam. This must have had quite a bit of impact on how they were looking at things.

HOWLAND: That's a very astute question and it absolutely did. Many of them were bitter. Others were not, but many who served there were really, really bitter. As a Foreign Service Officer coming into the Army War College at that time, there's no question a lot of them had their backs up about my being there. One guy endlessly harassed me about it. The interesting thing was they blamed the State Department and the Embassy in Saigon rather than the politicians in Washington. Basically every time we got into anything having to do with military vs. diplomacy matters, and I spoke, you could see hackles raised in my seminar group in the beginning.

I think there were 14 of them in the group, and they covered the range of all military specialties. That impressed me also since, in a similar general Foreign Service training session, the contingent would probably have been mostly political officers with maybe a handful of economic officers and maybe one token consular officer. That was the case in several FSI courses I attended. But at the AWC there were quartermasters, ordinance specialists, there was a marine, there were a couple of Air Force officers and so forth and artillery infantry, aviation, everything. They had gone out of their way to get people into the War College from diverse military specialties and I thought that was really pretty nifty. That was a great idea.

Toward the end they began to realize that I was a useful resource because I could write. Many of them had writing problems, they couldn't write very well. Most of these courses had to do with writing. You had to write lengthy paragraphs. not just short Ops plans, in Army-speak, but for example budgets and budget justifications. We had six weeks on the good old "planning, programming and budgeting system" -- PPBS, remember all that stuff? A lot of writing had to be done. Also, we had to do war games. We did a lot of writing for the war games. Some members of my seminar group had real problems with writing more than two or three pages, because that's all they had ever had to do before.

That said, I don't mean this to derogate them in anyway. They were wonderful guys to deal with. If I were in their place, I probably would have had my back up about Vietnam more than they did. They had watched best friends die because of political constraints. I knew about that from Laos and I did my best to try to be diplomatic and to overcome all

of this. I don't know how well I succeeded. I made a couple of good friends and we stayed in touch for a few years, but then drifted apart. I don't mean to be patronizing, but I was tremendously impressed by all the ones I met in my seminar group.

I recall that some of the army officers were bemused that I was there, saying that they felt the purpose of the course was to turn them all into assistants to the Secretary of State. "You're already qualified to be an assistant," they said. I replied that I wanted to learn something about land warfare. Well, we never learned anything about land warfare. The one thing they never taught was any details of military operations. It was all really to fit them for the bureaucratic level, to make them general officers and so forth. And it was quite well done. The AWC instructors were superb and it was a terrific experience.

The first two thirds of the course were sort of seminar exercises and lectures in what we called the "big red bedroom," the huge lecture hall. They had terrific lecturers, top people from Washington and outside experts like John Keegan, the British military historian.

Q: Author of "The Face of Battle."

HOWLAND: Right. We had General Sir Robert Thompson, the British officer who crushed the Communist insurgency in Malaya. Jorge Dominguez, who until Larry Summers came along was the youngest tenured professor in the history of Harvard; he was a Caribbean specialist and spoke about Cuba. This was an unparalleled thing and I just drank it up as you can imagine.

The Commandant of the AWC was Major General DeWitt, a very erudite and witty gentlemen. He must have majored in English history because he was really knowledgeable on not only the wars and the kings, but all the background of Scotch history, English history, and Irish history. At one point he asked if I would be interested in joining with an Army officer to interview Cyrus Vance, at the time Secretary of the Army I believe, for the Pentagon's oral history program. Vance was planning to retire. It would have meant driving to Washington in the late afternoon, doing evening interviews, and driving back late at night, several days a week. I should have leaped at it but stupidly I demurred. Vance of course went on to become Secretary of State.

The last third of the course you were required to prepare a long paper on some course-related subject. I did three or four papers, each one of which was fairly long. I just was interested in several different things and but that didn't go over too well with FSI. They wanted something they could put on a shelf and put in the library that flagged their support for the program. That kind of muddled it toward the end. Overall the experience was tremendous. It was very worthwhile.

Q: You were through with this in '77 and you mentioned on the last tape that you sort of blotted your copy book or something with East Asia or something?

HOWLAND: You know, I don't want to overdo that. This is just speculation on my part,

but in the last days in Surabaya I had tried to get a job in the East Asia Bureau but they said, no, they had nothing. That wasn't true and I was a little miffed because I'd served in the trenches -- and so three years political counselor during the war in Laos, consul in Indonesia. I had four years before that in Indonesia, all 25% hardship posts, not Hong Kong and Tokyo. So I thought there must be something in the Southeast Asia area. They said, no, we're going to give you a real benefit, we're going to send you for senior training to the Army War College until something opens up. So, I said fine.

Q: Then what happened?

HOWLAND: Toward the end of the Army War College I got a call from the inspection corps that said, would you like to be an inspector, get some experience in other areas. So I took in effect an "out of function" tour and I don't regret that I did. Although career-wise it was potentially a disaster, but I was fairly comfortable in that regard, feeling that I had a good record. I said, yes, I'll go be in the inspection business. I should have fought harder. Because of the senior training and no onward desk assignment, the following year I was low-ranked. I later met several Ambassadors who told me they had the same experience after senior training or an inspection assignment. Like them, I survived and became an Ambassador. You might say I went from disaster to disaster, rising ever higher.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL (S/IG) 1977 - 79

Q: So, you were in the inspection business from '77 to 79?

HOWLAND: Right, in what was then called S/IG, but is now OIG, the Office of Inspector General.

Q: How was the inspection system set up in this period? I think it's changed a lot now.

S/IG in the 1970's

HOWLAND: It was very different from the way it is now. Then there were no separate units of auditors, investigators, and lawyers, and virtually no GS employees on the teams. The inspection corps, the inspection business, I shouldn't call it a corps, because it wasn't a corps, did not have investigators; they were in the Bureau of Security, SY. And S/IG may have had a lawyer, but it was someone in the Department's Legal Advisor's office.

Now, of course, it has inspectors, auditors and investigators, security auditors, lawyers, a vast bureaucracy. A later IG named Sherman Funk put the present arrangement together under the Federal IG Act passed in the late 1980's at the behest of Senator Jesse Helms, who hoped to use it to destroy the State Department. That didn't work out, but the Act gave the State Department a formal IG system after a lot of controversy and a lot of bad blood with the Congress. The importance of the

inspection function, especially in an organization with so many far-flung offices, has always been under-rated in the Department. I think only George Shultz and Colin Powell among the Secretaries of State paid much attention to it. Larry Eagleburger was the biggest fan because he understood the uses of power in the building.

Inspections go back a long ways and we've all been inspected, but over the years, even by 1977, the clout and prestige of the inspection process had been declining. It was restored briefly at about the time I got there because the new Inspector General was Bob Sayre, a very bright, very tough, very scrappy little guy who was sometimes difficult to work for, but there was tremendous respect for him. He was quite influential at the top levels, on the Seventh Floor. If he thought you were right, he would back you up to the hilt. If he thought you were wrong, he'd kick you out. There was no fooling around with Bob Sayre; nevertheless, I still liked working for him. I still see him every once in a while, usually in the barbershop. He's become a counter-terrorism expert.

Then the inspection teams were virtually all FSOs, plus what were called "audit qualified inspectors" or "AQIs" to look at budget and fiscal ("B and F") matters, and they would go out and inspect posts, or inspect bureaus in the Department. Another difference was that now, under OIG, you know, inspection teams have eight or ten members from diverse specialties, but then there were usually only four, and we stayed out longer. For instance, we did four Caribbean posts in seven weeks with four inspectors, including a secretarial one. After the Bahamas we added a consular inspector. We did ten West African posts with four inspectors, staying out for 66 days. The Arabian Peninsula was different because we had to split the team, so we had a couple more. It was very grueling then but in a way more fun. I got to inspect all four functions -- pol, econ, consular and admin -- in many places.

Also at that time the inspectors were housed in a tiny office down on the second floor opposite the press room. There originally were about 60 inspectors there, with ten guys in each small room. Everybody worked at the same big table, with loose-leaf books piled all over and things like that. We had secretaries to do the typing, believe it or not. Actually I thought it functioned very well. The assignment had more prestige in those days and a number of prominent senior officers did a tour in OIG and went on to bigger things. For example, Sheldon Kryz was on the team for West Africa, David Osborne and Mel Manfull led the teams to the Caribbean. It had a lot of prestige and attracted good people; often when very senior officers were waiting for a new post, they worked TDY in OIG. Now that's not the case, and there are many GS employees and few FSOs.

Then as now the IG and his staff were up on the sixth floor in nice offices that we all envied. There was very little good feeling between the inspectors down on the second floor and the senior people who ran the whole thing up on the sixth floor. We felt really that they were just there to deal with the higher levels, the Seventh Floor. The amount of management attention we got was virtually nil unless we stirred things up

with a complaint of some sort.

The teams looked at every facet of post and bureau operations then, as now, but perforce much more briefly then. Now there are very detailed guidelines for instructing, but then there were really none, and with the small team we had to skim over some things. I was going to inspect political and economic sections since I was a political officer, but I wound up doing other functions which I knew little about, such as Admin, depending on the post, and Consular.

Right at the outset I should surface our biggest complaint at that time, and also more recently, when I was an inspector again 1990-94. That was the time it took to clear a report in the front office. Then, as now, we left draft reports at inspected posts so they could be reviewed by the Ambassador (and whomever on the staff he/she wished to show them to) because we had to bring home their comments for the IG. That is different from today's OIG auditors, who don't turn out a report maybe for many months after they do an audit. We would come back with a draft report, which we had written fast so it could be reviewed in the field.

Actually, Bob Sayre, the IG, could go through a report in a half an hour; he was fine. But he was not the only one who was reviewing it. I can't remember who the deputy IG was, but the head reviewer of all the admin inspection stuff was a guy named Sandy Mentor, Sanford G. Mentor. He took weeks to read reports and then sent them to his staff who took more weeks. Then the rest of the OIG staff, with nothing else to do but look at reports, and knowing nothing about the issues, would take months to tear it to pieces and rewrite it. It was the usual Foreign Service nit-picking exercise which made the team members very furious. Those people had not much else to do except rewrite inspection reports, and that's what they did, often word by word.

By the time the front office finished rewriting the report, the team members were dispersed onto new teams and were already back in the field inspecting new posts. So, then when we came back with a new report, there would be the previous cycle reports that had been rewritten to look at. And the final report never got to the posts for many months, sometimes after some of the officers at post had been transferred. This was just unworkable, unworkable. The front office always promised to change but never did.

We also wrote IERs, Inspectors' Evaluation Reports, on DCMs and on untenured junior officers. It was a two-page efficiency report. The IERs on DCMs were done so that the Seventh Floor committee which in theory selected Ambassadors would have some valid basis, since the standard Department Employee Evaluation Reports (called EERs at that time) were always slanted so favorably they couldn't be trusted. The IERs on untenured junior officers were for the panels who were granting tenure. I thought that was an excellent idea, until I got to Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica where I had to write IERs on 20 junior officers each; nevertheless it was a good idea. I think team leaders also wrote on Ambassadors then, as they do now, but

they never shared them with the team. Later as a team leader in the 1990s I always did.

Getting Started in OIG

No overseas inspections were done in summer months because of transfers and home leave, and that first summer I was waiting for an overseas cycle to start. However, OIG did inspect bureaus in the Department but I had entered in July too late to get onto a bureau team. So they gave me about 20 IERs to do in six weeks on officers in what were called out-of-area, out-of-function tours in different agencies, and in the Congress under the Pierson program, remember that? Up on the Hill they had one officer with the foreign relations committee, another FSO in HEW, several in Commerce; there were a number in the Pentagon, at least two or three over in ISA there. I had to go to Boston to do one, I recall, working in State government..

Q: IERs being the inspection reports?

HOWLAND: No. Inspectors' Evaluation Reports that are the same as the EERs that go in the individual's personnel file.

Q: Yes, very important.

HOWLAND: In theory these assignments were for "broadening" but in the system they were regarded as career dead-ends for officers who couldn't make it in their specialties. The summer IER program was run by a dynamic woman FSO named Nancy Rawls, who had been Ambassador to Kenya and later passed away from eye cancer. A terrific officer and a wonderful lady. She didn't like my writing at all, but she was very gentle about it. She liked writing that was a little less direct, which was strange because one of the things I liked about her as a supervisor was that she was very direct and frank. But the writing she wanted to put in these IERs was vapid -- perhaps she knew that anything really critical would mean selection out after one of these tours. That was really sad because virtually all of the officers were doing terrific jobs and got glowing reviews from their supervisors.

For instance, you recall Dante Fascell, Chairman of a Subcommittee for the Foreign Affairs committee of the House at the time. Yes. A very powerful man from Miami, I believe. Wasn't he a representative from that area? A very powerful man, a very fine man, a very nice man, very, he gave me an hour of his time. An hour. We talked about the FSO detailed to his staff, but we also talked about foreign affairs. He asked me lots of questions about my background. You can say, well he's a politician, but he also was able to convey a really sincere interest. And he gave his FSO terrific high marks, with concrete examples which are really the key to a good IER. A very good guy.

Q: I think his career proved that.

HOWLAND: Anyway, actually those “out-of-agency” IERs were a good way to break in to inspecting because thereafter I often wrote them on other than political officers at posts. Nancy Rawls gave me a good write-up and often the team leader would say “you’ll do the IERs, Dick, because I understand you do those very well.” That was fine because usually as the political officer on the teams after that, my job was sometimes writing up the political section which was a page and a half, very easy to do. I enjoyed writing the IERs, and of course the portions of the overall report on other sections.

Q: The IERs were not included in the big report?

HOWLAND: No, not the big inspection report on the post, although by and large I often wrote those too. You see, team leaders knew political officers existed to write and most could turn out pages of prose in ten minutes that were readable and concise. So I was often asked to do their sections on the management of the post. I did that all through the Arabian Peninsula inspection. Why not, I enjoy writing and that’s what I was paid to do.

Caribbean Inspection -- The Bahamas

After the summer we received our fall cycle assignments and the first team I was on went off to the Caribbean, to inspect the Bahamas, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica. We left on the 30th of September, and got back a few days before Thanksgiving. Now, the Department’s view of the Caribbean posts was that the personnel were lucky to be down there in a “resort area” with not many problems. We found lots of problems -- as I wrote in the overall report, “storm flags are flying all over the Caribbean.” And perhaps conditions were resort-like for tourists, but places like Port-au-Prince, Haiti and Kingston, Jamaica were definitely hardship posts.

Q: This was in 1977.

HOWLAND: Yes, 1977. Melvin Manfull was the team leader and brought his wife along. I was the political, economic and at first consular inspector. Bob Granick, who became a very close friend of mine, was the lead admin inspector and Marvin Wolfe was the so-called AQI, the Audit Qualified Inspector. (Marvin brought along his new wife, a woman who spoke no English. and whom he had married on an inspection tour in Central America). Starting with Haiti we added a consular inspector, and two USAID inspectors, Marilyn Zack and another chap, Lewis Townsend. But the four of us were the core of the team.

We did some survey interviews in the Department before departure, but not to the extent that the inspection business does now. Now, quite rightly it is realized that you should put in two or three if not four weeks of surveying the Department and the other agencies before you go to post, but then I think we saw the assistant secretary, if that, and then left. I did chat with the Country Director for the Caribbean, Ted Heavner,

whom I knew so well from Indonesian language training and serving together in Indonesia in 1964-66. But as always, officers were sort expected to know instinctively everything necessary to do their jobs.

Q: Was there any equivalent to instructions to look for this or that; I mean what were you after?

HOWLAND: Well, you were evaluating the management and the policy implementation of the post, but in addition of course you were looking for crooks and bad guys. No one ever came to you and said, look for crooks and bad guys. It sort of grew on you that this was probably the process. Let me tell you why I say that. We got to the Bahamas and I was doing the political, economic and consular sections. For the Bahamas President Jimmy Carter had appointed some Atlanta friend of his as Ambassador. He had been confirmed but only came to the post once every six weeks. The post was actually being run by a very fine DCM, an officer by the name of Rush Taylor, who later became Ambassador to Togo. He had a very good career, was an excellent officer and a pretty good DCM, but then again a political officer, not a manager, not a consular officer, not an admin officer. But we found the admin section was doing fine. Political reporting, done by Rush Taylor, was doing fine. The economic officer had just left the post and it was the woman who was just the director general of the Foreign Service. Remember, a couple of times ago?

Q: Genta Hawkins?

HOWLAND: Yes, Genta Hawkins. She just left the post so I wasn't able to inspect her work, but her section was excellent and she had a very good Bahamian British FSN helping her replacement so that was not a problem.

The big business there was Consular, and I mean that in more ways than one. I was kind of scared about inspecting the consular section which was a big consular section, which had four or five officers and a lot of FSNs. The Consul General was not at the post. He was on home leave, conveniently; he had taken home leave even though people at the post are always told not to go on leave if an inspection is due. But that didn't tip me off to potential problems at the time. Although now it would, it often means there's something he or she doesn't want to answer questions about. I hadn't done much consular work since Cambodia, but I did have the FAM.

Q: The Foreign Affairs Manual, the book of instructions.

HOWLAND: Yes, right, the entire FAM. I'd remembered that and before I went to the Bahamas I sort of reviewed the FAM and I went to see a friend John Dewitt, who was a consular officer. He said, look for this and that and so forth, but nothing prepared me for what turned out to be a major problem.

Now, in the consular section, there were four or five white British women FSNs,

expats who had stayed on, and four or five black Bahamian FSNs. The groups didn't get along, it seemed, so each sat on the opposite side of the main aisle in the section. The black FSNs were on one side and the white FSNs were on the other side. The minute I walked in I thought, that's kind of strange, why is that? I didn't say anything about it at the time. I'd been in the consular section interviewing and reading the files maybe four or five days, when there came a knock at the door, and in walked one of the black FSNs. She said, "Oh, Mr. Inspector, here's the passport list you asked for." I had never asked for a passport list, so after that was sorted out I asked if there was anything else on her mind. She said she had a problem with processing immigrant visas because, as she said, the Consul General kept them locked in his office. That seemed strange, so when I interviewed the visa officers, the FSOs and in one case, an FSR, I asked them about that.

Q: Foreign Service Reserve Officer.

HOWLAND: Yes. Their main complaint was that the consul general spent a lot of time away from the post, or locked in his office. One officer suggested that someone he knew had seen the Consul General working in the offices of an immigration law firm in Miami.

So, I went back to the hotel that night and decided to call my friend and A-100 classmate, John DeWitt, a senior consular officer. I called him at home from the hotel. I was afraid to call from the Embassy for fear that switchboard operator might overhear the call. I called John and I told him all this. He said, "Don't do anything more about it. Your team will be joined by another consular inspector. He'll show you a memo from me. You just write down everything you just said and when he shows up, please give the information to him and that's it."

The new consular team member was a specialist in Consular fraud, who had worked for John Dewitt when John was Consul General in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Now, at the time of the inspection, I think, he was working in Toronto. They detached him from there on TDY, but he couldn't get away fast enough to meet us in the Bahamas. He showed up in Haiti, our next inspection post and I debriefed him about what I had learned. He then went back to the Bahamas with a team from the Bureau of Security (SY) which handled consular fraud in those years.

Later, I read somewhere that the Consul General was indicted on 34 counts of immigrant visa fraud. It was alleged that he was part of an immigrant visa ring that included a number of other posts in the Caribbean. They were said to be bouncing files from one post to another to get people into country on fraudulent immigrant visas. I don't know what happened in his case. I just cite this to show how you've got to keep your eyes and ears open in an inspection particularly in consular or admin.

There wasn't really much else in the Bahamas of interest. As I say Rush was doing a very fine job running the post in almost total absence of this political Ambassador.

Q: Was it considered beyond the pale for the inspection to note that the political Ambassador wasn't there?

HOWLAND: I'm sure we said that in the report, but either it would have been taken out or else no one would have paid much attention to it.

Next Stop -- Haiti

From there we flew in a plane that seemed no bigger than a Piper Cub to Port-au-Prince, Haiti because almost no one was flying to Haiti in those days. Even though Haiti is a nightmare now and was then a terrible morass of poverty and disease and brutality, for a visitor it was a delightful place. Of course the old dictator "Papa Doc" Duvalier was dead. His son "Baby Doc" ruled the place, and behind the Palace there was a big billboard with a big picture of him and some positive slogan. But on the upper left end corner, kind of faded as if it were in the clouds, was Papa Doc's face. You could just make it out. Nothing had changed,

There we were in Haiti, a few months into the Carter administration and seeing the impact of its emphasis on human rights. I happened to agree with that but not to the excess it was taken by the new Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, Pat Derian. She was making everyone's life miserable in the Department of State. In Haiti she had instructed the political section, which did what she wanted, to forget about everything but human rights stuff. As a result, the officers there were spending all their time driving out into the countryside of Haiti, tracking down cases of people being tortured, and virtually no reporting was being done on the political situation in the capital. The army, the old dinosaurs, the secret police, the non-existent or crumbling education system, all of that was being set aside as they went off to document human rights abuses. I kind of giggered them pretty strongly on that, but I'm sure no one paid any attention.

The other problem was that the Ambassador, Hay Isham, an East Asia specialist had been put in this Embassy by the Seventh Floor over the ARA Bureau's objections, as a reward for having done a very good job in Vietnam. Isham had picked another East Asia specialist, Frazier Meade as his DCM. I knew them both, and they were fine officers. But often whenever that happens, the new bureau doesn't provide a whole lot of support because it is annoyed. The Bureau's position is often that there were ARA officers who were more qualified and should have gotten that post. Moreover Port-Au-Prince was not your typical ARA Spanish-speaking post, and tended to be last in line for everything. So what was happening in Haiti was the bureau short-changed the post on admin support. The cars were breaking down, supplies were non-existent. The housing was terrible. In contrast, just across the border, in the Dominican Republic Bob Hurwitch was the Ambassador and he'd been the principal DAS of ARA. So there you had a fleet of 100 cars, beautiful Embassy, well-kept housing. etc.

Then too, Isham and Meade were political officers with little traction in ARA and less interest in consular or admin work except in how it affected the political relationship. There was an incredible gulf, worse than I've ever seen, between the consular section and the rest of the Embassy. Consular officers didn't go to the Embassy staff meetings. They had their own staff meetings. In effect they were running their own Embassy because they had what the average Haitian wanted: visas to the US. So the consular section had this tremendous power. They were very annoyed that the front office never acknowledged their influence or followed the proper procedures, i.e. using the proper forms to recommend that one of their contacts, for instance, be issued a visa. Instead the Ambassador or DCM would just call down to the Section Chief with a name, and order that he be given a visa.

The head of the section, whose name I can't recall, seemed to spend most of his time in his office again with the door closed, and a junior officer named Sue Wood was really holding everything together. I was kind of suspicious about that. Sue explained that it was because he couldn't face the work. The police had to control these mobs outside, demanding visas. The police would keep them in line with clubs. There was this terrible waiting room. Have you ever been to Haiti? They had this kind of shed with the lines between fences; applicants would snake through them for hours. Sometimes they'd just jump over the fences and try to force their way in. People were fighting out there. Every once in a while the cops would come in and start clubbing a few people to get them to stop fighting. This is what those poor officers issuing visas saw everyday of their lives. Then if the Ambassador or DCM had received a visa request from a contact, they would call down in this cavalier, you know, imperious manner saying be sure to give a visa to my friend so and so. It was outrageous.

Sue Wood was trying to bring some order to the whole thing. I think it was her second post. She had been a junior officer, a political officer in Rome. She was bored being a political officer, just reading Italian newspapers at that level, so she changed to the consular section and found she loved consular work. She's had a brilliant career including DCM in Ecuador, and consul general in Jakarta (where I asked for her to come out in 1984), and in Montreal, and then DAS in ARA.

The last problem was the AID program, which in my opinion was totally focused on dealing with cabinet ministers. I never found any evidence that they were doing anything at all in the countryside. Maybe I just didn't see it, but if you drove out in the countryside and saw how those people were living, it was like, well it was overpopulated and there wasn't a tree left. They had no firewood. They had no running water. There was nothing. They had to go down to mud-holes when it rained and filled up jerry cans and the whole thing was just horrible. I never saw any AID people out there, but they all seemed to have offices in the Ministries which were doing absolutely nothing. Read Graham Greene's "The Comedians" and you'll probably find it still an accurate picture of Haiti.

Dominican Republic

We then went to the Dominican Republic. What a difference from Haiti, it was like night and day. The country in those years, 1977, seemed to be very prosperous and bustling. Now it's a mess again, but it was prosperous then. Bob Hurwitch was the Ambassador. He had been Bill Sullivan's first DCM in Laos, which would have been 1964-66 and he is still spoken of with tremendous respect by the Lao and others who served with him at the post.

I don't remember anything about inspecting the political and econ sections except disgruntlement because the Ambassador and the DCM were doing it all. The Ambassador was pretty much running the country. He had a hotline on his desk right to President Balaguer, an aging, blind autocrat who had replaced the infamous Rafael Trujillo. Hurwitch even had a phone in his bedroom that connected him directly with President Balaguer at home, the residence. President Balaguer didn't make a move without checking with the American Ambassador. LBJ had sent the troops in after Trujillo fell in '66, and then swamped them with aid. That bought a lot of influence as it did in Laos.

The Ambassador was also very much an intimate of top-level American CEOs with big interests in the country, like Gulf and Western Corporation. The Ambassador had done a great job with the policy, no question, policy and political side, the Dominicans loved him. He dominated policy. He was really Mr. DR, which didn't surprise anyone who knew him in Laos. That was kind of the Laos way. We dominated Laos. Nobody made a move in that country. You didn't want a better proconsul. He was fantastic on U.S. interests; there's no question. He even ran the consular section well.

But almost from the moment we got off the plane, in fact from the moment we walked down the ramp, people were coming up to us complaining about alleged malfeasance by the Ambassador I don't want to go into all the details but it was obvious we had to report what we heard

Q: In what form was this taking place?

HOWLAND: Again, as inspectors, we weren't supposed to go into detail to this, but when you find possible evidence of waste, abuse or fraud, you turn it over to someone from SY or CA. Let me just say there were very serious allegations, and after the team left, the Deputy IG came down with investigators and they removed Hurwitch from the post. Justice refused to prosecute, saying it was a State Department matter and they hadn't vetted the evidence themselves. Hurwitch agreed to leave the service and the Department remanded his case to what's called an administrative law judge, an ALJ. And he persuaded her that the worst thing she could possibly do to a Foreign

Service Officer was have him dismissed for cause. He also persuaded her to let him keep his pension and she did it. He later went back to live in the Dominican Republic, and served on the board of Gulf and Western.

Jamaica

Then we went to Jamaica. In Jamaica we also found a problem with the Ambassador, an administrative officer and former Ambassador to Iceland who seemed to be having some kind emotional or psychological problems. Jamaica is seen as a resort but is actually a very hard post. I should point out that this ambassador was sent there because the previous Ambassador, a political appointee, had spent his entire time at the post living on his yacht, diving around ancient sunken ships. He was a diver, a scuba diver who liked bringing up coins and cannons. He never came to the Embassy except to get his mail every once in a while, and wouldn't live in the residence because he was afraid of the crime. It was because of that fiasco that the Bureau fought to get a career officer and picked someone thought to be a good administrative officer, because most of the problems down there were thought to be administrative. Of course, they weren't, they were consular and political, and he wasn't up to them.

Have you been stationed down there?

Q: No.

HOWLAND: As you know, the crime is bad. The North coast is nice, where the tourists go, but Kingston is awful and the visa business is a nightmare, as in Haiti. People are deluging the post endlessly for visas all the time. Outside the consular section were just hundreds of people even though it was closed in the afternoon. As I went in, a person grabbed me by the arm and said, "You must tell her I should have a visa." I said, "Really, why is that?" He said "because I am the illegitimate son of Thomas Jefferson." I said, I'll tell her that, and I did. I was told that once when the line got really long out there, out of boredom they started looting the supermarket across the street and they had to deploy half the riot police in Kingston to calm them down.

So here was the Ambassador, a superb admin officer. He had been Assistant Secretary for OES and done a terrific job. He comes to this nightmare of Kingston, Jamaica, Manley's Jamaica, almost pro-communist, at least left-leaning pro-Castro, a poster child for the far left, and finds that his staff, all political officers, just looked down their nose at him. He told me once he felt that no one considered him the Ambassador, that Jamaicans didn't pay him any respect.

We found during the inspection was that the post was a shambles, partly because of the difficult working environment, but partly because the Ambassador was not handling things well. For example his cables belied the truth of his conversations with Manley, and he had endorsed a strange exchange scheme between the Jamaican

Communist Youth Organization and little-known groups working in under-privileged areas of the US, all to be funded by USAID. When we reported this curious idea, Bob Sayre was able to kill it in Washington.

Of course, the Ambassador had never done consular work, but he was so appalled by the mobs that that he was sure that if we would just be nice to the applicants and issue them their visas, they would go away. He was getting complaints from his contacts about the lines. So, he finally directed every officer in the Embassy to go work in the consular section one day a week, issuing as many visas as possible, even if they had to work well into the night. You walk in, you get a visa. When this didn't work, he called all the junior consular officers in and said you're giving us a bad name. He even issued threats about their career status.

At the end of the inspection, we reported back that this Ambassador had to change his management style, or else should be replaced. The IG, Bob Sayre, along with a senior trouble-shooter for the office of the Under Secretary for Management, and a few others, went to the post and he was persuaded to resign from the Service. They found him a job as dean of foreign students at Harvard. Oh, maybe he found that on his own, but he was taken care of. He did resign; within six months he was gone. The DCM was also transferred, and a very capable officer, Roy Haverkamp, who had been one of my fellow junior officers in Cambodia 1962-63, was detailed there temporarily as his replacement. He stayed on as Charge because the Department didn't want to give up the Ambassador position as a Foreign Service slot, but the White House saw the post as a resort area ideal for political patronage. Roy straightened out the post very quickly while the struggle went on in Washington. I don't know how it came out.

Q: Yes. I was just wondering looking at it, these men, there were six of them who went around and did this inspection more or less were acting in many ways as sort of psychiatrists. I mean the first people that many of our consuls ever had a chance to talk to. Did you find yourself playing that psychiatrist role?

HOWLAND: Oh, absolutely, it's a big part of the job -- counseling. Especially now, It's mutually rewarding, because the officer gets it off his or her chest, and you learn about post operations. I had specific questions, of course, but I always started interviews with the question: What's it like for you, serving here? Often that opened the floodgates. That's all you have to say. It all comes out and then you pick up clues and then you follow the clues. They're anxious to unburden their souls.

Q. Today is the 20th of February, 2002. Dick, we've talked about your first inspection tour where you were in the Caribbean where you sort of went through there like Christ cleaning out the money changers from the temple. How did the second one go?

HOWLAND: Yes, that was quite an introduction to the inspection business and it was

never repeated. Subsequently, I guess I was in the inspection business for another year and a half then, and four years full time in the '90s and then part time on a couple of inspections. Never did we find any posts or any people that could match the problems in those four Caribbean posts. However, I think I was just lucky because there were still plenty of problems.

INR Inspection

After we came back and wrote up the report from the Caribbean, I was assigned to inspect the bureau of intelligence and research (INR).

Q: This would have been when?

HOWLAND: This would have been in the winter of '77 to '78. Maybe January through April of '78. The team leader was Bill Cargo, a very well known, but not originally a Foreign Service Officer, perhaps someone who came in as a high level political appointee and then was converted. I don't remember if he had been an Ambassador. He was easy to work for and quite able.

Q: I think he was in Sudan, I want to say.

HOWLAND: I guess he was a Middle Eastern type, that's right, and Hal Saunders was the head of the INR bureau and perhaps that's why they put Bill on as the team leader. We had a good Deputy Team leader, and four other admin inspectors. I think the Bureau had over 300 employees, the vast majority of whom were secretaries or lower level analysts.

The bureau had four informal components. First, the old-line civil service analysts who had been there for years and years. Then, the office directors, who were largely civil service, but not totally, and the front office and its DASs. Then, the FSOs, who would come in for two-year tours, and were sometimes section chiefs. There were many more at that time than there are now, when INR has become known as the graveyard of careers for FSOs. "If this officer was any good, why isn't he or she on the desk?" was the attitude then. Finally there was the clerical staff which was poorly managed and in a permanent state of rebellion against anything or anybody from the other three groups.

There was a new woman inspector on the team, an AID person, who later went on to be the head of the human rights in AID; she and I were assigned to interview all the secretaries except those in the front office. I guess we must have interviewed 120 or so secretaries, eight hours a day, each one had about 15 or 20 minutes worth to talk, but you gave them an hour. Counting lunch and everything, we saw maybe six a day. She and I saw six each a day. We decided to do it through two weeks and that would take care of all the secretaries.

Basically every secretary had the same lament: whoever her boss was, her boss didn't respect her, he or she treated her like dirt, never gave her any decent work to do, had no idea about her personal problems. It just went on and on. They were right, of course. There was no question they were right. But after a while we just got compassion fatigue. The fact was that they didn't understand one of the main problems of the Foreign Service. Everything is managed upward, nothing is managed downward. The people who were supposed to be managing these employees were focused on advancing their own careers and that meant pleasing their superiors. That was sort of the main ethos of INR.

There was another more severe problem. INR was trying to computerize, put all the files on computers, because the CIA and the Pentagon had already gone way ahead of the State Department. We were always behind in the computerization. They wanted to get every file out of the safes, scan it in some way and get it on the computers. The safes were full of paper and there was no more room for safes.

Well, the old line civil service analysts fought this tooth and nail, not the Foreign Service analysts, who were very keen on it because they'd only come in for two years and needed past history in a data base. The civil service analysts, the long term analysts, their lives and their careers were in those safes. They had developed elaborate filing systems to retrieve the data fast so they could turn out a briefing memo quickly. If they gave up their personal files, they worried that machines would do it all, or that FSOs would do it all, and they would be fired. We had to struggle against that attitude all through the inspection.

When I later inspected INR again as an OIG team leader in 1992, I found that the filing system had finally been put on computers. The intention was that analysts would go through the morning cable traffic on their computer screens, print out one or two things that they wanted, and then write a briefing note. That would cut down on the paper, it was thought. Unfortunately not, there was even more paper than ever before. It seemed analysts don't like to read things on screens. They mull over pieces of paper, you see? What would happen was the analysts would just log into their computer, bring up the morning take of cables from the posts, hit print, go down to the cafeteria and have a cup of coffee, then come back and read their traffic on paper. That's what we found 15 years later, yes, 1992, it was 15 years later. Almost nothing had changed. Vast amounts of paper were still going into vast filing cabinets in vast rooms, data which analysts considered their little career hedge against unemployment. Anyway, the bureaucracy doesn't change, you know that.

West Africa Inspection

In the spring I then went on to do an inspection of West Africa with Bill Hamilton, an old friend from Indochina days, as team leader. We did eight countries of West Africa in 66 days, with five inspectors. Bill, myself, an auditor (AQI) named Harry

Chancellor and an admin officer named Sam Jones. Harry and Sam were the two admin guys. For part of the time, we had a rather dour economic/commercial inspector with us, also named Sam, who had a medical problem, couldn't lift suitcases and stayed in his hotel room most of the time. We called the two of them "admin Sam" and "econ Sam." I inspected consular and political sections, and Bill did post management, i.e. the Ambassador and DCM. There were just five of us; now they sent out teams of 12 people.

Q: This is tape 14, side one with Dick Howland.

HOWLAND: As I was saying earlier, we wrote IERs on untenured junior officers and DCMs, so there was lots of work for me in these African posts particular Dakar and Liberia which had good sized consular sections -- particularly Liberia where consular work was really a hassle, but I'll get into that. The countries we did, in order, were Niger, Mali, Senegal, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Upper Volta, and Mauritania. At the same time another team led by David Osborn and Sheldon Kryes was doing the other West African countries, such as Nigeria, the ones that we didn't do. So, all the Embassies in West Africa were being inspected.

We set out in May of 1978, a bit unhappy to be in West Africa in the hottest part of the year. As it turned out, it wasn't that hot. Liberia and Guinea and places like that were hot, but up in the dry countries of Niger, Mali, Senegal and Mauritania, it was quite comfortable. Senegal and its capital Dakar were perfectly comfortable even in July. Dakar was a delightful place -- in fact in those years, all of West Africa was at peace and interesting to visit. Only Guinea and Guinea Bissau were nightmares because of their repressive, quasi-communist regimes.

Niger

We set off overnight via Paris. Bill had some kind of consultation at the French foreign ministry, but he went alone to that. Bill, who was a wonderful guy in many respects, seemed a bit defensive about his position as team leader, and he would sometimes do things by himself and not include others. That was different from Mel Manfull's practice in the Caribbean inspection, when I went along on some of his interviews. Later when I became an OIG team leader in 1990-94, I always tried to include another inspector. For one thing, he or she could write the notes, and I could concentrate on the interview.

We then flew from Paris on the French airline UTA, to Niamey, the capital of Niger. As we came over Niamey, the stewardess said to me, "Are you getting off here?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Here, I'll give you a free bottle of wine. You'll need it in Niger." She was absolutely right. We stayed in a awful called the Hotel Terminus, cockroaches everywhere. Breakfast was in a dark room, fishing for croissants in a basket with the other guests, drinking cold coffee.

The Ambassador was a very nice, former Peace Corps country director; a political appointee named Henry James. The DCM was an old line African specialist named Jack Davison, who had been in the Congo for years. I teased him about being “a burnt-out case,” like the protagonist of the Graham Greene novel, but he was holding the place together. When we arrived, the air conditioning in the Embassy had been out for weeks. The Ambassador, being ex-peace corps, was very happy with that, because he thought it would impress the Nigerians that we were living just as they were. So, he not only wanted his people to work in this Embassy at a measured 106 degrees inside their offices, he also wanted them to walk to work through the heat from wherever they were living perhaps miles away.

The DCM was kind of caught between the staff, which was livid over this nonsense, and this kind of strange Peace Corps guy who would write his EER. The Ambassador’s residence was across the street and was air conditioned, of course, and had a swimming pool the temperature of which must have also been 106. I put my hand in it and it was almost like boiling water. But the Ambassador could walk across the street for a cool lunch, while everyone else had to sit in the Chancery and sweat. To his credit he sometimes ate in his office, but there were windows at both ends and a breeze blew through. In our inspectors’ office the temperature was 104 degrees. Luckily for me, the substantive pol and econ files were all down in the secure classified vault. Because of the need to keep communications equipment cool, it had a window air conditioner. As the political and economic inspector, I was able to work down there, looking through the files and writing my portion of the report there.

Happily this only lasted a few days, thanks to our team leader, Bill Hamilton, bless his heart. He immediately started looking into this problem and found out that there was a relatively small part that was missing from the Embassy central air conditioner. He talked to the GSO who said: yes, the part had been sent to the Embassy in Paris -- the regional administrative support facility for West African posts at that time -- and was awaiting shipment. He added that he had thought of asking us, the inspectors, to bring it to the post from Paris, but the Ambassador wouldn’t permit that.

Bill then went to the Ambassador and said, this is outrageous. We can’t do our job. I’m going to cable back to the Inspector General and say we can’t work in 104 degrees, we’re going to have to leave the post. We had already found some big problems in the AID warehouse, possible theft. The Ambassador gave in and Bill called every other post in the region to find out if one of their officers might be in Paris on R&R. Sure enough, there was an officer from Ghana visiting Paris. Bill talked to him by phone, asked him to pick up the part, and to come back via Niamey. He said we would pay the difference in travel costs, which we never did. Anyway, he did it. We went out to the airport and got the part. The GSO was able to install it and, within five days of our arrival, the Embassy was air conditioned once again.

The inspectors were the big heroes of the moment, but the Ambassador was very unhappy about that. He was a nice man. I have to emphasize that he was nice, he was

just misguided. His reaction to any problem was to say: "oh well." For instance, Bill couldn't seem to get close to him and we needed his input to write the IER on his DCM, Jack Davison. We liked the DCM. He was holding the place together. Bill wanted to write a good IER on him, but we had to have the Ambassador's views. But he would never would commit himself on anything. Finally after we were there almost three weeks -- there were so many problems in the admin section that we extended our time there by a week -- the Ambassador invited Bill and me over to his house for a drink, a "sun-downer." Bill was really keyed up because, he thought, oh, finally we'll be able to get close to him and get his views.

We went out on the terrace of the residence and there was the great Niger River, the main artery as it were of African exploration, flowing through the trackless desert. On the other side were giraffes in the distance, browsing in the thorn trees, and in the residence garden there were storks and other African birds. We sat and chatted about one thing or another. The Ambassador was not saying much. Finally, Bill started to ask about his views on the DCM's performance, asking how they got along.

The Ambassador said, look out there at the birds, and described some of their behavior. He never answered the question. He was telling us that he was a very non-judgmental person, I think, and he wasn't going to say anything about his DCM. The Foreign Service system, of course, was totally unfamiliar to him. Besides he was a nice man and we gave up at that point. We wrote up a nice IER and we never had any input from the Ambassador on him. We showed the overall post report to the Ambassador, and he looked at it and he said yes, thank you very much. Never even said, this is good, bad, there are parts that are wrong. Just totally non-judgmental.

That said, his relations with the government were superb. He was doing a great job in that area. It's just that he didn't understand what an Embassy was. You can't have people working in 106 degrees. They have to work. They don't just walk to work to be seen to be as the same as the Nigerians. They also have to sit at their desks and type reports and things. You can't do that in that kind of temperature. That was our Niger experience, my first experience with an African country. By the way Niamey had a wonderful market. Also Bill and I made a great week-end trip out in the countryside, we crossed the Niger in an African pirogue, and we went to visit some Peace Corps people working in a traditional village. They loved the Ambassador -- fellow peace corps guy, of course. It was a wonderful experience, and Bill and I bonded as kindred, romantic spirits at heart.

Mali

We flew from Niamey to Mali in a Soviet tri-motor aircraft via a place called Gao, then to Timbuktu, then to Mopti, finally arriving in Bamako. We stopped in Gao, an old Foreign Legion post, where an army commander was going to kick us off the plane because he wanted to send his extended family to Timbuktu for some social event, but we managed to yell and scream and flash our diplomatic passports and

stayed on the plane. When we got to Timbuktu, Bill, Harry and admin Sam wanted to spend the weekend there. I myself did not want to spend more than a day in Timbuktu in the heat. It was really hot. The next day econ Sam and I flew on to Bamako, sitting next to a lady who was taking a big Niger River fish to sell at the market in Mopti. She needed to pray so I offered to hold her fish, and I like to think her prayer helped get us safely to Mopti -- a pleasant traditional African town, and on to Bamako.

There I checked into a nice French-run hotel, which I understand went terribly downhill after a few years. When we were there it was very nice. The food was very good, and the hotel had a pool, tennis courts and everything. The Ambassador in Bamako was Pat Byrne, whom I'd heard about from her work in Bill Hamilton's political section in Laos in 1961. Sending Bill out to inspect an officer who had earlier worked for him apparently was not considered inappropriate -- it had been 16 years after all -- but it would never happen today. Pat was doing a very fine job running the Embassy and, in effect, the country as well. I don't remember anything special from Bamako except AID was doing fine and Pat was holding it all together. She had good relations with the government.

Senegal

From Bamako we went to inspect the Embassy in Dakar. Hank Cohen, who later became Assistant Secretary for African affairs, was the Ambassador. He may have been the only former labor attaché in history to become an Ambassador, then an assistant secretary. His wife, Suzanne, had been my French teacher at FSI 1960 -- unfortunately I suspect she didn't think much of my French in 1978 either. Bill had very cleverly done the scheduling of the inspection so that we would spend a few weeks in hardship posts like Niamey or Guinea-Bissau, then transit through Dakar on the weekends to recuperate. It worked out very nicely that way. Nothing special in Dakar except the consular section. It was a good size consular section. For some reason Senegalese had lots of consular problems. Have you been to Dakar?

Q: No, never.

HOWLAND: The high spot was to visit the "Ile de Gorée," a holding area in earlier times for African slaves before putting them on the boats for the Western Hemisphere. For the first time in my life, that visit brought home to me the horrors of slavery. When you see the former slave quarters and realize how awful those human beings were treated, it really hits pretty hard, I must say. Even today I can remember my feelings there very distinctly. I see recently President Obama went there -- even more poignant for him than me I'm sure.

Guinea-Bissau

From there the team temporarily split. Bill and Harry and I flew to Guinea Bissau; "econ Sam" went to start the inspection at the Cape Verde islands, and Bill went there

a few days later. Guinea Bissau had just won its independence in 1974, after a bloody war with the Portuguese, and had established a pro-communist regime which, like Angola, was really being run by Castro and his Cuban expeditionary army.

The pro-French, rightist Senegalese weren't happy about this little cancer of Portuguese Marxism-Leninism, stuck right there on their southern border, and there were constant incidents. The Guinea Bissau government was on in a permanent war footing. We flew down on Air Guinea Bissau, in a laboring C-47 with no doors, with inebriated Portuguese pilots, just like my trip to Portuguese Timor which I told you about earlier. You know, when you're young, things like that are a great adventure. We landed at a military field and a mob of armed soldiers, with bayonets fixed, just converged on the plane. We got into town somehow. The Embassy didn't have any vehicles. It had just been established less than two years earlier, and the first Ambassador was Melissa Wells. Have you ever had Melissa Wells in for an interview?

Q: No, I would like to get a hold of her.

HOWLAND: She was the first Ambassador. Before she went, the Department had to open that post. So it sent an FSR admin officer whose name was Fred something, and the Ambassador's secretary, whose name I can't remember either, and one other officer to open the post in Guinea Bissau. The admin guy had been in Africa before as a Peace Corps volunteer, but had never been done Foreign Service admin work. The Department had said to them: go out and open the Embassy there. Well sure, but how? Well, go there and get a building and so forth. They arrived the same way we did in Guinea Bissau, driven in for a bribe on an army truck from the military strip, and dropped on a street corner. From there they had to create an Embassy, speaking no Portuguese. Luckily, they were terrific. In similar circumstances, in Equatorial Guinea, there had been a violent incident at the post.

Q: Oh, God.

HOWLAND: The Department does it every time, don't they? So, I think Melissa came a couple of months later, but these people, three people, one woman and two men, Fred and this other economic officer, were sent with no experience into the unknown to create a Foreign Service post. And they did it. As I said, when you're young, everything is a great adventure.

They rented a building, repaired, cleaned and painted it themselves. There was a lift-van of equipment already in the port, and they found it and cleared it through customs. They were firing off orders to bring in desks and they were doing all these things. The staff all slept on the next floor up from the Chancery, which was on the second floor. When we did the inspection two years later, they had a functioning Embassy. Melissa went on as Ambassador for almost two years and then left for better things. Now there was a new Ambassador, Ed Marks. A nice guy and good

manager. His secretary, who was about to leave, took me around, showed me all the painting she'd done, the repairs that they'd made, how they put in the doorknobs and locks themselves and so forth. It was inspiring.

Luckily, we weren't there on Saturday morning. The Embassy building had a kind of alleyway through the bottom floor, and behind it was a courtyard in the back. The whole courtyard stank and there were bloodstains everywhere. The secretary said, that's where they kill the pigs for the market every Saturday morning. If you're here on Saturday mornings, you can watch them cutting up the pigs and eating the entrails raw. That's the real Africa, she said. After a while you get used to it.

The town of course was still a mess. It was a quasi-communist regime; there were no food markets and the ordinary people were just starving. Of course the members of the ruling party got all the food they wanted, brought in by the Cubans. The other diplomats used to wait for one weekly plane to come in from Dakar with orders of food. There was an egg ration in town and the government controlled the distribution of eggs. So, one egg per person per week was the ration. There were six or seven people in the Embassy. Whenever their egg day was, one person would have to take a basket and go to the government store and be handed seven eggs and certify that there were seven people eating seven eggs. Then they'd go back and the next morning they'd have a big egg breakfast. That was how they got their eggs. But apparently the shrimp and other seafood were good, and frequently available.

There was no medical care of course. When one officer cut himself with a saw, he had to go to the Cuban hospital for care. The Cuban hospital had a doctor, but no medicines, no anti-biotic, nothing. So, with no anesthetic they put in stitches with fishing line. Then they had to take them out of course in a couple of days when the wound had started to heal. They pulled the fishing line out just like that. No anesthetic for any of it. That was what it was like in Africa in the Foreign Service those days.

The only problem now seemed to be a gulf between the "founders of the post" so to speak, and new people who were just arriving, who took everything for granted and hated it. It was the old "hardy band of brothers" syndrome but time would take care of that. We were very glad to leave Guinea Bissau, which in the ensuing 35 years now has gone from coup to coup, and is now a dangerous "failed" state used for various narcotics traffickers.

Guinea

Then we flew back out to Dakar for another week-end rest stop, which we deserved after Guinea Bissau. From Dakar we went on to Guinea, which in 1978 was almost as bad as Guinea Bissau. In many ways it was worse. It had been a dictatorial quasi-communist, totally deprived police state since 1960, much longer than Guinea Bissau. The government had totally wiped out the private sector. They had expelled all the Lebanese merchants, and Sekou Toure was running the country like a 12th Century

African emperor, rationalized by a phony Marxism ideology. The only “private sector” we noticed in Guinea was a few old ladies selling mealy corn by the side of the street opposite the Embassy.

There were banners and slogans everywhere with the usual inane revolutionary slogans; it reminded me of Indonesia under Sukarno, but this place was more brutal and dilapidated. The streets were pure potholes but it didn't matter, there were no vehicles except for the Ministers' Mercedes-Benz limousines. Sekou Toure's children and his ministers, and the upper levels of government, were flying to France every few weeks and living high off the hog. The people totally suffered.

The Embassy in Guinea in those years was located in the former General Motors dealership building, which had big glass windows. People walking back and forth on the street could see right into the offices because they were next to the street behind the windows. No one feared any security problems in Toure's police state, but if there had been it would have been pretty awful. I think there were 12 people in the Embassy. I can't remember the Ambassador's name or that of the DCM. The admin officer was another Peace Corps person who had been converted into the Foreign Service, because she was willing to serve as an admin officer in West Africa. She subsequently went on to be a consular officer in Mexico. She was an FSR-5 and she was terrific. We were barely off the plane before she was telling us this post is really deep in guilty stuff.

She said, I've told all this to the Ambassador. He just kind of laughs it off, so I'm telling you guys. Among the things that had been going on, she said, since the Embassy provided fully-furnished housing, people arrive with bales of used clothing in their household goods shipment. As soon as it arrives, they start selling this used clothing on the outside. There's no other way of getting clothing in this country. They sell it at the outside at the black market rate, which was 80,000 to one or whatever, and then use the receipts to convert it into dollars at the official rate. She said, always be suspicious of a hardship post where people are reenlisting year after year. There's some reason for that and the reason is usually black market money, not the differential.

Another interesting quirk we found right away. When we inspected the commissary books, we found that these 12 Embassy employees were buying 300 cases of Heineken beer a month, i.e. or 600 bottles of beer a month per person. Obviously somebody was selling it on the outside, making a fortune. Everybody was selling something on the black market. The Embassy had no trouble getting people to do a second tour in that godforsaken place. They were making fortunes.

So, we went to the Ambassador and told him all of that -- the used clothing sales, the commissary beer sales, etc. It appeared he may have known all about it, that Guinea was such a hardship post, that people needed special “inducements” to serve there. We took appropriate steps when we got back to ensure that these “inducements” were

stopped and people involved were properly disciplined.

Liberia

From there we went to Monrovia, Liberia, where the DCM, Hal Horan was serving as Chargé.

Q. I know Hal.

HOWLAND: Yes, a fine officer. He and I really bonded for some reason. He said, when you become a DCM, remember T. S. Eliot has a line in a poem of how you measure out your life with coffee spoons. Well, DCMs measure out their lives with checklists. Endless checklists. If you become a DCM, your best friend will be that steno pad. Anything that happens, or needs to be done, write it down. Anything you want to remember. Write it down, date it, put the time and so forth. Organize it by however you want to organize it so that, when the Ambassador walks in having noticed some arcane problem, you can flip through the steno pad and say: yes, Mr. Ambassador this is what happened then and this is what we're doing about it. That was the best advice I've probably gotten from anyone, and I lived by that as a country director and a DCM and an Ambassador. There's no substitute for organization and preparedness, none.

Embassy Liberia was well-run. The main problem in Liberia that I recall was consular, in that all Liberians thought of themselves as Americans. You know the divide in Liberia between the so-called Americo-Liberians, repatriated slaves from the US, and the tribal peoples of the interior. The Americo-Liberians dominated the country for 160 years. You never saw the tribal peoples in Monrovia except as servants only these Americo-Liberians, many of whom had homes in the US, and went back and forth.

None of them understood they had to get visas. They lined up by the hundreds to demand passports and started have riots to get passports because they said they were really Americans. Well, the consular section was constantly seized with that and of course had to combat a lot of document fraud, endless document fraud. It was a very tough section being run very well. The country itself was a total mess. The only thing reason it worked was the Firestone plantation, and how much they paid to the government. Soon after we visited it all fell apart for decades. Thanks to the DCM, the Embassy was well run. It wasn't anything really special there.

Upper Volta

We moved on to the Ivory Coast en route to Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), but only for a stopover. The Ambassador in the Ivory Coast was Monty Stearns, who was the first DCM when I was in Laos from '71 to '73 before John Gunther Dean arrived. The other West Africa team was inspecting the post later. He gave us a lunch and we

learned that Ivory Coast was probably the most comfortable and well-run country in the region. The hope was that the local autocrat, Houphouet-Boigny, would last forever. Unfortunately he didn't, and Ivory Coast fell into chaos for years.

Then we went to Upper Volta, I believe Tom Boyatt was the Ambassador there, and we found a well-run post in a nice quiet small town.

Mauritania

Then back to Dakar for a day of rest and then we did what I feel was probably the best part of the inspection and it was one of the most exotic places I've ever been: Mauritania. Bill Hamilton, the incurable romantic that he was, always wanted to see Port Louis, which was the first slave port in Africa. It was in Senegal, north of Dakar, and also a key place for the Transatlantic ferry runs of bombers and seaplanes during World War II. They'd fly down to Brazil, and cross the Atlantic, ferrying supplies to North Africa or wherever they were going. The bombers had landed in Dakar and the seaplanes, the Pan Am clippers, which were taken over by the military, had landed in this big swampy inlet in Port Louis. Bill was also a great gourmet, and said he had heard the best single restaurant in West Africa was in Port Louis. It was true.

So, we decided to drive along the coast from Dakar to Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania. We got an Embassy car from Dakar to take us to the ferry landing on the south bank of the Senegal River. The Embassy in Nouakchott agreed to send a Jeep Wagoneer to pick us up on the opposite side. Can you believe that, after almost seven weeks in disorganized West Africa at that point, and having had years of experience in the Third World, Bill and I blithely went off to do this mad road-trip, presuming the Nouakchott Embassy car would be there? Well, It was there, but no one in their right mind would do that today. I mean it would just never show up today.

Anyway, off we set for Port Louis, which is a nice drive, across the desert in Senegal which was characterized by these beautiful Baobab trees, big thick trees with little branches up at the top with thousands of birds and animals living on them. They're one of the greatest environments on the planet. We stopped and we looked at the Baobab trees, marvelous things, and little worlds of their own. We had our lunch at Port Louis, and got to the Senegal River, well, maybe about 2:00 pm. The distances were not vast.

There we sat in the hot car looking at the ferry, which was still sitting at the other side of the river. There were lots of Africans standing round on our side, also waiting for the ferry and being eaten by a million biting flies. It was the first time I ever saw a kid with his eyes open, with a fly walking across one eye, and not paying any attention to it. Flies had obviously done that on his eyes for years. There we sat, with windows closed to keep the flies out. No ferry.

We learned that the ferry crew was having their lunch on the other side, then of course

a nap. They'd be over in a while, we were told, but meanwhile we could just envision the hours going by, and the Nouakchott car -- if it was there -- getting worried about darkness and returning to the Embassy before we got there. Then we would have been stranded amidst the flies on that side of the river, with our car from Dakar having left too.

Finally we showed our diplomatic passports and persuaded the ferry office on this side to run up a signal flag, and saw the ferry grudgingly come across the Senegal River. It was a great, wide river, half a mile wide, a nice river, a picturesque river with native boats and huts along the banks. The ferry swept in and with great trepidation we asked the ferry guy if there was a truck waiting for us. They didn't know, but hustled us onto the ferry. With more trepidation we sent our Embassy truck back to Dakar. Then we were really following in the footsteps of the ancient explorers. Bill Hamilton, the incurable romantic, was in heaven -- I confess to a thrill as well, setting off into the unknown across the Senegal River into Mauritania. The other two team members couldn't have cared less.

The ferry landed and amazingly the Nouakchott Embassy Wagoneer was there, the truck was there! We all piled in the truck. But it was a close thing. The driver said, well, good thing you came now because I would have had to go back pretty soon, even though I saw you on the other side. The road becomes impassable by the late afternoon because the wind from the ocean blows sand across it. Every morning guys from the villages are paid to dig out the sand, but they quit at noon so you only have this brief time. Never mind, a great day after all.

As we drove farther north through the desert, a beautiful desert with high dunes and occasional glimpses of the sea, the sand was starting to blow down across the road and at times we had to skid through it. We got about half way up and we hadn't seen a living creature for 20 miles so we made a pit-stop. It was all sand as far as the eye could see. Not a living creature, not a blade of grass. But within seconds we were covered with flies. We quickly got back in the car and drove fast so the wind could blow the flies out of the car. I asked the driver how, if nothing lives there, and flies only live a couple of days, how come they're always there? The guy says, oh, yes, there are always flies here, everywhere in the desert. Well, there must be a lot of flies, I said. They must come in from somewhere. It is the will of God, he answered.

We got nearer to Nouakchott, a distant and low town on the desert horizon. As we drove closer in, we saw a Mauritanian couple, husband and wife, walking along the main road. The husband was emaciated and dressed in rags, leading the wife on a chain. She was dressed in blue finery and jewels, and very over-weight to say the least. The driver said that was the ideal of marriage in the country. In the town there were a lot of buildings with shell holes in them because the war was going on with the Polisario, the rebel front trying to liberate the Spanish Sahara.

Q: Algerians?

HOWLAND: No, not exactly, but a Saharan war with Morocco had spilled over into Mauritania as well, and the Moroccans and Algerians were involved. The Embassy had been hit in a coup attempt because there was a cabinet minister who lived next door. There was a rocket hole on the side of the Embassy.

Nouakchott was, in many ways, an exotic and strangely beautiful place. I imagine you could go mad there in a year, but for a short visit it was great. The bead market was fabulous. The Embassy housed us in a strange “modular hotel” right on the beach, in the dunes by the Atlantic and the booming waves. It was run by Canadians, an aid project to house their aid workers, and consisted of a row of what appeared to be lift vans. Each one was a self-contained modular room with an air conditioner and a water tank and was nicely furnished inside, cool, and pleasant. They were all connected by a tunnel. You went through the tunnel to the main part of the hotel where the dining room and the front desk were, and then you went back through the tunnel to your little modular room, which was absolutely tightly sealed.

I wondered: why are we living like this? Then when I went outside I realized was because all day long the sand blows in from the dunes on the strong ocean winds, and slowly covers up these cocoons where we were living. That was during the day. In the evening the ocean wind died, and the hotel started up some big airplane engines mounted on the backs of trucks, which blew the sand back onto the dunes toward the ocean. The swimming pool was full of sand because you couldn't blow the sand out of the swimming pool. That was the Canadian hotel. That said, it was a nice hotel with good food and we learned a lot about the country from the Canadian AID guys living there. The best part was that it was right on the water. You had to walk over the dunes, some 200 feet high, magnificent dunes. When you got over them the Atlantic of course was very rough and beautiful, but you couldn't swim. The currents were very fierce and there were sharks.

Now, I should mention by the way that a kind of serfdom still existed in Mauritania at that time, in 1978, maybe it still does. There were two elements of the population: there were the Mauritanian Arabs, and then the blacks from Senegal who had either emigrated, or been abducted, supposedly by gangs that sold them to wealthy Mauritanians. They did the heavy lifting that the Mauritanian Arabs wouldn't do. One of the things that the Africans did was fish along the shore, catching fish for their masters to sell at the market and to the hotel among other things. These were very rich fishing grounds because the cold deep Atlantic current swept up along that shore bringing nutrients to the surface.

So nearly every morning I woke at about 6:00 am and walked down to the beach to go jogging, just as some fishermen were pulling in their nets and others were swimming out to set more of them all along the shore. They had no boats. In this terribly dangerous water, full of sharks, the way they'd get the net out would be for a bunch of guys to take one end of a net and swim out with it holding on to small logs. The other

end of the net was secured on the shore. The swimmers would go out a ways and then traverse along the shore, setting the net outside the breakers, and then swim back in to the beach.

After a short time, the men started hauling in the nets, chanting and singing. There were fish flopping on the sand everywhere, big fish too, the women cleaning and putting them in plastic tubs, gulls fighting over the entrails. Meanwhile behind the beach to the east, the sun was coming up behind the dunes. On the highest ridgelines an occasional *Marabou*, the wandering holy men of Morocco and Algeria, walked slowly by, black robes blowing in the wind, casting a long shadow from the sunrise. Well, what a thrill it was, to stand there as the sunlight began to illuminate this great traditional African scene, to experience the old, old sights and sounds of an Africa which now I am sure has passed away. I was very privileged to be there.

The staff lived on the Embassy compound, which looked for all the world like Fort Apache, a series of low buildings bordering a quadrangle with a flagpole at the center. You could almost hear the Foreign Legion bugler as you drove in every morning.

The Ambassador, I remember him very well, was named Greg Kryza. He had been the executive officer of the AF bureau and a very good admin officer, a very nice man, very able Ambassador, but with not much to do except watch for incoming rockets, I supposed. The DCM was a really good officer and Arabist named Charlie Dunbar. He had sailed to the post on a small yacht across the Atlantic, after being on home leave. He had sailed to the mouth of the Senegal River and then had his sailboat put on a big Sahara transport truck and driven to Nouakchott. That's how he got to his post, on a sailboat. I thought that was pretty neat, too; again, very African.

As one would expect with an Embassy run by a good Ambassador and DCM, there were no problems that I recall, so the Mauritania stop was easy to write up. Besides a few adventures -- I went out on the desert looking for "sand roses," an unexplained natural phenomenon in the dunes, with some Embassy staffers -- there were some great stories.

The Ambassador's secretary was dating a sergeant in the French foreign legion, who was actually seconded as an Intel specialist at the French Embassy. She invited me home for a drink and a chat with him, and he had a great trove of stories about his time in West Africa. For instance, a previous assignment had been as commandant of the prison in Chad during the transition from the last days of the colonial rule. During the dry season there was nothing to eat in Chad so many people committed petty crimes to get into the French jail where they knew they would be fed. He said the real thrill of his day was in the morning when he'd walk into the prison yard and thousands of prisoners, waiting for breakfast, would shout: "Vive le Commandant! Vive La France!" as they banged on their dinner plates with spoons. Ah, again the old, old Africa.

The Polisario frequently raided Nouakchott, which had sided with Morocco against them. Whenever he heard rumors there was going to be a Polisario attack, the sergeant would try to check them out. Once he went out in the desert on his motorcycle, climbed up on a dune with binoculars and saw dozens of Land Rovers coming along a track. There he was, out about 40 miles from Nouakchott in the desert, with no compass, nothing, but he knew how to get back because he knew the desert. He just stopped and stood there. The Polisario came up and he saw there were Algerian officers among them, actually in uniform. Then they asked him for directions to Nouakchott, and of course he sent them the wrong way.

He said, who knows if they ever got back. They probably ran out of gas. They're out there dead somewhere. This was a large war party and he probably saved quite a lot of lives by putting them astray. He said, to this day I don't understand, why they didn't kill me, a French sergeant in uniform, and why they believed me. He thought it was very interesting that the Polisario actually had Land Rovers. Where did they get the Land Rovers? Well, the Algerians of course. They got them from the Algerians. They wouldn't use Soviet vehicles because they couldn't last in the desert. But the Land Rovers were built by the British for the desert. So, they had Land Rovers from the Algerians. Thus his view on the Polisario insurrection was that it was an Algerian plot to encircle Morocco, an arch-enemy for years before the colonial period.

We also got a lot of insights about the country from the Canadian aid workers, usually in the bar at the hotel. They were quite frustrated with the Mauritanian inability to focus on development. For example, little was being done expand a very valuable iron mine that the French and Germans were exploiting in the north of Mauritania although it was the main source of income for the government. Also, there was no harbor at Nouakchott, just ocean shoreline as I described earlier. The only way goods could get to Nouakchott was via a natural port way up in the North at the iron mine, or by means of the Senegal River. Either way the road was not so good. Or by air, which was expensive. So it was very hard to get stuff in. The Germans wanted to keep on the right side of the government, and offered to build them a beautiful floating dock to start a harbor offshore Nouakchott. That would greatly reduce cargo costs and promote development -- it was part of the reason for the Canadian aid projects as well.

But unfortunately the Germans also said to them, it'll promote tourism. You'll be able to get tourist dollars from cruise ships. There was a wonderful market in Nouakchott, a bead market and the Germans realized that the tourists would love it and the rest of the picturesque desert town -- plus the beaches of course, girls in bikinis escaping the cold North European winter.

If the Germans hadn't described the tourism benefits, the government would have agreed, but once the government realized that tourists coming in to Mauritania would witness such traditions as marital slavery -- wives were bought and sold, for instance - - they saw trouble ahead. I mentioned that we saw at least a dozen instances of

emaciated men, dressed in simple clothing, leading around overweight women, dressed in gold and jewels and bright new garments, around the market, buying them beads. It was quite a sight. The men led them around on leashes, their faces uncovered and heavily made-up, hair was in a jeweled veils and bodies partly revealed in brightly-colored clothing. The men were emaciated and dressed practically in rags, but the women were obviously force-fed to make them as obese as possible. It was a mark of a man's status among the people. They were showing off their wives, who were their property.

The government became terribly worried about this proposal, and decided to retreat to the desert, like the Bedouin in Saudi Arabia, to ponder and consult over such a difficult decision. The reluctance to admit tourists was also a Saudi-like phenomenon. One weekend the cabinet ministers and other notables drove off with guards into the desert with their tents, miles out in the desert, and sat out there under the stars on their carpets, talked about the whole situation, asked Allah for guidance and so forth. On Monday they came back to Nouakchott.

Now, this German harbor project would have been exactly what the country needed, it was brilliantly conceived and would have worked, would have gotten all kinds of goods in there for the population. It would cost \$60 or \$70 million in aid funds, which in the '70s was a big project. But the government said, no, thank you, they just didn't want that project, thank you very much. And, by the way, goodbye.

The Germans were flabbergasted. They were afraid the decision meant all kinds of problems for their operations at the iron mine, but no, that was fine, the Mauritanian government simply wanted to preserve the lifestyle of the country, and was afraid tourists would destroy it. They were probably right, and that was the end of my African adventures until much later.

We flew back to Dakar at dawn on a "Twin Otter," cruising along above those wonderful beaches, afraid we would miss a Pan Am flight, the only flight of the week back to the United States. The Pan Am came across Africa all the way from Nairobi, across the Congo, stopped in the Ivory Coast and other places. It was July and US Embassy families from all over Africa were going on home leave, required to cross the Atlantic on an American carrier. We had managed to get seats, and after 66 days away from our families on this trip, we were very anxious to get back. As it turned out, the Pan Am flight was nine hours late. It was indeed full of Embassy families from all over Africa heading for home leave. As I sat there on the plane, happy to be leaving West Africa, the child ahead of me stood up in his seat, turned around, leaned over the back of his seat and threw up in my lap.

Q: Oh, no.

HOWLAND: So, there I sat. We had been on the road all day. The stewardess, bless her heart, the Pan Am stewardess helped clean it all up and brought me three of those

little mini-Scotch bottles, saying: you know, it's a long flight. Just drink these right down and go out. So, I did. It reminded me of arriving in Africa 66 days earlier, when the UTA stewardess said, you're getting off at Niger? You better take this bottle of wine, it's a terrible place. Well, this other stewardess had been nice to me and I went right out. We'd been up since 2:00 in the morning and woke up the next day, arriving at JFK at 2:00 in the morning. No onward flights then, of course. I sat around there with a terrible hangover from the Scotch, tried to eat, but I couldn't eat. At dawn I called my wife and then caught the first flight to Washington. And that's how we got back from our 66-day inspection tour of West Africa.

The Arabian Peninsula

The next time I will tell you about inspecting the posts in and around doing Saudi Arabia with Ambassador Chris Van Hollen, whose son is a congressman now and a rising star in the democratic party. His father was a very fine Ambassador and we got along very well together.

Q: Okay, very good, thank you.

Q: Today is the 6th of March, 2002. Dick, you went out to Saudi Arabia. When was this inspection? What year was this?

HOWLAND: The fall of 1978.

Q: Okay, tell me about it.

Saudi Arabia

HOWLAND: I've already mentioned the team leader, Ambassador Van Hollen. Deputy Team leader and Admin inspector was a nice guy named Danny Williamson, who had been a DAS for Budget, and the consular inspector was officer named Irene Hammond. I did the economic sections and Al Williams, the political sections, except when we had to split the team. One further person who was along was our audit qualified inspector, John Mercurio, a very competent and interesting guy. He later resigned from OIG when he was offered a position, I think in 1981, as the chief accountant for the New Jersey State Gaming Commission, which was just setting up the casinos in Atlantic City. John had come from Trenton, New Jersey. It took him

perhaps 12 seconds to make that decision to resign from the Foreign Service. I never heard another word from him.

We first went to Jeddah; the Embassy in those years was in Jeddah. They had a liaison office in Riyadh because the Saudi capital was going to move there, but I think the decision had been made, but no site for an Embassy had been found. However we also had to inspect Riyadh, but the main Embassy was in a compound in Jeddah. Have you been to Jeddah?

Q: No.

HOWLAND: There was a huge Embassy compound, with a sand golf course and tennis courts in Jeddah. The Ambassador was a political appointee, the former governor of South Carolina, John West. When West left the governorship, President Carter, once Governor in Georgia next door, appointed him Ambassador out there in Saudi Arabia. The rumor in the Department during our pre-departure survey was that West thought of his tenure as a way to benefit South Carolina, where his son was running for mayor of Charleston. There was concern that West wanted to use his position to help his son.

That said, he got along very well with the Saudis because the mark of a successful Ambassador in Saudi Arabia is that he can pick up the phone and call the President of the United States and he could clearly do that, so the Saudis liked that. Not only to get things done, but more of the prestigious factor, a special relationship.

Anyway, when West had arrived he found that the Embassy, which had a very fine DCM named Marshal Wiley, was resistant to his efforts to change the thrust of the relationship to commercial benefit for his home state. He then basically fired him as DCM, and told him he couldn't even come into the Embassy to work. For months Wiley had sat home until he could leave the post for a new job, a good one as Ambassador to Oman. But he hadn't been replaced by the time of the inspection.

The head of the economic section was not a Saudi expert and actually had been a commercial officer. He had been named Acting DCM, and there seemed to be a natural convergence of his views with those of the new Ambassador. With the new emphasis on commercial work, the remainder of Embassy responsibilities were languishing. There were severe commissary problems, because the facility had just been transferred from the Defense Department to State, and there were enormous profits which the Embassy had apparently used for going-away parties and to installing grass greens on the sand golf course.

Because of the emphasis on commercial work, the Embassy staff had to forgo even the most basic political and economic reporting. Actually we found that to be the case in other posts in the Arabian Peninsula. The political function had been marginalized and the CIA -- and even the DIA -- had moved into the gap. DIA was doing political

reporting that was just totally off the wall. We knew we had to address that on a regionalized basis and we did, but specifically in Jeddah we knew we had to do something about this DCM who was just catering to the Ambassador's notions that he was really the Ambassador from South Carolina.

In addition he was basically serving as West's staff aide. He was doing his schedule. West would call him in and say, can you draft me up a letter, I've got a letter from Prince Faisal. He wants something or other. Can you draft a reply for my signature? He was basically functioning as sort of a private secretary to the front office, not a DCM. West had recommended making him permanent DCM, but we blocked that and recommended assigning a new one. It turned out the best candidate was Rocky Suddarth. Do you know Rocky Suddarth?

Q: I know, I've interviewed Rocky.

HOWLAND: Oh, good, you've done him? A great Arabist and superb officer. Then we had the problem that West really did need a staff aide. I suddenly remembered that my GSO from the Surabaya Consulate in 1974-76, Bill Pierce, had become an Arabist and was stationed in Damascus. He was from Georgia and I knew West would like him, and I knew Bill would leap at a chance for a political cone assignment. It all worked out fine and the two of them got West under control. Bill had married a Syrian, a beautiful Syrian woman and had converted to Islam. I hope you've done him, he's just retired.

Q: I've interviewed Bill, too.

HOWLAND: Isn't that marvelous, that's great. I ought to track him down. You know I've forgotten the name of that. Anyway, we got Bill Pierce. This happened afterwards, but we heard afterwards that he straightened the place out. Absolutely straightened the place out because Rocky was superb and Bill did a great job. As a Muslim, when the fanatics seized the great mosque in Medina, he was able to get in on the scene as a Muslim. It was either in Mecca or Medina, I forget which one. I think it was Medina wasn't it? He did some great reporting out of there. As it turned out it must have been the high spot of his life.

Q: Do you recall whether West understood the problem?

HOWLAND: Yes, he absolutely did, but he didn't want to change. We had the report, a thick report. We gave the report to him one day and he didn't read it. We saw him for about an hour the next day and briefed all the points. I must say Chris Van Hollen -- who was on the point of retirement -- was very strong in all of that.

West said, well, you know, I've just been looking over my letters from Jimmy. I got a letter last week from Jimmy and he was asking me about some of this stuff. Van Hollen said, can I see the letter? He handed it over. It was a handwritten letter from

the President of the United States to his pal, Governor West, you see. He and the President wrote back and forth on a handwriting basis. We sort of sat there, stunned..

Q: This is tape fifteen, side one with Dick Howland.

HOWLAND: He said, now. I'm willing to give Bill Pierce a try and you tell him to come out here and I'll see about Mr. Suddarth and the DCM, but anything else that you were talking about, like all the bad things you said on the commissary, I just have to put this in this letter, I'm writing now to Jimmy about you boys. That just sort of hung in the air.

So, Van Hollen replied, well, we appreciate taking your time. We left at that time and I never knew what he was going to write about us, or if he even did.

Q: Why would he bother, but it was a threat.

HOWLAND: Yes, this is the threat, exactly like that. West went on. I didn't know whether we moved West out, even though he was not doing a very good job, but that was the outcome of the Inspection. Well, did he know that he should have been doing all of this Foreign Service stuff, reporting and the like? Yes, I'm sure he was told, hey had the charm school in those years, but I don't think they really got into it pretty much. It was more that the idea was to kind of envelop a political Ambassador with competent career people who will get the other job done and prevent him from doing too much damage to the relationship.

The nice part about that inspection was that an old friend and FS entering classmate at the post, Gordon Brown, had me out to dinner with a number of Saudis, as did the consular officer, a woman who functioned quite well as an official, despite the Wahhabi restrictions on women working, driving and so forth. She even went to visit prisoners in the jails, things like that. She had us all out to meet some Saudis that she dealt with, including some women professionals and their husbands. We were able to get more of a picture of the strange anomaly of Saudi Arabia.

We also got a good picture of the situation in Riyadh where the administrative officer who was as the head of the post turned out to be the same the FSR ex-Peace Corps administrative officer who had set up the post in Guinea Bissau that I mentioned earlier, the same guy. He was becoming a specialist in putting together new posts. I guess that's why they sent him to Riyadh and he was doing a great job. We then flew to Dhahran, which is a compound that began with houses out on the desert, and became a Consulate General.

Q: I lived there for two and a half years, 1958-60.

HOWLAND: Oh, that was long before. So, we did Dhahran. Do you remember the American club, the club there on the compound?

Q: We didn't have a club.

HOWLAND: Oh really? They had built a club building there and they set up cots for some of us inspectors there because there was no other place to put us up in Dhahran. The one memory I have of Dhahran -- which was run by Ralph Bergstrom? Do you know him?

Q: Ralph, no.

HOWLAND: Very capable officer. He was consul general. The only thing I remember distinctly was going out to see the famous Dammam number six, the first successful oil well up on that hill. And as I recall the story, a German engineer wouldn't let them stop drilling. He kept saying no, go down another 20 feet, go down another 20 feet and they wanted to give up. He said, no, go down another 20 feet. Finally they hit the oil that changed the face of the planet and changed the course of history. We went out to see that well which was still pumping 40 years later.

UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain

We wrote up Dhahran and there was nothing special as I recall. Then the team split. Danny Williamson and I then went to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and to Bahrain and the other team consisting of Chris Van Hollen, Al Williams and Irene Hammond went to inspect Oman and Muscat, which are really the only interesting places on that whole peninsula. I was really terribly distressed I didn't get to see them, but Danny and I were good pals by this time so we did a good job in UAE. Fran Dickman had been the Ambassador in the UAE.

Q: Oh, Francois Dickman.

HOWLAND: Yes, but he was on home leave and the DCM/Charge at the time there was Brooks Wrampelmeier.

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: A very nice guy. A nice little Embassy. Since the Ambassador was gone, Danny and I and John Mercurio got to stay at the Ambassador's residence, which was kind of fun. The residence was empty so why not use it for inspectors? We were able to take some trips over to the coast, Fujairah, and to Ras-al-Khaimah.

Q: Did you go to Dubai?

HOWLAND: Yes, there was a consular post there. Van Hollen joined us at that point and he and I rented a car and went across the mountains to a place called Khor Fakkan. That was where the Muslims fought the battle that won them the peninsula,

in 639 AD. We went and saw that battlefield where it probably hadn't rained since the 7th Century. I was told the stones on the plain marked where the Islamic warriors had fallen, and had never been moved. So that was the UAE.

We went on to Qatar, which was not particularly interesting except that I had just received a low-ranking letter from the good old personnel system and so I was whining about that to the Ambassador and he showed me his from 15 years before. I thought well, if he made Ambassador with a low rank letter, then I'm going to make it, too and I did. Then we went to Bahrain, a very interesting place, always has been. A little island now connected by the causeway, but then not. It was a very homey place with a U.S. navy base on it then as you know. I guess it goes back even to your time then.

Q: Oh, yes.

HOWLAND: We inherited it from the Brits.

Q: East of Suez.

HOWLAND: Yes, that's right. We had a nice little inspection in Bahrain and had very nice accommodations. The post was excellent. The consular officer was Vince Battle, a superb officer whom I later inspected as DCM in Cairo in 1998. He later became Ambassador in Lebanon. You've been to Bahrain?

Q: Oh, yes.

HOWLAND: You know the Emir's Beach? That little beach outside where all the foreigners can go take off their clothes? There's a big fence around it so the rest of the Bahraini people can't see anything, but the Emir himself has a cottage right on the beach where he could sit on the porch and watch all the bikini clad maidens. Vince took us out to meet him, and introduced us all as inspectors. We explained what the inspection was and he was fascinated. The Emir was kind of a roly-poly guy, pleasant looking guy with his beads, always fingering the beads, never stopped with the beads. He told us about Gulf politics, which was quite interesting. This was in 1978, the fall of '78, and of course Iran was the big issue and Bahrain has a large Shiite population. We asked him about that. He said the Shiites were under control. They were not a problem. He said

What I've always remembered that he said, was that the real threat in this area is Saddam Hussein. That Saddam Hussein is a megalomaniac who will not rest until he is king of the whole of the Middle East. That's his goal and ambition because as a boy he was treated badly and he's getting even with everyone in the world, he's going to be the king. It took 12 years for him to be right, but he sure was right. Embassy Bahrain was doing fine.

Kuwait

Then we went to Kuwait. It was in another self-contained compound and the Ambassador in Kuwait was an excellent and high competent Arabist, political officer, and was praised and respected by the staff. Everything was fine at the post, except for one problem caused, as they often are, by the best of intentions. Before our arrival the Ambassador was somewhat worried about the inspection and noticed there were a lot of crates and junk laying around, as is usually the case in any GSO compound. He thought we inspectors are going to be very upset at this because it wasn't neat. Actually we wouldn't have cared as long as the stuff was there and we could mark it off the lists that no one had stolen and sold it. But he turned to his admin officer and told him to build a warehouse to store the unsightly items. Told there was no budget for that, and that it would have to be requested, he said: "I don't care how you do it, just do it." He told us he said that.

Now, the admin officer, having no FBO money to get this stuff under cover, went to the new junior GSO, a first tour junior officer and said you've got to find some money because the Ambassador wants this done. "I don't care how you do it, just do it." The junior officer knew nothing about B and F, but found there were unobligated funds in the "S&E" account, to be spent on salaries and expenses. Unspent, it would have to be returned to the Department at the end of the fiscal year. So he said he had found some money in the S&E account. Fine, said the admin officer, let's just spend it on some prefabs and so forth, little warehouse like that and get this stuff out of the way before the inspectors come. That was in June, long before we arrived, and in July the admin officer was transferred to a post in Germany and the junior officer got the post ready for the inspection, and did a great job.

But within 25 minutes of our first day at post John Mercurio, the eagle-eyed AQI, found that buildings had been purchased with S&E funds, money which by law could not be used for that purpose. Only FBO funding was to be used for buildings. And, the unfortunate junior officer had been told by his boss, the departed admin officer, to sign all the Material Requisitions, all the contracts, all the chits that transferred the funds, debited the appropriation allocation and all this stuff. The departed admin officer didn't have a fingerprint on anything in the whole transaction, and he was off in Germany. We sent him cables and never got answers to the cables. He never returned phone calls from him. He knew exactly what the issue was.

The Ambassador said, well, I didn't know what was going on. I just told him to get that stuff out of the compound before the winter rains began. We wrote a cable back to the IG, Bob Sayre, but he passed it to Sandy Mentor, in charge of Admin matters in OIG, who was hard as nails. This kid was a very fine admin officer, the kind of guy who got things done, he just didn't know these rules. It didn't matter. He was selected out within a year.

I'm sure the admin officer, wherever he was, went on to bigger and better things.

Danny Williamson and I were very appalled, but there was nothing we could do. We did complain. We did point out the extenuating circumstances, but there was nothing we could do.

The one problem we had identified in the region as a whole, was the dearth of political officers, and the lack of training of those who were there. The team produced a memo flagging this problem for Sayre to send to the Director General, Harry Barnes. From that memo came the whole effort under Paul Boeker, Director at FSI, to establish courses in political tradecraft, and to get more political officers out in the posts who knew what they were doing. It started with that inspection, then it built on itself. Paul Boeker would be good to interview about that.

Q: Unfortunately he's in California, Los Angeles.

HOWLAND: Probably on the Council on Foreign Relations, or something like that. A very bright guy. A very competent guy. Paul Boeker put together the proposal that they took to OMB, and got \$23 million and 100 training positions, I remember his telling me that "if we run to OMB for five training positions and \$1 1/4 million, we'll never get it, but if we make a big case and go over there for \$ 25 million and 100 positions -- the biggest amount we can probably fit into the old FSI building, we'll get it." He was absolutely right. That's what came out of that inspection of the Saudi Arabian Peninsula. I'm very pleased that I was a part of that because it was an excellent inspection.

Inspection of the Near East Bureau

Then we came back and found NEA was up for inspection, and I was logical to do it, just having been out there. Chuck Cross, a good EA Ambassador, was the team leader, he's just written a book for you about growing up in China.

Q: He's up in Seattle. We've interviewed him.

HOWLAND: Yes, out in Seattle, teaching at the University of Washington. He's a sailing enthusiast. He lives out on an island. A wonderful guy. A wonderful man. Perry Linder, a lifelong friend, joined us and that was it: just the three of us, plus one AQI for the first two weeks. Chuck sort of knew me from East Asia. The guy in the Bureau who sort of looked after us a young officer named Jim Collins who I think just finished up as Ambassador to Moscow.. He was also head of that group that funneled aid to the Soviet Union, during the break up. A very fine guy. I don't know what Jim's doing now. He's probably head of something like the U.S. Russian Foundation or something like that. Very competent manager. Brilliant political officer. He was in NEA/RA in those years and that's where they assigned us offices. He was a big, big help. The one issue in NEA at the time apart from the Arab-Israeli problem was Iran and the fall of the Shah.

Q: We're moving now into '79, aren't we?

HOWLAND: Yes, January to the early spring of 1979.

Q: The whole place is boiling over. The big hostage crisis. There was an incident on February 14th.

HOWLAND: Right. The Iranian country director was Henry Precht. Do you know Henry?

Q: I've interviewed Henry.

HOWLAND: The DAS who was in charge of Iran was Bill Crawford, who had been Ambassador to Yemen.

Q: And to Cyprus.

HOWLAND: And to Cyprus. A good friend of David Newsom, who was at that time Undersecretary for Political Affairs. It was strange that Crawford was the DAS for Iran, because the other DAS, Jack Lafarge I believe was his name, had been DCM in Tehran. The rumor was that he was considered too close to the Shah, because he'd been Charge for a long time, awaiting the arrival of Bill Sullivan as Ambassador. So they gave Iran to Bill Crawford; Bill who had never served in Iran, knew little about Persia, didn't speak Farsi, but was a terrific Arabist and in fact had gone to Arabic language school with Newsom, the Undersecretary and "Mr. Middle East." I don't know if you ever read Bill Chapin's piece in *The New Yorker* on Newsom, "The Eye of the Storm?"

Q: Yes, I did.

HOWLAND: Yes, remember that? Well, that was Newsom in that era. Newsom had been Ambassador when I was consul in Indonesia, a superbly competent officer, but sometimes a difficult man to deal with. Hal Saunders, who had headed INR when I helped inspect that bureau, was now Assistant Secretary for NEA. So, we'd settled in and were going through the bureau doing interviews. We're inspecting this and that, and I'm talking to everybody and life is going on despite the big crisis. I'm learning a lot about the Middle East, and having a good time interviewing a lot of officers on the desks.

Then one day Chuck Cross comes back from the Seventh Floor, where he had just had an interview with Dave Newsom. He's got a long face on. Chuck was generally a very happy guy. But now he said, we've got big problems here, because Newsom is not happy about this bureau, specifically about Iran. He doesn't like it that whenever an Iran issue comes up, Bill Crawford doesn't come up to see him. He sends up Henry Precht. Precht of course knew the Iran issue best of anyone, but he tended to be rather

assertive. Both Newsom, and, most importantly, the White House didn't like his style. Precht would be sent over there to the security council where Brzezinski was and everybody in the White House running for cover after letting the Shah into the US for medical treatment, causing the hostage crisis

Chuck continued that we had to write this report very carefully, because in his opinion the Bureau was doing a good job. He felt the problem was on the Seventh Floor and while Precht's style may have been wrong for that era, he was generally recommending the right thing, and being criticized for it. Why they didn't like Precht over there, but liked Holbrooke who had a similar personality, I'll never know.

HOWLAND: Anyway, we went on writing the report carefully and one day, toward the end of the inspection, Crawford calls all of us into his office. We thought he probably wanted to talk about the report; but, no, his face was ashen. He said he had just had lunch with Newsom with the other DAS, and Newsom had told them to clean out their desks and be gone in 24 hours. The message was that the White House basically needed high level State Department scapegoats.

Bill said Newsom had recommended him for a job as head of a think-tank, the "Arab American Association" or something like that, which would pay him six times more than his current salary, so it wasn't the end of the world. Bill was approaching retirement age in a year or two anyway, but nevertheless it was quite a shock to be suddenly given 24 hours to resign. Then Bill told us that, he said, I went through Arabic school with Dave Newsom. I served with Dave Newsom in two posts. I've worked my entire life with Dave Newsom. We've gone out together. We've entertained together, our wives are close friends. He said, I couldn't believe I was talking to the same man at lunch today that I'd known all my life.

Well, that's the way it sometimes happens. The fact is Newsom was doing what he had to do and that's the way it is at those levels. If you can't play by those rules, you shouldn't get up to those levels. I saw it many other times. That's the way these guys operate, but it was a bit of a shock and it left us in a quandary about writing the report. Quite an interesting challenge to have two DASs suddenly removed from a bureau, whose performance we were evaluating. What do we say about them? Well, nothing, no IERs if they were leaving the Service, thank heaven. But what about the main report?

I think Chuck Cross came up with language that he described to us as his single best piece of artful drafting. He rewrote the report and then he took it up and ran it by Newsom before he did anything else with it. Newsom made a few changes and then Chuck ran it by Saunders. It was accepted quickly by SIG, and that was the end of the inspection. It was unfortunate that the main issues were not really addressed, but the report made it through without envenoming the situation further.

Q: When you were doing this inspection did the Israeli issue come up, or was that

somebody else doing that?

HOWLAND: Well, at the political level, the first priority was to build support for Israel among the Arabs no matter how unrealistic that was. The politicians wanted to start with Qatar and UAE, first to promote support for an Arab Israeli peace plan, and second, to get this state to develop relations with Israel or something like that. Things that were politically correct, but so far beyond any possibility as to be absurd.

Q: Wasn't Bob Pew, the charge in Baghdad, supposed to go to Saddam Hussein and ask why don't you be nicer to the Israelis?

HOWLAND: Probably. So, we did get a recommendation saying there should be more realism on those important things. In the end, however, they did get the Camp David Agreement, so I guess we were out of line a little bit. But that was after I had left the inspection business.

Finishing up in S/IG

The last two months of my tour in S/IG, Bill Walker, later a DAS and Ambassador to El Salvador, worked on what was called "compliance follow-up" together. Now OIG has a huge staff to monitor whether posts and bureaus complied with the report recommendations. Then there was no real process for that, the problem being -- as I mentioned earlier -- the delay of the S/IG front office in issuing the inspection reports. We two didn't have enough time in our tours for new inspections, and the new IG, Bob Bennett, was concerned about compliance. He gave us an office and a huge stack of reports to close out if possible.

As far as we could see, after these carefully-written and vetted reports had ever gone out to the posts concerned, and no one had ever bothered finding out if the post had ever complied with the inspection recommendations which were, as I also mentioned, left with the Ambassador before a team departed post. There were just dozens of reports, some five years old.

So Bill and I would take a report that was at least three years old, and make phone calls to see what the post had done about it. With so many to do, we decided to pick the five most significant recommendations in each report and then send a cable to the post asking about compliance. The reaction was catastrophic, particularly on position cuts. In particular, Embassy London sticks in my mind. The London team had made 113 recommendations. One of the recommendations was to cut one person, one FSN from the travel office in London. As you may know the travel office in London was a great feature at that post, offering travel assistance to virtually anyone from the USG passing through. For this they had a huge staff, and when you went there they would pick you up at the airport, and trundle you around. Now some of this was justified because they had a lot of congressional travel and all that kind of stuff, but a lot of it was just slush for visitors who were not entitled to such treatment. So, the inspectors

had cut one FSN.

I think another recommendation was to cut the 13th officer in the political section, who basically worked on African and Asian countries' relations with Britain. This was after "east of Suez" and all the colonies were gone by then except Hong Kong and the Falklands, but never mind. We had just inspected the Arabian peninsula and found a severe dearth of political officers in an area of vital US interests. We dared to push on to cut the 13th officer in London so we could transfer the position to the middle east.

Well, you would have thought S/IG had tried to cut the stars out of the American flag for the reaction we got. The Ambassador at the time was the guy who had been president of Yale University, Kingman Brewster. I was sitting there the day after having sent the cable and the phone rings and who is it? It's Ambassador Kingman Brewster calling from the barbershop at the Embassy! He had just been reading his cables at the barber shop and violently objected to this dastardly attempt not only to cut a body not only from his travel office, which was the most important thing in history, but from his political section too! How dare we cut the staff of the most important Embassy, the most important relationship going back to World War II, the British stood by us and on and on. Yes, sir, Mr. Ambassador. He said, if you persist in this I intend to call the President personally and he hung up.

We went to Bill Bennett and explained the whole thing and he said, of course, the report was too old and things had changed. That was the end of that. Then Bennett kind of lectured us, saying we were taking too long with these reports, we should go through them more quickly.

Q: So much for those recommendations, folks.

HOWLAND: That was our sort of first experience with compliance follow-up. Then Bill and I went through 30 reports in a week. Bill would read the text of the report, check the recommendations he thought were important and pass them to me, and I would call the post and ask if they had complied, and if there was any indication they had, we would close the file. We had a beautiful system and we were just racing through the job. I think we knocked off 30 reports in a week and we had 60 reports to go and we had two months left to the end of our tours.

Then the IG, Mr. Bennett came in, and said he'd been getting some complaints from the posts that they were being forced to work on these things too quickly. He told us we were going through these things too fast.

So after first being told we were going too slowly there to and to get through them faster, now Mr. Bennett wanted us to go more slowly through the reports. His reason was that he wanted some to be left when newly-assigned officers arrived in the summer, so they would have something to do before the fall overseas inspection cycle started.

I said, you mean to tell me an officer who has never inspected, and knows nothing about the inspection system, and is going to then do compliance and deal with people like Ambassador Kingman Brewster? Well, Mr. Bennett was very annoyed that I had raised this question because I knew that new inspectors did not do compliance, which would be absurd. They did the IERs for the out of agency tour officers just as I had done during my first summer. Ah, he said, doing compliance follow-up would teach them about the Inspection procedures as well. Not only that, I thought -- it would certainly make the posts happier too.

So Bill and I slowed down again, but still by the end of our tours, we had cleaned out the back-log and felt we had done our jobs.

BUREAU OF PERSONNEL (DG/P) 1979 - 81

New Assignment: Personnel

My two years in the Bureau of Personnel turned out far more interesting than I expected, since I wound up as chief negotiator for the five foreign affairs agencies in the first federal multi-management/multi-union talks ever held. Also I conducted negotiations that involved possible constitutional issues with the FSI language instructors. The histories of both those negotiations have never been recorded as far as I know, so here they are.

First I might mention how I got into personnel. I had just finished assignments to senior training in the Army War College, and to the inspection corps. These in theory were supposed to prepare me for senior responsibilities. In theory, perhaps, but not practice. Instead, as a result of those assignments, in 1978 I was low ranked by the promotion board, and almost selected out.

Q: At one time I was low ranked and got a \$5,000 performance pay.

HOWLAND: Right hand and the left hand, right? Nevertheless, it really did throw the fear of God into me.

Q: Oh, sure.

HOWLAND: The guy who had signed the low-ranking letter was at that time the DAS for personnel, a deputy director general, Bob Gershenson known to one and all as "Gersh." I don't know if you ever knew him.

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: Well, I was just finishing the inspection tour when I thought, I may be selected out so I better find something to do on my next tour that will help me get a job in the outside world. No one was hiring political officers in the private sector those days.

This was before the years of overseas risk analysis companies. Now it's a fad. If you're a political officer you can go work for a think tank somewhere, but then that was not the case at all. I talked to a friend – actually I talked to John Rouse who at the time was head of performance evaluation in DG/P, and to Ed Dejarnette, who was his deputy. They both said, boy, you're in pretty big trouble. You're five years in grade, you've got this low ranking letter and you're way behind the curve. I think they suggested going into personnel and doing either EEO matters or labor relations, employee management relations. John said that the latter position was open in personnel. I bid on that, but was told I didn't get it, and then I went to another friend of mine, Jerry Hoganson, who had been my deputy in Laos. At the time he was Harry Barnes' staff assistant and he got me an interview with Gershenson. He was later "TIC-ed" out as an FSO-1, which is what I feared.

Q: Harry Barnes being the Director General.

HOWLAND: Yes, he was the Director General. I showed Gershenson the letter, and explained why I wanted to try labor relations. He said, don't worry about this, I'll tear it up. I said, no, I'm framing that. I'm keeping that. Whatever happens in my life I'm keeping that (twenty years later Gersh and I, both WAE employees at OIG, inspected a bureau together, and I showed him the letter. He couldn't believe it).

Gersh was sympathetic and I was soon assigned as "Chief of the Division of Employee - Management Relations," the euphemism in those years for dealing with AFSA and the other unions. The terminology "labor relations" was considered inappropriate for the professional sensitivities of Foreign Service employees. The fact is I also did some traditional labor negotiations with the print shop workers and the FSI language instructors which I will talk about. Those certainly were classic, bread and butter issues, involving wages and particularly fringes in regard to the FSI workers.

It was a two-person division: a secretary and I. Virtually all the work was negotiations, and I loved it. I also found that all negotiations are very similar in character and evolution. The organizations with which I negotiated were, first and most important, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), the professional organization which had the exclusive bargaining rights to represent Foreign Service employees at State and USAID in negotiations on working conditions, and in grievance cases. Then there was also local 1534 of AFGE, the American Federal of Government Employees, which the exclusive bargaining rights for the Foreign Service employees at USIS. There were various other union locals; AFGE had the bargaining rights for the print shop and motor pool employees at State, and also, most importantly, for the language instructors (native speakers, not the scientific linguists) at FSI, who were mostly foreign citizens. Finally, when we got into the negotiations on the provisions of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, I dealt with representatives of employees in the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture who were being brought into the Foreign Service system.

More Dramatis Personae

As I said, Harry Barnes was the Director General, and Bob Gershenson was the principal DAS. Gershenson soon left and then Andy Steigman, as head of assignments and training, was in effect the other DAS, I think. A woman who had been there for along time, Jackie Manley, a very competent and nice GS employee was head of civil service personnel.

My immediate boss was a civil service employee named Tony Kern, Director of the Office of Employee Relations. He was really a long-time federal labor relations official and negotiator. State had brought him in from the labor Department, and he was my mentor and a very sharp labor expert. His responsibilities also included disciplinary matters, employee malfeasance, etc. Tony worked directly for Gershenson. The Undersecretary for Management was Ben Reed, a democratic appointee. This was all during the Carter administration, so labor relations were given some priority under the democrats.

Most important to me, however, was a lawyer from the Office of the Legal Adviser (L), Paul Koran. The Deputy Legal Adviser, Jim Michel, the key person putting together the legislation for the new Foreign Service Act. Koran was a brilliant lawyer, one who always looked for ways to solve your problems, not make more of them for you. His last assignment by the way was as the chief counsel for the EEO office people in the Department. Very sharp guy, but acerbic and danced to his own drummer, very much his own man. Anyway, he was my labor lawyer, the guy I went to and turned to for everything.

I'm trying to think of who else was a dramatis persona. Over in personnel evaluation, i.e. promotions, a big part of AFSA's concerns, the head was John Rouse, later on to be DCM in the Netherlands. The number two under Rouse was Ed Dejarnette.

The most important employee associations I dealt with were, first and foremost, AFSA, which at the time was headed by an FSO, Ken Bleakley and a very smart and assertive Foreign Service secretary named Thea de Rouville. Most of my dealings were with her, often over coffee in the cafeteria. Once we had agreed, AFSA and management usually went along. Behind them giving advice in AFSA was none other than Ambassador Hank Cohen, back from Africa and quite interested in the field as a former labor attaché. AFSA also had a bright new lawyer; a young woman who knew labor relations inside and out, as did Paul Koran my lawyer.

Second, as I mentioned we also dealt with AFGE Local 1534 which represented USIS employees. It was headed by an old line labor negotiator, Abe Harris, a GS who had been head of the local for years. He was really sharp, did his homework, and could cut me to ribbons in any negotiation.

I want to mention at the outset that although I expected this job to be onerous, it turned out to be a lot of fun, mainly because there was a lot of negotiation. I enjoyed that. I

enjoyed the give and take of negotiations, some of which were far more complex than all the posturing of the negotiations to end the war in Laos. Plus I was my own boss. I started off with a very unpleasant secretary and managed to have her transferred. Then I hired a very capable woman, whom I started taking along to negotiations where she could take notes. AFSA was very annoyed at that, but I did it. I said to AFSA, look this is an employee that I'm trying to bring along. She's an EEO hire, she's an African American, and I'd like to train her for a higher position. Anyway, she was great. I had my own shop with a really good secretary, who got along with everyone. By the way she later became a special assistant in the Human Rights Bureau, so I was proud of my part in that.

The Print Shop Negotiations

Before any dealings with AFSA, my boss Tony Kern let me wind up negotiations already underway with the print shop workers in the Department, represented by another AFGE local. The manager of the print shop was Paul Washington, a very fine guy, who was at the same time head of the "Thursday Club," an association of African American employees throughout the foreign affairs community. He was the head of that. A very competent manager, Paul had informally negotiated the terms of a new agreement with his employees, who were not under the Foreign Service Act. But he could be hard as nails on labor relations matters, because the issues might wind up under the National Labor Relations Board and/or federal mediation. So he made sure everything was fine before he let me sign the agreement on behalf of management.

It was a good experience and introduced me to the whole field of labor relations in the federal government, something I badly needed to know about if I had to look for a job later. He also had me represent the Department in collegial gatherings of labor relations officials from the management of other USG agencies, conferences held once every two weeks in the basement of the Departments of either Commerce or Treasury. There the officials got together, compared notes, looked at cases, agreed on a common stance on some things and then had an interesting lunchtime speaker. I guess there were about 15 of us at least. Through that I learned a lot about labor relations in the federal government as a whole. The guards in the bureau of prisons, the Treasury workers, and the semi-autonomous agencies such as the FCC and FTC, the FBI, all these civil servants were unionized all over the government. All the rules were different depending what the agencies had done and so forth.

I also was fortunate to attend an executive management seminar held in Charlottesville for a week and went through a labor relations course. I felt that for my ultimate goal, I was really getting a lot of good stuff. I was taking a lot of notes and learning a lot from Paul Koran, learning a lot from Tony Kern, so that if I was selected out of the Foreign Service I'd have something very solid to go sell on the outside. I'll tell you it was pretty good stuff.

Q: Yes, with other agencies and all this. Did you find as all of us heard that the Department of State was way behind and all this? Did you find that you were in a

functioning organization labor-wise or not?

HOWLAND: Oh, yes, but the issues in other agencies were very different were very different from those with AFSA of course. The issues in the other agencies were real bread and butter stuff, nitty gritty: e.g. how many times an INS guy should be required to stamp passports an hour, or whatever INS people do, how long can print shop workers have at the end of the day to clean up after using a certain amount of ink. Like 15 minutes or 30? Their work is rated and measured, and the standards for rating that work, which have to do with whether they get their step increase or not, are negotiable. It was all this really detailed stuff.

That's why the other labor relations officials told me they all wanted to come to the State Department and negotiate things with AFSA like R&R and going to exotic places. They thought that was wonderful. God, they thought I was the luckiest guy on earth. We all got along very well because they were really in the trenches dealing with the labor side, the union people, and I respected that.

For instance, they were dealing with the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) from a Federal Reserve Board section, or from the Mint, and that was particularly tough. The Mint was particularly bad. The NTEU Local President there had gone into labor relations within the first week of working at the mint and had done only that for 30 years. During that time he had been paid his full salary and gotten all his fringes, plus he was his own boss, with his union office and paid union employees. He didn't have to come to work. He didn't have to do anything. These union guys knew the labor business inside out and that was their pigeon. They weren't going to let anybody mess with that and get them unelected as heads of their union. Each year they had to get more and more, and it was just knock down, drag out fights. I didn't have very much of that in the State Department. The closest it came to was my negotiation with the FSI language instructors, but in the end that came out all right.

Negotiating with the Foreign Service Institute Language Instructors

The training course really helped in giving me ideas. For instance in bargaining with the language instructors at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), I actually went to the Federal Mediation Service and got a mediator to help. This was because it appeared from the beginning that the parties were so far apart, I could make no headway. So I got a mediator, who helped a lot – more with the management side, my bosses, than with the union. On the one hand, when I say the parties were so far apart, I was talking about FSI management and Department management on one side and the FSI linguists on the other side. And it was no an acrimonious disagreement, just an insoluble one.

Q: What was the problem?

HOWLAND: The problem came up right away in the negotiation, and thank God I had Paul Koran, my brilliant and helpful lawyer. The system whereby FSI hired and paid and

managed their language instructors, the so-called “native speakers,” was best described by Paul Koran as ‘the last vestige of plantation agriculture.’ The emancipation proclamation and the subsequent amendments to the constitution, which court rulings had specified mandate equal pay and therefore the same fringe benefits for equal work, had never reached FSI. This affected only the language instructors, not the so called “scientific linguists” who supervised them.

For the language instructors, there were only about 110 formal Department positions that included such fringe benefits as health care, annual and sick leave, medical attention, pensions and annuities, all the things that come with FS or GS employment status. Now overall, there were 255 language instructors (don’t hold me to those numbers, but that’s about right). The ones who were not in those positions were on contracts, “personal services contracts” which expired on the 28th of February every year and were renewed on the first of March. The language instructors worked for five days a week, four weeks a month, 12 months out of the year. Sometimes FSI bent the rules to let people off for a few days around Christmas time, or in a family emergency, but they didn’t have to do that.

So the majority of the language instructors were contract employees; yet, they were performing identical work with those of their colleagues who had State Department positions, and who were getting all the benefits of being a GS employee. The health, the insurance, etc. They were doing identical work, which was teaching language to pupils. There was no difference in, let’s say, the Swahili language teacher teaching five officers who were going to East Africa, and who was on contract at low pay with no fringes, and the Dutch instructor, who had a State Department position and got the benefits.

You see, what had happened was an explosion of language teaching requirements. The formal positions derived from the time when only European languages were taught. Then the new ones came along as the African and South Asian and Southeast Asian countries became independent – Swahili, Nepalese, Bantu, etc. FSI scrambled for instructors and some of the ones they hired were students with no visas to come and work in the United States of America. They had tourist or student visas. FSI had interceded with INS to keep renewing the student and tourist visas so they could go on in this quasi-bonded serf hood type of employment. Others were spouses of diplomats or of non – diplomatic permanent administrative personnel at foreign embassies. Moreover there were limits on positions imposed by OMB and the Congress, and a position is a position whatever its occupant does, i.e. one more political officer position at State meant one less language instructor position at FSI.

Frankly, all this was illegal but none of them generally made a fuss until a union came along and organized them. That was the problem, and then the fuss over the new Foreign Service Act -- which didn’t apply to these people in any event because they would never be Foreign Service --- had kind of awakened an understanding among them of this situation. That was the point at which I started the negotiation for a new contract for the language instructors with the chief union negotiator, a Swahili language instructor named John. The first thing I found out was that he was basically an undocumented alien, having

spent at least 20 years in the US working for FSI on a student visa. Now, you cannot work on a student visa. John was a Kenyan, a very nice man, very bright, but the first thing I did was tell the union council they had formed for the talks that he could not be their chief negotiator, as I was for management. I could not be dealing with an illegal student on labor relations. They got somebody else as a front person, but he was present in the background.

John and the others were well aware that this was a constitutional issue and he was right. If you're under the constitution, if you're doing the same job, you cannot have one person doing that under one category and another person on another, one in which an annual contract was renewed and so forth. You just couldn't do it. Over the years FSI had sort of gotten around this a little bit by creating a few minor benefits every year, a few little things, vending machines in the employee cafeteria, this kind of inducements.

The previous time when this issue had come up, my predecessor was able to wheedle ten more positions out of the Department and then say all right we're going to give you ten more positions. We're talking about 255 people of whom 115 had positions and the others did not. They'd coughed up another ten. What would then happen is the ones without positions would fight over who gets those positions and that would be the end of the labor negotiation. To get a few more positions, they would always give in. Now, I had a few other concessions in my "goodie bag" like flexi - time, to offer at the right time. When you go into a negotiation, you try to trade one thing for something they might be willing to drop a demand for. You've done negotiations, too. But this time we went around and around on positions and fringes. They were not interested in talking about anything else.

Paul Boeker, who was head of FSI at the time, did not want to give them a lot of positions. In fact, there were no positions. Paul had just gotten a number of new positions to train 100 political officers in political tradecraft, which I told you came about because of the inspection of the Arabian Peninsula. The Under-secretary for Management (M), Ben Reid, knew that his road to better things would not paved by whether FSI language teachers got positions or not, but rather by whether he could tell Congress I've got 100 new political officers out there, working on countries around Iran. We're not going to find ourselves in the dark anymore. So he didn't want to give up the positions. The whole thing became a shell game – it became a negotiation within the State Department and with OMB as to how many positions we might dole out to these language instructors this year, and how many to promise them unofficially next year, and the year after that, which would get them off our backs at the moment.

And there I was in the middle of all that, a brand new labor negotiator. Thank God, I had Paul Koran to advise me. He came to most of the sessions with me. Tony never came to the talks; he was up to his ears in formulating the new draft Foreign Service Act by that time. We had one session a week, over at FSI. We sat around and talked, then we'd take a coffee break. Once or twice I got management to do a lunch for the union council with the second level of FSI managers, and a couple of people from M, an informal get together to

answer questions and things like that.

I was trying all these other techniques to smooth this over because I knew in the end the Department would just fire these people and say the hell with it, we'll get someone else. M's position was that languages were not important, an officer should just pick one up in the country of assignment. What are languages, who needs them? That's the way they've always looked at languages. I felt tremendously constrained as a triple language officer, French, some Khmer and Indonesian and knowing how important language capability was to everything I had done overseas. I must say Harry Barnes felt the same way. Personnel felt the same way. So I wanted to avoid any drastic outcomes, but I also didn't want to take positions away from that political officer training project because we had fought hard to get that. M even suggested at one point having the scientific linguists do the training, which wouldn't have worked because they didn't speak the languages!

Q: They were intermediaries. The guts of our language instruction were the native speakers.

HOWLAND: But there was no give in the Department's position. There was just no argument to advance in negotiations. . The Department would just say we're going to keep this person in contract status and this person in GS and we're going to give this one some benefits, but not this one. They wanted total control, like the head of a steel mill in the 19th century. There was no way you could rationalize that.

As I said, the new head of FSI, Paul Boeker, as a result of our inspection in Saudi Arabia among other things, was pushing for expanded political tradecraft courses. For that he needed more training positions for political officers. He was a political officer and wanted more positions for teachers to teach the course. There is no way on earth he was going to ask for more positions for language instructors, even though anyone in their right mind would realize that all the trade craft in the world is not going to do a political officer very much good if he can't speak the language of the country where he's assigned. So, the two ideas really should have meshed -- more tradecraft, more language training.

I talked with Boeker, who was kind of a superior European political officer type, not for hours because he'd never give you hours. I talked personally to Ben Reid, the Under-Secretary. Ben Reid could talk hours with you. He was a nice man. Talked to Harry Barnes and so forth. They just couldn't see the point. Bluntly stated, their position was: "Howland, you were sent out there to mollify these language instructors; now if you can't do the job we'll get Kern to go over there or else fire a few of them." Of course they didn't have to face them every Wednesday afternoon week after week and go over this and over this and try to offer other little things.

Q: Was there the threat of a class action suit or . . . ?

HOWLAND: No, they never threatened that. They threatened to go to the Supreme Court and if they had, Paul Koran said they would have won. They threatened, but they didn't

have a lawyer. If they'd gone to the court, or to an administrative law judge, the judge would have ruled in their favor and everyone would have said hurray for them and Howland you're finished. Because that's what the Department didn't want. They didn't want to give up these positions. They were very adamant about that.

Finally I went to the Federal Mediation Service, the FMS, which is not arbitration. It provides a mediator whose main job is to go into an acrimonious labor negotiation, where the parties are at such loggerheads that they won't even talk to each other. One where negotiations have completely broken down. That wasn't the case with us. We were still talking. Usually the Mediation Service only goes in when the sides aren't talking anymore, aren't even talking, tries to bring them together.

But my idea was to try to embarrass management into making a few more concessions. Federal mediators are big deals in private sector negotiations, and the press gets interested because they try to avert a strike or a lock-out. State management said all right. Then it came home to them that if it got in the press that the State Department needed a mediator to get into a discussion with its employees, it might be a good story.

So management started grudgingly coughing up positions, more positions and some other concessions that the language instructors wanted. In the end we came up with an agreement where they were happy enough with what they'd gotten out of the talks. The issue of positions and fringes was put off to a commission to study. Good old tactic. We'll form a commission that is going to report to a committee after six months. Of course they never report back after six months because in another year you're going to have another negotiation anyway. I was very happy that it had gotten settled. Actually the Department didn't have to give up too much on it.

The main thing we offered was a real benefit, a kind of unmonitored flextime. They could come in early in the morning to prepare for classes that started at 9:00 am, and could leave at 3:00 pm rather than prepare that afternoon for the next day and have to stay until 5:00 pm. It would have the same result, but of course no supervisor would be there at 7:00 am, in the morning to see if they were really there. With tele-work now, they could prepare at home and not spend eight hours in the office, no one would complain about that as long as they did their job. But then -- we're talking about 1979 -- that was a big benefit. What they basically got was a six hour workday, maybe a six and a half hour workday out of that. The Department preferred to do that, turn a blind eye, rather than give these people the positions, the fringes or stuff like that because it didn't impact on the budget or position levels which had to be worked out with OMB and Congress. I think we also gave them some thing else they really wanted, like an employee lounge with vending machines and music and stuff like that.

That was the FSI language instructors. I was very proud that I had worked that out and did that pretty much on my own, with Paul Koran's help. Tony Kern, my boss, stuck his head in every once in a while, but not that often. However, he was always there for me to consult with.

Foreign Service Negotiation Procedures and Issues

Let's talk about dealing with AFSA to familiarize you with different negotiating process there, often derided as the formulation of "sweetheart contracts" by others, such as my counterparts in other federal agencies. I started in Personnel in the fall of 1979, as management was preparing legislation to update the Foreign Service Act of 1948. Among other things, the new bill would include grievance provisions and a framework for collective bargaining under government rules in the Department of State, including a Foreign Service labor relations board analogous to the NLRB. But it didn't exist yet, when I got there. We were playing under the old rules, and things were very informal. Now they are much more rigid and professionalized, in 2001, let's say.

I should explain the role of the negotiator at that time. In the Bureau of Personnel were many different offices: career management, performance evaluation, assignments and training, the people who drafted regulations etc, etc. They initiated changes in the management and working conditions of the service, or changes were proposed by AFSA, the employee representative. I was only the interface with the employee associations for personnel policy changes, conditions of work that management wanted to change. Now, some of them were management prerogatives and they could do it without any consultation with AFSA. Under the "consultation" rules in our dealing with the employee associations. Other changes had to be "consulted" with employee associations. Only certain areas were "consultable" – not salaries or fringe benefits of course, but things loosely considered "working conditions." These included procedures for performance evaluation, promotion, assignments, "R and R", a whole range of things. There was case law on which was which, and Tony Kern and Paul Koran were the experts on that.

This "consultation" was not collective bargaining, and of course there were no such things as strikes or lock-outs. It basically meant talking some issue to death until one side or the other gave in. The basic rules were spelled out in a memo written in the early 1970s by an officer named Walker Diamante. This memo, accepted by all, prevented field posts like Embassies from negotiating with employees at specific posts on various conditions of work. That would have been too cumbersome, and could lead to different working conditions in different Embassies and agencies. All negotiations were to be conducted centrally in the Department between my office in PER and AFSA, or by USIS with AFGE 1534 for the USIS FS employees. Incidentally Walker is now a retired inspector who lives out in Montana for the fly-fishing. I guess we can stop here.

Q: Okay, so then we'll pick this up now. It was still 1979. What about civil service employees?

HOWLAND: At that time the civil service people in State, AID and in USIS were unorganized, i.e. had no bargaining representative, unlike the Foreign Service employees

who were, because AFSA had gone in and gone through the motions of an election, and won against AFGE 1534. So FS employees in State were in one “bargaining unit” and AFSA represented all of them, e.g. in grievance cases, whether they were members of AFSA or not. AFGE, however, had won in USIS. The GS employees in State, particularly the secretaries in State, had always felt nervous about being in a union. Secretaries are very hard to unionize. They just resist the idea of thinking that they are in a union, much more so than officers, because the latter just call it something else, an association, because they want to run things in it.

Now as I mentioned the main reason I sought this job was I wanted to learn something about labor relations to have a saleable skill if I had to look for employment in the outside world. The other reason was that the Carter administration had indicated they were going to rewrite the Foreign Service Act of 1946 and they were shooting for the Foreign Service Act of 1979, but as it turned out it was not until 1980 until it was passed.

For example, let’s take AFSA’s role in the field. What does AFSA do in the field? If AFSA finds some working conditions it wants to change in some embassy can it do that? No, not really because as I mentioned, there was a memo, which everyone agreed to back in 1971. It specified that, because of various concerns all negotiations on labor relations matters, employee working conditions, will be conducted in the Department between central personnel and AFSA.

Q: And why was that again?

HOWLAND: Well, because you can’t have 156 embassies, each one negotiating their own nifty little working conditions out there. You have to negotiate a provision, a working condition that is centralized and thus same for everybody. It’s just the nature of the organization of the Foreign Service. Now, a few simple things could be “consulted” at the posts – one example is the operating hours of the Embassy snack bar, which obviously was not a Service-wide issue. Or hours of operation of the Consular Section, let’s say. On things like that the Ambassador’s decision was usually final, although the AFSA rep at the post could refer the issue back to AFSA to take up with State management. But usually when some picayune thing was not resolved in the Embassies, AFSA or management in the Department tacitly agreed there were more important things to worry about, and nothing was done.

Oh, let me just step back a minute and say while all this was going on, this type of “collegial negotiation” you might call it, there was a powerful movement elsewhere in the government, and in the Congress, and in OMB and OPM that was trying to stop it, to make it more like the standard “adversarial” model of labor negotiations. They called our system “State Department labor relations incest” because the management officials, negotiating these provisions with the union, would benefit from the same provisions since we were all Foreign Service employees together. It wasn’t a case where, let’s say, a federal management official, GS-16, with his own benefit structure, was negotiating with a union of GS-3s or --5s or -7s who were on their lunch hour breaks. If AFSA won a

concession from management for employees, the management negotiator would also often benefit from that concession. As the negotiator for Personnel, I was considered a “management official,” but let’s say in my next assignment I became a political counselor, the provision I had just agreed to (on management’s behalf) would apply to me as well. For example, as I’m about to tell you, here I was negotiating against AFSA on an AFSA proposal for taking R&R leave in the States, knowing that the minute I got out to a foreign post I would benefit from that provision for R&R in the States. We were all in the bargaining unit!

We maintained against these charges that our negotiations were really rough and tumble and it wasn’t like that at all. But in the end, they stopped assigning FSOs to my position, and brought in a professional labor negotiator, a GS employee, from another agency. It was probably the right move.

Negotiations with AFSA

This is a good time to talk about the atmospherics of such routine negotiations with AFSA on things like, for example, taking R&R leave in the States. We negotiated formally one afternoon a week, but constantly met informally at other times during the week as I’ll explain later.

Back then there was no provision that you could take your R&R in the States. They wouldn’t pay to fly you to the continental US. Instead each geographic area with overseas posts had what was called an “R&R Post” – for Indonesia it was Hong Kong. The government would pay for your travel to that place, or another if it was cheaper. Remember those days, you had an R&R post?

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: So, if you were stationed in Gambia and your R&R post was Rome, that’s where you went. If you didn’t want to go there, you had to pay the difference. What posts had done over the years was try to arrange for the R&R post to be as far away as possible so it was “cost constructive.”

Q: Cost effective.

HOWLAND: No, cost constructive to go somewhere else, because the cost was less. So, you had these anomalies that Beijing’s R&R post was Nairobi, Kenya because it was so hard to get there it cost a fortune. I think ours from Jakarta when I was there was really Hong Kong, but nobody wanted to go there. We changed it to Tokyo, which made it cost-constructive to go to Australia. But it was never the United States of America. Not even from Mexico, not even from Central America where it would have been dirt cheap to fly to the US; instead, the R&R post was them was Rome!

Now AFSA studied this issue and pressed personnel to change the regulations. Their argument was excellent. First, they said, it would help the balance of payments, and

promote the “Fly America” act, pleasing the Congress. Second, the FS employees with families could get them back to see grand-parents. Third, they could be “re - Americanized,” the whole argument for Home Leave, which was much more expensive. Fourth, for most posts, R&R travel costs were “cost-constructive” for those who wished to go somewhere else. Fifth, the stated goal of R&R was not to take families to some fascinating foreign post where you would have a great time. It was to relieve you of the drudgery of the present situation in a hardship post. The idea is to give you the exact opposite of whatever it was like where you were assigned. For instance, if you were in a tropical post; your R&R post would be Norway or someplace like that. So since the United States of America ipso facto is the exact opposite of virtually every post except Canada, it fit perfectly with that goal.

The Department of State went around and around on this, but finally agreed to draft a proposed regulation. My problem was in negotiating with AFSA. I’m sitting here and AFSA is sitting there. The personnel department which ginned up the new regulation would not give me the authority, or even the knowledge, of what they wanted the final regulation to say. And they kept changing it. I could only present what they drafted as a “take it or leave it” proposition, without any areas to stand firm on, while others could be traded for concessions. So AFSA would make some proposals and I couldn’t say yes, we agree with this and so forth. I’d say I’ll have to check this with the office in personnel that drafted the proposed regulation.

Luckily, that office had made a number of technical errors in the regulation which AFSA had caught, where AFSA came and said, do you realize if you do this it’s going to cost you about \$30 million more than it would otherwise because somebody has made a mistake in writing this. Under the way it’s written, it would allow somebody to go on a multi - R&R to 16 different countries and take their time and get paid for it. I forget what the exact provision was, but it was something like that, just a mistake in drafting. So I had to go back to management and they said oh well, I guess that’s right, and then gave up on everything else. A really stupid mistake to make. Do you want to change the tape?

Q: No, we’ll just talk for a minute because I’m just getting ready.

HOWLAND: That was R&R in the States. Another AFSA proposal was to permit employees to use the diplomatic pouch for personal package mail in countries which had no APO. They could use the pouch for letters but not packages. They couldn’t send packages. They couldn’t receive packages, they could just receive letter mail through the pouch, remember that?

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: We had to negotiate on packages. The Department was willing to let packages be sent to the post, but didn’t want the responsibility of the packages coming back from the post, because of the Customs aspects, unless it was returned merchandise or something like that. They went around and around on that. I negotiated on that. There

were any matter of a dozen of things, but AFSA once made a great proposal which the Department turned down.

They never gave in on that one, and years later in Suriname, 1987-90, we had to work out an arrangement with the US Post Office in Miami to send packages back and forth. I did that as Ambassador. We rented a post office box for packages, and took turns taking week-ends in Miami to bring them back in air freight with the pouch.

Assignment Issues

Many issues involved the assignment business since assignments determine promotions, and promotions determine rank and pay. One was curtailments at the post. Another was when you can or can't turn down an assignment. For what reason and so forth. A third was how long you are supposed to be in a Washington tour: five years, four years, three years, whatever, before you're forced overseas. Many people were fighting this because of spouses who couldn't work overseas.

At the time Andy Steigman was the head of the whole career development and assignments, CDA. He was a perfectly nice man and we frequently went out to lunch together, sometimes with friends from AFSA. No matter how congenial, however, he wouldn't give an inch on anything on CDA stuff because he realized the power of assignments. The Department fought tooth and nail to keep AFSA out of anything to do with assignments.

But of course, all these issues are conditions of work and they were all consultable with AFSA. Management had to meet and discuss them with the employee representative in what I called the "ad nauseum" process – our once-a-week, usually Wednesday afternoon negotiating sessions. These went on interminably. If management in the end said: that's it, we're going to do it our way, AFSA could claim it didn't fully consult, and, in those years, take the issue to the National Labor Relations Board. They did that on a couple of occasions and won.

So AFSA said, for instance, why don't we do an agreement on that on the criteria and procedures for curtailing from a post, or for being curtailed from a post, or turning down an assignment, or staying on in Washington for another two years for family reasons. Ha, Personnel wouldn't hear of it. They wouldn't open that can of worms. They had all the power to do it themselves and were so happy with the way it was being done, i.e. the use of high level influence. Let's say hypothetically if a deputy country director wanted to stay another two years in Washington,, he would go to his DAS, who would go through his assistant secretary, who would call the DG, who would call the head of CDA.

Q: This is tape sixteen, side one with Dick Howland. Yes?

HOWLAND: He'd then go to the CDA and say convene the panel, but be aware that I see this as a real Department need to have him stay on another two years. Of course the panel

would roll over and do it. AFSA wanted to codify that. No way on earth the Foreign Service personnel system would let them do that. There were dozens of things like that, which the Foreign Service preferred to handle informally because it maximized the power of whoever was doing the handling, rather than codify the rules. There was no way they were going to allow this sort of thing to be codified into the Foreign Service Act.

Q: What sort of thing were you seeing in this, that it meant that if you were, I hate to use the term old boys' club, but if you've got good connections you could get what you wanted. But it meant that the poor slob who was out there being a good soldier out in Ouagadougou or something like that did not have recourse to this.

HOWLAND: That's correct.

Q: You know, preferential treatment.

HOWLAND: That's exactly right, if he didn't have a friend. Now of course the assignment process has always worked that way. You lobby someone whom you meet in the halls, or someone recommends you for an assignment, and calls out to an ambassador, saying I really do recommend this guy, take a good look at him. Probably for the assignment process there has to be a regional bureau opinion that is dominant, a bureau can't just take anybody who is dumped on them. There has to be a give and take kind of situation. That I can understand, but on the other hand it also affects assignments and in turn, promotions. The fact is, the EERs are so puffery that corridor reputations are more important, and only the regional bureau knows them. So the two Bureaus do have to work together on assignments.

But for the things like after five years in the Department, when you were required to take an overseas tour, could you stay in a job for another two years until a child finished high school? Management's answer was, "sorry, that's why we have a Foreign Service. It's just the breaks." I know Wendy Chamberlain just quit in Pakistan because she wanted to be with her daughter. Well, we had two daughters, they were a little bit older, 15 and 18, but we had just as much deprivation as Wendy. I'm not blaming Wendy, good for her.

Q: She made the right decision, a solid decision.

HOWLAND: Right, I couldn't agree more.

Q: A solid decision to opt for the family.

The Negotiating Process

There was a certain truth to the allegations that we had a very congenial rather than adversarial negotiating process with AFSA. My closest contact was the AFSA Vice President, Thea de Rouville. I saw her much more than I did the AFSA President, Ken Bleakley, or their lawyer, Susan Votek. But we all got along quite well.

Usually a few days before we would sit down to negotiate some proposal with AFSA, I would talk to the office director in Personnel who had responsibility for whatever the particular issue was. Let's say, I'm responsible for negotiating a new EER form, the efficiency report form which Ed Dejarnette, Deputy Director of Performance Evaluation, had drafted with the help of a couple of outside consultants to give it a certain cachet.

Q: They try to do that one way or another.

HOWLAND: Anyway, this was 1979 and they wanted to get this done as part of the basis for many provisions in the new Foreign Service Act. Of course a performance evaluation form is, ipso facto, an issue that had to be consulted with AFSA. It involves conditions of work; it has to do with advancement. Management could not simply issue this new form as a fait accompli. They had to go and consult with AFSA. In the end, after consulting, if there is no agreement, management might say, we're going to go ahead and do this, but until they reach that point they have to meet and consult.

So on the things like the efficiency report form on which I couldn't give anything away myself, Thea and I would get all our documents together a few days before the formal meeting, and we'd go down to the cafeteria together, the day before. It was usually about 3:00 pm and we'd have a cup of coffee and go over the positions of both sides. We kind of worked out the general ground rules for the next day's negotiation.

She'd then talk to Bleakley and Hank Cohen and sometimes the AFSA Board, and the AFSA lawyer, and I would go to the Office Director for Performance Evaluation, John Rouse, and his deputy, Ed Dejarnette. Then the next day we'd each go into the negotiations with some idea of the positions. I won't say there were no surprises. Some surprises came up, but it just kind of greased everything and moved it forward having that preliminary little meeting. Everybody knew I did it. It was just part of the business. Then I could go back to after the meeting I could call Ed or John and say, you know, they're absolutely going to stand firm on this. Thea said we're going to have to give them something else if you want to get that through and that's my judgment. John Rouse would say, well, I don't think they will stand firm. Let's give them one more meeting and then we'll talk about it again. That's how it kind of worked out. I was negotiating not only with the union, but with my own side, perhaps more to so than with the other side. All in a very collegial way.

AFSA occasionally would go and raise the threat of going to the NLRB or whoever they went to. Under the new act when it came out, the Foreign Service Labor Relations Board was set up. That made a lot of big business went to them to adjudicate. The act made a tremendous difference.

The Foreign Service Act of 1980

All through this in dealing with AFSA I was exquisitely aware that I had to build

relationships for when the real crunch came, and that would be the negotiation of the most important provisions that affected AFSA in the Foreign Service Act of 1980, primarily the TICs and the rank structure for Foreign Service Officers, specialists, i.e. secretaries and others.

Q: TICs being time in class.

HOWLAND: Right.

Q: Which meant a person, if they won't promote him, before a certain time would have to leave.

HOWLAND: Five years in each class and whatever it is, 22 years in a number of classes, that whole stuff. That would affect of course as I said, not only State Department officers, but USIS officers and as it was conceived, supposedly the Department of Commerce, Agriculture, and AID officers.

So the new Foreign Service Act was to codify the rules for all this, and as the preparations evolved, it all came to the focal point of dealing with AFSA, with AFGE 1534, and the other associations on opposite sides of the table. The management side was centralized theoretically in me, as the chief of the division of employee management relations. With the new Foreign Service Act, this was broadened because Commerce, Agriculture and AID and all were going to be brought under the labor relations provisions and other authorities of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, which for the first time was going to make everything more or less the same. The Foreign Service personnel would be unified and any officer could theoretically serve in, let's say, Commerce or in Agriculture as well as State or USIS. Well, actually, that never happened, but that was the theory.

The other agencies, of course, saw all this as a power grab by State. They were right. It all came to a head in the dealings with AFSA and AFGE 1534. The proposed Foreign Service Act of course got enormous high level attention right up to the Secretary of State. As this developed, tremendous attention began to focus even on my other little proposals negotiated with AFSA, like R&R in the States. It was heady stuff but it began to complicate everything. Somebody would come up with an idea, we'd have to run it by AFSA because AFSA could allege later to the Foreign Service Labor Relations Board when it came into existence that we had failed to consult on things affecting working conditions.

Q: All right, well we'll pick this up. You've already gone into much of the background of working as the representative, the State Department representative to AFSA, particularly. I mean the negotiator.

HOWLAND: I was the chief negotiator for the Foreign Service agencies in the

implementation of the majority of the personnel provisions of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and handled all other labor relations matters.

For instance, although my boss Tony Kern wrote the section of the new Foreign Service Act which codified labor relations processes, I wrote the grievance section for the Foreign Service Act. Why? I don't know except Tony said to me: "Why don't you write the grievance section?" There were some analogous provisions for submitting and adjudicating grievances in the 1946 Foreign Service Act, and there were regulations in the FAM. So I got the regs and cribbed from them to write the grievance provisions. They were accepted with minor changes by both AFSA and management and wound up in the Act. It was sort of "do-it-yourself" legislation, following the good old FS motto: "wing it!"

The most important negotiation from my perspective was the new "TIC" or "time in class" provisions, including the Senior Foreign Service and the TICs at FSO-1 and for junior officers. The Department thought it was going to subject all these other agencies to the identical TICs, but that was pie in the sky. The person who was running this whole process, and drafting much of the legislation was a University of Virginia professor who had been hired as Director of the Policy Planning Office in the Bureau of Personnel, named Bill Bacchus. Do you know Bill Bacchus?

Q: Actually, I've interviewed him a long time ago.

HOWLAND: Bill Bacchus, yes. Bacchus was a very intensely bright and pushy operational guy, with a good knowledge and background but no patience with anyone but himself and his bosses. He did know the management side of the foreign affairs business. He was quite well-connected, a personnel systems expert, but very much out for himself, and one of these guys who jumped effortlessly from Congressional staff to an agency official to academe and so forth. His own watchword seemed to be: never find a simple solution when a complicated one will do. He talked fast and moved fast, and, in my opinion, left chaos and destruction in his wake. He really had no intrinsic interest in the people in the system, just in his own ego and in being known as the only guy who knew what had changed so he could maintain a good job there.

I didn't get along with Bill. He was kind of overbearing to those he considered below himself in bureaucratic rank or intellect – I qualified on both counts. I just didn't pay any attention to him. The Deputy Legal Adviser Jim Michel; Undersecretary for Management Ben Reid and Director General Harry Barnes all swore by him. From their perspective -- all of them busy guys with lots of other things on their plate -- he was the guy who had cooked the Foreign Service Act for them. He was their Foreign Service Act guy. He had drafted a good bit of it with Jim Michel. He had cleared a good bit of it with Ben Reid. Harry Barnes was trying hard to be the first Director General to get out of office without a lawsuit against him, something no DG had ever done before. Everyone had been sued for something or other.

They all kind of shuffled this off on Bill Bacchus, but he left me fairly alone on the labor relations side, because he didn't get along with AFSA at all. AFSA hated him. The AFSA people hated him up front, but behind the scenes, he and Bleakley were always having lunch, doing stuff together. And of course Reid would often talk to Bleakley himself. It's just like any negotiation, I mean these connections went on behind the chief negotiator's back. But I wanted to make sure through all of this, that when I got to the table with AFSA et al, that I had reasonably good relationships with the employee associations, and the management people, in all five agencies, State, Commerce, Agriculture, AID and USIS. That was my goal, to keep everything collegial and congenial.

Plus while this was going on of course we had to negotiate the various terms of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 with the Congress, not with Senators and Representatives but with their staffers. Although Dante Fascell was always very much interested in the talks.

Q: The Cuban operations or something.

HOWLAND: Yes, but also very interested in Foreign Service stuff. There were a half dozen principals, let's call them, who were very interested. I forget which ones they were. The Hill relations were handled by the "H" Bureau of course, and by Bacchus. In the Admin Bureau, the Assistant Secretary was John Thomas, a tough but fair guy, and his aide in dealing with the Congress was Rick Weiss, an FSO who had never served overseas, but was invaluable because of the relationships he had built with Congressional staffers. Weiss was the guy who saved the Foreign Service from having overseas housing taxed which would have destroyed the Foreign Service. He subsequently died of a heart attack at a very young age, 43 or 44, but we still are in that man's debt because the Congress of the United States was going to allow the IRS to tax housing. Weiss saved us on that. I mean single handedly went up and talked to the people in Congress and made the deals. He put it all together. He and Bacchus got along quite well, handled the Congressional side. I was actually told to stay out of the Congressional side, so I did. I went up and saw Fascell once I think, but not in a very serious way.

AFSA of course was also maneuvering with its contacts on the Hill to try to precook the bill. They didn't affect the section on TICs. There are a number of other things, the grievances, there are a whole range of things, career assignments, and things like that, on which they had input when the bill was being marked up.

Q: Did the women's suit come in at all?

HOWLAND: No.

Q: Did you get involved with that?

HOWLAND: No. I don't remember anyone filed it. This was '79, '80. Was there even a women's suit then?

Q: I'm not sure.

HOWLAND: I'm not sure either. The bill was passed in late 1980. The Act specified that its provisions had to take effect by a date certain, i.e. 60 days. By that time the negotiations with the labor unions for the regulations implementing those provisions that were consultable had to be completed. The Bill itself was not consultable, what was written in the bill was not, that was a legislative thing. We didn't go to AFSA and say we want to renegotiate with you section 23 of the ACT, but rather the implementing regulations for that section.

The bill simply said the Foreign Service will establish an "up or out" policy providing that officers will reach a certain level in a certain number of years, and then be considered in a time-frame "window" for promotion to the Senior Foreign Service. Or, in the case of junior officers, there would be a junior threshold and junior officers who passed it would have career tenure. It was the Department which had to make decisions and write regulations which said things like: "after you reach or cross the junior threshold, you have 22 years to reach the senior threshold. Then you open your "window" to be considered for promotion to senior ranks, and if you are not promoted, you leave the service.

Bacchus had sold this TIC structure to the Department of State, i.e. to Barnes and Reed as an enlightened personnel system. A system which he claimed would generate "fast trackers," super-capable officers who would zoom up through promotions, but if not promoted to senior ranks, could get out at a time when they were still saleable, their skills were saleable. They would be able to get a pension based on, let's say, their usually 22 years of service if you came in at 22, you were 44 you would get a nice pension from the State Department and you could go out and get another job somewhere based on your prestige. That was the theory for that, and there were a few of these officers eventually who did that.

But the majority of officers could not, and did not want to. Many of us loved the Foreign Service and saw it as a life-time career. Moreover, a number of people, not AFSA, but including myself, thought it was inane to dismiss an officer -- to whom the Department had given language skills, area experience, and functional skills -- and just at the point when they should be graduated up to a senior Foreign Service job. Many officers had to leave the Service not because they lacked the qualifications, because there were no position numbers, no promotion numbers that year. A double tragedy, for the individual of course, but also for the Foreign Service which did not get to benefit further from those efforts and expertise.

Nevertheless, Bacchus argued everybody down on his vision for the TICs, and won over OMB which was always trying to cut State position numbers. The Foreign Service was having difficulty formulating a universal staffing pattern, listing universal skills, which the Congress had mandated. The idea was that the Department of State would know exactly what its inventory of skills was. The provisions of the new Act would do that, it

was thought. I'm giving the real story now. It was really Bacchus peddling snake oil, and a few people in Personnel wanting to look "progressive." The fact is, the last time I looked at this in the early 1990's, it still hadn't been done to OMB's satisfaction. The Personnel Bureau was incapable of doing that. IBM does it routinely. The Defense Department does it routinely. Everybody else, but the Foreign Service is still totally incapable of doing it. Why? Who knows? This is all the stuff that was going on.

My job, as a good soldier, was to get this TIC structure through AFSA, which was fighting tooth and nail against it, AFSA was. The other agencies didn't like it either, but the other agencies had already arranged on the management side to have their most important practices exempted. So, it was really AFSA. USIS got different TICs. I don't know if Agriculture ever got any TICs. Some things we had to negotiate with all the agencies, others not.

The Department of State was desperately anxious to put the bill into effect because the bill also changed the salary structure and everybody got kicked up, \$10,000 or \$12,000, for what were then 03s and 04s and later 01s and 02s when they did this management study. They were going to get about 7,000 more bucks a year or something. That was the main thing. That was the kind of real benefit that management had available to sweeten the whole deal.

Negotiations Underway

For the first big negotiation I managed to get a really fancy conference room down in the basement somewhere. We set it up with coffee and pads, pencils, etc.. On my side of the table were the labor relations officers of five agencies, including myself. On the other side was AFSA, and AFGE 1534, the only unions involved in these negotiations, representing State, AID, and USIS. Yes, I think that's right. The Foreign Service employees from Commerce and Agriculture, if I recall correctly, were not represented by any organizations, but I had the management officials on my side who dealt with them on labor relations. In the opening session we were talking about this issue of who does what and I was handing out copies of the management proposals. The only thing we accomplished that day was to ascertain who were the "chief negotiators" -- myself on the management side, Bleakley and Abe Harris for the unions. Then we adjourned. We had to complete the negotiation within 60 days; i.e. if we didn't get agreement on the implementing regulations for the labor - related portions of the bill, it would not have come into effect.

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: Yes, its the "time in class" regulations that were the nub of the problem. Management had to show Congress it wasn't just creating a structure of sinecures for five agencies. In turn, management itself had to show that it was not just creating this structure so that it could benefit, even though in the end management benefited. The Congress was very intent on that and so in another sense Bacchus had some backing. But the way they

did it, with people just being summarily ousted, people who had spent their lives in the belief that they were going to go on being Foreign Service Officers, that was very cruel and inappropriate.

Q: It cut down on our expertise quite badly.

HOWLAND: That was main thing. Yes. You've trained and fed and housed these people and then all of a sudden, as I was saying, when they got to be at the height of their powers, they're gone. After 20 years of learning everything there was to know about Morocco, the Morocco expert is selected out, and we send off some new guy out to Morocco who was previously stationed in Uruguay and had never heard of Islam in his entire career. It made no sense.

Q: It's also the expertise, though as I saw it the Foreign Service Act meant that you had to get your management experience also.

HOWLAND: That's right. In the end, that's right. For example, I've been sort of giving political examples because I was a political officer, but all this was tremendously valid of course for each cone, which had entirely different set of career rules to rise by, of tickets that must be punched. I don't know how it was with admin people, but for economic and political officers, you had a standard track. You were a junior political officer in a section. You then went to some other neat country usually in the same area, a slightly higher job and you went back and by that time you were a desk officer, usually in the same bureau or same general area. Then you went back out to some country in the area and were a political counselor or the number two in a big political section. Then if you were the political counselor, you got a DCM job somewhere there. Then you went back and you were a country director. Then you went back and got a big DCM job. Then you came back and you were a DAS in that bureau and then you went out and you're an Ambassador. Standard political officer track.

So that is what the officers on the promotion board for the political cone look for, because that is what they themselves did. When they see a personnel folder of an officer with glowing reports on that track, that's the officer they recommend for promotion. I don't know if it's true that consular is the same way. As I understand it though the consular side, what you get the credits for is handling large tough sections somewhere. Haiti, Dominican Republic, Kingston, Manila, the real tough sections, not just visa mills. I mean there are some in Europe that crank out visas, but I don't think those are considered really difficult plus they're Europe. Geneva must issue a number of visas, but nobody would claim Geneva was a tough assignment. Bermuda must issue a large number of visas, but no one would claim it was the same as Tijuana. So, those it seems to me are on the track, right? Those difficult people who demonstrate they really can manage a large section under difficult circumstances. Right? That's entire different from the political officer thing.

So the Foreign Service Act and the Foreign Service have to somehow treat all these

people the same in terms of promotions, even though they are tracked differently, their backgrounds and skills and potential to move higher are difficult to correlate. The military seems to do it okay, but we have had endless trouble.

Q: Well, also, it really is different. It's a battalion is a battalion is a battalion.

HOWLAND: Yes, maybe. Of course if you look over the range of general officers, the combat arms infantry, armor, artillery, those are the dominant "promotables," not the ordinance, not the quartermaster corps, especially not the military attaches. You think with all the emphasis on intelligence, they would be, but how many military attaches have you known have gone on to be general officers? Verne Walters.

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: Period. I mean maybe Verne Walters was a very unusual guy, but the rest of them, they're mostly over age colonels. They get to work in an embassy. Then on your way buster, that's it. Too bad because I've known some attaches who were really superb officers and exactly the kind of person you would want to have in the Pentagon, dealing with big issues with other agencies, and moving big numbers of troops around the world, but, no, they give those stars to the guys who have led a handful of troops in the trenches.

Q: We would be doing the same, so and so is a great drafter.

HOWLAND: There you are.

Q: Drafting is today is not really as important a skill, I mean there are so many others. Yes?

HOWLAND: For a political officer what you look for in the EER report, if it doesn't say he's a great drafter, then why aren't his drafting skills underlined here? If it says something like "his drafting is generally superb," the boards ask: Why not invariably superb? Things like that. "His presentations meet the mark" Well, you've got to ask, what does that mean? But they're supposed to surpass the mark. So, if they only meet the mark. "In large part, in country team meetings his ideas and proposals have carried the day" – but not always? Oh-oh. Now, nobody's perfect all the time. If you are marginally down from perfect, that's it you can't do the job at the next level, that's what happened to me on the low ranking.

Q: Well, now, just to wrap up this particular part, when the Foreign Service Act came in, you've mentioned the TIC thing and all this, I mean this is looming ahead.

HOWLAND: It wasn't spelled out chapter and verse, TIC by year, by year, by grade in the Act. That's a management prerogative. The management level has to be able to specify that in order to manage its work force.

Q: So all of a sudden, within a year or two, they found an awful lot of people you know, having to leave or being threatened to leave.

HOWLAND: It wasn't really a year or two. It was more four or five years.

Q: That's right, they had to bide their time.

HOWLAND: You had to open your TIC and do this. They increased the TIC in class, multiple class TIC, to provide a little bit of grandfathering, but yes, within three or four years. Of course people's ranks would change because a lot of 05s were made into 04s because they lopped off the old FSO-8. And they got more money to sweeten it. So, in general, it was all moved up. Management was just given the requirement in the Act of this "up-or-out" system in general terms, the senior threshold and all that Management had to have the prerogative to specify that, if too many people in class 03 just piled up there, management had to be able to say they're out after such and so many years, otherwise everybody would be a class 03 officer. What people didn't realize was going to happen was the disappearance of the onward promotion numbers to senior ranks. That's what happened. Same thing happens in the military when there are no wars.

Q: Yes. It was the beginning of a hard time that's lasted for about 20 years.

HOWLAND: That's right. So, anyway, that's it.

Q: All right, well, why don't we pick this up again in 1981?

HOWLAND: Yes, I want to get into the actual negotiation, yes, of sitting down at the table and what we said and they said and so forth.

Q: Yes, okay, great.

* * *

Today is the 29th of May, 2002, Dick, you're sitting around the negotiating table in 1981.

HOWLAND: Yes, I think the spring of '81, maybe late winter, early spring, first meeting in the basement of the building somewhere in that big room I had put together. After that we often met in a conference room that was right near the AFSA headquarters there on the second floor, where the two buildings AID and State come together. AFSA is now down in the "two" corridor I think.

At any rate, there we sat and on one side myself and four representatives from AID, Commerce, Agriculture and USIS management, the labor relations people from those agencies and on the other side was Ken Bleakley, president of AFSA, next to him Thea de Rouville, vice president, then Susan Votek, their lawyer. Next to them was Abe Harris who was the head of AFGE Local 1534. Those two unions between them represented the Foreign Service contingents of State, AID and USIS. The Foreign Service contingents in

Commerce, the Foreign Commercial Service and in Agriculture, the Foreign Agricultural Service, as I recall did not have representatives. However, since the Foreign Service Act had placed their employees in a bargaining unit of the Foreign Service writ large, whatever we negotiated would apply to them as well, except that each of the agencies had been delegated authority to manage its TIC structure.

Q: Time in class.

HOWLAND: They could set their time in class structure as they wanted to, so they never did one. For instance the Foreign Agricultural Service, was entirely separate, even though they were under the Foreign Service Act, used the Foreign Service Act authorities, but operated their tours and transferred from post to post on a very different basis.

Q: It was a civil service section, wasn't it?

HOWLAND: well, no, they were called Foreign Agricultural Officers, but they did not, they weren't selected out and they were highly politicized in the sense that they were working to sell agricultural commodities under the PL - 480 program. That's what Foreign Agricultural Service Officers do. They go to a country and they run and push the PL480, which of course is a big thing for our farmers and is ministered by the Department of Agriculture. So, it was an entirely different situation from the State Department Foreign Service. They used our personnel system in terms of admin support and all of that, so they came into the Foreign Service in that respect. They had their own rules. What we were negotiating was really basically for State and USIS. USIS and its union had pretty much agreed on what they were going to do, so Abe Harris did not make much of an issue. But State and AFSA had not agreed and there were terrible pressures within AFSA as well as within State not to give in.

Q: When you're saying State, this means you?

HOWLAND: No, not as a decision-maker. I served my masters, whatever they wanted. Well, the issues were addressed within the State Department offices, and between management and employees at the officer level. The officers who would be subjected to the new TIC system were scared that it was a management trick, which to a certain extent it was, to just kick them out, get them out of the Service when positions were short. Most people who came in the Foreign Service, cherished at the bottom of their hearts, the thought that someday they would get to be an ambassador. The plain and simple fact was except for a handful of lucky officers, that wasn't going to be the case. So, the problem was in persuading them essentially that they would be leaving the Service after 20, 26 years, 28 years, whatever, much as you do in the military if you don't make general officer. They would leave at the equivalent of colonel or a naval captain or a lieutenant colonel or a major or whatever, but that that was a very respectable career. They would get a pension when they reached retirement age. The theory was that many would be young enough to switch careers. I was very skeptical of all of this; it was what I was trying to do by having gone into labor relations. But everyone was conscious of the fact

that some years earlier under the old system, there was one guy, you recall the one guy, Thomas, who had killed himself.

Q: John Thomas.

HOWLAND: Killed himself, yes, a political officer I believe, when he was selected out without a pension at 48 with no saleable skills, was unable to find another job, had a family to support and so everyone was quite upset about that. The new Act would not, of course, preclude this happening again, but it did lessen it somewhat.

Q: His wife, for years afterwards, Cynthia Thomas, was a major force.

HOWLAND: She went into consular work, I think. Anyway, people were conscious of that. It was a highly charged atmosphere. Management of course had Bacchus pressing and then when the Congress held hearings on the Foreign Service Act, unfortunately a lot of people who came up and argued for it were retired Ambassadors. They said they wanted those provisions in order to preserve the elite status of the Foreign Service. This was not a popular approach to the Congress of the United States, and was not generally the feeling in the FS at the time. The Congress of the United States didn't want to go back to its constituents and say, and one of our biggest achievements was to maintain the elite status of our diplomats.

I remember Joe Mendenhall testified along those lines, and Dante Fascell cut him down. Dante Fascell was a man of the people and a wonderful guy in many ways and just said I just want to tell you that this is not the line to take with the Congress if you want us to do what you want. We cannot muster a majority to vote to create a European - style Foreign Service to go and drink cocktails and look down on the average American. It was really a counter-productive approach especially at a time when the Service was finally moving in the opposite direction.

Of course the issue that was still uppermost was the Foreign Service recognition in 1972 that it was discriminating against women, who had been forced to leave when they got married. Only eight years from that change and it was still a lively issue. I don't remember any court cases or anything, but everyone was apparently aware of that.

I think the AFSA side knew the handwriting was on the wall, and if they stone-walled and delayed the Act coming into force, Congress would simply mandate the TIC structure. But AFSA did not want to give up too much, or at least not give the impression that it just rolled over and played dead on this issue of crucial importance to its core constituency – Foreign Service officers. There was some give built into the management position. We changed the TICs here and there; I frankly don't remember the ins and outs of it. Five years for this and four years for that. It meant endless talking and posturing.

Hank Cohen and Dennis Cox on the AFSA side were terrific in keeping the situation under control as was Thea de Rouville. Bleakley was doing a lot of outward posturing, and we took a day off once in a while to go over the Foreign Service Act and sort out

management proposals and AFSA proposals on other issues. The grievance thing was taken care of fairly quickly. The whole grievance regulations, in a few hours. My strategy as always was to get the easy things out of the way and build our trust and vested interests on both sides until we get to the TICs as we finally did. We had a lively discussion on an unexpected crunch issue which we went around and around on for weeks. That was what Foreign Service staff, that is to say secretaries, administrators, reserve officers, the computer specialists, the nurses, would call themselves. For them, that seemed to be the most important issue.

Q: The communicators.

HOWLAND: The communicators. What were they going to be called? They didn't want to be called Foreign Service staff which they'd always been called in the past, sort of an informal kind of thing. They didn't want to be called "specialists" either, because they thought that being specialists was not as good as being "generalists" since most political and economic officers were generalists. See, they thought the secretary title was pejorative. Why that is I don't know. They wanted to be called office managers or something like that. Since FSO-1s and -2s were being renamed as minister counselors and counselors, they wanted to be renamed as something, too. Finally it was all sort of left alone. I don't remember that we ever succeeded in sorting that out. They were called FSs as I recall or FSS or something. They gave them something and then eventually it shook down to where they're now called "OMSers" of all the arcane titles.

We had several sessions with the TICs. I think it was starting to come close when we were in a week of the date that the Foreign Service Act was supposed to take effect and management would have to completely redo all the computers, everything had to be redone. The little cards with personnel data on candidates that the promotion boards got, you know, everything had to be redone with the new ranks or they might have to postpone the promotion boards, which met in the summer. Nobody wanted that, of course.

Q: Was there any model that you were looking to because in the Foreign Service Act of 1946 the model was essentially the navy.

HOWLAND: The navy, yes.

Q: With people coming out of the military and ambassadors, the captain of the ship, he has an executive officer like a DCM, but was there anyone you were looking at anywhere in the government anywhere else?

HOWLAND: No. As far as I know and this is just my understanding, Bill Bacchus designed the new TIC system with inputs from Harry Barnes, who didn't know that much about it, and Jim Michel in the legal advisor's office. Ben Reid who was a management guy, a very fine man, a very good guy, just signed off. Tony Kern on the labor side. Jackie Manley who did civil service personnel. Bob Russell who did civil service personnel. They all kind of drafted this up and I don't remember how it was approved at the high

level. That wasn't my area.

Q: No, but I was just wondering whether...

HOWLAND: It would have been nice if they had invited me to those meetings, but you know this business. If you don't have some clout, you don't get invited to the meeting. I didn't have any clout. I was just supposed to do what I was told. The fact is, as it came down to the final crunch, it all hinged on me because I was the negotiator, so if I didn't know what I was doing, all those senior officials would have been in big trouble with the Hill. I'm not sure I knew what I was doing, but anyway.

I don't want to flog this dead horse too long, but we finally we got it all put together except the TICs, and AFSA according to Thea de Rouville, in private to me, had grudgingly gone along with the TICs. However, Ken Bleakley was boggling either genuinely, or for purposes of posturing.

At one point he slammed the table and he said, "There's no way I can sell this to my membership, to my members of AFSA. There's no way they will buy this. No one will be able to convince them that this is the way it should be."

I looked at Ken and I said, "Ken, I can't believe that. I simply can't believe it. Here we've known each other for almost two years. We've been negotiating for almost two years. We've handled a lot of dicey things together. You had to take them back to the membership. I've had to take them back to management. Somehow I managed to get these things through management, but I've always been struck with the ease with which, using your diplomatic skills, you were able to get very tough things through your membership. I don't believe you're going to have any more trouble with this than you had with those things. So, my faith is in you."

He said, "Well, you know, if you put it that way." Everyone on both sides breathed a sigh of relief. We had the proposal right there on the table and I said, "I'm going to sign this thing and just leave it with you. We know the deadline is next week. I'm sure you will do the right thing and get it back to me before then."

I handed him the proposal, which he took, and then just on a thought I handed him the pen and I said, "Or you can just sign it right now." He went ahead and signed it. That was it. That was the last crunch issue. There were a few things we had to tidy up which we did with no problem. I think the real power behind their side giving in was Thea de Rouville, of course. I think also that top-level management, as one would only expect, and as often happens in all negotiations, made available a few little "sweeteners," private, nothing explicit, but a few little add-ons to the AFSA side that there would be a few other things coming down the pike – like good assignments, perhaps.

Q: Yes, you would have been sidelined in a way.

HOWLAND: Hey, I didn't complain. I was eight years between promotions and now it looked like I was on my way up again. I had shared one Superior Honor Award for working on the Act. Harry Barnes was no longer DG, getting ready to go to India I believe as ambassador. Joan Clark was DG, but Harry, bless his heart, wrote up a superior honor award for me, which Joan signed and then got it moved through the system in time for the Promotion Boards, but that didn't work. But the next spring I got a very good EER by a tough grader, Dan O' Donohue, and was promoted in the fall after a year on the Thai desk.

New Assignment: the Thai Desk

Luck comes in spurts in this business and mine held out. In the fall of 1980, maybe December or early January, I was wandering through the halls and happened to run into John Negroponte, who I had known when he was in the A-100 class before mine at FSI in 1960. Then when he was on Spiro Agnew's staff, he'd come to Laos with Agnew and we'd done about a week of hacking around together trying to keep Agnew from destroying the policy. Anyway, John and I had a good healthy respect for each other and we got along very well. I ran into John in the hall and John said, "Hi. What are you doing? I haven't seen you in basically since '73."

I said, "Well, I am just finishing up a tour in labor relations and I don't have a clue." He said, "Labor relations? What are you doing in labor relations?" I said, "Well, I'm kind of getting to the end of my time in my present grade and I figured I better get something to sell on the outside."

John said, "I'm going to get you back into the East Asia bureau. This is ridiculous. Come with me." He was at that time a DAS in EAP and took me to see John Holdridge, who was going to be the new assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Holdridge was in a little side office somewhere waiting for the 20th of January and the inauguration of Reagan. Of course I knew Holdridge from before. I'd first met him in 1961 on the roof of a Chinese restaurant in Phnom Penh. And, as Consul in Surabaya, I had escorted his wife Martha on a visit to Central Java when he was Ambassador in Singapore. Later we stayed with them in at the residence in Singapore. John is a very fine guy. I don't know if you ever interviewed John Holdridge.

Q: I have.

HOWLAND: A wonderful man. Anyway, you know he passed away recently and suddenly.

Q: Yes, I know.

HOWLAND: Of some sort of strange lung fibrosis; within six weeks of the initial diagnosis he was dead. That's what Martha went through. Do you know Martha?

Q: I've met her.

HOWLAND: Yes. Incredible. He didn't smoke as far as I know. He jogged. The only explanation is at some point in the Army or in the Foreign Service, something must have gotten in there.

Anyway, Negroponte took me to Holdridge and Holdridge was not a guy who fooled around. Dennis Harter was his special assistant at the time. We went in to see John, and Dennis was there, and we chatted for about a half an hour and Negroponte said, "I think we should have him take Paul Cleveland's place as country director for Thailand." So, Holdridge said, "That's a fine idea." But Harter said, "There're a lot of other candidates," as special assistants should be pointing out their boss, don't commit yourself. Quite right. I said, "Fine." We shook hands and I went back down to labor relations. I thought to myself, "Well, it sure was nice, but I don't think this is going to come about." Just then the phone rang and it was John Holdridge, who said, "Dennis has just left and I want to tell you you're going to be the next Country Director for Thailand." That was just terrific of him.

Q: That really was.

HOWLAND: Moments like that restore your faith in the Service, don't they? Then I had the problem of course that my labor relations job was three years. I'd only been in it two. So, that's problem A. Problem B was that I was an FSO-1 and the Thai desk was a Counselor (FE-OC) level position. Problem C was that, the way the world works, I knew that if I didn't get somebody to replace me in labor relations, there would be no way the office of senior officer assignments would downgrade the position so I could get it. Miraculously I ran into a friend, just a drink and coffee kind. Jim Mack. James Mack. Do you know him? I think he later went on to be ambassador to Peru or somewhere. Very nice young man. A nice guy. He was an 0-2. I took Jim Mack to a negotiation so he could see what it was like. He enjoyed it and he, at the moment for some reason, wanted to get out of the Latin American Affairs bureau, ARA.

Q. That was lucky.

HOWLAND: So, Jim agreed to bid on the position and Harry Barnes put in a word and I got to be country director to Thailand, back in my home bureau after five years of being out in the wilderness, but five years which were wonderful and which were broadening, and which I enjoyed. Jim did not last very long, he went back to ARA and has been an ambassador since. He did the labor relations job well but management quite properly decided to make his successor a professional labor relations official to remove the "sweetheart deal" issue, no longer running FSO's through the job. But that came out of the Act, as a result of the Act. It was getting to the point that an FSO just couldn't handle the work, it was too arcane. It was just not in our line of work. Maybe some of the new ones they have could do now, but not in those years. And the job didn't fit into a cone and was hard to fill with FSO's.

But it was really my lucky break. Out of the labor relations tour that I did for two years, I got two superior honor awards. One for the general negotiation that I had done and one for saving the Foreign Service Act. Harry Barnes signed the first one. Joan Clarke the second one. I went into the 1982 boards with a good efficiency report from my first year as the country director for Thailand, plus two superior honor awards from the Foreign Service Act. It was very different. I did very well. I was 19th on the list that year. But if I had stayed in personnel or gone to some other out of area thing, I would have been finished, out of the service, no question about it. No question that it was John Negroponete who saved my career and my livelihood, but I like to think I helped.

INSERT LAST PART HERE.

Q: You were Country Director for Thailand from when to when?

HOWLAND: 1981 to '83. It was a wonderful experience, one of my happiest tours. John Negroponete was my supervisor at the outset, as the DAS for Southeast Asia in EAP. That was in July of '81, but within a month or so he had left to await confirmation as Ambassador to Honduras, basically to run the Contra operation in that country – just the man for the job. He was replaced as the DAS for Southeast Asia by Dan O'Donohue. I think Dan had just been a DAS in the Political/Military Affairs bureau (PM), and before that DCM in Bangkok. He was a legendary figure in EAP. You've interviewed Dan of course?

Q: Yes.

HOWLAND: He was an expert in Northeast Asia, and in military stuff, and the protégé of Phil Habib. So, Dan came in very soon, and Negroponete went off to wait in the Central American Country Directorate to get confirmed, and never came by EAP after that. They were very different bosses, both excellent in their way. John delegated more, and occupied himself with issues at his level and higher. Dan occupied himself with everything. His watchword was: "If I'm not in charge, it's out of control." And his having been DCM in Bangkok recently, and my never having served in Thailand, the good thing about having Dan there was, he was always right. Nevertheless I challenged him on everything, because he liked that better than subservience. Very rarely, I won. I think I better stop there and wait to do some notes first on the policy stuff, or else I'm liable to goof up. Better to talk about people now.

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up the next time 1981 to '83 where you're talking about all the issues you had with dealing with Thailand and of course the border areas. Burma of course is there too.

HOWLAND: Yes, Burma I didn't get involved with at all. Burma was under Fred Z. Brown, on the Indonesia/Malaysia/Singapore desk. Don't ask me why. It had to do with some intrigue under the previous assistant secretary, Richard Holbrooke.

Q: I was just wondering whether the Burma situation impinged.

HOWLAND: There was an occasional incident on the border with Burma. Well, actually the Burma issue was drugs in the North, the KMT Chinese drug runner Khun Sa, I think his Chinese name was Chang Chi-fu. He had a base in Thailand, Ban Hin Taek, but we chased him out in 1982.

Q: I'm sure you got involved one way or another in the missing in action.

HOWLAND: Yes, Bo Gritz's adventures, and all the POW/MIA issues. Absolutely. I'll talk about that later.

Q: So, you had what is known as a full plate?

HOWLAND: Yes, it was a full plate, but decision-making for Indochina, because the agency was clandestinely supporting the anti-Vietnamese groups along the border, was really held apart from the Thai desk. I knew what was going on, but that policy was run by the DAS and by Desaix Anderson, the country director for Indochina and his number two, Ray Burghardt. That was true first under Negroponte, who had put together the policy for trying to force the Vietnamese out of Cambodia. It was the same under Dan O'Donohue, who emphasized the importance of defending Thailand, which I got into, more than fighting the Vietnamese.

I think also, in an implicit way, because I had had the earlier background in Cambodia, they didn't want me involved, because the situation in Cambodia was totally different from the early 1960's of course. I think they didn't want the former Cambodian hand sort of getting in there and yapping about Sihanouk and earlier times, and they were right. They were absolutely right. I had more than enough to do with Thailand as a whole. Thailand in those years seemed to face a threatened coup almost once a week. Most of these never happened, but you never knew what was going to come.

But the main part of my work, I like to say, was sort of "psychiatric" because of the strong personalities involved in the USG policy arena regarding SEA at that juncture. I often wondered if Negroponte picked me for the job because I knew all the people involved – indeed had served before with many of them. I was kind of moving back amongst very bright people I had known and who were a little worried, reasonably worried whether I could function properly and fit into what was going on. And I still feel that my one achievement during my time there was preserving peace and forward movement in the midst of many strong animosities and rivalries; the struggle for policy dominance was intense. Animosity is not too strong a word; there was hatred in some cases.

The main rivalry – a friendly one – was between Dan and Rich Armitage, who handled Southeast Asia policy for the Defense Department as Francis West's deputy in ISA. He

considered himself an SEA expert although his previous experience in Southeast Asia had been commanding a riverine force unit in Vietnam. Anyway, Rich Armitage and Dan were constantly struggling, in a friendly way, for pre-eminence, but they respected each other very much. Generally, they worked together to tone down the Ambassador in Thailand, John Gunther Dean. They considered him a loose cannon.

Now, I had worked for Dean in Laos, when he was DCM and Charge. He got me promoted to (old-style) FSO-3, bless his heart. I had the highest regard for him, but often his ego got in the way of his judgment. Like many good Ambassadors, he saw the Country Director as his personal representative in the Washington policy councils, and indeed that was one function of the desk. But Dean grossly over-estimated my potential influence in the face of much stronger guys like Dan and Rich Armitage. Not to mention the National Security Council Director for Asia, Jim Lilley, another old friend from Cambodia 1960-61. Dean's deputy was Stape Roy, also a very strong and capable officer, whom you probably have interviewed,

Q: I haven't.

HOWLAND: Stape is working for Kissinger now, you know. He's now the executive officer for Kissinger Associates. So, you can probably get him in. P. Stapleton Roy, a China hand and nobody's fool. Tough nut, but a brilliant guy. If he comes to see you, he will redo your whole computer system.

My key contact and advocate in the Embassy in Bangkok was the head of the political section, a Thai language officer named Jim Wilkinson, who also I think recently retired. A superb Thai speaker. I can't believe that someone with his Tennessee drawl was able to achieve an S- 4+/ R-4+ in Thai.

Dean had recently arrived in Bangkok, and the outgoing Ambassador from Thailand was Mort Abramowitz, who at the time was waiting to go as Ambassador to Indonesia. He had been scheduled for the Philippines, but I believe elements in the Pentagon blocked that, and they had switched him to Indonesia. Oh, finally I should add one more person to the *dramatis personae*, Dan Arnold who was station chief in Laos '73 to '74 when I was there. He had been station chief in Thailand later when Mort was Ambassador there, and seemed to have some sort of vendetta against Mort. He was now retired, more on that later. But he was on the phone with me everyday saying: have you heard this? Can you do this? You know about that, why don't you do this? He was just kind of floating around, basically serving as an unannounced, unregistered lobbyist for Thai General Kriangsak, the previous Prime Minister, who had been eased out in a "quiet coup" in February, 1980. Arnold supposedly hated Mort because the latter, according to Arnold, had done nothing to keep Kriangsak afloat.

So, as I say 90% of my work was psychiatric dealing with these personalities. Sure, there were policy issues and big issues, but most of my job was keeping all these people reasonably happy with each other while I tried to learn about Thailand, where I had never

served. In that sense having all these knowledgeable people to coach me was beneficial. This happened all the time, mostly with Mort. He was sitting on the nearby Indonesia desk in the same suite of offices, but seemed to spend as much time in my office trying to run Thai affairs as he did over there. The first thing Mort did when he came in every morning was stop at the Thai desk and see my secretary, Caroline Hodges, and grab all the Thai traffic so he'd read it before I did. He'd get in at 6:30 to get that traffic so that he'd be waiting when I got in and he'd say, you see this, you've got to do this and so on and so forth. He'd do all of that.

Of course I liked Mort, and as I said, I didn't resent it at all because I was coming to the Thai desk after having had nothing to do with Thailand since '74 first of all, and having been in Indonesia in Surabaya for two years, and then inspector all over the world, and then labor relations. Then suddenly here I am back in Thailand with a total gap as to what was going on. I read the papers. You read the NID, the National Intelligence Digest and so forth, but you're not plugged in. Plus I had never been a desk officer, and now I was a Country Director. I had a lot to learn very quickly. So Mort was very helpful. He was always there, nearby. I could bounce stuff off him. It was also tremendously helpful in bringing me up to speed that Negroponte was very forgiving and helpful when I did something dumb. Dan was too, actually.

Q: This is tape seventeen, side one with Dick Howland. Yes?

HOWLAND: Another key person was Dick Childress at the National Security Council. He spent 90% of his time on the POW/MIA matters, because the Reagan White House during that era was endlessly trying to make end runs around the bureaucracy to foment rescue missions and things like that. Dick's boss at the NSC was Jim Lilley, Senior Director for Asia, whom you've interviewed, a very solid guy and an old friend of mine from Cambodia. One of the first things that happened when I got on the desk and called on Jim, and he said: "Hey, while we're here let's go see the Vice President" and we went in to see Bush, just a courtesy call. Bush talked about Thailand and obviously knew Southeast Asia very well.

My most important asset was my secretary, Caroline Hodges. Caroline was a very bright woman who was an American success story; I think she's now moved on to personnel. She was one of ten children and had come up from the South to Washington, D.C. as a child. She had had and virtually no education until she got to D.C. at age ten or eleven or whatever. She went through high school and got into the civil service, then became a secretary for the Thai desk. She was absolutely terrific. I thought Brenda Johnson was great, my secretary in labor relations, but Caroline Hodges was even better than Brenda.

Q: Was she African American?

HOWLAND: She was African American, yes. She was a wonderful person. I remember she was worried because State was just converting to the good old Wang system then, remember, from whatever the IBM was called.

Q: Word processor.

HOWLAND: Word processing system. She was frightened to death of the Wang system. I said, “Nonsense, Caroline. You do so well and you know what this is going to do? When I need a new briefing paper instead of you having to sit and type it all out, you’re going to have it in your machine and you just bring it up on the screen and change the date and hand it to me.” She thought that was pretty terrific. Also, she had a great memory and was fabulous on bios. She had internalized all these complicated Thai names. So, anytime I had a bio question, if she couldn’t answer it, she could call the person in CIA who was the bio analyst. So I was very lucky. By rights, I should not have stayed on in that job even though I did reasonably well, enough to get promoted, but Caroline did more than anyone to get me through. Then I had a desk officer named Gene Henderson on the desk. After he left the desk, he went to teach at the Naval Academy, and I don’t know what became of him after that. An economic officer, Jeff Wolfe, who was married to Sandy Vogelgesang, also worked there for a while. He was a good guy, but neither one of them were really crackerjacks. They were very slow. I’ll stop here.

Q: Today is the 14th of June, 2002. Dick, lead on.

HOWLAND: I wanted to start by mentioning a few important events that happened before I took over the desk in August of ‘81. The first are the coups in 1980 and 1981, that established Prem Tinsulanonda as Prime Minister and ended the rule of his predecessor, Kriangsak. The one in 1980 was a “soft coup,” so to speak, and the second one failed.

Q: This is of Thailand?

HOWLAND: Yes, the Prime Minister of Thailand. Yes, I took over as Country Director for Thailand after that second coup attempt, but I want to get into the sequence of coups just before then, because it bears on much that I was involved in later – the Queen’s visit, Prem’s visit, and other things. I suspect I will make some mistakes here since I wasn’t on the desk at the time of those coups so bear with me. I’ll try to check the facts later.

In February, 1980, General Kriangsak, the previous Prime Minister, who had been quite close to the agency, was quietly ousted – he was said to have “voluntarily resigned” under pressure by a “young Turk movement” in the Army. The basic causes were economic difficulties and allegations that he had directed the proceeds of corruption disproportionately to his own supporters.

Q: You’re talking about the CIA.

HOWLAND: Yes. He had resigned in 1980 and Prem had become Prime minister. Then

in April of 1981, there was another coup attempt by the young Turk officers, army officers. I would say majors and lieutenant colonels, nobody higher than a lieutenant colonel. In a kind of classic Thai manner of coups, several rogue battalions had seized different strategic points in Bangkok – tanks at the intersections, that sort of move to cow the populace. Not unusual; up until that time I think that had happened 44 times since 1932 when the Monarchy lost power; it made working on Thailand always a challenging experience.

Anyway, this 1981 coup was different in one respect, in that the coup group also made some disparaging remarks about the monarchy, and as you know the King and Queen of Thailand are the one symbol of constancy in all the Thai politics. Not so much the Queen, but the King was considered almost sacred, the main factor for stability and continuity. The Queen had never been fully accepted for various reasons, but these young Turk officers made some remarks about the Palace to the extent that the royal couple felt they had to flee. They got into a chopper at the palace in Bangkok and as they were flying over the coup group, according to the Queen who told a person who told me, somebody took some shots at them, which really made her very nervous. I think they took refuge at an Army base in Khorat, and Prem went there also.

Q: This is in Thailand?

HOWLAND: In Thailand, yes, the fifth military district, the commander of which was Arthit, I believe. They took refuge at the military base there and she made a broadcast, which in Thailand, as in the British case, was unheard of for the monarchy, for the King and Queen, to get involved publicly in politics. They have no formal power. To go back a little bit further, in 1932 the absolute monarchy was overthrown and from '32 until the present the monarchy has been a figurehead, and supported parliamentary democracy, except there hasn't been much parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, behind the scenes they always played a kind of balancing role, but publicly, this was the first time. And of course it was interesting that the King didn't make the speech, the Queen felt strongly enough to make it even though her popularity and political authority were nowhere near as great as the King's.

The Queen was quite upset. Perhaps she thought that Kriangsak was behind the coup attempt and she hated Kriangsak because he was uncouth in her view, and involved with drugs. She made the broadcast. I make a point of this because when she came to the United States and I escorted her to several cities, she got that question from all the Thai expatriates, all the ones working here, mostly in the Texas oil fields. They all asked why she had gotten involved in politics. I'll get into that when I talk about the Queen's trip to the United States.

Q: What was her background and what motivated her?

HOWLAND: Well, power and fear. She's a very fascinating woman. In that year, 1981, she was 49 years old and quite a stunning woman. I still have the photo she gave me after

her visit later that year.

Q: She is Thai royalty also?

HOWLAND: Oh, yes, she's Thai royalty from a lesser branch. The way the Thai royal system works is very sensible. Each generation moves down one level in rank and precedence, so that, say, you might be waited upon by a waiter in a restaurant, who four generations back could have had ancestors in the Thai royal family.

Well, in April, 1981 it was a bit tense until the Queen for the first time spoke out and turned the thing around. Mort Abramowitz, as US Ambassador, was blamed by some a year earlier for not supporting Kriangsak. The new Prime Minister, Prem, had been brought in a year earlier as a kind of a temporary compromise; he was thought to be a weakling and not expected to last.

So Kriangsak was definitely finished, and the monarchy had basically endorsed Prem Tinsulanonda as the Prime Minister. Prem was chosen primarily because the Queen and King liked him, and he was self-effacing and honest, a decent man. He was not corrupt, had no connection with drugs and he seemed to know how to deal with the King and Queen in that proper respectful way, but without giving them undue obeisance as an Army General. They just had to get somebody. It was presumed Prem would be an interim Prime Minister because he wasn't considered a strong person. In fact he was considered a very malleable leader. He also was thought to be, interestingly enough, a homosexual, because he had no family. That was one reason they picked him, since Kriangsak had been very corrupt, because he had mistresses and children. Prem didn't have to finance hangers-on and a dynasty, it was said, so he could be honest. He wasn't expected to last, but he lasted longer than any Thai Prime Minister in history.

In the Embassy in Bangkok throughout these times was Mort Abramowitz, a very strong Ambassador. In both coups, the "soft" in '80 and the failed attempt in '81, I suppose Abramowitz could have saved Kriangsak, or reinstated him, by simply speaking up and saying that's it, knock it off, put Kriangsak back. After all, Kriangsak had been the leader who crushed the Thai communist insurgency, and we were very happy about that. As you know, the United States of America is probably the major foreign player in Thai politics. The country has especially been considered a sort of a little fiefdom of the agency going back to World War II, when the OSS dropped in a number of operatives and Thai fighters like Siddhi joined them. When Prem came in, he brought in Siddhi as Foreign Minister. He had become an air marshal, air vice marshal and was also close to the agency. But no Thai government was a U.S. puppet, it was just that their interests and ours aligned on many key issues. On others – trade for instance – they fought us tooth and nail. Everyone viewed it as an interim government at that time.

But Mort Abramowitz did not lift a finger to save Kriangsak because of the drug connection, and also perhaps because Mort's main concern – along with his wife, Sheppie, was the refugee crisis, about which Kriangsak was unconcerned. He was right

about all of that as Prem's subsequent career showed, although I don't remember Prem wringing his hands about the refugees either.

Q: Was there anything though coming from Washington or with you on the April coup, I mean.

HOWLAND: No, I'm saying this was April 1981 before I got on the desk.

Q: Oh, I see, okay.

HOWLAND: I have no idea what Paul Cleveland did on the coup issue. You know Paul?

Q: I know Paul.

HOWLAND: Paul Cleveland was the country director at the time. I replaced him. It was kind of nip and tuck there, but finally the rebel troops gave up and they were put under house arrest, a wonderful Thai solution which lasted a couple of months and then it kind of one after another they were kind of put back in the ranks. But the government, under Prem, who was kind of just considered an interim, temporary guy, had continuing fears of coups. The Army put a trusted West Point graduate, a Thai officer in command of the First Regiment, which is the Bangkok command. So, Prem was quietly starting to take charge, even though everyone is saying oh, Prem is going nowhere, he's nothing. I could see, as I came on the desk, that he was starting to put little markers down here and there to kind of build a little bit of defensive fortress around himself.

Q: Today is the 7th of August, 2002. Dick, 1981 you were on the desk in '81 to when?

HOWLAND: Until 1983.

Q: '83. Okay. You've got your subjects that you want to talk about. You said none of them really thinking that Prem had a chance.

HOWLAND: None of them really thinking that Prem had a chance. I thought that Prem did have a chance. I'm not sure why I did. I guess it was because the one thing he had going for him in my opinion was that he wasn't corrupt. He didn't have to be corrupt. He didn't have a family to take care of. He didn't have a faction to take care of. He didn't have anything going into this except the King and the Queen liked him.

The King and Queen did not like Kriangsak because they thought he was a drug peddler. Kriangsak's most viable, valuable, vocal supporter in the USG arena was Dan Arnold, the station chief who retired at the time Abramowitz left. He had not received a new assignment in the agency, in effect perhaps forced out by the CIA because of various things. He was in Washington trying to get Kriangsak back into office, lobbying for

Kriangsak, but not as a registered foreign agent or anything like that, just a guy who knew everybody because he had been station chief in Bangkok. He was on the phone to me three or four times a week saying, what are you doing this or that for Prem for? Prem isn't going to last, he claimed.

Q: It's almost the traditional marriage between the CIA and a powerful general, in a place and the hell with other things that go on like drug peddling.

HOWLAND: Well, that's their job, not moralizing, and they do it well. Thailand has been a CIA responsibility since the OSS dropped in operatives during the early '40s. Many of the people who rose up to be station chief in Thailand had been either in the OSS or on the fringes of what became the agency in the late '40s. This was during a time when Thailand had recurrent coups, which of course were meat and potatoes for CIA operatives. Brilliant careers and frequent promotions come from coups and counter-coups. Dan Arnold was a specialist in that.

One last thing about the nature of Thai politics that belies the often bloodless denouement of coup attempts. It can be merciless and unforgiving at times. There's a lot of myth about the Thai being sweet, lovable, peace-loving Buddhists. But underneath that it just doesn't always hold up. For instance, Thai politics can be murderous. What do you do if you're facing a really tough political rival? Hire somebody to kill him. He's found in a body bag on a highway somewhere. When the police come around because they know who else could have killed them, they put you in jail, you go on running your campaign and if you win, you get parliamentary immunity and you're out of jail and you're in the parliament. It happens a lot, an awful lot, especially down on the Peninsula which was like the Old West in America.

Or, let's take journalism. Some newspaperman writes a derogatory thing about a corrupt government official. When I was on the Thai desk, you could hire a hit man for 50 bucks to wipe out that journalist. There was a big issue with the NGO that defends journalists, because 40 or 50 journalists were being in Thailand every year, more than the whole rest of the world, combined. Usually most of them die in war and things like that, but this was, that was going on in Thailand. I said Thailand is a very interesting place as far as all that goes.

Q: You said something about the Queen of Thailand visiting early in your tour on the desk?

HOWLAND: Yes, one of the first events that came up at the beginning of my tour, when I was kind of feeling my way with my new boss, Dan O'Donohue, DAS for Southeast Asia in EAP, was that the Queen of Thailand was going to make a trip to the United States. She made a trip every other year to publicize Thai products, mostly silk. The Thai silk industry had been created after the Second World War by Jim Thompson, a legendary former OSS operative who stayed on in Thailand afterwards. He mysteriously disappeared in the Malaysian jungles in 1968 and no one to this day has ever figured out

what happened to him. Some say that he was still on the CIA payroll and he simply was exfiltrated and sent somewhere else under a different name. Still a mystery.

Anyway, after Jim Thompson disappeared, the Queen pretty much took over the silk industry, much of which was in the under-developed Northeast, the Khorat Plateau. The Thai of that area were of Lao origin, and it used to be a backward area, so the silk industry was highly beneficial to development there. The Queen also tried to publicize a kind of unusual weaving industry, which made rattan and other forest products into unique and very elegant forms of Thai basketware, furniture and other things. It was actually stunning stuff. So, she wanted to publicize this by getting these products into the best Department stores in the United States, such as Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, etc.

Then another reason for her periodic visits was to escape the fishbowl of always being on display in Thailand, just to have a little time for herself. So in addition to the commercial aspect she came to have a good time, and that had to be taken into account. Anyway, in October of '81 she came to the United States in order to do a silk and basket promotion. She went to Seattle, Salt Lake City, Dallas, Washington, New York and Boston. In each place there was some prestigious, upscale department store that was showcasing her and the Thai products,

Now, O'Donohue was rather blasé about the Department's getting involved beyond providing security protection, which was handled by what was then the Department's Bureau of Security, SY. I argued that, given the April 1981 coup attempt, where she had for the first time made an influential political statement publicly to the nation, and given Prime Minister Prem's support by the royal family, someone should escort her just be there in case some question came up from a reporter. I said a thousand things might happen, who knows. I was not too familiar with this lady at the time. I had always heard about the Queen of Thailand, one of the world's ten best dressed women for 25 years or so, but in my delusion, I thought but she's just, well, you know, an Asian noble woman and might need help getting around. O'Donohue of course, knew better, but he agreed to let me escort her in Dallas, where the Queen was going to be the main attraction for a major Neiman Marcus promotion of Thai fashion and home products, silk and baskets. It was her longest stay in one place.

So, O'Donohue grudgingly agreed, and then I suddenly realized I knew nothing about dealing with royalty. Actually Mort Abramowitz gave me a good idea. Mort had replaced Charlie Whitehouse in Thailand as Ambassador. To say that Mort was underwhelmed by the royal family would be the brightest light on his attitude, which was: what are they still doing here? Get them out of the way. They're undemocratic. They have no purpose here. Most others felt that in this rapidly modernizing state, the only things the Thai had to hold onto were the King and Queen and Buddhism. Everything else everyday was changing. All the mores were changing. All the customs were changing. You had prostitution, you had drug dealing, you had jewel smuggling, the Khmer Rouge, refugees from Indochina, the boat people, etc., etc. The only things that were still Thai and went back through

history were the King and Queen and Buddhism.

But Mort said, do you know how to deal with this woman? You know, you cannot stand up when she's sitting down. You can't bend over her. You always have to keep your eye on what you are doing and saying. Good stuff. I said, well, you know I served in a Buddhist country and I had good relations with Prince Sihanouk. Mort just laughed at that. Sihanouk wasn't in the Queen's class. Mort went on: you know, my predecessor, Charlie Whitehouse, I criticized him for paying so much attention to the Queen of Thailand, the King and Queen, but you see he came from that level, Charlie Whitehouse of the Newport Whitehouses. Charlie was – I think I mentioned to you – Jackie Kennedy Onassis's first date. He was 17 and she was 15. They grew up in Newport together. Charlie Whitehouse knew how to comport himself around the Queen.

My other concern was, of course, if she was going to Neiman Marcus in Dallas, you would have all the Neimans and the Marcuses and all the hangers on wondering about how you deal with the Queen. I needed someone to go down and brief them, for instance, especially on just one little tip, one little point, that you never mention that play and movie *The King and I* in front of the royal family of Thailand. Even I knew that was the number one “no - no.” I could just hear someone saying: oh, I just love that play about your country and didn't you like Yul Brynner as the King?

So I called Charlie Whitehouse at his estate in Middleburg. He was not divorced then. He was still married to Molly and they both thought it would be a lark. He loved the idea and so did Molly, his wife. They came up to Washington. We had a little talk and I got him signed in as a WAE and we went through all this kind of stuff so he'd get paid and everything and this was in '81. We went for lunch to the Metropolitan Club and he briefed me about how you deal with Queens in Thailand. He also suggested that he could arrange for Jackie Onassis to give her a lunch when she visited New York. That was a master stroke. I then brought him into the State Department to brief all the people that were going to deal with her. I think he enjoyed it and in fact, the next year he went to work for the Defense Department on some project.

By this time the Queen was on the verge of arriving in Seattle. I decided that Charlie should meet her as she got off the plane. She would find the former Ambassador and his wife, whom she dearly loved, standing there to welcome her to America. I just thought it would set a nice tone and so he agreed to that. He went to Seattle and they then went to Salt Lake City together. She was just going to have a rest stop. Seattle was just a fly through. Salt Lake City was a rest stop.

I should also mention that when the Queen came every other year, there was always one particular guy from SY, now called DS, who always served as the head of her security detail. O'Donohue was furious that she was getting security, pointing out that the Thai Prime Minister, when he came to the US, didn't get an SY contingent. I foolishly argued for them, knowing they could do a lot of small favors for her that I didn't want to be responsible for. She had always had bodyguards on her visits. It was a mistake because

the guy who was assigned had been the head of her security detail, the SY guy for a number of times, tried to take over the whole visit and gave me a hard time.

Be that as it may, the Queen arrived and went to Salt Lake City for a few days, while Charlie Whitehouse went to Dallas where we got together for a planning dinner on the program. The Queen stopped in Salt Lake City two days, and she wanted to go skiing. She had skied a lot in her youth in Switzerland. She grew up in boarding schools in Switzerland. Her hosts there took her up to a nice mountain, I think out in Park City or somewhere in Utah, but there wasn't enough snow to ski, so she and the retinue had a snow-ball fight and apparently a nice lunch at a ski resort.

Then she came to Dallas, and Charlie and I were there to meet her again at the airport. The Queen was 49 years old, and she was quite impressive and regal. She was traveling with her youngest child, a daughter named Chulabhorn, known as Julie. She was in her early twenties and was a very interesting and well-educated young woman, very bright. She played the guitar. She and the Queen would sing Thai folk songs together. There were rumors that the princess had taken up with an unacceptable suitor and the Queen wanted to get her out of Thailand for a while to settle her down. She actually did get married in 1982, but was divorced only a few years later, and never remarried.

Now, it is interesting that, as I said, in Thailand every new generation of royal family children moves down one step in rank unless they are in the direct line of succession, i.e. Crown Prince or princess. So, if one of the members of the family, say one of these four children, accedes to the monarchy, then their whole line remains in rank. But the other children of the other members of that level of the royal family moved down one step in rank entirely. The royal couple had four children. The oldest, Ubol Ratana, a very beautiful girl, never liked palace life, never wanted to have anything to do with it from the beginning. She went to school in Thailand, then to MIT, got a degree in chemical engineering at MIT, married an oil man and became an American citizen and went to live in Newport Beach, California with her husband. At the time of the Queen's visit, she had given birth in California to a baby who then was five or six months old. When she left the royal family, she had to surrender all her status and titles and for a while there was a gulf between her and her family. But now there was a grandchild and so I had a suspicion that one reason the Queen was coming to Dallas was she wanted to see her.

The other daughter, Sirindhorn, was supposedly not very close to her mother, and was very much her father's daughter. She went with her father on all kinds of royal occasions. She really liked all the royal activities. When her sister left the palace, she may have hoped that if something happened to the one boy she would be the heir apparent. The Crown Princess. So far that hasn't happened. The next child of the King and Queen was the Crown Prince, Vajiralongkhorn, not at all like his father. He was a real bad actor, a fighter pilot, shoot-'em-up character. We had trained him to be a fighter pilot at one point. He was a good pilot, but he took on all the worst characteristics of the "Top Gun" type of guy. He was reportedly always getting in trouble, hanging around with criminals and other unsavory types. Although married, he also supposedly had dozens of mistresses.

Once the Crown Prince had gone into some restaurant and fired his pistol in the air when he didn't get the service he thought he was entitled to.

The King was endlessly wringing his hands about this and trying to get us to help straighten him out. O'Donohue again was dead set against that. But the King had one little ace in the hole – John Holdridge, the Assistant Secretary, had served in Bangkok, it was his first post. So, I had a feeling also that the Queen was going to put the arm on Holdridge to do something about the Crown Prince, about getting the Crown Prince out of Thailand for a while. The King also wanted to send him to the United States because there was criticism of the royal family after the April coup attempt, when the Queen had addressed the nation and told the people not to support the coup.

So, the Queen arrived off in Dallas, and Charlie and Molly Whitehouse and I greeted her and took her to her hotel. Well, it was all sweetness and light and everything nice there, at "the Mansion at Turtle Creek," a pretty nifty hotel. I was very happy I was on per diem. I think it was \$750 for a room in 1981 and she had a suite up on the top floor. Oh, yes, of course the security detail showed up. She was happy to see her former security guy; they really got along very well. The Agent in charge was a very urbane guy, but I could see there were problems coming because I wanted certain things done and I'm sure he wanted certain things done, so we had a little competition for the Queen's ear.

The first night she of course just collapsed into bed. That was a Wednesday. The second night was a Thursday and she was going to be feted at the Dallas Art Museum. I was not invited, which was okay, I don't remember why. Charlie Whitehouse went to that. During Thursday she was sort of resting up with her entourage. In fact, habitually, the Queen never arose until noon, why was that? Because they're a very hard working royal pair in Thailand. All day long they are out working. She is out doing volunteer stuff. She has her own Save the Children projects, plus the events where she has to accompany the King. One project was to rescue prostitutes and train them and give them a decent place in society. She was endlessly doing good works, but she also had her silk business, and the King of course had a tremendously full schedule. This was the 1980s, and all day long they were busy and in the evening they usually have some diplomatic event or some royal ceremony. Also, it appeared at that time that they were very much in love. There had never been a hint of scandal for either one of them in all their marriage years.

The outcome of that was that the only time they got to see each other alone was at 10:00 or 11:00 at night, and then they liked to listen to music and chat and see the children together. So, habitually every night, over their lives, they have gotten used to staying up to 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning together, and then she sleeps late in the morning. It was a sort of Thai thing and everyone worked around it. So the next morning I went with Charlie Whitehouse to brief the Neiman clan, the Marcus clan, the top level officials of the city of Dallas, including Mayor Jack Evans and anyone else who was going to come into contact with the Queen, about five or six main protocol points. One, do not mention the play/movie *The King and I* under any circumstances. Two, do not stand up when the Queen is seated, but do stand up when she comes into the room. If she beckons you to

come over, do not tower over her. Get your eyes down below hers, etc. The group all took it with very good form. Finally, do not toast the Queen. You can't toast the Queen. She cannot return a toast. You can only toast the King and then she can return the toast by toasting the President, but the King is the guy. She is a reflection of the King. It's just done that way. They took all that in and everything was fine.

That night she went to the affair at the Dallas Art Museum, which I understand, was held in a huge pillared Egyptian-type hypo-styled hall, the acoustics of which were very bad. No one could hear any conversation, and the Queen was a little bit unhappy because she was stuck at the end of the table, guests were sitting too far apart and so she never talked to anyone. She had a bad evening. A very bad evening.

Afterwards there was no dancing or any fun or anything like that. It ended at about 10:30 or 11:00 which is much earlier than the Queen liked to go to bed. So, what did she do? She got together with her SY security detail and said, I've heard there's a real good Western joint over in Fort Worth called Billy Bob's. I want to go over there and my daughter does, too. The daughter was a guitar player and liked Western country music and she'd heard about this place. So off they go. I didn't have a clue that this was going on, but with the SY guys I guess she was safe. Off to Fort Worth and the bar scene, and they had a glorious time. I wish I could have been along. It would have been great fun. They came back to the hotel at 4:00 in the morning after her night out and that's when I began to realize that how the Queen really viewed this American trip as an escape every other year. As a kind of "get out from under the palace" vacation and have a good time which was a very important insight. That was Thursday night.

On Friday Charlie and Molly Whitehouse left and I was on my own, protocol-wise. The Queen and her party toured the Neiman Marcus store, opened the exhibit and watched a fashion show. That night, Friday night, there was nothing planned for her, rest night. Saturday night was a dance at The Happy Valley Country Club. But Friday night, for some reason I can't remember, there was just nothing planned. I took my tennis racket and got directions to a local tennis court, and played a few sets of tennis. I went back and went to bed. At 12:30 am the phone rings. The Queen is hungry. She wants something to eat.

Okay, so I went up and talked to the Chancellor of the palace, Lord Poonperm, and the King's Private Secretary and nephew, Thongnai Thongyai, who was along on the trip. The Queen wanted Chinese food. As we're standing there an American man and a Thai woman carrying a baby come up and get out of the elevator. I took one look and I thought, my goodness it's the first grandchild, and it was she. A very emotional moment because we had the door open, and the Queen saw the child and cried. Everything was patched over. The oldest daughter was back in the family. It was great. But where was the Chinese food? I called the Dallas police protocol number and explained, and happily they knew about the Queen of Thailand. They said, don't worry about a thing. This happens all the time. We'll get a Chinese restaurant open for you. Just go to such and such an address. We collected this huge Chinese meal, took it back to the hotel and were up all

night eating Chinese food and playing with the grandchild. I had a great time. The Queen and her daughter were reconciled, which was a major step for the royal family.

The day after that was all family-oriented until the country club dance in the evening, a big dance and fashion show to which I was invited. After the fashion show was over a few people went out dancing. Now, in Charlie Whitehouse's briefing, he had mentioned that the Queen had to have the first dance. I certainly couldn't dance with her because I was not the ranking man present. That was Mayor Jack Evans of Dallas. He was standing at the bar downing a bourbon, the Longhorn Bar.

I went up to him and I said, Mr. Mayor, we have a diplomatic crisis here. The Queen is not dancing and this is the first dance and she has to be out there on the first dance and you're the ranking person. Gosh, he said, I can dance with the Queen? What do I do? I said, you just walk over there and bow and say, your majesty, may I have the honor of the first dance? He said, I don't know if I can do it. I said, yes you can and you better. He did and he went out there and had the first dance. I think the next person was the head of the museum or something, and then I had the third dance with the Queen. What a moment in my life, I tell you. After that we went back and she played with her grandchild all night again. The next day, Sunday, she toured the city with the Mayor's wife.

On Sunday night was the Marcus black tie/white tie dinner for the Queen at the Marcus residence, which was a much understated, quiet, pleasant, little ranch house. Many rooms, but not one of these huge ugly mansions that clog the suburban landscape now. It was quite elegant in its way, but it had a very Texas kind of ranch house look and feel, a nice clapboard white exterior. I really liked it. We got there a little early. So, Sunday night, there I was alone with the whole Nieman/Marcus entourage waiting at the residence for the Queen. I'm standing with Mrs. Marcus, a lovely lady, and up drives the Queen's party. She was supposed to arrive just with her daughter and a handful of palace officials. Instead a fleet of cars drives up. As she's getting out and we were greeting her, I see that there are dozens of Thai ladies getting out of the other cars. Of course the Marcuses were having a white tie, sit - down dinner with place cards and liveried servers. Then someone says to me, oh, the Queen thought this would be such a wonderful event that she just invited all her ladies in waiting to come along. Mrs. Marcus - I'll never forget - her hand was shaking. She said, what on earth do I do?

Now through all this Dallas visit the Thai Ambassador, of course, was present, a real disaster as are many older Southeast Asian Ambassadors. He'd gotten his position by family connections. He was utterly hopeless. He wasn't even obnoxious. At least if he was obnoxious and effective you could put up with him, but he wasn't even obnoxious let alone effective. Anyway, whenever any crisis like this came up with the Queen, if anything happened when she turned to him to ask him something, he magically evaporated. He wasn't there anymore. He just had this ability like a chameleon to blend in with everything so that he couldn't possibly get himself in trouble by saying or doing the wrong thing.

Then she turned the other way and I'd be standing there or this SY guy would be standing there, a very good, very smooth SY guy. So, the Thai Ambassador was hopeless. As Mrs. Marcus first turned to the Thai Ambassador and he disappeared. Then she turned to me. I said, Ma'am, this happens in Southeast Asia all the time. You find the people come hours late with hundreds of people you never knew were coming. I'm sure you have some card tables around? Well, yes. I said, just set up a few card tables in the library. The Thai will sort it all out by order of precedence and they'll take care of the whole thing. Some people will eat in there. You may have to send out for some Thai food. I can't do that. I said of course you can. That's the only thing to do.

I didn't know if this was the right idea, but what else are you going to do, put them back in their cars, tell them they've got to go home? Do that to a Thai? Out of the question. Set them up in the study. What about the order of precedence? Then I turned to the Thai Ambassador hoping he could sort that out. But as I had said, he quickly disappeared. Then I went to the Lord Chancellor of the palace. He was rather drunk. So finally I said, all right, give me a list of these people's names. You go here and you go here and so forth. They were all perfectly happy wherever I put them. It all sorted itself out.

Before the dinner we toured the Marcus house and his collection of pre-Columbian art and tiny books. He has the world's leading collection of tiny books, which he had, in a tiny library with tiny shelves. It was marvelous, the Queen loved it. We got to the dinner and it was all nice. I was not at the head table, thank God. The Queen was up there at the head table. The dinner was soon over and I'm sitting there thinking this visit has been a big success. But then Mr. Marcus stands up and, after having been told not to toast the Queen, he gives a long glorious toast to the Queen and then he sits down. Nobody moves. Chancellor Poonperm was by this time, after many drinks, was just totally out, and the Ambassador was sitting across the table from me. I said, Mr. Ambassador, you have to stand up and toast the President and he said, I can't because nobody has toasted the King. I said, well, you stand up and toast the King. Oh no, I don't know what the Queen would think of that, he said. I said, all right, I'll do it. So I stood up and toasted the King of Thailand. Luckily I pronounced his name right. I didn't know all the rest of it, but I gave a long glowing toast about his majesty, not only a great monarch, but an engineer, and how important he's been in the relationship between our two countries. Then the Queen stood up and toasted the President. It was all wrong but nobody really cared. That was the end of the dinner.

The next morning, Monday morning, she was going to meet with the Thai community at a traditional and beautiful old Western hotel; the place to stay since 1890 and still flawlessly kept up. It's the only place in town where they had a huge ballroom. The royal party was expecting a large group of Thai, since there were many working in the oil business, plus a lot of Thai students studying oil engineering at Texas A&M and other schools in Dallas. As we go into this large ballroom, there were at least 1,200 Thai present, and all the Thai rushed forward to greet her, the Queen. Now, perhaps she was used to this, but the security guys didn't expect that many people, so they positioned themselves between the crowd and the four or five of us and pushed us behind them

against the wall in a bit of a crush, all of us pushed close together.

Finally everything was back under control and we all sit down, on the carpet, very nice, there was a traditional welcoming ceremony there for the Queen. After that she went to the dais with her daughter, made a few remarks, and then she and her daughter played folksongs on the guitar, and all the Thai sang together in a very moving way. The Queen then asked if there were any questions. There are a couple of innocuous questions and then a Thai student standing in the back, got the microphone and asked: "Why is it that you made a broadcast to the Thai nation about during the coup, when the monarchy under the constitution does not get involved in politics? You violated the constitution. Why did you do that?" What a question. The Queen gives some very nice answer, all in Thai of course. Gives a very nice answer and everyone seems to calm down and there are no more questions.

Afterwards I asked the King's nephew and private secretary, Thongnai Thongyai, about the question. He served basically as the King's special assistant for foreign affairs, basically the King's own Foreign Minister, a young guy, and my age. He was along and he was kind of my interlocutor on this whole thing, but he hadn't been at the Marcus dinner for whatever reason. I asked him what was going on and he said, oh, nothing, it was just such an interesting question, you know. At that point the Queen came over and as we were chatting with her I wanted to say something nice. I said, oh, Your Majesty, Mr. Thongnai translated your remarks for me. Your answer was so convincing, I'm sure it solved that gentleman's problem with that question. She just sort of smiled sweetly and said thank you. Afterwards to Thongnai I said, your Queen really came across very well. The guy didn't ask another question. Yes, he said, I'm not surprised. It sounded a bit ominous so I shut up after that. So that was the end of the Dallas meeting with the Thai community, and it went well.

The Queen and her party had been booked on commercial air to fly to Washington next, among other things to meet Mrs. Reagan, but she had gotten sick on the flight from Salt Lake City, so . . .

Q. This is tape 19, side one with Dick Howland. Yes?

HOWLAND: She wanted a private plane. I was told she had gotten ill, but I think she just had had enough of riding around in big commercial planes that weren't Royal Thai Airways. Then too possibly the crowd pressing forward that morning had unnerved her a little. After that was over, the Queen asked me, is there anyway you can get a private plane? Doesn't the State Department have planes? I said, no, the State Department does not have planes. Well, she said, when General Kriangsak was here last year or the year before, he flew all around the country on Air Force One. No, I said. I don't know what he did, but I know he didn't fly around on Air Force One. Air Force One is only the designation for the President; any plane that the President flies on is Air Force One.

Well, can't you find a private plane for me?

I didn't know what to do. Charlie Whitehouse wasn't there and there was almost nobody I could turn to. She was leaving the next day, and my going to the NSC or the military would take too long. When in doubt, turn to the CIA. I called a retired station chief whom I knew in Laos, and he arranged with a former Air America pilot, who had started a small charter airline in Tennessee, to send a small jet. The Queen had gone off to pack, and we were all at the airport at 4:00 p.m. I then called my wife and told her I was coming back on this plane. After a few minutes in a private room . .

Q: The VIP room?

HOWLAND: I guess. The plane arrived and we boarded with a small group; the others in the entourage went commercial. We flew to National on this day. I had called my wife and told her where I was coming in because my wife had been going out to go meet us at the gate at Dulles and I didn't want her going out there.

My wife came to general aviation terminal at National instead, and I think Dan O'Donohue came from the State Department. My wife had wanted my daughters, one of whom was born in Thailand, to meet the Queen. She stopped and talked to them for three or four minutes, very gracious. It was a very nice arrival, and she thanked me for getting the plane. To this day I don't know who paid for it.

Off we went to the Hay Adams where she was staying. That evening was some kind of big affair. I can't remember what it was. Somebody was giving some event for her, perhaps the Thai Ambassador. In any event she was now the property of State Protocol, and my escort duty was over.

The next day she called on Mrs. Reagan, about 40 minutes with Nancy, which is more than most people got. I was living in fear, but apparently it went very well. We took her to the Congress, where she met Senator Lugar, the chairman of the foreign relations committee. Then she did various good works, went to the Red Cross, a foundation for disabled children, and so forth. She was a little upset that she didn't get to stay in Blair House, but I explained to her that really, only guests on State Visits stay there, which is not always true.

Oh, I forgot one last thing about the Queen's visit. The Queen did get to see John and Martha Holdridge. She was desperate to see Martha Holdridge and made a long appeal to somehow straighten out the Crown Prince, her favorite child and the heir to the throne. If I recall, he had impregnated his mistress and she was going to file a paternity suit if he didn't marry her. He was actually living with her. The royal family couldn't take it anymore and the official wife had gone to the King and pleaded for a divorce, but was refused. After the Queen left, the Assistant Secretary told me to try to find a place to stash the Crown Prince of Thailand in the United States until the big scandal blew over in Thailand.

So after many phone calls, the Pentagon agreed to send him to advanced pilot training

some place in Florida. Jim Lilley and Dick Childress at the NSC arranged for that. But that was a mistake because he could go out on the town and have a good time in Florida, and was throwing money around. Rumors were getting in the press about his behavior. We then sent him out to Arizona to some flight school out there, where he would learn how to fly F - 4s. As it turned out, he made friends with a couple of very solid U.S. Air Force instructor pilots, who didn't exactly make an honest man out of him, but almost. They really sat him down and gave him a good talking-to, saying if you don't knock it off, boy, we're going to really put you through the wringer at this base. You want to be an F4 pilot, you are going to behave and not cause any trouble in this area. He not only took it, he loved it. Nobody had ever talked to him like that before.

When the Crown Prince went back to Thailand he was a different person. I met him at the Thai Embassy in Washington before he went back, and he seemed perfectly fine. He did not get in trouble after he returned and did marry the mistress. They worked all that out and he's still the Crown Prince and I hope he's been a pretty solid guy since then. I don't know who those unnamed air force officers were down in Arizona, but they made a man out of him at last, not a spoiled brat. That actually worked out pretty well.

That was the last basic thing in the Queen's visit, her getting Martha Holdridge to tell John Holdridge to do something about the Crown Prince. That event kind of typifies the relationship we do have with Thailand. The fact that we did do things like that, not only for Thailand, for other countries and things like that, really gives you an insight into the penetrating nature of the American role in the world which is as you know has always been the case. No country on earth can forego taking the views of the United States of America seriously. Every country has to think, what is the American view on this. Not only because of our power, but because of the many relationships, the interface we've had with every country on earth as you know. Just the consular thing alone. Just the fact that everyone in the world wants to come to the United States of America has to make a new life and that's part of our responsibility. We can't just run away from that responsibility even though it's very costly at times in blood and treasure. We shaped up the Crown Prince of Thailand, at least for a while. He wasn't an embarrassment during the rest of my time.

Q: Not on your watch.

HOWLAND: Not on my watch, right. Anyway, then the Queen and her party went off to Boston and then New York. She was leaving to go back to Europe and then back to Thailand. Dan O'Donohue and I went up and saw her off. She gave me a lovely autographed picture, which I still have to this day and off she went. That was the end of my brief brush with royalty.

I should mention that when I went to Thailand a few months later in January, 1982, occasionally a Thai would come up to me and say, I know you, you are Mr. Thai desk. I'd say, I beg your pardon. Oh, he would say, I saw you with the Queen and then with Prime Minister Prem. Of course her trip was filmed by Thai TV and the TV commentator would

ask some one who I was, and would be told that I was the guy from the Thai desk at the State Department. Everybody knew the State Department Thai desk, so I became Mr. Thai desk with the Queen, always standing with the Queen wherever she went. Many people all over Thailand said to me – I know you, you are Mr. Thai desk. I was surprised no one asked for an aid program or even a visa.

Meanwhile Thailand was sort of falling apart. There were all kinds of coup rumors. A rogue battalion had moved in at one point and seized some of the telecommunications buildings, but the attempt fizzled. Prime Minister Prem's position was said to be really very shaky. Only the fact that the King was still behind Prem was sort of keeping him in office.

At the conclusion of the Queen's visit the relationship, the U.S. relationship which had been rocky after the end of the Laos war, and the refugee crisis, was just settling down to a kind of uneasy balance. But the Queen's visit had been positive and I was very happy that I had gone along and sort of made sure that nothing was going to crop up and be a distraction. And after that, back to back almost, we had the prime minister of Thailand coming so that we could try to sort of build a little glow of American support around him to give him a little more clout in office. He turned out to be a very bright guy, a very interesting man in many ways.

Q: Prime Minister Prem's visit.

HOWLAND: In the fall of '81.

Q: In the fall of '81 and we'll continue from there. You've already talked about the queen's visit. Great.

Q: Today is the 10th of December, 2002. Okay, Dick, we're off to Thailand. We'll talk about Prem's visit now.

HOWLAND: Yes, General Prem Tinsulanonda had become Prime Minister of Thailand through some curious circumstances involving a "quiet coup" against his predecessor General Kriangsak. I think I talked a little bit about that and the royal family's role, and how they liked his presence. Prem was believed to be a homosexual, but I never saw any evidence of that. He had no children and had been relatively uncorrupt, which is pretty unusual for a Thai general. When he first came into civilian government, however, he had a reputation as a kind of meek, nice apolitical general who'd kind of risen to the top by keeping his mouth shut and smiling sweetly. He was Defense Minister when Kriangsak resigned in February, 1980, and before that a regional commander or something like that.

The royal family really liked him. He knew how to relate to them, knew the terms of address. He was very smooth with dealing with the royal family, sort of your classic

pleasant Thai. There was another army General, I believe he was named Arthit, who was sort of the power of the day. He was a more typical Thai political general, and when Prem became Prime Minister, Arthit became the head of the army. Prem also put someone related to the King in some way as the Bangkok garrison commander, which was the single most significant job in the military – the guy who commanded the Bangkok regiment. The way the coups and politics were played, he who controlled Bangkok had his hand on the throat of Thailand. It was expected that eventually Arthit would take control, and that Prem was an interim figure, someone who is put up there until things quieted down to give the Government a good image. A nice guy, he's not corrupt and so forth, he'll be Prime Minister for a while. As I said he became the longest serving Prime Minister in the history of Thailand.

I recall the economy was a real mess. They had all kinds of great economic problems. The baht, or "tical" which for years had been worth a nickel – "a tical is a nickel" – i.e. twenty to the dollar, had started to decline on the world markets. The government tried to prop it up and there were all kinds of concerns. The Thai government under Prem finally accepted an official devaluation of the dollar which of course helped Thai exports and had all kinds of benefits like that, but psychologically it was a blow to many Thai. Of course it didn't help their bank accounts much since they would have to pay more to exchange their Thai currency for dollars.

There was an uproar and mild riots in the streets. Prem finally went on television, this mild, meek little man and said, well I don't know very much about economics. I'm an army general, but I really listened to the secretary of state for finance on this matter and he persuaded me that it would be beneficial for the country to do this. I'm sorry so many people are upset and I'm firing the secretary of state for finance. He won't have another job in my administration, he's finished. Just like that. Within hours everything was calm and everybody said, that funny little guy, just fired him like that.

I thought, hmmm, perhaps we've got another Suharto here, how interesting. So either Dan and I wondered if perhaps when Prem came to give a speech to the UN in November, as he was scheduled to do, we could offer him a few days "working visit" in Washington, e.g. meet the Secretary and perhaps a lunch with the President. It would not be an official visit. It would be a working visit. State visits, official visits, were out because Prem at that time didn't have the stature or the proven durability in coup-prone Bangkok. The NSC was also aware that he was probably gay, which wouldn't sit well with the Reagan White House. So, a working visit. Both O'Donohue and Holdridge liked the idea.

As it turned out, Prem to this day is the longest surviving Prime Minister in the history of Thailand. I think he lasted 11 years or something. So, that visit, that working visit, was the thing that started his tenure, and he did a superb job. It turned out that since he had no family, he had no hangers on, and he was totally uninterested in anything except doing a good job for his country. He didn't want a whole lot of money. When he retired, he had less money than when he went into the Prime Ministership. A funny little guy, but very bright in many ways, and a superb politician as it turned out. I was around him an awful

lot on that visit and I got to know him very well. He called me “Mr. Thai desk” like the Queen.

Prem had in fact been pressing his Foreign Minister Siddhi, for an official visit to the US. The White House was kind of up to its ears in official visits during this fall of 1981. Jim Lilley was the National Security Council advisor for East Asia. He didn’t think much of the idea of Prem coming. The agency felt Prem was just an interim guy and he was on his way out. O’Donohue kind of shared that a little bit. I felt Prem was someone we ought to put a few chips on. If I recall correctly I think Rich Armitage also being an ex-military guy thought highly of Prem.

Q: Early Reagan White House.

HOWLAND: Early Reagan White House, imperial presidency. This is Reagan making decisions on who came to the White House. Finally through some mysterious alchemy, I don’t know if we did it through Schultz’s wife’s, Schultz’s private secretary or somebody, but something clicked and they said, well, if Prem comes to give a speech at the UN, let’s say in November, we’ll give him a lunch with the President in Washington. He can come down, drive down from New York, have a lunch 11:30 to 1:00 with the President so he’ll get pictures and he’ll get exposures and he’ll chat with the President and then that’s it. That’s all we’ll give him. It’s not an official visit. We’ll call it a working visit. We had planned a working visit. So the White House agreed to that. John Holdridge, I went to John Holdridge who, when he felt you were right, he really supported the staff. He was a wonderful man. I said to John, you know, the thing about Prem is, first he’s not corrupt, two he’s not connected with drugs in anyway and three, he’s very pro-American. Now he may fall in which case some other “tweedle dee or tweedle dum” will come up, but why don’t we help him out a little and see if we’ve got a stayer here. I sent a paper up to SS for Larry Eagleburger, the Under-Secretary, and lobbied his aide, Darryl Johnson, his East Asia guy, so Larry agreed.

Meanwhile, while all this was going on, by the way, the Vietnamese were sending little patrols across the border into Thai villages and so forth. I felt it was really time, we had sent some guns out there, some cannons, which the Thai had hidden so they wouldn’t get the Vietnamese mad. They might really do something bad. I thought it was kind of time. We ought to stand up to this. O’Donohue was a little nervous because he was quite nervous about Indochina about rekindling the Vietnamese war hysteria, the Congress would say we were trying to start the Indochina war all over again and that was in ‘81, it was still very fresh. The boat people were still coming out.

Q: O’Donohue was what?

HOWLAND: He was the DAS for Southeast Asia.

Q: Okay, deputy assistant secretary.

HOWLAND: Right.

Q: You were what?

HOWLAND: I was the Thai country director. We started chipping away at the White House. The first chip was why can't Prem come down here and stay overnight? Okay, he can come down and stay overnight. How about Blair House? All right, we'll give him Blair House one night. Well, how about he can't really, if he leaves the lunch, what is he going to do? Go and get on a plane? Yes, he's going to absolutely go and get on a plane and get out of here. He's going to give a speech in Dallas to the oilmen, since Thailand had an offshore natural gas reserve and pipeline and there was interest in that. So, he'll have to go there. Okay, well, he can spend the night before at Blair House. How about a press conference at Blair House afterwards? Okay, he can have a press conference at Blair House afterwards. Well, that will probably run late. Can we get him there another night? All right you can have him there another night, but that's it. This is when Blair House wasn't being used; you could get Blair House. Finally I think we got him three nights at Blair House. The rest of the Thai stayed up at I think the Shoreham. They didn't want to stay in official quarters because they wanted to go out to the bars and nightclubs needless to say, which was kind of interesting. I'll get into that in a minute.

Then it came down to when the visit started, very soon, in early November actually. Prem flew in from New York, I guess, and we were standing at the airport or we had just gotten to Blair House. We were standing in the foyer of Blair House. He was just terribly pleased. He said you know, my predecessor, General Kriangsak, when he came here to see the President, the President gave him an airplane to fly around the United States. Air Force One. I explained that it wasn't Air Force One. It's only Air Force One when the President is in it. So, he said, well, yes, he got an airplane and I'm not getting an airplane to fly out to Dallas to give my speech. So, I said, well, you see your predecessor was on an official visit. He was official. You're just here on a working visit for a lunch with the President. We already got you Blair House.

He said, well, I don't think the Thai people will distinguish between my predecessor's official visit and my working visit and all they're going to say is, General Kriangsak, when he was Prime Minister, the Americans liked him so much and supported him so much they gave him Air Force One to fly around the country and they're not giving to Prem. Frankly, Mr. Thai Desk – I was introduced to him as Dick Howland from the Thai desk and he didn't catch the name, but he knew Thai desk, so he called me Mr. Thai desk. So, Mr. Thai desk, I'm afraid that in the next few weeks when you're working away, you'll get a cable from your Embassy saying that General Prem has just been overthrown because the Americans didn't support him.

On his mind was the fact that when Kriangsak was forced to resign, the story was that Mort Abramowitz could have picked up the phone and saved him, but didn't because Kriangsak was tied to drugs, and because he hadn't always given Mort what Mort wanted on the refugee crisis. Anyway, Prem said to me, I really would rather have an airplane to

fly around in.

So, I'll digress into this because it's interesting. Out in front of Blair House, O'Donohue, John Holdridge, Rich Armitage, Jim Lilley and some various other hangers-on were standing – we had all just come from the airport where we picked him up. He flew in a little plane to that terminal; you know that little jet aviation terminal there? I went out and I said to them, Prem really wants to fly to Dallas in a Presidential airplane because he said Kriangsak had done it. He's afraid if he doesn't get the same treatment that Kriangsak had – that's why the Thai wanted Blair House – then he'll get back to Bangkok and the average Thai person is going to say, the Americans don't like Prem and immediately all the generals are going to start scheming.

Holdridge immediately said, absolutely right. He should have an airplane. We should get him an airplane. He turned to Lilley, who had been the station chief when Bush was ambassador to China, and John Holdridge was DCM. So, he turned to Lilley and said, can't you call the Pentagon and get Prem an airplane? So, Lilley said, all right, but State is going to have to pay for it. Holdridge said, fine, we'll pay for it.

O'Donohue then says to me, you've just created a ticking time bomb – as always . O'Donohue knew far more about the workings of government on things like this. So, Lilley called the next day and said, all right you've got an airplane, where do you want it to go? He got a deal with this one guy who did airplanes in the Pentagon. I forget his name. He was wonderful. He got me C- 5s to fly cannons and other equipment to Thailand. He'd get crews on short notice for flights. He really was a super guy. I called him and it got all worked out that Prem was going to get a Presidential plane, one in the fleet probably a small one, a Boeing -737, and they'd chopper him out to Andrews, he got the whole panoply. He'd get on the plane with Thai TV filming all this and that's what he needed absolutely. He was absolutely right and I was absolutely right.

That afternoon we called on Secretary Haig with Siddhi, the Foreign Minister of course. Haig had his briefing book. Prem had no briefing book. We had briefed Siddhi. Prem didn't say very much, and as usual they started with chatty things. Finally, Haig said, I want you to know we're giving you full support and we are going to give this and that, and Prem said, we need more howitzers. We'd just given them a dozen! We said okay, you need more howitzers. It made you realize that again underneath this sweet exterior as with all Thai, there's always a little dagger lurking there to get what they want. That was the Haig meeting. And of course that's what prompted Weinberger deciding that he was going to talk to Prem as well.

Q: Because you had the Haig vs. Weinberger rivalry.

HOWLAND: Yes, possibly, and also the airplane scheduler had to get the clearance from the OSD, office of the Secretary of Defense. Perhaps Someone in the office of the Secretary of Defense decided that Casper Weinberger should go and have a call on the Prime Minister. We were delighted with this. Of course we had to arrange it at the last

minute. The next morning before the lunch at the White House, to which I was too lowly to be invited, Weinberger was going to call on him, some early hour of the morning. Then we were going to do a press conference in the afternoon after the lunch and then the Thai were going to go off at quiet time which meant they go out and hit the bars.

That morning Casper Weinberger comes for the call on him and everybody is there. Armitage is there. Weinberger was kind of a stiff and formal guy. The Thai are such fun. It was a pleasant event. We were kind of nervous about it. Of course Weinberger had his briefing book. Prem had nothing. Not a piece of paper. Weinberger was going through it and he's listing all the neat things we're going to do. When he was all through it reminded me of that wonderful New Yorker cartoon, the famous Christmas cartoon. A little boy is sitting surrounded by mounds of packages and presents, with a Christmas tree in the background, just hundreds of things. He's about this high and there are all these presents and he's looking up to his parents and he's saying: "Is that all?" That's what came next, as follows.

Finally Weinberger said, in case you need to knock down any Vietnamese aircraft that might overfly your territory, we're going to give you some "Red Eye" missiles, the army Red Eye AAA missiles. We've identified some in excess at an arsenal. Without batting an eye, Prem replies: "what about Stingers?"

For Weinberger, this wasn't in the script at all. This was in '81, of course, and we had been giving the highly effective Stinger missile to the Afghan resistance. Prem had obviously read that. His staff, his aides were shaking their heads, this had come right out of Prem. Weinberger said, well, you know, the Stingers are kind of in short supply. The Red Eyes are pretty good. Prem said, no, the Red Eyes can only fire this and do that and they can't attract this, they're easily decoyed away from the target. Who knew if this was right, but he laid the whole thing out.

Weinberger said, well, certainly we'll look into the Stingers. Prem said, we have to provide a solid front to the Vietnamese here, so we've got to have a kind of armament which is at least as good as what you're giving people elsewhere in the world. He said this not in a forceful way as I'm doing now. He said, I'm so happy to be here and it is such an honor for me, etc., in his lovely Thai manner, just very charming. Weinberger sort of said, well, okay, we'll see what we can do. Armitage subsequently did get them some Stingers, which was good. That finished the meeting.

They went to the lunch. I wasn't at the lunch. O'Donohue just said the lunch was fine. It was kind of a Reagan lunch. What do you do at a Reagan lunch? You don't get into the details or anything. There everyone was on their very best behavior, the President of the United States. There were pictures and all that kind of stuff. Afterwards we had the press conference. Prem started, it was in Blair House, that large anteroom, have you been in Blair House?

Q: No.

HOWLAND: There is one larger press conference room and there must have been 50 Thai journalists there. Fifty Thai television and movie cameras, everything. Somebody from the Times or the Post, nobody else had stakes in the American press, but never mind. We walked in. I was inside and Prem walked in and first Siddhi spoke a few words, and then he introduced Prem. The first thing Prem said, after saying hello and I'm happy to be here, was I would like to introduce to the Thai people the man who has been responsible for this visit, Mr. Thai Desk. Would you please come out Mr. Thai Desk? Happily I was properly dressed. I walked out and he put his arm in mine. He said, Mr. Thai Desk has been so terrific. He's just facilitated everything. I'm going to be flying Air Force One to Dallas. Prem listed gave his whole schedule of visits, Haig, Weinberger, everything. He said he had had dinner with the President.

Of course he wanted this account going back to Thailand, and of course it would be sent right back. Within hours they'd have it on TV and over satellite and all that good stuff. He gave about three or four minutes and turned to me. I was totally unprepared and I said we're very proud and honored to have the Prime Minister here. He's already proven he's a great leader for Thailand, the usual kind of stuff. Then I went off stage – and actually I think I was the only State Department official there. I don't think O'Donohue was there, but he was not totally happy when he heard about it. But when I went to Thailand in January of the following year, at least 50 people all over the country must have come up to me and said, I saw you on television. You're Mr. Thai Desk. Prem was very nice and I thought, this is a great politician. This guy's really going to last – he certainly won me over.

That was that. The next morning we all went to Andrews. We were supposed to drive, while he would get in the chopper. But I think, as it turned out, he didn't get a chopper, we got a Presidential limousine and a police escort which in some ways is more impressive for the cameras. Then he got on the plane. The next day we went to Andrews. He flew down to Dallas. He saw the Thai community, a big Thai community in Dallas for some reason. Went to Los Angeles, saw the Thai there. I'm trying to think if there were any other interesting things from that visit. I don't think he ever went to Boston. There's a large Thai community in Boston.

Prem was the longest serving Prime Minister in Thai history. He is still head of the King's Privy Council and a bit player in Thai politics. Since Prem left, Prime Ministers of Thailand have been in my opinion unmitigated disasters. They've all been crooked or weak, or too strong or whatever, but Prem I think was the best. I'm not boasting because if Holdridge hadn't backed me up at all these times, nothing would have happened – and Dan did too, really, and got me promoted, so I'm grateful to both of them. but I was very happy and I was doing what a good desk officer did which is thinking ahead and thinking of ways to serve our goals as well as bolster the relationship for the future. That was the end of the Prem visit, and helped solidify his position internally.

Q: How did this the problem of the Cambodian Border with the refugees, the Vietnamese

troops there and so forth, affect Thailand internally?

HOWLAND: Yes, the internal situation in Thailand was strongly affected by the many aspects of the Cambodian border issue – (1) the effort by John Negroponte to put together the Khmer coalition government at the UN, (2) the Thai support for the Khmer Rouge against the Vietnamese occupying Cambodia, and (3) of course the crisis - level number of refugees – Thai and Vietnamese in camps on both sides of the border. I'll take those up in order.

The first thing that came up really was the formation of the Khmer coalition government, put together at the UN session in September of 1981, but not finally established for months afterward. At that UN session, remember, in those years the Khmer Rouge still held the Cambodian seat at the UN. They had never been kicked out of that seat. They acceded to it by conquest in '75 and they still held it. The DPRK, Democratic Peoples Republic of Kampuchea, delegation was led by Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, and all these murderous Khmer Rouge types. Of course we never could deal directly with them. You couldn't look at them, or shake hands with them, even though they would be part of the shadowy and shaky coalition government we were trying to put together as a counterfoil to the government set up in Phnom Penh by the successful Vietnamese invaders in 1979.

At the time, Al Haig was the Secretary of State, John Holdridge was Assistant Secretary for the East Asia bureau, and John Negroponte set the policy for Indochina. All of them had worked for Kissinger during the denouement of the Vietnam War. Frankly, there was no way on earth they were going to acquiesce to the takeover of Cambodia by the Vietnamese, no matter that in humanitarian terms the takeover had expelled the Khmer Rouge who were murdering the population, and had murdered their own cadre in the factional infighting. Never mind all that. Only years later did the desire for revenge back-handedly become clear to me when one of the players, whom I met on the street, said “ I'm glad it's finally time to stop punishing the Vietnamese, I think.”

But the Vietnamese take-over of Cambodia also upset the apple cart vis-à-vis the overall balance of power in Southeast Asia. That was probably the most important factor for the ASEAN countries, although they had not accepted the Khmer Rouge itself, and Cambodia was not a member of ASEAN. But nevertheless after the Khmer Rouge takeover in '75, the Vietnam victory the same year, the rest of Southeast Asia had banded together in ASEAN. Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations had created a kind of stable balance in the area. ASEAN was not unhappy with the Vietnamese being in power in Vietnam itself because it kept the Chinese on their toes.

As you know, when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in December of 1978, the Chinese sent forces down into North Vietnam where they got their clocks cleaned. The Vietnamese fought just as ably then as they did a few years earlier, and the Chinese pulled back. In fact, they got beat up badly. The Chinese army was no longer a fighting army. They were still using the stuff they'd used in Korea. Of course the Vietnamese still had

their brand new Soviet stuff. But when Vietnamese forces moved to the border of Thailand for the first time in recent history, the buffer between two great antithetical civilizations was erased.

The history is quite interesting. From the fall of the Khmer empire to the Thai in 1431, until the inception of the European colonial system in the mid 19th Century, there were 400 years of warfare between the Thai peoples and the Vietnamese peoples, with the Lao and the Cambodians kind of caught in the middle. The Thai and the Vietnamese had come from the north and soon became the most the dominant and vigorous peoples on that part of the peninsula. So, the colonial period had put a blanket over this for the time being by creating Laos and Cambodia. Then the British took Burma, and the British and the French agreed Thailand would be remain independent although the French would run their customs service, the British would run the railroads and so forth. It maintained stability because the British then had Malaysia, and the Dutch had Indonesia, and we the Philippines. World War II changed all that, of course.

When the Vietnamese moved in 1979, following the Khmer Rouge like good combat commanders, it was the first time since, I don't know, perhaps 1810 that the Vietnamese had been right on the Thai border. PAVN main force units were perhaps 80 miles from Bangkok, looking down a wide open invasion route highly suitable for armored warfare. That's why both we and the ASEANs agreed on creating some kind of bulwark against further pressure from the Vietnamese. Thailand itself has a large Vietnamese population, in Northeast Thailand. We had to dispel the Vietnamese idea that they could just push over Thailand with a flick of the wrist. Actually we weren't as worried at their pushing over Thailand, as we were Thailand sort of declaring neutrality. Remember in '81 we're still in the midst of the Cold War. It was when the Chinese were still in an aggressive kind of communist mode. The Russians were trying to create a strong Vietnamese state as a barrier to the Chinese. The Russians wanted to use . . .

Q: Cam Ranh Bay.

HOWLAND: Cam Ranh Bay, that's right and all that. It was the era of Brezhnev with the so-called "greater collective security sphere in Asia," initiative, whatever that meant.

Q: The Russians, the Soviets had moved into Afghanistan, showing more of an aggressive power than defensive.

HOWLAND: That's absolutely right. That's absolutely correct. Of course in those years, the Indians were always considered a kind of quasi-Russian satellite and we were kind of defending Pakistan being squished between them, that kind of thing. It was a kind of a dicey time. It was decided at the highest levels that we had to create some kind of Khmer resistance, something, even if it was only a token. The policy which was never stated, never stated, was fundamentally in my opinion that we would get some non-communist Khmer groups and assist them with the understanding that a certain amount of what we gave them would be bled off to the Khmer Rouge troops, okay, so the Khmer Rouge

would get some bullets basically. And that was to persuade the Vietnamese to give in? Once again, we under-estimated the patience and resolve of the Vietnamese. Sometime I'll tell you about my conversation with Henry Kissinger about that.

We and ASEAN wanted to put together a coalition that would bring together the non-communist supporters of Sihanouk, the former leader of Cambodia who was up in Beijing, with the intellectuals who had survived the Khmer Rouge, gathered in a faction called the KPNLF, and the residual fighting forces of the Khmer Rouge. His family, the royal family and the people who were still supporting Sihanouk were important, and in Cambodia among the Cambodians his prestige and charisma were still very much alive, operational. The Khmer people themselves had very few competent officials who were still left and who knew what they were doing, and did not have any real fighting forces. The fact that this policy benefited and, in a way, absolved them, meant the Khmer Rouge issue was finessed. It was hoped that, at a suitable time after if the coalition government won, the Khmer Rouge leaders would fade away, and the followers would be absorbed into a new Cambodia. We had the impression that or we thought that at some point Sihanouk would take over the government. We hoped the Vietnamese would be forced to pull back by the pressure of world opinion and then someone would indict the top Khmer Rouge leaders and all the little Khmer Rouge would just fade away into the countryside. That was the idea. That was the whole plan, it was to put the fighters under this coalition government, and it was totally cynical.

Q: Were you doing this while you were at the UN?

HOWLAND: I'm giving you the lead - up to the policy in 1981 to put together this coalition government. Then since the UN general session brought together all the *dramatis personae*, the Thai, ASEAN, both factions of the non-communist Cambodians who were trying to get that UN seat away from the Khmer Rouge, and the Khmer Rouge who held the UN seat at the UN, all under the auspices of the UN, that would be the place to have everybody get together and formulate some sort of agreement forming a coalition government. What did we call it? It became the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge insisted on that. With our never talking to, or getting involved with, or dealing with the Khmer Rouge, as the United States of America, that aspect would all be handled through the Thai and Chinese.

One of the problems we had on this was that of revenge, of course; many of the people in the non-communist Cambodian groups and their families, their children had been murdered by the Khmer Rouge. On the one hand we were trying to bundle them together with the Khmer Rouge, because you needed to have viable fighting forces on the ground if you were going to negotiate the Vietnamese out of Cambodia. They were the only chip we could have brought to the table, and said you pull out your troops and we'll demobilize the Khmer Rouge. But without something to demobilize, if we had just gone in and said, say, suppose Sihanouk and his group, and the KPNLF, would form a little exiled government, with no fighting forces, no one would have paid attention to them, not in Southeast Asia. If you ain't got the guns, you ain't got a government. You had to have

the Khmer Rouge muscle and moxie, but the USG couldn't work with them. That's the nexus of the policy dilemma of how to go about this. And in the end, it never worked.

Even if it didn't work, the AEEAN countries won because they had preoccupied the situation with a new stable balance which protected them in the sense that they could go about and do their business. They didn't have to worry about the Chinese coming down and getting involved with their indigenous Chinese populations because they could always sort of crank the Vietnamese up and do some of these kinds of things.

The KPRLF and the Sihanouk groups – I think the latter was called something like “Funcipec” – were very weak reeds, however. One was headed by a doddering old man Son Sann, who had been Sihanouk's corrupt Finance Minister when I was there in 1961-63. The other by Sihanouk's weak son, Ranariddh. So John Negroponte was desperately trying to hold the thing together even enough we all knew as far as fighters went, the only fighters were the Khmer Rouge and yet the American government could not be seen to be associated with helping, to be supporting in any way as a matter of our national conscience, the Khmer Rouge.

We had to do what we could for the Khmer resistance and keep that implicit Khmer Rouge there. Now you can argue on the wisdom of this policy because in the end the Vietnamese won. Heng Samrin, who was the Vietnamese puppet dictator, or his immediate successor, Hun Sen, after the Vietnamese invaded in Christmas week of 1978, now 30 years later is still the dictator. The non-communists are just as weak and flaccid now as they were then. So, who won? The Vietnamese won of course. Anyway, this was the beginning of it all, but I hope someone who's writing something on it someday will find my account useful.

The other important part of this was the role of the Chinese and our relationship with Beijing. The Chinese of course were supporting the Khmer Rouge. The Chinese had always supported the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge were their ace in the hole against the Vietnamese. For example, if the Vietnamese caused them, the Chinese, any trouble in Laos, in North Vietnam along that soft tribal underbelly of China, Beijing could crank up the Khmer Rouge, but not too much, not so much that the Vietnamese would go into Thailand, because the Thai and the Chinese were very close all through this. That might really get involved in another war and they couldn't afford to lose another way against the Vietnamese.

So, there were all kinds of nifty little maneuvering going on, and into this war, this minefield, I stumbled along with about three weeks experience on the Thai desk. As you know up, until that time I had spent the previous two years negotiating the 1980 Foreign Service Act regulations so I had no familiarity whatsoever with developments in Southeast Asia since 1976. Although from December, 1980 onward I knew where I was going so I was able to go down and read in and talk to other people in the bureau and so forth.

Luckily when we went off to put together this Khmer coalition government. I didn't have any role at all. I just went along for the ride, in New York at the UN in September 1981. John Negroponte, Desaix Anderson, Ray Burkhardt, and the head of UN/P, which was the dominant division in IO, were in charge.

Q: And his name?

HOWLAND: His name was Mel Levitsky. The famous Mel Levitsky, almost a perfect look - alike for Rich Armitage. The two of them were indistinguishable. Surprisingly uninvolved, I think, was the Ambassador to the UN at that time, do you remember who?

Q: We're talking the UN when? Probably Jean Kirkpatrick.

HOWLAND: '81. The head of the USUN Mission. Apparently we had little to do with Jean Kirkpatrick; I only remember a courtesy call and attending a short mission meeting.

Q: She was Ambassador there in '81.

HOWLAND: I can't remember her having anything to do with it. Anyway, the key group was John Negroponte and Desaix Anderson, Ray Burkhardt and Mel Levitsky. Since I was just starting out as Country Director for Thailand, John Negroponte had the idea that, since everyone was coming to the UN session, including the Thai Foreign Minister and since the crunch was coming in regard to forming a coalition government within the Khmer exiles, to fight against the Vietnamese, who had control of Cambodia at the time, that would be a good idea to bring me up to meet the Thai Foreign Minister, Siddhi Savetsila, for the first time and chat with him. John also wanted me to meet some of the other players, particularly the young guys that Siddhi had brought into the foreign ministry from Chulalongkorn and other Thai universities, or from American universities, a kind of junior brain trust, a very bright, very agile, very knowledgeable, very operational type guys as well as thinkers, to help the Thai out in their foreign policy. Did I mention them?.

Q. Yes, you did.

HOWLAND: Thailand needed their talents. The Thai were going through a very difficult time. Not only did they have Vietnamese main force units 80 miles from Bangkok for the first time in their recent history, they also had the so-called Vietnamese boat people fleeing Vietnam who were coming both by sea into Thai waters and a smaller number coming by land. They were running huge refugee camps for the Khmers along the Thai border with Cambodia, and for the Lao and Hmong along the Thai border with Laos. Both groups had sought refuge after the communist takeover of Laos, and I think the camp near Chiang Mai, or to the east had as I recall 56,000 Hmong and other refugees in it. No small amount of people to look after. They also had a Lao refugee camp to the East of Nong Khai in Northeast Thailand where, among others, our former Lao maid from Vientiane days, Khammai Valykhamsao, had fled to after swimming the Mekong. She

finally got to America, a plucky girl.

So, John Negroponte and I flew up to New York one morning in the first or second week of September. We went right in for a nice chat with the Foreign Minister. Like all Thai, he was a very pleasant and personable man, but with an interesting background. He had been studying metallurgical engineering at MIT in 1941 when the war broke out and the Japanese occupied Thailand. The Thai had joined the Japanese during World War II, nominally in the so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, but there were also Thai resistance forces that were put together and supported by the OSS. In 1942 Siddhi went to the U.S. government, to the War Department in those years and said he wanted to volunteer to go to Thailand and be “a spy for the Americans.” He hated the Japanese.

The OSS sent him out to Utah, some totally un-Thai place, to train in the desert and in 1943, he was dropped in by parachute with Jim Thompson, the silk magnate. He was to contact local resistance groups and blow up bridges and all that good stuff that the OSS did during the war. Later he became a Thai air force officer and favorite of the King, and now in 1981 had become the Thai Foreign Minister. Quite a story.

Okay, my part in this operation there was really as an observer, and John Negroponte made that very clear. He was my boss and I wasn't involved in anything to do with putting together the Khmer coalition government. That was the job of the VLK desk, Desaix Anderson and colleagues. What John didn't want – and he was quite right – was my making a mistake, just having come on the Thai desk a few weeks before, he didn't want me saying some dumb thing. He didn't want me shaking hands with some Khmer Rouge by mistake, perhaps not knowing who the individual was.

He wanted me to deal with Siddhi, talk to Siddhi, deal with the Thai, get to know the Thai diplomats so I would have those contacts and things. John's actually a superb officer, Negroponte, a superb manager. He was quite right. I certainly respected that, although I had grave, grave moral qualms and policy qualms about the putting together of the coalition government with the Khmer Rouge, and the U.S. getting involved with the Khmer Rouge. I knew that before long, some bright NSC staffer would say, why don't we arm the Khmer Rouge and get them to kick out all those communists, not knowing what the Khmer Rouge had done before. Indeed there was a political appointee in State Policy Planning named Sean something, who did suggest exactly that, but we were able to keep that under control by asking him to write a long paper about it. By the time his paper was done, the issue was over. He became an impediment for the EAP Bureau and Dan O'Donohue pulled some strings and the White House finally sent him off to the Energy Department.

Anyway, I had qualms about dealing with the Khmer Rouge, having been stationed in Cambodia, which no one else there in that group had been. I had many Cambodian friends who were killed by the Khmer Rouge, such as the Prime Minister, Long Boret, and a very close friend when I was there in '61 – '63. Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak was another. Bill Thomas and I were often in touch with dozens of

others whom we knew had later been killed, including some left wing guys, Hu Nim and Hou Yuon. They were killed in the Khmer Rouge factional purges although they were also hard-line communists. Nevertheless, as a Foreign Service officer, I saluted and was kind of pleased that John Negroponte said you just watch and stay out of it. I didn't have to get involved in it, not because I was worried about bearing some eventual guilt or being blamed or something, but because I had great personal problems with it. I thought it was a mistake that would come back to haunt us all. In the end it didn't matter; Hun Sen and the Vietnamese won, and have run that tormented little country for more than 30 years.

Given the ASEAN implications and the threat to Thailand at that time, however, I don't know what else we could have done. From the standpoint of my being responsible for relations with Thailand, yes, this helped protect Thailand – much more so than if we pressed the Thai to have their troops sitting right there on the border. The Vietnamese would have gone through them like a hot knife, and then there was no one between them and Bangkok. A deep penetration was unlikely, but the danger would have been not so much that the Vietnamese would have moved down to seize Bangkok, but that another rebel group in the military, more young Turks, anti-monarchists in the Thai military, would have pulled another coup and Thailand would have been neutralized. The refugees would have been wiped out in some way or shipped off or something and in effect Thailand might have moved under the influence of Vietnam.

I don't know if China would have permitted that, because China and Thailand have always been very, very close; “scratch a Thai and you find a Chinese” it is often said. But it would have further destabilized Southeast Asia. In these years, six years after the end of the Vietnam War, we were interested in the stability of ASEAN and stabilizing Southeast Asia and tamping down these problems, but also in getting the Vietnamese out of Cambodia.

The third reason we were trying to get the Vietnamese out of Cambodia was that we felt it was very doable. We felt the Vietnamese had overextended themselves, that they'd taken on too many new challenges. They took on the UN. They took on China. They'd taken on the world, but they had overextended themselves, so it was just a matter of creating this coalition government which would then take over the UN seat since the Khmer Rouge would be part of the government. It couldn't have a separate seat, but in effect the Khmer Rouge would lose the seat. But getting all the Khmer factions, who all hated each other, plus the ASEAN countries, to all agree on what this “government” was going to look like, and what we were going to go with it, took all kinds of interesting bits and pieces of diplomacy and promises and so forth. This is what Negroponte put together with Mel Levitsky and they did a great job.

It was really my first introduction to UN politics and lobbying – much of which seemed to go on at the bar in the Waldorf Astoria in New York.

As I mentioned, at times Ray Burghardt and I would be sent to the bar in the Waldorf Astoria to get together with the young ASEAN diplomats and wait for a Foreign Minister

to come in after the UN session, 10:00 at night and you'd see him in the lobby. We'd all go out and say, hey, come on in and have a drink; we're having a party in here. Well, no Southeast Asian ever turns down a party. So, then the Foreign Minister would come and we'd ask him what went on today because there were these Foreign Ministerial meetings and we knew he was in there. He would tell us and then we'd kind of lobby him to support the latest proposal or I'd run off and get Negroponte and he'd do a cable at 1:00 in the morning and it was great fun doing this. It was the real guts of the work. Real fun work. Being part of that was the sort of thing that really made it a wonderful experience, not the fact that at the end it all came out right eventually. It didn't come out right for Cambodia, but we got the coalition government for the moment. Hun Sen got Cambodia for 30 years.

I stayed about five or six days I think, and then Negroponte was approaching the real crunch. He said, well, you've been here long enough, you go back to Washington. I did. It didn't bother me and I went back to work on the Thai desk and all that. It was put together, the coalition government, the CGDK, was put together but the Khmer parties took another ten months to sign a document on it.. They did get to keep the seat. It resulted in a certain degree of black eye for the Vietnamese. We were able through this coalition government to move more resources in terms of the agency, up on the border, to work with the Thai Task Force 80, whatever it was, and build up the anti-Vietnamese forces as a whole.

Q: The Thai supported the Khmer resistance I'm sure.

HOWLAND: Yes, behind the scenes, the Thai were supporting the Khmer Rouge struggle along the border against the Vietnamese, even to the extent that areas of Thailand were being used as rest camps for the Khmer Rouge fighters. I saw one of these camps by mistake as I was being driven to see something else on my visit to the border in January 1981.. Plus, the Khmer Rouge had taken over a little town in Southwest Cambodia called Pailin which was a great center of ruby and emerald mining. So, the rubies and emeralds were flowing out through the Khmer Rouge channel into Thailand and of course into the jewelry industry, the big jewelry industry of Bangkok and greasing everybody's palm that way.

The Vietnamese had over 30,000 troops in Cambodia, not all first-line, of course, because they also had to guard against another possible invasion from China in North Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge had been expelled from the major population areas by the Vietnamese in a brilliant, blitzkrieg campaign from December '78 to February '79, and at the same time the Chinese had invaded North Vietnam in an attempt to divert the Vietnamese. However, since the Chinese got their ears pinned back, they pulled back. The Vietnamese held Phnom Penh, of course, and for all practical purposes, all the populated areas of the country. They were building up their Cambodian puppet government forces, but that would take time.

Now, the Vietnamese military system is very much a disciplined one, and always operates

from communist rules and policies that are decided at the center. In Laos in my time from 1971-74, they never came too near the Mekong valley. In Cambodia they had come pretty close to the border in Thailand, but only crossed in small, patrol-sized units. They had also left some refugee camps in Cambodia, some actually straddling the border. There were both Khmer Rouge fighting bases and non-communist refugee camps in the North near Dangrek Mountains, and along the western flank Cambodia all along the border, where it runs up into the end of the Dangrek range. In the south the Khmer Rouge leaders actually had houses in Thailand while their troops survived in miserable conditions in the Cambodian jungles.

Q: There's no point, no exact line, I mean.

HOWLAND: Yes, if I had my map of Thailand, I could show you how strewn along were a few non-communist refugee camps on the Cambodian side, right on the border, some within ten feet of the border so they could flee across if the camp were attacked. Both Khmer Rouge and the non-communist bases were fighting camps as well as refugee camps, and the Vietnamese would mortar them and take civilian casualties with no qualms, of course. On the Thai side, many of the refugees had fled wholesale into Thailand, and were in huge camps there being cared for by UNHCR and NGO groups. The largest was at Khao-I-Dang, built for 300,000 refugees with about 160,000 there in 1981.

The Thai policy, which Mort or the UN perhaps had imposed on them, was that once a refugee got into Thailand, he wasn't going to be kicked out, he wasn't going to be sent back to the country of origin where he'd be shot. The Thai had a big interest in keeping them penned in; a lot of them had just overwhelmed the border before the Thai even realized they were fleeing the Vietnamese. So there was a huge, very well run refugee camp, indeed several refugee camps on the Thai side run by what was called Task force 80, which also handled the Thahan Phran, the "self-defense militia" I mentioned earlier. They were actually run pretty well.

This is not to say there were no problems in the camps. In fact there was some brutal stuff, kind of exploiting the refugees, there was a lot of rape, sometimes taking groups of refugees nominally to do work to keep them busy, but actually growing crops for the Thai army and things like that. We beat on them about that, but didn't do a great job.

Well, they went back to the Laos war for a model, and created a para -military force, called the "Thahan Phran." They recruited criminals, thugs, mobsters and gangsters from the slums and prisons of Bangkok, and created a "people's militia," gave them some rudimentary training and put them along the border, identifying them as militia, not regular forces, hey, no regular forces up there, you guys. They were dressed in black uniforms, not regular Thai army garb. So, that if the Vietnamese came over the border, these guys presumably would fight and push them back. However, since they weren't regular army, the Thai reasoning went, it would not be an incident that would require the Thai government to declare war on Vietnam, in which case the government might have really collapsed as all Thai fled in all directions. Main force Thai would not be facing

main force Vietnamese units. As the Thai have always done, they practiced their own effective form of diplomacy. Probably they were right; the Vietnamese would come over in little pin-pricks from time to time, but never reacted seriously to everything the Thai were doing to support the Khmer Rouge.

Then you had the Khmer Rouge fighters, the whole organization and its leaders, who were the real barrier between the Vietnamese and the Thai forces. From the main road between the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet, and the Cambodian border town of Poipet, to the south, was largely Khmer Rouge country. It was heavily forested south of that and merged into the Cardamom Mountains, the remote vastness of the monsoon forest south and east of Pailin, Cambodia. Going along the Thai border, on a long peninsula that runs down alongside Cambodia, were the Khmer Rouge camps. The Khmer Rouge were the only fighters that would have had a chance to beat the Vietnamese in any kind of a battle. As I mentioned the non-communist Khmer to the North of the road were split into two groups. One was anti-Sihanouk, the KPNLF, headed by Son Sann, and the other was pro-Sihanouk, headed by his son Ranariddh, and called the Funcinpec. Since the Khmer Rouge had decimated the intellectuals and the military forces associated with the Lon Nol regime in their 1975 take-over, these groups were relatively powerless militarily, and clueless politically.

We dealt with Son Sann's group and we dealt with Sihanouk's group, but of course we could not deal with the Khmer Rouge officially – or even non-officially – in any way. However, the Khmer Rouge had retained the Cambodian seat in the United Nations. When they took over in 1975 they brought Sihanouk back from exile in Beijing. He was the single symbol of the sovereignty of Cambodia, so they got the UN seat because they had Sihanouk. When the Vietnamese overthrew them in December of '78, and they fled to the border they were in effect a government in exile, but retained the UN seat although Sihanouk had split with them by this time. ASEAN was very firm on this issue, not to give it to the Vietnamese, in effect, as a result of an act of aggression. Anyway you couldn't do that comfortably under the UN charter. They still held the UN seat, but we of course didn't deal with them officially. I mean not a handshake, not a wink of the eye, not anything publicly or officially. Behind the scenes I don't know what went on. The agency always had various connections, possibly through Task Force 80, but officially we never dealt with the Khmer Rouge.

But the Khmer Rouge, of course, were an integral part of the jerry-built Thai defense structure along the border along with the Thahan Phran, all orchestrated and supported by the so-called "Task Force 80." I mentioned that the Thai leaders were frightened of getting into some kind of regular force fire fight with the Vietnamese, that might provoke the Vietnamese to simply roll down toward Bangkok, which they could have done very easily. So, the Thai didn't send their really best regular troops up to the border. They established this covert arm called Task Force 80, which didn't really work for the Thai army, except it was of course staffed by Thai army officers, headed by General Chavalit, if I recall correctly. TF-80 worked directly for the National Security Council of Thailand, but was heavily influenced by the Foreign Minister, Siddhi Savetsila. It was responsible

for the Thahan Phran, the Khmers and “land Vietnamese” refugee camps, and the relationship with the non-communist Khmers, and the Khmer Rouge.

Earlier, between 1975 – 78, the Thai had been delighted that the Khmer Rouge, a very formidable fighting force, were sitting there in Cambodia putting 350 miles of well guarded terrain between them and their arch enemies, the Vietnamese. As I recall, the two countries had even exchanged embassies, or at least some representation. I believe there was a Khmer Rouge Embassy in Thailand. The Thai had provided medical support to the Khmer Rouge leaders; those who’d gotten malaria or other problems would go to Thailand, check into some quiet little clinic for a couple of months out of public sight, perhaps a military clinic.

Plus, during the same period, ‘75 to ’78, there was no refugee problem on the border, and only the Vietnamese boat people issue in the south. Strangely enough when the Khmer Rouge were in power, murdering thousands of people in Cambodia, virtually no Cambodian refugees fled the country and came across the border into Thailand – only a few stragglers, perhaps 8 – 10 per month. The Thai of course would have pushed them back. They knew that they couldn't make it. The Khmers fled, they lived like animals in the jungle until they were trapped and caught. Virtually no refugees. The massive refugee influx started when the hold of the Khmer Rouge was broken by the Vietnamese. Then they all fled the Vietnamese along with the Khmer Rouge.

The Thai Foreign Minister, Siddhi Savetsila, was the authority behind a whole lot of the border developments, but in Thailand of course it is hard to tell where real authority resides. There are these interlaced family and business networks, totally impenetrable to the non-Thai but which influenced TF-80 in running the border, which had a commercial dimension as does everything in Thailand. TF-80 was not a secret organization, by the way. Everyone had to deal with TF-80, from NGOs to our refugee people, and especially of course, the agency.

So Task Force 80 also ran the relationship with the Khmer Rouge, a very important relationship. The Khmer Rouge had to be resupplied, but this process could not be supported by the US. It had to be resupplied to continue as a first line of Thai defense against the Vietnamese. In addition to the base area of the Khmer Rouge down near Pailin in the Southwest Cardamom Mountains, the Khmer Rouge had other units in North and Northeast Cambodia, some East, and South of Laos along the Upper Mekong. There was another group up near the old Preah Vihear border temple area in a place called Anlong Veng, where years later Pol Pot died or was murdered by his colleagues. These troops couldn't live off the land. All this terrain in the north – I'd been there a lot years earlier – was light scrub forest, not jungle or rice fields, because as you know in an monsoon country, you can live off the land when it's raining, but in the dry season there's nothing to eat up there, it's all sand and tree bark. Nothing grows in the dry season. There's just no rain.

The Khmer Rouge had to be resupplied if they were to go on fighting the Vietnamese. I'm

not saying morally they had to be resupplied. I'm saying tactically, in order to survive and fight, they had to be resupplied and the supplies were coming from the Peoples Republic of China. Since the Vietnamese controlled most of Cambodia, and the Cardamom mountains blocked the use of Cambodia's relatively unpopulated southwest coast – as you know I did the NIS for that coast in 1963 – the only way it could come was via Thai ports. We had built a good Thai port at Sattahip south of Bangkok, and were still using it for aid for Thailand. So, part of that port was presumably sequestered by the Thai and used to transport supplies to the Khmer Rouge. All along the border there were mysterious trucks, presumably taking supplies across the border to the Khmer Rouge.

In fact, halfway down that long peninsula that is split between Thailand and Cambodia and reaches the sea there, there were rest and refuge camps for the Khmer Rouge on both sides of the border, some under cover as children's vacation camps. Of course the Vietnamese knew all of this was going on. The Vietnamese have one of the best communications intercepts systems; they were trained by the Czechs, who were even better than the Russians. They had that whole border covered. They had their field listening posts just as they did in the Vietnam War, and of course so did the Thai, who could pass intelligence to the Khmer Rouge, and to the non-communist Khmer. So, the Vietnamese knew everything that was going on there.

The fact is, if the Vietnamese wanted to put the resources in, their best units in force, they could have smashed the Khmers resistance immediately. But the Vietnamese units there were not first-class. I think they still feared that if they really threatened Thailand, the United States of America might go back into Indochina. Moreover the Chinese had already demonstrated they could invade the north, and Hanoi might have feared facing a two-front war while still facing difficulties incorporating the south into the communist system.

Occasionally there would be a Vietnamese incursion. The one or another of the Khmer resistance groups, the Khmer Rouge or the non-communist Khmer, would ambush a Vietnamese patrol or shoot up some pro-Vietnamese Cambodian soldiers. Then the Vietnamese, when they'd get tired of this would either shell the Khmer camps on the Cambodian side of the border, or else occasionally overstep the border and shoot up a few police posts in some Thai town. I don't know of any Thai who were ever hurt from being shot at in those incursions. There were some Thai who were hurt from mortar fire, but in any event, the Thai weren't happy about this. I think I mentioned that the Thai, however, did not want to put the regular Thai army along the border for fear of getting into a war with Vietnamese, with the Vietnamese. So, they did not want to provoke the Vietnamese, but they wanted to be defended against them. They wanted us to help defend them in spirit but not to provoke the North Vietnamese because the Thai were afraid of a US over-reaction because of residual Indochina war sentiment in the United States.

The other thing was of course, there were some political neutralist elements in Bangkok and the Thai had just had a coup in April of that year. Part of the coup was by some young soldiers who were believed to be of neutralist leanings, so the Thai feared the

Vietnamese would provoke something along the border in the hope³ of strengthening neutralist sentiment. Of course the Thai wanted the Vietnamese out of Cambodia, too, but not in such a way that it would wind up with more Vietnamese troops there, and disrupt an already somewhat unstable situation in Thailand. That was the way the game was supposed to be played.

Now, any American could have told them we would never go back to Indochina. It was politically impossible for the United States to go back in. If they could have just come and asked the Congress of the United States, they would have learned that they had nothing to fear from us. Nevertheless we wanted to keep that fear a little bit alive in their minds just so they wouldn't be so sure that if they wiped the resistance out they could get away with it. That was part of Negroponte's policy. We didn't do it; we couldn't do it policy wise in such a way in such a heavy handed way as to run the risk of either getting reinvolved or having our bluff called. That's the reason one of the first things I could involved in on the desk was the issue of resuming use of Utapao airbase in southern Thailand.

Q: That was the old B-52 base for the Vietnam War.

HOWLAND: Yes, our military wanted to designate Utapao as a possible recovery site for B-52s en route to Diego Garcia that might suffer in-flight problems and have to land somewhere. Some of these flights, of course, were routine patrols aloft with nuclear weapons. Coming back from a trip, I believe, with the Pacific area commander, i.e. CINCPAC, Negroponte told a journalist that we were thinking of reactivating use of Utapao airbase in southern Thailand. This base had played a major role in our Indochina war, including use by B-52s that bombed Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. It had been closed when, at Thai request, we had withdrawn our forces from Thailand in 1975- 76. Soon the idea began to snowball into a ploy to make the Vietnamese a little more nervous about what we might or might not do about the border problems they were causing for the Thai.

John had called CINCPAC and said, "How'd you guys like to fly a B-52 into Utapao?" He had been to the base on a trip to Thailand, and told CINCPAC they had better take along a refueler aircraft because the fueling equipment had not been maintained on the flight-line by the Thai, and was not working now. The Thai had let it fall apart. The Embassy was instructed to ask the Thai if we could use the base for B-52 recovery, and they agreed. Then the B-52 flew in and flags went up all over the place.

The Vietnamese knew it was going on because they could monitor who flies around the border and the aircraft was not, of course, on radio silence. That was fine from the Negroponte approach, but the American and Thai press immediately took up the refrain that the Reagan administration was trying to resuscitate the Vietnam War. The Thai began getting very nervous and wanted to withdraw their permission for use of the base. The Senate asked the GAO to open an investigation. My old friend from Laos days, Col. Broadus Bailey, had just retired and was working for the Senate Foreign Relations

committee. He formulated 35 questions on relations with Thailand which he gave to Senator Pell on the committee to pass to State. No one wanted to alienate them because they confirmed Ambassadors and other officials for the new Reagan administration.

Dan O'Donohue had come on board by then and got the thing under control, both with the Thai and the Congress. His approach was slowly, step-by-step, to put in the refueling apparatus which would benefit the Thai as well as our military. Then I believe we flew in some supplies for the Royal Thai Army. We rehabbed some barracks and put a few Air Force civilians on the base to oversee reconstruction. Part of the policy aspect was continuing to hint that we were still around, and that we'd be pretty unhappy if the Vietnamese crossed the border. But O'Donohue's method got the fuss calmed down.

Q: What do you think the Vietnamese plan for Thailand was?

HOWLAND: Well, that was unsure. I'm not sure in hindsight whether we really had to do things like pump up the imagined Utopao menace, because I think the Vietnamese, as you know play a very long term game. Their hope was not to conquer Thailand. They didn't want to take on something like that. They'd already gotten Laos and Cambodia. Their whole motivating dream had been to regain from the French what they'd almost had in the middle of the 19th Century, which was total control of Indochina. Perhaps they would have been very happy if the Thai went communist, but perhaps even happier if it just kind of went neutralist and left them alone to focus on their real problems – the economy, and establishing their control of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Q: They had enough problems with China.

HOWLAND: And they had problems with China. In those years they still had problems with China especially after the Chinese incursion of February of 1979. So, they just danced around on the border. They never really knocked out the Khmer Rouge there, although they went at them tooth and nail in other parts of Cambodia and they left the non-communist largely alone. I mean it's hard to determine whether they left the non-communists, the KPRLF and the Sihanoukists alone, or whether the non-communists were so weak and so inept that they were incapable of even provoking a firefight. There were a few firefights in the non-communist areas which they always lost. I never knew whether that was because they wanted to lose in the hope of our giving them more aid, doing more for them. Both on the military and the political side, the non-communist Khmers left alive after the Khmer Rouge purges were weak and ineffective. There were no trained military left. The ones that had some intellectual prowess, who had gotten out or had hid over the years, fled to the United States to go get a job. Except for Son Sann and a few of his coterie, none came back to fight in the maquis. I visited several of these half-refugee, half-fighting camps, and they were a shambles.

You might argue that if we had left the Vietnamese alone, they would have eventually wiped out the Khmer resistance and then left Thailand alone. It was more complicated than that. They were threatening Thailand and had created this enormous refugee problem

on the border. They had risked and suffered a Chinese invasion in their heartland and pushed them back across the Northern border. No one could predict that, after an interval of reconsolidation in all of Vietnam writ large, they might move again to try to make the rest of Southeast Asia communist, starting with Thailand. I mean they knew the historical annals, when they come up against the border 80 miles from Bangkok, that is a major, major strategic move. It was like putting the missiles in Cuba.

But the Vietnamese didn't behave that way. They probably knew they were in kind of a dicey spot. They would come across the border every once in a while, when provoked by the Khmer Rouge, and move into some Thai village and shoot up a 'Dunkin Donuts' shop or a Thahan Phran post, or something. For all its problems, Thailand was still a booming, prosperous country compared to its neighbors, and the border at that time benefited from a huge influx of foreigners and foreign aid. When the Vietnamese would cross the border they'd never seize territory or operate in force. As I said they'd go in and shoot up a few towns just to keep the Thai on their toes. The Thahan Phran would fire a few shots in the air and run away, and the Thai government would immediately turn to us and say you have to do something to warn the Vietnamese that this is not the proper thing to do. What we would invariably decide to do in those cases was send them some equipment of some kind. Some howitzers. Some airplanes. Some helicopters. Some other kinds of things, ammunition, something like that. This always meant a big fight with the Pentagon, which didn't want to give up the stuff, knowing the Thai would never use it. They were right, but as O'Donohue always said, they were "missing the point."

At one meeting I faced down the head of the Defense assistance agency by asking him if he wanted to be responsible for the neutralization of Thailand. Luckily he didn't know what that meant, so it worked. Then we'd usually get one of those huge cargo aircraft, a C-5A if possible, to fly the stuff in. There would be a big ceremony; the Prime Minister would receive the stuff; it would be in all the Thai papers. The Thai would ship tens of thousands of copies of papers to the border hoping that some would get across to the Vietnamese where they'd see pictures of the guns. The guns would all be packed and in cosmoline; the Thai would carefully transport them to the opposite side of Thailand from the border, where no Vietnamese could ever think they were a threat. They put them in a warehouse somewhere, locked them up and left them there. Because if they moved them to the border, the Vietnamese might decide to take them out and start a war with Thailand – the last thing on earth the Thai or we wanted. The Thai had a fairly sizeable Vietnamese population up in Northeast Thailand, which they mistrusted. They had the Vietnamese boat people in camps in Thailand, who they feared were laced with infiltrators and potential troublemakers, so they didn't want to start any trouble. That's how pretty much the policy was set.

Q: You haven't mentioned the Khmer refugees on the border.

HOWLAND: Yes, the next border issue was the Khmer refugees.. Interestingly enough, under the Khmer Rouge, with all the horrors of the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge takeover of Phnom Penh in April of '75 until December of '78,

when the Vietnamese invaded, during that three year period, which was when all the terrible killing went on, hundreds of thousands were killed or starved to death or whatever, very few refugees came out of Cambodia strangely enough. I guess Khmer Rouge control was too tight.

Only after the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, and took Phnom Penh and started pushing through the rest of the country, then the Khmer refugees began flooding into Thailand. The Khmer Rouge themselves, the fighters, harried by the Vietnamese forces, moved into camps along the border. Some of these camps were associated with refugees, others were not. There were other refugee camps were associated with Sihanouk's group, and others with Son Sann's KPNLF. There were large numbers of refugees, we're talking hundreds of thousands of people, refugees, who had to be fed and housed in very difficult circumstances where there was no food and no housing. The Thai didn't want them to come across the border, although virtually all eventually did come across the border. You had the Khmer Rouge fighters in their camps, Khmer Rouge fighters armed to the teeth. You had the Vietnamese army, the PAVN, the People's Army of Vietnam, pushing into Western Cambodia which for the first time, the first time in history on the border within 80 miles of Bangkok, the capital of Thailand.

Q: What about Laos? Weren't the Vietnamese on the Thai border there?

HOWLAND: Good question, yes, along the Mekong River, but the Thai were not that concerned because that border way up was a long way from Bangkok. Also there was lucrative trade back and forth across the Mekong River. It was a totally different situation although there were refugee problems there too, which I'll discuss later. No Bangkok Thai cared much politically about what happens that far away, but when all of a sudden you have the Vietnamese army sitting right on your border within a couple of hours Jeep ride to Bangkok, that's big trouble for any government in Thailand. What are they doing there? What are we going to do about them? That becomes the question.

The Thai were smart enough to know that he who starts a war with Vietnam does so at his own peril. The Thai had not fought a war against anybody worthwhile since they expelled the Burmese in the 18th century. The Royal Thai Army and Air Force were worried that if they put their regular forces on the border, looking down the Vietnamese gun barrels, there'd be some incident that might provoke the Vietnamese to attack, in which case they'd have to fight or run, both very unpalatable alternatives. What did they do?

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up. You're going to talk about the Vietnamese refugee problem: the boat people.

HOWLAND: There are a lot of issues I wanted to start outlining at the outset in the relationship with Thailand. I mentioned the boat people and the Khmer refugees before. These issues were tremendously complicated. We had an orderly departure program in Vietnam in which we interviewed people, and if they had some previous tie with the United States, they were taken out and put in camps in Thailand and then taken to the

United States. Apart from that, people were still coming out by boat, desperately, and a small number of Vietnamese were coming through Cambodia and through Laos trying to get into Thailand by land. These were the so-called land refugees.

The boat refugees had to run the gauntlet of the Thai Malay and Indonesian pirates, basically fishermen moonlighting to steal what they could from the refugees, who often fled with their wealth in the form of gold. The stories were absolutely horrible of what was being done to these people. I mean the fishermen, the Thai fishermen would get in a refugee boat, they'd kill all the men, they'd take all the women and just keep them on their boat and rape them ad seriatim for a month or two and then throw them overboard. I mean it was horrible. You couldn't believe that the sweet, loveable Thai, good Buddhists, were doing this. Nevertheless they were doing this. So, were the Malays. We were pretty upset about that. We were constantly beating on the Thai to get out patrols to do something to stop this, but the Thai were immobile on it. They went through the motions, but they weren't going to run the risk of alienating all these fishermen, especially at a time when the government was weak.

The Far East Economic Review had done an article, just before I went on the desk, which caused a big issue by saying that the refugee problem was caused by the United States, which, because of continuing hostility, was still fighting the Vietnam War. It asserted that we were trying to get even with the Vietnamese by forcing all their best people to go to the boats and escape so the new regime wouldn't have any competent people to help restore the country. Well, the fact was the people who were fleeing would never be in any administrative position in Vietnam to help anything because they weren't in the party, and if fact were its enemies. But there was a lot of propaganda going back and forth. Teddy Kennedy was holding hearings. In those hearings we were being lambasted left and right. What's his name, the former Congressman from Brooklyn?

Q: Solarz?

HOWLAND: Solarz.

Q: Stephen Solarz.

HOWLAND: Steve Solarz, thank you, was holding hearings. By this time he had gotten some constituents who were refugees. They wanted to get more refugees out. I think Solarz was partly responsible for creating the orderly departure program, which was a superb and brilliant move. It just took a little time to get underway, and boats were still coming out. It had slowed down, but the boats were still coming out. They had to run this gauntlet of pirates into Malaysia and Indonesia as well as Thailand. We were constantly beating on the Thai to be more helpful on the refugee situation, but they were constantly dragging their heels.

For example, we funded a number of patrol boats for the Thai. Then the Thai would always say we can't do anything about the fishermen because their boats are faster than

ours. So we gave them faster boats to operate out of Songkhla, the main navy base in the south. Then the Thai said they needed radar to find the fishermen. We put radar in the boats, and the radar would break down. We'd put radar specialists in Songkhla to work the radar when the boats went out to look for pirates. The Thai wouldn't let them go out on the boats, absolutely not. They're a sovereign country. So we started training Thai guys to work on the radars. But we were told they can't do that because they have to be in the Thai police. So we started training Thai policemen, and . . . it just went on and on like that. They didn't want to do anything.

The whole thing really came home to me when I went to Songkhla on my trip to Thailand in January 1982 and was told by one of our refugee officials that he had taken a second look at one of the fishing boats brought in by police and sequestered, for a day or so, after the refugees were taken to the camp. He walked onto the boat, heard someone crying. And found a 14 year old Vietnamese girl concealed under a net, in a locker. The police had searched the boat and his presumption was they left her there so they could rape her. That's what she said. That's what was going on.

It was just horrible, but the Bangkok government didn't want all that being publicized, of course, and viewed the piracy as a disincentive to more boat refugees. They wanted it to be known that the boat people would be mistreated. Above all, they didn't want a single Vietnamese to be left in Thailand after the whole refugee exodus was over. They already had an indigenous ethnic Vietnamese population in Northeast Thailand, which had been a big problem for them over the years. These people were now finally intermarrying and becoming Buddhists and becoming less of a problem. But the Thai were afraid that the Vietnamese communists were actually infiltrating their agents through the land and boat refugee channels, who would get into the camps and create communist cells. They feared these cells would reinfect the Vietnamese in the Northeast of Thailand, who were all pro-Ho Chi Minh in the old days. Of course that was nonsense, but it seemed a real fear among the Thai and after all, it was their country.

Q: Did any Vietnamese come by land?

HOWLAND: Yes, and the Thai were particularly concerned about the so-called "land Vietnamese" refugees on the border. They were interned in a camp designated NW-9. These Vietnamese, instead of coming out by boat, had worked their way either across Southern Laos or across Cambodia and made their way to Thailand. You can imagine with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, that wasn't a matter of bribes, that was a matter really of hiding and traveling at night. Some were whole families of Vietnamese, but actually most of them were not. Most of them were men who hoped to get to Thailand, and "get a number" in a camp, and then be able to get families into the orderly departure program or something like that. Many of them were former Vietnamese combatants who had been in hiding or had somehow or had been released from the self-education camps and then had fled and gotten across Cambodia into Thailand.

The Thai always treated them very badly. There were some women; some Vietnamese

women who'd come across and they were raped by the Thai border guards. There's no question about it. The situation in the Vietnamese camps along the border was awful. I don't remember this too clearly because I'm not sure whether the Thai even let the UN go into those camps. They were administering those camps themselves I think. You'd have to ask someone who was working on the refugee program at that time for the whole story on the land Vietnamese along the border, because that whole refugee thing ought to be really covered. In the end it was State Department responsibility, because AID just kind of provided the money, I think. Those were the land Vietnamese. .

Q: One question, Dick. What was the refugee process in the Department?

HOWLAND: The refugee bureau was very assertive and motivated, and did good work, but didn't seem to understand the clearance process and the dominant role of the regional bureau on issues affecting its countries. This rivalry between regional and functional bureaus was nothing new, of course. The officer I dealt with on a day-to-day basis was Jeff Millington, who has just gone off I noticed as charge in the Sudan for the first time. A very motivated but sometimes impatient individual.

Q: How did you relate to it, I mean, was there a jurisdiction or bureaucratic problem with the refugee bureau?

HOWLAND: Yes, in the sense that they were endlessly trying to send requests for Embassy demarches to the Thai out of the Department without coordinating them with the desk. One of the main problems on the desk, with so much stuff going on in the country, also drugs, of course, was coordinating these functional bureaus. What was it called? Narcotics matters?

Q: Yes, bureau of narcotics affairs. It's moved back and forth.

HOWLAND: Yes, so the refugee bureau, and the human rights bureau, which also had something to do with refugees, were endlessly just sending cables without clearing them with anyone. They never seemed to understand that the way the Department of State works is that everything must go through the desk in order to maintain coordination. As you know in the Department, there has always been that tremendous tension between the functional bureaus, on consular stuff, you know, on legal matters, desk officers in those bureaus who just want to give orders to embassies. But the embassies belong to desks, properly stated. I can't imagine how it works now with even more of these strange bureaus, global affairs and so forth. Luckily the Bangkok Embassy was well trained and thanks to my good relationship with the political counselor, Jim Wilkinson, he'd always call up and ask if EAP had cleared some message that would have made the situation worse. I'd say, nope, don't do it yet, don't make the demarche. Then if the refugee bureau, say, jumped up and down, we would kick the issue up to the seventh floor.

That was always fun – I would get to go to some high level meeting. EAP would draft a decision memo and refugee affairs would do a memo and they would

go up to the Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, Larry Eagleburger, and perhaps on to the Deputy Secretary, who at the outset of my time was Walt Stoessel, I believe. Problems rarely got pushed up that high, but when they did I learned very early on that the way to get Stoessel to approve your memo was just to use the magic phrase: “we fear that continuance of the refugee affairs bureau’s recommended course would seriously irritate the bilateral relationship.” Then Stoessel would always approve the EAP position. But most “bucks” stopped at Eagleburger’s office. My contact, the officer who handled Asia matters on Eagleburger’s staff, was Darrell Johnson. Subsequently he became Ambassador to Latvia or maybe Lithuania.

Q: An Asian specialist?

HOWLAND: Yes, he was a Chinese language officer who had served in Poland when we had the talks with the Chinese there. Anyway, I always went to him to get to Larry Eagleburger, the Under-Secretary, who Larry was terrific. He didn’t always take the EAP side – Larry knew you had to give a few crumbs to the refugee people once in a while, but the one thing you got from Larry was immediate action. He was a treasure in that respect, especially after Wolfowitz became Assistant Secretary for EAP. As much as I liked Paul, you never got immediate action from Wolfowitz. Whatever the issue, it always got stuck in his in-box somewhere. So, after a while I would just go up and see Darrell, who would get me in to see Larry, and Larry would sign off on it if he thought it was sensible. Then I’d let Wolfowitz know, and he’d never object. One of the marvelous things about working on a desk, everybody knows and respects each other.

Q: Weren’t there refugees on two sides? You had Burma, but this is Indochina.

HOWLAND: Burma’s refugees were more Fred Brown’s concern on IMBS next door. When I visited Burma, the Embassy never raised the issue with me. The Thai were looking after the Mon and the Kachin refugees in camps and nobody paid any attention to any others. It was a Thai matter and we had enough to cope with on the Cambodia side. I’m not even sure there were any. The Thai army was in league with the Burmese army and they and Thai generals were stripping Burma of timber and jade resources, just the way they were stripping everything else in Indochina with help from the Khmer Rouge. I don’t remember one single Burma refugee issue in my two years on the desk.

Q: Okay.

HOWLAND: One problem in the Department in dealing with these issues, both internally and inter-Departmentally, was that State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) did not have a strong Southeast Asia group at the time. I think the Southeast Asia guy I dealt with was named Allen Kitchens, who was a fine analyst, but the young guy who did Thai affairs had been an intern for one year, and then he stayed on with not much other background. In contrast the agency had a very strong suit on Indochina and Thailand. They were always strong in Thailand, but they had a very good officer I knew from Cambodia, who is still there working on Indochina. They were very strong. INR was kind

of weak, so you didn't have a sort of intelligence backup in the State Department to beat back the agency on various issues.

Sometimes you know, when another desk or bureau is pushing on some idea which you oppose, one option is to turn to INR to do a study. That bogs down the issue for a while, and then of course the study usually comes out the way the desk wants. Then you've got your study and the agency does a study and you kick it upstairs and somebody on the seventh floor decides whose study wins. But on Thailand INR didn't have the capability to do anything like that – or least said they didn't. I think they knew Thailand was CIA country, plain and simple. The agency was pretty much carrying the day. In that sense it was very lucky that Jim Lilley was on the NSC, because Jim tended to be a cowboy on some things, but he understood Reagan's views very well. He had been George Bush's station chief when Bush was Ambassador to China. He had a very good connection with George Bush, as did John Hold ridge who had been Bush's DCM when Bush was Ambassador to China.

There were also ethnic Lao refugees in Northeast Thailand, on the Khorat plateau, the population was of Lao origin, very different from the Bangkok or Chiang Mai Thai. After 1975 of course the Pathet Lao controlled, and therefore the Vietnamese controlled, the former Kingdom of Laos. Most of the border was demarcated by the Mekong. That was fairly easy to defend in a massive way since the Vietnamese could not have moved large numbers of troops across, but there was no indication they would do that. In fact it was an open border, with ordinary people and traders going back and forth all the time, largely unmonitored. In 1981 the economic push of the Thai back into Laos had just begun, eventually leading to their later regaining, basically, economic control of the strip of Laos along the Mekong River. But then there was still a kind of uneasy hostility between the Thai and the Lao. I'm not sure whether the Lao had started selling electricity from the Nam Ngum Dam to the Thai at this point. I just don't remember whether it was still hostile.

When I visited Thailand in 1982, I went up to the border north of Udorn, to the river town of Nong Khai. My last time there had been in 1972, driving my wife to Bangkok to have our third child. There was still an excellent restaurant in Nong Khai, right on the river. I was dying to set foot in Laos again. The ferry was going back and forth, but unlike the old days when there were virtually no border controls, and you just got on the ferry and paid somebody a hundred kip to chop in, now you could look across and see the Pathet Lao troops on the other side. It looked a little dicey and I decided not to try it.

We were monitoring the situation in Laos, but it was difficult in those years. We still had our Embassy in Laos, thanks to John Dean's and my peace agreement, but we were also monitoring what was going on in Laos from Udorn. There was still an agency officer and other kinds of operations going on to monitor the various intelligence aspects of Laos. Many Lao refugees had come across the river and were in a UN-run camp near Udorn, and there were also the Meo refugees who had come across and to the West of Udorn and the Northeast of Chiang Mai in the names of places that I'll be able to fill in later.

One more thing about the Lao and the Meo. In order to discourage more Lao from fleeing Laos into the camps in Thailand, the Thai had established a cut off date. After that cut off date, perhaps November 18th, 1979, or something, if a refugee was not in a camp with a UN card by that date, they would not be eligible for emigration. Now, behind the scenes, we knew that we could press the Thai eventually, that the Thai would not want these people to spend the rest of their life sitting in a camp in Thailand. But all of the countries in the Association of Southeast Asian nations had done this to try to discourage more refugees from flooding out. To a certain extent it had worked. The flow was down, but there were many other problems with this system. Some Lao who hadn't made it to the camps by then, but were already in Thailand, perhaps working, would go back into Laos and come across again, trying to bribe the Thai border officials into creating new documents for them, showing they were in the country before the cutoff date. The Thai were getting increasingly upset about refugees, afraid that in the end the Americans would just walk away from the problem and leave them stuck with it. In fact, that's what we did with the Hmong, wasn't it? In the end they'd have to absorb all these people. They didn't like the Lao; the Bangkok Thai looked down on the Lao. When we took the kids to the beach in Thailand, in 1973, with our Lao maid, she was totally mistreated by the Thai. They wouldn't even serve her in a restaurant as soon as they saw she wore a Lao sarong.

But in the end we and the Thai worked closely together. There had been a number of disputes between the Embassy and the Thai government within the fact that we always had tremendously tight close friendly relations not least because of it was an agency country, like Turkey. The agency always kind of carved out a few little countries here and there. Perhaps Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt in earlier times, plus there were close military contacts. These ties cushioned the potential upheavals over such things as refugee disputes, so the State Department could work the sharp the diplomatic edges off them. That was galling sometimes but helpful overall. One of those issues was drugs which I'll talk about next.

Q: You were going to talk about drug raids and the like.

HOWLAND: Yes, you asked about Burma and drugs sometime ago. There were endless problems with the Burmese, with the government of Burma over the drug thing. We would try to get operations going against the drug smugglers in Burma. The Burmese government would find out about it and tip them off. It wasn't a happy situation. The drugs were coming down from a big heroin refinery in Burma, a place called Tachilek, down through the area around Chiang Mai or into Laos near Ban Houei Sai. Most of the morphine base was brought by mules, huge mule trains through the mountains of Burma to this refinery in Tachilek which was Chang Chi-fu's main base. There it was refined into number four heroin, put in the little containers and so on and smuggled across the border where it got into the vast network of Thai road commerce. Thailand has excellent roads with excellent trucks, excellent buses, excellent cars. It's a remarkably well developed country for that part of the world. Once it got over on the Thai side, your chances of finding it were very slim. We had to either stop it at the border, or get tips

through informants in Chiang Mai. There was quite a DEA and CIA operation up there, which never succeeded, and it is still a problem today.

The famous drug lord on the Burma border in the north, as I mentioned, was Chang Chi-fu, who also used the Thai Name Khun Sa. I believe he was the twelfth son of some Chinese who married a Shan woman, and was born up there in that Shan country of Northern Burma, which is, somebody once called it, “Terry and the Pirates” land. That’s where the original Terry and the Pirates comic strip was set. Remember that cartoon?

Q: That cartoon series was by Milt Caniff.

HOWLAND: Milt Caniff. That’s right.

Q: Milton Caniff. A cartoon called Terry and the Pirates.

HOWLAND: Right and that’s where it was set. Up there in the Shan states near Burma, because that was an exciting place in the ‘30s. The British were up there. You had warlords and bandits and all these old Shan Kingdoms. You had the Kachin Kingdoms. You had the French and the Meo in Laos, and all these kinds of exotic people. An absolutely fascinating place. If you look at an ethnic map of that area it’s like the skin of some poor kid who has really got the measles, except each measles is a different little ethnic patch on the quilt.

By the 1970’s or earlier the Shan and everybody else up there had cottoned onto the fact that one of the great markets for heroin was the American soldiers in Vietnam. The Lao military provided the transportation from the Burma border for the heroin or the morphine base or the opium or whatever it was, and it was refined in either Laos or South Vietnam, so it had become a huge industry up in the golden triangle. You’re familiar with all this kind of stuff. Much of Northern Thailand had been totally corrupted by it. It was also coming out through Thailand, which had thousands of trucking companies with little pick-ups because you don’t need much to move heroin, to move a few sacks of heroin. It was basically unstoppable then, it’s basically unstoppable now as long as you have the demand for it.

Now what’s happened of course is that these countries themselves have become tremendous markets for heroin. I mean something like 5% of the population of Pakistan is addicted to heroin, probably higher in Thailand. So, the local government bureaucrats of the region who said, it’s not our problem, it’s the Americans’ problem, soon found out it did become their problem, dealing with massive addiction in their own countries.

That was going on and we were trying to do something about it, needless to say. DEA was up there, a rather large contingent in Chiang Mai in the North. The CIA also, and most of their responsibilities in the North had to do with narcotics trafficking. With agency assistance, the Thai had created another unit I called the “mafia militia.” It was the same type of para-military “self-defense forces,” the “Thahan Phran” that they deployed

along the border with Cambodia, in order to insulate the regular Thai forces from the threat of a Vietnamese incursion that might put regular Thai military full time in the front lines against the Vietnamese. They had used the same method, i.e. recruiting among criminals along the docks in Bangkok and various other criminal elements. The Thai also did this in the South against Muslim insurgents by the way.

The Thai had created a little unofficial strike force against the drug lords which could operate surreptitiously on the Burmese side of the border as well as in Thailand. We went out in helicopters and trucks, but because no one trusted anybody not to tip off the smugglers before operations the whole gang of them was rounded up and sequestered in an armed, palisaded camp in Northern Thailand. In this camp they were insulated from the outside world, and as Charlie Whitehouse once told me, once in a while we'd go up there in a truck and throw some raw meat in through a gate. Well, I found that not only were they throwing raw meat in through the gate, but once in a while they'd round up a few dozen prostitutes from Chiang Mai and truck them up to the camp.

Then everything would lock down for two or three weeks. Suddenly the transport would arrive, the troops would board the choppers or trucks, and be ferried over to where they'd have a big attack on some town, marked by a lot of gunfire but not many casualties, it seemed. The bad guys would then evacuate that particular town, and our good guys would move in and find ten pounds of heroin and destroy a "refinery." It'd all be a big success. They would then pull out and be on their way to another location. Meanwhile the drug people moved back to their town and rebuilt the refinery, a straw shack with vats, and waited for deliveries of chemicals and opium to begin again. Recreating a heroin refinery is pretty easy – takes about two days. So there were these little charades going on in the North. By 1982 we had chased Chang Chi-fu out of a Thailand so the para-military units made a few raids over there, but that was dangerous because the Burmese Army sometimes got involved.

The other drug control project in the north was run by the UN and promoted crop substitution. Local hill farmers were paid to stop growing poppies, and plant such things as peaches, avocados, whatever, instead. Unfortunately the outcome of those idealistic efforts was often that the farmers took the money, and went on growing opium poppies in hidden locations. Ah, well; it was always fun working on Thailand.

Q: Any of these problems spill over into south Thailand?

HOWLAND: I mentioned the Vietnamese boat people, but there were some ethnic dissidence problems as well. In the far South, in the four or five provinces that are along or near the Malaysian border, the predominant elements of the population are ethnic Malays, of Muslim persuasion. There are also a number of Thai Muslims there, who had converted when the area was under Malay rule in earlier centuries. There had been a very minor communist insurgency rather, run by renegade Malays chased out of Malaya in the 1950s. But that had died out when Kriangsak negotiated a détente with China in 1979, as did the communist insurgency in the north. But the periodic bouts of insecurity caused by

Muslims continued in the south.

As in the case of the Moros in the Philippines, there was some question to what extent this was an ideologically motivated Islamic insurgency, or the work of mostly gangsters, thieves and footpads. The Malays were of course the best pirates in the East a century ago. There was evidence it was perhaps abetted by strongly Islamic Malay individuals, wealthy believers across the border, but not by the Malay government. In peninsular Malaysia you have those very strong Islamic provinces up in the North there. The Thai police and military tried to cope with it, but the main function of the military in the south was politics and corruption. Rich Armitage was always very worried about that, and wanted some US military presence there, but O'Donohue and everyone else sort of yawned. As usual Dan else was right; it smolders on even as we speak but doesn't affect anything very much. I guess I should stop there for now and see you next time.

Q: This is the 12th of March, 2003. Dick, Thailand 1982 and we'll continue.

HOWLAND: Right. Still talking about the various issues with which the Embassy and the Thai desk were dealing, and I was talking about the Muslims in the South, yes, that was another issue. In the South apart from the refugees, the Vietnamese boat people who came to the South in large numbers. Let me get into a little more history. As I said there was a long smoldering Islamic dissent movement in the Southernmost five provinces, which were originally, and still are, populated by people of Malay origin. In fact they indeed were Malay provinces under the earlier Malay sultans before the British conquered Malaya. But there was a great period of Thai expansionism from the founding of the Bangkok dynasty in 1772 through Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, up until the end of the 19th Century when the European powers starting whittling away at the Thai realm. The Thai had taken over these Southern provinces. Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, those are the main towns down there, Hat Yai, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Songkhla, where we had a consulate. The Thai had imposed themselves over the traditional Malay system. The Malay rulers sort of swore affinity to the new Thai monarch because that was the way Southeast Asia worked in those days. If you came under a new ruler you swore affinity to him. If he took care of you that was great, if not you'd pile all your people in the boats and head for Borneo, head for Sulawesi, to find some new ruler. Really a quasi-lawless feudal system with a built-in safety valve for freedom, unlike the centralized Hindu model of the ancient Thai state, that's how it worked. Today that didn't fit very well into the modern world of ethnic and religious division, ethno-centrism. Plus there was an economic dimension to the situation there.

South Thailand is an area of large rice fields and particularly rubber and palm oil plantations. Palm oil comes from a kind of low cut palm and also a lot of cashew nuts are grown down there. The peninsula is potentially very rich because as it stretches all the way down to the Malay border like a dagger and gets rainfall from both monsoons. It gets the Southwest monsoon that comes up during the summer months North of the Equator

and it gets the Northeast monsoon down across Vietnam and then blowing across the Gulf of Siam which it picks up more moisture. It's always raining like heck down there. Everything's always flooding as I can vouch for having driven down there a lot in the '70s,

So it is very rich. The agriculture areas and the attendant businesses trucking businesses, that truck the stuff up to Bangkok, stuff like that, are all run and owned by Chinese. Most of the workers were either Thai,, but even more so Malay Muslims. Thai citizens of Malay descent or Thai of ethnic Thai origin who one way or another had become converted to Islam. That's one thing the Thai would never face; they'd say oh, those Malays down there are always giving us trouble. But there was also a sizeable number – I don't remember how many hundreds of thousands – of ethnic Thai who, through the blending process over the years, had adopted Islam. Perhaps they'd gone to work for a Muslim guy and they'd been told they had to be a Muslim to work. They were of course loyal to the King as all the Thai were, but they were not Thai Buddhists. Scratch any Thai and you'll find a Chinese, but scratch any Malay and you don't find a Chinese – you find a Muslim.

So there was a built in kind of friction between the Chinese and the Malays. During the emergency in Malaya, the emergency of course was the result of Chinese communists, ethnic Chinese communists who were rubber plantation workers. Very few Malays, if any, were in the communist forces that were trying to expel the British.. This is one reason why the communists lost.

It was different in Southern Thailand, and the Chinese there of course were wealthy businessmen, most of them. My theory was that the price of rubber and agriculture commodities in a way determined the level of unrest in the South, because when the price of rubber fell, the Chinese of course would hire less Muslim workers to harvest less rubber. They wouldn't pay them if they weren't harvesting rubber, so they would be out of a job. The workers would retaliate by going to their separatist buddies, getting some weapons and kidnapping some Chinese businessman. They'd hold this Chinese businessman for ransom and somebody would eventually pay the ransom, and then they'd have some money. Part of the money they'd give to the separatists for letting them use the weapons and the other part they'd use for themselves, but when the price of rubber improved they'd be rehired, perhaps by the same Chinese they'd kidnapped, who knows, to work in the rubber field. That was the economic dimension, and at least part of the problem of unrest.

So the Thai decided to handle the problem and expanded the “Thahan Phran” concept to the south. I suspect some very bright agency guy in the Embassy had suggested this and persuaded the Thai police to offer various Malays with proven kidnap records positions in the a police auxiliary. They got training and full lifetime employment, perhaps land, if they would rat on their buddies of course, but also refrain from any kidnapping or anything like that. That seemed to take care of much of the kidnapping problem down there. The “Thahan Phran” troops worked in the harvest season, and policed when they

were not working. Whether it had anything to do with the waxing and waning insurgency I don't know. On the dangers of the insurgency, there was a great difference of opinion in the U.S. government. Dan O'Donohue, my boss, was convinced, since he'd been in Thailand and knew the country well, that the Thai were exaggerating the threat to get more U.S. aid down South.

Now Rich Armitage, who was his counterpart in the Defense Department, who had spent various times in Bangkok and considered himself an expert on Thailand, argued that there was still a serious communist insurgency in the south. He felt we really had to worry about it. Dan and other knowledgeable people felt the communist insurgency was over in Southeast Asia. Happily Dan was able to block any new military programs for the south, which probably would have made the situation worse. With all the other troubles on the Thai agenda, neither they nor we could have handled a serious outbreak in the south. Better to just let it smolder along, as it is still doing I believe.

Without Chinese support the communist insurgencies in Northeast Thailand and in Southern Thailand were going nowhere. That was it. It was all over. The Defense Department of course never really saw this. They were sure that the communists were still there. Rich Armitage was sure about that so I did not feel it was my job to block anything they wanted to give the Thai for that reason. The Pentagon was very happy about that and we found that in dealing with the Pentagon it was very convenient to pump up the non-existent communist menace in the south just a little bit. It kind of got their blood boiling again from the old days in Vietnam and they usually would bend and give us what we wanted. But there were battles about it as I said earlier, to the extent that I think there was a "wanted" poster in my name on the bulletin board in the battalion headquarters at Fort Ord, California, after we took away their new howitzers on three successive occasions to give them to the Thai. One officer said the next time they got howitzers they were going to load them up and head for the State Department.

Q: From what you've been saying though, those howitzers would end up in Thai warehouses.

HOWLAND: Yes the howitzers would end up in storage and the cosmoline never came off the howitzers. They sat miles from any threat, but they made the Thai feel comfortable. God knows, they're probably still sitting there. As Bill Sullivan might have said, "those are not combat howitzers, those are therapeutic howitzers."

Q: Have I asked you about the POW/MIA Issue?

HOWLAND: As I mentioned at the outset, Dick Childress at the NSC was the principal coordinator on POW/MIA matters. There were also high-level officials in State and Defense who worked on the problem. Childress was the main contact with the woman who was head of the league of POW/MIA families, Ann Mills Griffiths. He and she were constantly in touch. Childress also got involved in – or maybe just knew about – some

unauthorized operations into Laos to try to rescue POWs by private citizens. Now, as you know the POWs were released in 1973 and this was 1981. The thought that POWs had existed eight more years either in the Laos jungle, or in a camp somewhere, was kind of far-fetched, but nevertheless, they did run these operations in. None ever succeeded in finding anyone, and those involved were victimized by Thai and Lao swindlers.

As we recall, Ronald Reagan, bless his heart for some things, was very keen on POW/MIA issues, as we know from the Iran Contra episode, so it was a big deal. Unfortunately the NSC always thinks that the State Department and the bureaucracy is never doing enough and that we're bogged down in a) bureaucratic isometrics, and b) they of course want the credit for anything that you've done to go to their boss so he gets reelected. Behind the scenes elements in the NSC were involved with various people to try to do POW rescue stunts, buying bird bones from totally unscrupulous people. This was during the era when the expert forgers in Taiwan, Hanoi, Bangkok and everywhere were creating dog tags, were creating the bead chains, were making machines with steel brushes to put wear on the dog tags exactly as if they had been work by GIs. Dog bones, human bones if they could find them. Caucasian human bones from anywhere, they dug them up from the cemeteries of Hong Kong, the British cemetery in Hong Kong they dug up guys buried there since 1890 and got the remains to Bangkok where they sold them in the bars to Americans and it was quite a racket. No DNA in those days, of course, so difficult to trace for sure.

Q: Dog tags.

HOWLAND: If they found a real dog tag you could be sure that within one week there would be thousands of identical copies being flogged all over Asia, Hong Kong, Tokyo, wherever. Somebody would say: I've got this real dog tag and I know where the guy is. Give me \$100 for the dog tag and I'll tell you. It was a terrible thing the families must have gone through, just terrible agony during that time. We were trying at that time to get the Vietnamese and the Lao to do some exhumations, to do some survey crash sites in the area and all of that again was not handled out of the Thai desk.

Q: When you were dealing with, I mean the POW MIA thing is such a political thing, did you find that you were putting yourself under certain constraints and other people talking about it. I mean could you even say, come on now this is ridiculous, there aren't any.

HOWLAND: Yes, that was a big problem in the sense that no one could say that. I think if anyone, you could say it privately, but if any State officer or any officer on public testimony somebody said, there are no POWs, they're all dead, they would have been fired

Now, I followed all this but the POW/MIA issue was centered in Indochina, and handled by the Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea (VLK) desk: Desaix Anderson and his deputy Ray Burkhardt, two very fine officers. I asked Desaix Anderson once whether there was any hard evidence ever that one single "incompliant" POW had survived. As you know there

were several defectors.

Q: Sure. Sure.

HOWLAND: But there was no evidence that even one in-compliant POW remained alive in Indochina. Over 1,200 airmen went down in Laos in various operations, things and only eight came out. People said, how could it be? Well, it could be because you crash in the middle of the Laos jungle and mountains. If you're not captured by the Pathet Lao, you're dead; there's no question. Perhaps one in a thousand would make his way out, but not more than that. A couple of guys did make their way out, but not more than that. If captured, the PL might kill you out of anger, or turn you over to their Vietnamese cadre, who marched you to Hanoi. Only a handful survived and made it to the prison camp in Hanoi. Most of the circumstances of these crashes or disappearances, were such that survival was almost totally out of the question.

Q: Also, it just didn't make any sense on the part of the enemy to keep these people for that long.

HOWLAND: Afterwards? No, none whatsoever.

Q: There was nothing to be gained.

HOWLAND: Of course not. People said well, they're keeping them because they think they'll use them as hostages for reparations, but the fact was if they ever tried such a stunt like that the American people would be so outraged we would have probably nuked them. The Vietnamese with all their faults, the Vietnamese leadership were not dumb. These were intelligent guys.

I went to Desaix once and I said, "Desaix, how can we go on with this fiction? We're deceiving the people, the families and everything keeping alive hopes." He said, "Well, there's more to it than that." First of all, as long as the cases were slowly being shifted from MIA to KIA, certain bureaucratic requirements concerning pensions came into play. I don't know if the family would then get less money, less perks, less what, than if the person was considered missing in action. I just don't know whether missing in action or POW meant that they were still getting full pay.

Q: I think they were still getting full pay, plus there were automatic promotions.

HOWLAND: Well, whatever. Anyway, I don't know what the story was on that, but that was obviously one facet of it. The second was the whole thing, the emotional context in the country. So, I said, "Yes, you're right." Not that he was getting anything about it, but the political context was such that it had to be handled very delicately and that the normal facing of reality had to submerge into the emotional context. Probably right, after all. And then too, the President of the United States was convinced there were still POWS over there.

At one point the White House people who worked on POW stuff, MIA stuff, were persuaded by a former Special Forces trooper that the Khmer Rouge would be able to help them find POWs in Cambodia. Without any authorization I believe he had actually sent someone to talk to the Khmer Rouge at a time when we were trying to keep on course. We don't want to be blackened with the Khmer Rouge brush, but someone came up with the idea of an assistance program to get the Khmer Rouge to look for POWs. Everyone who knew anything about it, knew there were no POWs in Cambodia.

Q: Also, at the time it had a very definite political, these right wing Ross Perot and those that and those that didn't like big government felt they'd been sold out.

HOWLAND: Right. There was all that. Anyway, I'm happy to say this came to a head just as I got on the desk. It wasn't my issue because it wasn't going to be done in Thailand, but the process would have involved Thailand so I heard about it. I was told when it came up and someone made the pitch at a meeting, President Reagan asked, aren't these the people that killed half the population of Cambodia? There was kind of a dead silence and Jim Lilley, from the NSC, said, you're absolutely right, Mr. President. Reagan then said "Is there some reason why we should help them kill the other half of the population of Cambodia?" There was utter silence. Reagan said, "Moving along to the next item." That was it and he killed the idea.

Q: MIA meaning missing in action.

HOWLAND: Yes. The missing in action. It was a really big issue even with the war having been over probably five or six years. You've probably had a lot of people talk about this MIA stuff.

Q: This is tape twenty, side one with Dick Howland. Yes.

HOWLAND: One of the people involved in all these putative rescue operations had gotten in touch with, of all people, the son of old Phoumi Nosavan who pulled a coup in Laos in 1960 that removed Souvanna Phouma from being Prime Minister. His name was Phoumano, and he was in Bangkok. I guess the old man was still alive, too, but he was doddering by 1981. Phoumano was proposing various schemes to run teams into Laos to find live POWs. There were obviously doctored photographs, reported to be live photos, current photos of POWs still in holding of the towels or something, sheets, laid out on a hillside spelling POW near a former camp. Some wealthy screen star had furnished \$100,000 as a contribution, which you could do. You could donate securities to the government, money that went to the NSC, to finance POW rescue things.. The *Wall Street Journal* had a series of articles on all of this. Some congressman from Louisiana had facilitated all of this and they were running, as soon as it got blown, of course everybody ran for cover and that was the end of it. They tried to blame the State Department, but we backed off from that.

This was the kind of thing that was going on. One thing I should mention is that, of course, some people were pushing this for political motives. There was that aspect to it. In addition there was a humane and there was real concern. There was the fact that the marines never leave anybody behind. You do not leave a fallen soldier behind. You take out the bodies, going back to the Revolutionary War. That was an issue in our Revolutionary War. It was one of those issues that has this kind of emotion. I can only speak for myself. I don't think any officer who had served in Indochina during this period. Military, but certainly in the agency or us, really thought there was any chance at all that any POW was alive. I would have been the first to cheer if they found one, but they didn't.

The Department wanted to shift the emphasis to diplomatic efforts to get the Lao government to start looking for crash sites. We had a number of reasons for that. Not only that we would be able to do something on the MIA issue, get some remains out, that would be beneficial, but also it would engage the Lao in something. It would give us another thing to start getting into contact with the government, and back into Laos on some issue. We did have the Embassy was there and they had no contacts. We wanted to have reasons to be able to go out to the Plain of Jars and talk to Lao officials, since part of our job is to find out what's going on. So, the MIA thing was one way to do that. And eventually, it worked.

Q: You wanted to discuss your visits to Thailand, which were useful you said.

Howland: Yes, but after these 20 years I can't remember what I did on each trip so I'll package them both together. In January of 1982 I persuaded my boss, DAS Dan O'Donohue to let me go out to Thailand for a full month on the grounds that I had never served in Thailand. I had not worked on Thailand, just around it. O'Donohue's view of visiting the field was to go one week every three months. I felt for a DAS that was all right, but if I went off for a week every three months, at the Embassy they'd say, oh God, that dumb country director is coming. Doesn't he have anything better to do? We've got to set up more appointments. It's easy to set up appointments for a DAS. Not so easy as you know for a country director. . . I said, look I'd rather go out once a year. I had small kids, I don't want to be away every three months, and I don't want to go in the summer. I'd like to go in January when the weather is gorgeous and I wanted to travel around the country and really get the kind of feeling for Thailand that I had for Cambodia through traveling, that I had for Java for being the most traveled guy ever stationed in Java. I wanted to do that in Thailand.

The DCM, Stape Roy, bless his heart, was a big fan of that because his first three weeks in Thailand, he and his family had spent traveling. He had arranged for his car to arrive before he did, and he told John Dean, he said, "John, Jim Wilkinson is doing a great job as acting DCM. I want to learn some Thai and I'm going to go out and I'd like to go out and travel."

Dean who was great on that sort of thing agreed. Dean liked Stape very much. He thought

very highly of Stape and Stape was a superb officer. Stape supported my position. I figured I would spend ten days in Bangkok, four or five days in the South, i.e. Songkhla, traveling by road, then four or five days up in Chiang Mai. A couple of days up in Udorn. I'm trying to think who the consular general was in Udorn. It may have been Phil Mayhew, but I'm not sure. I can't remember.

Then the last few days of this month away, grudgingly, O'Donohue agreed to let me go to Burma to see Pat Byrne and Mark Dion, Ambassador and DCM, for an orientation visit and because Thai- Burma relations, given the drug issue, were still kind of dicey. This was of course with the proviso that I not go near the Burmese government, which of course I didn't. The outcome of that was I got a delightful four day orientation in Burma with Pat and Mark and their head Burmese local whose name was John Wong or something like that. A really superb guy who knew Burma in and out, but I'm afraid I cost him his job. Because his wife, it turned out, was in the emerald business with one of the leading intelligence generals of the Burmese military. The Embassy was unaware of this, and the only reason anyone found out was because John asked me if I wanted to buy some emeralds from his wife. I said, no. The last thing I wanted. Of Course I had to tell the Embassy and may have cost him his job.

Be that as it may, I flew out in January 1982, and again in 1983, for a month in Southeast Asia. I didn't like leaving my wife and kids, but this was my first time in Asia since 1976, now this was 1982 so I was in heaven going back. One thing I was really looking forward – and indeed it turned out to be spectacular – was now, of course, with the Vietnam War over, Cathay Pacific flew from Hong Kong to Bangkok right across North Vietnam. I had never even seen North Vietnam. I went to Hong Kong overnight, spent the night at the Meridian right by the old Kai Tak airport. I fought tooth and nail to get that stop in Hong Kong. I said I'll pay for it myself. I wanted to hit the sack and get up fresh the next morning because I knew I was going to be invited to a dinner the first night and then the next day started a workweek.

The next day I got on Cathay Pacific and took the flight that went direct to Bangkok. When I got on I asked one of the stewardesses, I said, "I used to be stationed in Laos. I don't know how your flight pattern is, but if I should doze off, if you could wake me as we're approaching the Vietnamese coast because I'd love to see it." She said, "Oh, I'm sure the captain will be delighted to have you up in the cockpit during that part of the flight." This was before the hijackings, of course. There were about eight people on the plane, that's all. As we went off after about an hour the stewardess came back and got me. They put me in the jump seat.

Q: This is tape twenty-one, side one, with Dick Howland. Yes?

HOWLAND: Now it's all routine, but for an Indochina hand then it was exciting. So, as we went over the Baie D'Halong, the pilot kind of banked a little bit. Have you been up to that Hanoi Bay to see the pinnacles coming sheer out of the water? Right over Haiphong, Hanoi, right over the famous Doumer Bridge that was bombed and missed so

many times; I was in heaven. Then the Plain of Jars in Laos where I'd stood so many times and looked across to the NVA positions. Then of course over Vientiane, en route to Bangkok, with the Bolovens Plateau to the left. I could almost see the road that we fought over year after year, that road Route 21 up to Paksong and now the plantations were working, the trees were growing up again. The jungle had covered all the bombed craters on the plateau which I felt great about, and then we were crossing Udon Ratchathani and coming up on Bangkok. There was a great, just a lovely way to go back to Southeast Asia. The last time I must say I'd flown to Bangkok from the North I'd been taking the family down to Pattaya for a vacation. When I got off at the airport by myself there on this trip in 1982, I was tempted to say oh, the hell with work, I'll go down to Pattaya and I'll be snorkeling all week, great food at Dolf Riks restaurant, maybe some deep-sea fishing – but I knew, no, I can't do that any more. Plus family not here. Country Director now, no more of that sort of thing.

I was met by a young economic officer who picked me up the airport and he said, "You're very lucky because we usually don't meet anyone below the rank of assistant secretary. Because you're a friend of the Ambassador he sent a car and me out here." My first thought was that it's vintage John Gunther Dean. He was keen on status and hierarchy, as always. He later got his come-uppance in India, where as soon as he started behaving that way, the finance minister decided that Ambassadors were too low-ranking for him to meet. He would only meet with undersecretaries who came out to see him. There's no one more hierarchical than the Indians. Even the French don't have a caste system or official caste system. But John, I thought, oh no, this is not going to be good. Everybody should be met, not just friends. That's how you build friends on the Department.

So I really coaxed John about that when I was out there. I said, "At all costs, John, do not let Dan O'Donohue or Rich Armitage have to find their own way in from the airport or believe me, believe me, you will rue the day, absolutely rue the day." So, he took that advice and from then on anybody – even desk officers like Gene Henderson – got a car in from the airport. A local met him, but I said, it's just one of those things that starts out a Washington visit on its sourest possible note as you have to fight your way among the screaming Thai baggage-carriers and taxi drivers. Lovely people, I'm not mocking the Thai. One of my favorite peoples on earth, but nevertheless. We drove back in and we set up the first series of appointments. We went back and fought our way in through the traffic.

John very cordially and generously what's the word? In a very warm and friendly way put me up in the guesthouse. Have you been to the residence in Bangkok?

Q: No.

HOWLAND: It's an old Thai bungalow. Very lovely. Very Thai style.

Q: As a matter of fact I have.

HOWLAND: Old colonial-type bungalow. It looks very much like the old residence in Singapore. I think we did those like that, raised up you know with everything upstairs. Even though you can say, well, it's not very fancy, I thought it was exquisite. The Thai felt comfortable there. Then there was another guesthouse which was wood. Did you stay in the guesthouse?

Q: No.

HOWLAND: It was a classic wooden Thai house, which was just superb. The rooms were air conditioned of course, but it had the carved wood work and the sloping roofs and old tiles and everything. It had plenty of room. The head houseboy, Nong, had been Mack Godley's houseboy in Laos, and then Charlie Whitehouse's houseboy in Laos. When Charlie was assigned to Bangkok, he got Nong out of Laos to be his number one houseboy in Thailand. I heard that Nong eventually wound up running Charlie's house at his estate in Middleburg, until Charlie and Molly got divorced and then I don't know what happened to him. Anyway, Nong was there and I was able to get all kinds of information about all my pals in Laos, including my former maid whom I was very interested in tracking down and getting out of Laos to safety.

When I arrived there it was late afternoon and John showed up immediately. He left work early. He didn't have any social events that night and he and I sat down together. Actually in the guesthouse. He's such a funny guy. As I say he's very hierarchy oriented. Well, he must have thought, Howland is only a country director. If I have him for a private dinner in my house someone else who didn't get one will get5 mad, so we'll have it in the guesthouse. I was just as happy and John when he let his hair down was a regular guy. You know, he'd been in Vietnam. He'd been in the trenches. We had a nice Thai meal, a lovely Thai meal on the porch in the guesthouse.

As it turned out I was much happier there and we talked for another hour or so. He let his hair down and voiced all his complaints about O'Donohue, Armitage, this problem and that, refugees, on and on. He mentioned how in his view I was the only friend he had back there, which wasn't completely true. But I didn't do much to dissuade him, because it was pretty nice to hear that you're the Ambassador's guy, that you've become the linkage and can speak for him to a certain extent. Of course that never worked with O'Donohue. Then it was late and we shook hands and I put my stuff away and got ready for work. Good thing I had that overnight stop in Hong Kong.

I got there on a Tuesday, I think. The next day I was off on calls right away and the only chance to take a little rest was sitting in Bangkok traffic, except I didn't want to rest in Bangkok traffic. I wanted to pick the brains of whoever was coming with me to a call, about the people I was calling on. I think I will cut it off right there.

Q: Okay, you want to put down here where we've cut it off, what you want to do.

HOWLAND: I'm going to do that. I do have a couple of more things.

Q: Do you want to start?

HOWLAND: Okay, apart from John Dean, Jim Wilkinson was the political counselor, so that's who I dealt with during my visits. His number two, I'm not sure who was number two. In his political section he had a lot very good officers. Ed McWilliams who I've talked about. I gave you his name. I don't know if you were able to get in touch with him.

Q: No, I couldn't locate him..

HOWLAND: Oh. I'll look into that. Who else was in the section? Tim Carney of course.

Q: I've interviewed Tim. Just finished.

HOWLAND: Oh, good. He'll give you a lot more than I can. I'm just giving you the outside of things. Not the first time I went, but the second time Dick Gibson, who had been consul in Songkhla, switched with somebody, yes, I think it was Dick. Dick came out to be in the political section.

The main reason they switched was because in Sinkhole, the consulate and the residence were right across the street, and within 50 feet, of a Thai movie theater which broadcast Thai Kung Fu soundtracks with loud speakers out in the street all hours of the day or night. Plus there were endless lights and cars blowing horns. You know these Asian scenes. It was like a nightmare, so after a year Gibson's wife says, either we transfer or I'm going home and getting a divorce. He got out of there and Nick Mauger, who was not married at the time, was sent him down there, which was a good idea. However, I recall that Dick Gibson had come up to Bangkok and went along with Tim and me on our trip over to the border to see the refugee camps. I'll get to that when I get to the border. That was the political section.

The economic section had a very interesting guy whose name I've forgotten who previously I had met him when I inspected the Caribbean in September of '77. He was now the deputy in the economic section, not as the head. I can't remember who the head was, but I think he was the number two, a very sharp officer. When I went down to see his boss he took me aside afterwards and said, "You know, you're a big Washington visitor. I really need you to come and see three or four people in trade, in finance so the Thai really respect us. If you say you came from Washington, they'll be all ears and we'll get credibility." He's the only one in the Embassy who said that and who realized that here's a Washington visitor, let's use him for access. I was not the highest ranking type, but they could use him for something.

He and I went off to see the Thai woman official everyone called the "dragon lady," a beautiful woman, the director general for trade, the Thai ministry of trade. And was she

sharp. If I'm not mistaken, Wellesley under-grad with a doctorate from either MIT or Stanford, some economist. She knew her stuff. Nobody could fool with her. She was charming and vivacious just like all Thai women, but I went to see her armed with some pathetic argument about restricting textiles. With the Thai in those years the main issue was always textiles. I had some inexpert argument on why we couldn't increase the quota or lower the tariff and she cut me to ribbons. We went to see some others where I did a little better, but she was too good.

Q: All right, sure. You said you have a couple other things. . .

HOWLAND: Yes. In my first meeting with the Ambassador, the informal guesthouse dinner, John had come on pretty strong about my calls. He said he wanted to take me to see Prem, the Prime Minister and Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, the Foreign Minister, because he knew I'd met them both in the States. Siddhi and I had gotten along pretty well because we had a lot of mutual friends, especially Hugh Tovar, who in the OSS had parachuted into Thailand with Siddhi in 1944. But as it turned out. After that initial meeting with John, he had second thoughts and I never got to see Prem, and I never got really to see Siddhi except in passing.

To this day I don't know if it was perhaps the Thai who felt I was too low-ranking to see Siddhi. I did see a very key guy, the national security advisor, a very important guy, the guy who was basically in charge of the border and in charge of refugee policy and we got along very well. I had a couple of lunches with Siddhi's younger foreign ministry officers, very brilliant, all U.S. educated – the Thai are superb diplomats, great guys. We had “dim sum” lunches every other day, together. You can imagine how great that was. I got to meet several director generals. So I think John just had qualms about my seeing a minister. Well, he may have thought, if Howland sees a minister, then if I take Holdridge to see a minister, the minister will say, well, I saw your guy Howland and he said so and so, and you're saying something else.

Maybe John was right, I don't know. I think he would have been right in India. The Thai are not like that at all. I will get into a little bit of the various things we talked about on the calls. My concept of how I was doing these calls or how I was going to do it, would be that I would touch base only briefly – and of course I saw a lot of the people in the Embassy and naturally I had a meeting with the junior officers. Since I'd been an inspector in '77 to '79 I was used to coming into embassies and dealing with unusual things that previous visitors never would have thought of. I'll give you an example.

I knew that “L” in the Department was getting ready to open negotiations with the Thai on a prisoner exchange treaty, i.e. one that would provide for Americans convicted in Thai courts to serve their sentences in the US. So, one of the first things I said in Bangkok was that I had heard there were American prisoners in the jail here. Yes, they said, there's a woman named Sherry something or other from Massachusetts. I said, I'd like to see her. You see, I was also aware that once an inspection had occurred, where there were some American prisoners, and the consular section – wherever it was, in Dubai or somewhere –

had not done anything for the prisoners there. There was a fuss back home about it. The inspectors found out about it and asked to go to meet the prisoner, and the Ambassador said, we don't have people go to these prison camps and so forth. There had been something, a case involving torture that sticks in my mind.

So, I said, if there are American prisoners there and I'm on a desk, someday I'm going to get a call from somebody's mother or father or husband or wife or brother or sister saying we understand you were out in Thailand, my brother was unjustly accused. When you were there, did you look into it? I thought the best way of looking into it, without having to do anything about it, was to go to the prison and meet the person. Whatever comes out of it, whatever happens I'll go back and I'd say, well, the Embassy took me there and I talked to him in some length. I wasn't asked for anything to do. There were no requests for me to do anything. I did express my sympathy and tried to make sure they were getting proper treatment and so forth, which they were like that. It was even after four or five months as a Washington bureaucrat you start to pile up little thoughts like this, you know. You think of all the things that you've been called about on a desk that are totally off the wall. What about the yellow rain, what about this?

I did get to go to the Bangkok prison, and met the young woman convicted of smuggling heroin into Thailand. She was caught easily with her husband at the airport. As it turned out she was from a wealthy family in the states, a woman just gone wrong, and thought of herself as a professional drug merchant, I suppose. She was rather annoyed throughout the interview and eventually walked out. I believe she was released soon thereafter and banned from Thailand along with her husband.

I wanted to look up a couple of the people I had met and worked closely with during the Queen's visit, Notably, the King's nephew, Thongnai Thongyai and his wife, an archeologist and to get to meet them, to see them. Actually we made a week-end trip together up to Sukhothai, the old capital, and from there I went up to Udorn and Chiang Mai. It was like inspecting as I saw it. as if you're inspecting an Embassy with constituent posts; you first go and you spend three or four days at the Embassy to prepare and you inspect the constituent posts, finding out about them, what the issues are, and finding out how well the Embassy manages the constituent posts from their perspective.

Then you pull it all together back at the Embassy and write your report. I wasn't writing a report thank God, but I wanted to do the same kind of thing to get a picture of how the Embassy functioned. That was my plan. I spent the first four or five days there. Dean wanted me to spend the whole month in Bangkok so that every night he wasn't free we'd talk about the good old days in Laos and I did a good bit of that, but I wanted I really wanted to get out in Thailand and I wanted to travel with Thai. I wanted to take the buses. I wanted to do what I'd done as a junior officer in Cambodia years ago. That was not to be, of course.

Many times late in the day, I would call John Dean and he would say, oh, I've got a social event; maybe we can get together afterwards. I said fine. I knew he always closed off his

dinners at 10:00 and then he'd come over for a last brandy at 10:30 and we'd talk from 10:30 to 11:00. So, when I thought, gosh, it was just like the good old days in Laos, but unfortunately he decided that it was too dangerous to just let me go off on my own, with just a backpack; I was not going to be allowed to hop the bus or rather the train. He said Anne – my wife – would never forgive him if anything happened to me. There's a wonderful train I wanted to take to Udorn, and an air-conditioned train to Songkhla – I planned to stop at Haadyai for a day at the government rest house there, go down to the wharves and talk to the fishermen. All the Thai speak some known language. But no, he decided that I had to be shepherded around.

He assigned Nick Mauger, a very fine young officer, whose father had been a missionary and who spoke perfect Thai. A very fine officer, but there was no chance I was going to go off that beaten track and take trains and buses with Nick Mauger, although he probably did that on his own. Nevertheless being in the field down in Songkhla, where the refugee boats came in, and particularly my visit later to the refugee camp, the Meo refugee camp up near Chiang Mai, were the highlights of the whole trip, but I'll get to that because it was toward the end. So, I think that's about it. It's 3:30 and I want to beat the traffic.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up the next time.

* * *

Q: Dick, you mentioned last time about your trip to the Meo refugee camp in northern Thailand. Were they the Hmong Refugees from Laos in Thailand?

HOWLAND: Yes, an important part of the refugee problem was caused by the Laos war, when we had financed, trained the Hmong, also called the Meo, and led them in combat, fighting the Vietnamese in Northern Laos. A great number of them had fled out as refugees into Northern Thailand. There was one camp near Udorn just south of the Mekong, and another way up in the hills near Chiang Mai. I think between the two of them there were 76,000 Hmong there, many of them fighters or children of fighters. Even as we speak, and probably forever, many are still there in the camp.

In 1981, some of them had kept their arms when they came across the river, and were endlessly scheming to go back into Laos to overthrow the communist government, which of course was nonsense. If the US hadn't been able to stop the Vietnamese Communist take-over of Laos in ten years, spending three and a half billion dollars a year, certainly a bunch of aging fighters and their kids weren't going to do it. But there was a certain sensitivity to their plight, of course. The Reagan administration and some die-hards in the agency sort of aided and abetted this attitude of revanchism, I guess is the word for it. The Thai on the one hand didn't want them to go over there to provoke something. On the other hand, the Thai saw their existence as useful in keeping the Vietnamese on the other side of the border. But the one thing the Thai didn't was to let the Hmong spread throughout Thailand, and become bandits or public charges. That was their position on all the refugees.

Let me jump ahead and mention that on my trip to Thailand in January 1982, an old friend from Indonesia, now the agency base chief in Chiang Mai, persuaded me to visit one of these camps. He knew that I had served in Laos with Dan Arnold. We flew to the camp in a Thai Army helicopter. Upon landing a group of Hmong elders asked to have a formal meeting with me to talk about their plans to fight the Vietnamese in Laos. Suspecting I would have to get out fast after that meeting, I first asked to tour the camp so as to get some idea of their situation. As we toured the camp, they also complained that the Ambassador had visited a few months ago, and had promised to build them a school. Nothing had happened on that.

After the tour, we went into a mess tent, and there were a dozen Hmong lined up with weapons. The apparent leader asked me whether the U.S. Government would support them if they crossed the river and went into Laos to fight. They said they knew I had served in Laos, and hoped I would be sympathetic to their aspirations.

I replied that the United States had never broken diplomatic relations with the Lao government, now controlled by the Pathet Lao and, of course, the Vietnamese. We were, in fact, trying to get that government to help us search for American pilots missing from the war. I told them we owed them a debt and would try to help get them a school. Then I said: "But one thing: I would never tell anyone not to fight for their country, but I would say one thing – do not do so in the expectation of any U.S. Government support. By U.S. law, we could not do that."

After that was translated there was a lot of muttering and I shook hands and immediately got out of the tent and headed for the helicopter, fearing at any moment I would be shot in the back. I mean, these are tough guys, in combat for years. Nothing happened, and we flew back to Chiang Mai. Later I asked Ambassador Dean about the school he supposedly promised them, but I don't remember his answer.

Q: You also visited the Cambodian border – did you see any evidence of the so-called "yellow rain?"

HOWLAND: Well, the Yellow Rain issue was really Desaix Anderson's concern as VLK Director, not mine, except when it evolved toward trying to put a monitoring unit at the Embassy in Bangkok. That was my pigeon of course. Yellow Rain was the name given to – allegedly – a toxic powder sprayed from aircraft on Khmer Rouge detachments, and some of it coated the leaves. Now, there is no question in my mind that the Vietnamese had used toxic gases on the Hmong in Laos. There was no question of that. The proof of that is pretty well established. The Hmong had brought out evidence of the gas. There were also allegations of its use in Cambodia, which were surfaced by the Khmer Rouge initially to, among others, Ed McWilliams, a rather live-wire, high-intensity officer in the political section. A very good officer, but very intense. I think he was the number three in the political section at Embassy Bangkok at the time.

Q: Let me stop here. This is tape eighteen, side one with Dick Howland. Yes?

HOWLAND: Khmer Rouge refugees coming across the border into Thailand had brought in samples of this yellow rain, a little bit of yellow dusting for analysis and it had been sent back to a lab in Kentucky which supposedly determined that it was a type of toxin, some germ warfare type of stuff.

So, Ed McWilliams, sort of on his own, made this his cause celebre. Every weekend, on his own money, in his own car, he'd drive to the border to interview refugees to find out more about this yellow rain. He was a very determined, anti-communist lad. I emphasize that he was a terrific political officer; recently I saw he had done a letter to the *Washington Post* about Afghanistan where he also served. And I guess at one point he thought he would go to the source without telling anyone. He crossed the border into the Khmer Rouge area, and walked in to these KR soldiers and said, I guess, "Take me to your leader." They took him a Khmer Rouge camp, where he may have met one of the senior people who told many yellow rain stories. The next day they took him to a place where people had supposedly died from yellow rain. Now, you know the Khmer Rouge, a gang of murderers. . . Clearly they could have poisoned seven people overnight and then took him to see them. Anyway Ed stayed there overnight and contracted a severe case of malaria.

Q: Meningitis?

HOWLAND: Well, I don't know, a form of malaria that that works on your brain, for which there is a cure, but dicey. He went on to a fabulous career. Naturally the Khmer Rouge were delighted with him, they probably sent him off with garlands and flowers to tell the story, whether true or concocted. I suppose they even thought he might get the Americans to support the Khmer Rouge, which Ed, to his credit, never advocated. Even Ed knew we couldn't do anything with the Khmer Rouge. Anyway, Ed McWilliams, the only the only American to spend a week-end in a Khmer Rouge fighting camp, came back with almost untreatable malaria, but he also came back with specimens of this alleged yellow toxic powder on a leaf sample which was sent back to the United States for analysis as being some toxin of some sort that allegedly the Vietnamese were using against the Khmer Rouge.

Of course, who knows the real story? Sure, the NVA was probably doing something, but who knows? I certainly couldn't judge but had to cope with the bureaucratic consequences of the issue.

Anyway, this issue – like the MIA/POW one – got much politicized here between the anti-Communist right and the remnants of the anti-war groups, pro-Vietnamese groups in the United States. Many of them were situated in universities. The Reagan administration had just come in, so for them this was a good anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese issue of course, and we certainly played it up in the State Department. It took some of the edge off the rather shameful, unpleasant image that, among other things, in order to get the

Vietnamese out of Cambodia, we were indirectly supporting the Khmer Rouge. You ask how – simple. The Khmer Rouge refugees, I think, on both sides of the border were benefiting from the refugee feeding programs of AID and the UN. Of course some of this food was passed to the fighters. There was that aspect of the yellow rain story that made in a way us feel a little better about supporting the Khmer Rouge.

Q: I mean, how stood the yellow rain? Had it been resolved?

HOWLAND: No, it wasn't resolved at that time. I just kind of want to flag it and Ed McWilliams and get into the resolution later because it became a bureaucratic thing. I just want to indicate one of the places it started. Once we got leaves with yellow stuff on them the NSC became very keen on yellow rain, on making a big thing out of it.

Q: They wanted it to be a toxic chemical.

HOWLAND: Yes, yes. I mean it could have happened, the Vietnamese were certainly capable of doing this. But it was also possible that it was disinformation, let's say perhaps the Chinese had chemical warfare materiel and saw this as a propaganda coup. The Chinese were supplying the Khmer Rouge with arms and food through Sattahip port. The Chinese had very close contacts with them. There were Chinese advisors and even diplomats in the Khmer Rouge camps. The Chinese could have gotten a little leaf with a toxic chemical, put it in a satchel, took it down there and handed it to the Khmer Rouge, who handed it to Ed McWilliams or somebody. I'm not totally sure it was Ed, but somehow Ed was out there and Ed was very sure that this was toxic poison they were using.

The NSC was big on it. A guy named Jeff Crocker in INR was another big proponent of the yellow rain effort, trying to pin it on the Vietnamese as a war crime.. He probably did more than anyone else in the U.S. government to create – I don't want to say a fuss over this – but the move to the top people was sudden and swift, and at the time it quickly became a big issue.

At first I too was very keen on this, because I was very morally outraged. Happily, bless him, Dan O'Donohue calmed me down and said, let it percolate along and see where it goes first. Dan knew a lot more about this than I did, and was much surer-footed than I on bureaucratic issues. I don't mean from this comment that Dan himself, and all of us, weren't, pf course, totally outraged about it, if it were real. The issue was how you handle this diplomatically and bureaucratically. Being a bureaucratic warrior par excellence, Dan sensed that this was really going nowhere. He said, for instance, that Charlie Whitehouse wanted to take it to the UN. Dan was kind of sitting on that risky idea. He was not convinced, personally convinced, that we had the hard evidence, and in the UN that would be a disaster. As it turned out he was right.

What the NSC proposed was to create a monitoring unit in the Embassy in Bangkok. John Dean was very keen on this, as Ambassador, he wanted us to go look for yellow rain. So

elements in the Department wanted to create a unit there, but we had to get personnel slots for it, naturally. Somebody had to give up slots from somewhere and since it had to do with military stuff, we thought at the outset that DIA – which has 500 people for every known analytical issue – would be happy to give up some slots and send some guys to Bangkok, why not?

Q: Defense Intelligence Agency.

HOWLAND: Yes, there must be thousands in DIA who would want to go to Bangkok, live it up on Pat Pong Road and so forth. But that turned out not to be the case. The Pentagon waffled and the CIA also demurred. They both kind of waffled, telling us it was a State, not Defense issue, so we should supply the slots. Of course we didn't have any. Hmmm, I thought. Perhaps that was one reason Dan O'Donohue was skeptical.

Q: You made the proposal and they didn't want anything to do with it.

HOWLAND: Yes. They were willing to do the analysis and so forth, but not to send people out to collect more samples. So then we fanned out the existing sample through them to two or three universities, because we wanted to get corroboration from independent labs. One of the samples went up to Harvard. That turned out to be a mistake because Harvard had some very good people up there. Well, I don't want to prejudge the story, so what we did was send it out to some universities for studies and we tried, we were in the process of trying to create the unit to look at the yellow rain and Whitehouse back here and the Embassy out there were jumping up and down about yellow rain.

Then at a press conference a Harvard scientist announced that the yellow powder was actually toxic droppings from bees collecting pollen in the Southeast East Asian forests. In one fell swoop, it was the end of the yellow rain issue – I didn't thank Dan for keeping me from getting enmeshed in this one, but I should have. And in answer to your question, I never saw any yellow rain in my trip to the border – but had plenty of excitement anyway.

Q: What else did you see on the border?

HOWLAND: Well, what I didn't see was any of the military equipment – mainly howitzers – that we had given the Thai to defend themselves against the Vietnamese. That was about the first major thing I had to do earlier after kind of establishing good relations with Rich Armitage, who as I say was the Defense Department guy responsible for Southeast Asia. One issue with the Thai, the first issue that really came up involved the Thai always wanting us, very publicly, to give them endless amounts of military assistance, not for use, not to provoke the Vietnamese, but just to make them aware that the Americans would not take kindly to any major Vietnamese invasion of Thailand.

You see, the Vietnamese made little incursions into Thailand because the Khmer Rouge kept provoking them. Very often was the Khmer Rouge would provoke them, and then

take refuge on the Thai side of the border and the Vietnamese would come in and shoot up a few Thai police posts or a Thai village. Then the Thai would be frightened to death and the Thahan Phran would take a few shots at the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese would sit there a day or two. At that point the Thai would frantically get us and say, you've got to give us some big military aid thing so the Vietnamese will know we're not alone. Then we jumped through hoops to shift them some major pieces of equipment, ferried out on – what are those big planes, C - 5As?

Q: C-5, right.

HOWLAND: C-5. They would have a big ceremony to welcome the howitzers. When I visited Thailand in January, knowing that we'd shipped about 150 howitzers over the years, I specifically asked, where are those howitzers?. Oh, they're okay, they're safe, I was told. Are they near the border? Well, no, they're not too near the border because we don't want the Vietnamese to get them. Well, it turned out all the howitzers were still sitting in their cosmoline, never having been taken out of the boxes they came in. The Thai put them at the air base in Khorat where no one could ever get them or anything. The Thai kept saying, how about shipping us in some tanks. The Vietnamese will be scared if you ship in tanks. This never stopped. That was their national defense policy, that and the Thahan Phran and the Khmer Rouge to do the real fighting.

Q: I take it you were getting to the military and everyone else that the Thai army was not a believable army.

HOWLAND: Yes, it wasn't really a fighting army. It was more an eating and living army, and it ate and lived well. It was a political army. The officers were very important, extremely important to the political stability of Thailand. So no one would risk having the army defeated by the Vietnamese somewhere, because they would no longer have the credibility to go on basically guaranteeing the stability of Thailand – as long as things were going the way they wanted. You never knew, of course, with the Thai army whether you'd arm and train a Thai battalion to go to the border to fight the Vietnamese, but instead they'd get in their little vehicles and turn around and head to Bangkok and say, well we're now running the country. You always had the coup threat.

As I mentioned everything about the border was run by a Thai task force, called Task Force 80. They ran the Thahan Phran, they also ran the Khmer Rouge support, and there was ruby smuggling, other smuggling they got involved with. They looked after the refugee villages and camps because they were not secure. Their liaison was with the agency not with us. When I went up to the border, I was a State Department guy and I was taken around and all that, but they weren't my people the way the real army was my people. In Bangkok the real army took me around. You went to lunches with them and all that good stuff. Task force 80 was really the agency's baby up there and it was running everything, responsible really only to the Thai equivalent of the National Security Council under Prem and Siddhi.

Up there on the border, the main town, Aranyaprathet, was one of these typical wild west scenes as you always have, a magnet for every disgruntled or nut type from all over the world. The hippies come, the refugee workers come, the druggies come and they're all there going to the bars at night. They're literally about one kilometer, only one kilometer between a major Thai town and first of all, the NVA, the North Vietnamese Army. Second of all, all kinds of Khmer Rouge installations both on the Thai side and on the Cambodian side. I'll tell you how close it is to the border: when I went out jogging in the morning I went East from my hotel, which was probably a stupid thing to do. I didn't jog very far, maybe half an hour or 45 minutes. I came around a bend and there was a roadblock with a bunch of Thahan Phran, and on the other side was Cambodia with a Khmer Rouge flag flying. I turned on my heels and went jogging back to my hotel and decided to jog to the West instead of the East the next time.

It was one of these never-never lands, you know? As you went into town there were bars and bar girls and drugs everywhere. Everybody packing silver-plated 45 caliber revolvers and surplus Delta combat knives. Imagine Patpong Road in the middle of rice paddies. It was a marvelous fun place, but terribly tragic in many ways. Because Aranyaprathet existed on the enormous outpouring of help for the refugee camps of Khmers, both Khmer Rouge families, and non-communist Khmer refugees sometimes wandered around the town. If you went out to the refugee camps, they were run by a few UN high commissioners to refugees under the supervision of Task Force 80.

Naturally the Thai did not want any Khmer to get out of those refugee encampments and get out into Thailand for fear they would just flee and spread into other areas. They might wind up bribing someone to become citizens of Thailand or something like that. So, when the refugees attempted to flee these camps – which were rough camps, not country clubs, but compared to what they'd gone through under the Khmer Rouge were pretty darn nice – and they'd get shot by the Thai. They would shoot them and of course we were up in arms about that, as the UN was up in arms about people shooting refugees. Nobody's too happy about shooting the poor refugees who try to take refuge.

Q: Did you visit any of the camps?

HOWLAND: Oh yes, the big one on the Thai side of course, but we also went to one of the KPNLF camps a kilometer or so into Cambodia. I think it was on the second trip, in January 1983, and I was traveling with Tim Carney and Dick Gibson from the Embassy political section. We had a big old Chevy with an Embassy driver who was incapable of doing less than 65 MPH, it seemed, on the potholed windy roads of the border area. On a straight road, right up to 85. We first visited the big refugee camp on the Thai side, and then crossed into Cambodia – for me the first time in 20 years – and stopped at a KPNLF village about a kilometer inside the border. That was under the non-communist Khmer faction headed by Son Sann, of whom I spoke earlier. It was early afternoon and typically sleepy, typically slovenly – and all the village guards were asleep. We woke up a purported commander and he gave us a map briefing in pigeon French. It was a pretty sad exercise.

Then one of his troops came in and said there were rumors the NVA would mortar the camp that afternoon. He asked if we could take some of the children back to the border, so about ten piled in and we drove them to a Thahan Phran post in Thailand. Apparently this happened all the time. Tim went back for another carload of kids while Dick Gibson and I waited at the post.

Finally we were on our way south – we never heard whether the village was attacked or not. We got some delicious seafood at a restaurant on a wharf in a Thai fishing town, then spent the night at a hotel in Trat, I believe. The next day was another terrifying drive back to Bangkok. That was my border trip that year.

Q: Do I recall your mentioning earlier about a legal treaty? Was that for extradition?

HOWLAND: Not exactly – it was a prisoner exchange agreement, to permit Americans convicted of crimes in Thailand to serve their sentences in the US, and vice versa. Most of the crimes were drug-related, of course, but there were also very strange and strict laws against “*Lese Majeste*” and insults to Buddhism in Thailand. Any real or perceived aspersion against the royal family, or desecration of anything related to Buddhism, was punished severely under these laws. So the Office of the Legal Adviser (L) in the Department had been pushing for such a treaty for years, and the Thai were not opposed, just dilatory. Happily, when I got on the desk, I learned that an old Thai friend from Cambodia, Sathit Sathirathai, had just become the Chief of the Legal and Treaty Affairs of the Thai Foreign Ministry.

Sathit and I, and his lovely wife, were great friends in Phnom Penh in 1961-62, before the two countries broke relations over the Preah Vihear temple dispute. So I proposed that they send a delegation to Washington to complete the negotiations on the treaty, and they accepted. It all went very well and Sathit and I had a great time – we called on Chief Justice Burger at the Supreme Court, for instance, a wonderful experience. The only downside was the lunch hosted at the Seventh Floor dining room, where the food and service were atrocious. The treaty was signed and perhaps the drug smuggler I had interviewed was transferred to a U.S. prison.

Q: Anything else from your time on the Thai desk?

HOWLAND: Actually two things in my notes – one then, and one later when I was DCM in Indonesia. The first was an interesting meeting between Secretary George Schultz and Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi, I guess in the fall of 1962. Schultz had replaced Haig after the latter’s disastrous “I’m in control here” speech when Reagan was shot by Hinckley. Schultz was the best Secretary of State I ever worked for – or played tennis with, a few years later in Bali. I guess since George Schultz had gone to MIT, and was an MIT President at one point if I’m not mistaken, the first thing he saw on his briefing paper on Siddhi was that the Foreign Minister had been a chemical engineering student at MIT.

So there we were sitting in the Secretary's anteroom awaiting the time of the meeting, and Schultz came all the way from his office about ten minutes early, walked in, shook hands and sat down and said to Siddhi, "Have you seen the deplorable state of the dormitories at MIT? I'm trying to enlist everyone I know to write a letter to do something about that. That's just a disgrace." In his very warm and pleasant way. Siddhi immediately responded saying, "I haven't been up there recently Mr. Secretary. . ."

"Oh, call me George," Schultz said.

"I haven't been up there, but I'll certainly try to work it into the visit." Schultz said, "that would be great. We'll give you anything you need to go up there." That was kind of nice. Again it shows the change in the relationship with the Thai, after the unpleasantness of the immediate post-war period, 1976. As the formal meeting then got underway, the two of them talked mostly about MIT in "the old days," and Siddhi's adventures in the OSS during the war. We had to gently steer the conversation back to their talking points, which concerned, of course, the latest Thai request for highly-publicized military aid.

Q: And the other thing?

HOWLAND: Well, that was when I was DCM in Jakarta 1983-87, working for Ambassador John Holdridge. As I mentioned above, although at least once a month in Thailand there was some rumor of a coup, Prem I think lasted nine years, if I'm not mistaken, as prime minister. So I'm jumping ahead just a little to give an example of how he and we did that.

In 1985, maybe the fall of '85, Prem came on an official visit to Indonesia to see Suharto, with whom he was reasonably friendly inasmuch as anyone except his family and Benny Murdani could be friendly with Suharto. Prem stayed at the state guesthouse. We had quite a lot to do with the visit, and while he was in the state guesthouse, somebody from the Thai Army moved against the government in Bangkok. The usual thing, seizing installations and strategic crossroads around the city in the middle of the night, the only time the traffic would enable that to happen. The King fled to Nakhon Si Thammarat in the south, I believe, King and Queen and the royal family, while some general – I don't know who it was – grabbed Bangkok and held the army headquarters, the seat of power. So, there's Prem ostensibly overthrown, with Suharto always nervous about coups – although he had no reason to be – and Prem stranded in the state guesthouse on the palace grounds in Jakarta.

Of course the first thing that the Indonesians did was turn to us. We were all sitting and wringing our hands in the large anteroom of the state guest house, about 50 Thai and Americans and Indonesians. I happened to be at the guesthouse because I was the Embassy liaison with Prem's party, and Ambassador John Holdridge was at the Embassy, talking to Washington. Now, I had built a very good relationship with Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, the Indonesian Foreign Minister. We liked each other. So at one point Mochtar came over and said to me, you've got to get him out of here fast. The President

wants him out of Indonesia. We can't leave him sitting here for four or five days while things unfold in Thailand. If he's overthrown where would we put him? You've got to get him a plane and get him out of here.

Now, this was after Jim Wilkinson's time, so Phil Mayhew was the chief of the political section in Bangkok. I knew Phil. He was a very close friend of O'Donohue's, they had worked for Habib together. He had been consul in Udon when I was in Vientiane in the '70s and I'd stayed with him then so we knew each other. So I called and asked him, what are you going to do about Prem? How are you going to get him back? The Indonesians are pressing us to get him out of here.

Well, Phil said, he's in Indonesia, he's your problem, he's not our problem. We've got enough going on here. I said, well, look, we supported this guy. He said, well, we've got enough going on here. We're trying to find out what's going on. I said, he's the prime minister of Thailand. No, sorry, can't do anything. Click, he hung up on me. I told that to Holdridge and he was livid. But, the Ambassador called Clark to see about getting a plane. Then Prem said he couldn't go back to Bangkok. He said he feared if he went back to Bangkok, the coup group would shoot him down. I said, well, you'll be on an American plane, so they're not going to shoot you down. He said, I can't go back on an American plane. You've got to get a Thai plane to take me back. But the Thai planes, most of the Thai planes, were in Bangkok under coup group control of course. How about an Indonesian plane? The Indonesians would be willing to fly him out, but they didn't want to be shot down in Bangkok either. None of this would have happened, of course – it just wasn't Southeast Asian to do such a thing, except maybe in Laos or Burma. But they worried about it.

Finally, for some reason, as we sat there, the answer just leaped into my mind, why not do the same thing as in the 1981 coup attempt, when Prem and the royal family fled to Khorat, and the Queen's message turned the situation around? But I wanted to make sure that Holdridge was on board with this. So I called the Ambassador and said, why not fly him back to Nakhon Si Thammarat, then the two of them, he and the King could get on the radio together and rally the country? John thought that was a super idea. He came to the guesthouse and simply announced, in his best Commanding Officer manner, that we've decided that Prem should be flown back to Nakhon Si Thammarat. He added that Prime Minister Prem had agreed to that (which he hadn't, but he immediately did) and would consult with the King and address the nation. The Indonesians mopped their brow with happiness. They laid on a Garuda Airways specially-configured Boeing 737 and flew him back to Sri Thammarat. He and the king rallied the country. The coup collapsed and the next day they all went back to Bangkok.

In the typical Thai way, no Thai was ever prosecuted, but they were all locked up for a while. The plotters were young officers, with a figurehead general as it turned out. Periodically, a group of Thai junior officers would try to seize something. It all had to do with competition among graduating classes from the military academy, but don't ask me to explain it. Most of the time they were kind of intellectuals, who didn't have a whole lot

of solid troop support. They had a battalion or two, but nothing really spectacular. Then it would all fritter away. They'd go to jail for a week or two and they'd be exiled, or be sent to America to study, or something like that and that's how it was done.

I was very happy about that even though I'd left the Thai desk but I never forgave Phil Mayhew. I can't to this day imagine what he was thinking. The important thing was that we got Prem back, he survived again and eventually was succeeded by an elected prime minister, I think.

Q: Thanks. That was quite a tour in Jakarta too, I suspect. I'll look forward to hearing about it.

End of interview