

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

AMBASSADOR DAVID L. LYON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial Interview Date: December 9, 2010
Final Interview Date: June 30, 2011
Copyright 2018 ADST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	1951-1974
A-100	1974
Lagos	1974-1976
Vice Consul	
Recife	1976-1978
Vice Consul	
Accra	1978-1980
Consular Chief	
Manila	1980-1984
Consul	
AF/RA	1984-1986
acting Director	
National War College	1986-1987
Student	
Bangkok	1987-1991
Consul General	
Office of Transnational Affairs, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters	1991-1994
Director, INM/T	
Beijing	1996-1999
Consul General	
Melbourne	1999-2002
Principal Officer	

Senate Confirmation	2002
Suva Ambassador	2003-2005
Post-Foreign Service	2005-

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is 9 December 2010. This is an interview with David L. Lyon and it is being done on behalf of the association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. It is being done by telephone and I am here in Arlington, Virginia—and you are where?

LYON: Pebble Beach, California.

Q: All right. Well let's start this off: When and where were you born?

LYON: I was born in June 1951 in Frankfurt, Germany.

Q: Let's take your family on your father's side. What do you know about them?

LYON: My father, Scott Lyon, was from Columbus, Ohio. He was born in 1912. His father was a fairly well known journalist/columnist in the Midwest who, among other things, accompanied Pershing in WWI as a war correspondent. Family lore has him among a small number of correspondents who slipped into Berlin just before the war ended.

Q: Oh, and do you know anything about the education or upbringing of your grandfather?

LYON: No, not really. My great-grandfather was a railway linesman who was killed on the job. I don't believe my grandfather had very much university, but frankly I don't know. My grandmother was an Oklahoma Sooner in 1889, but her family eventually had to return to Ohio.

Q: What about your father? What sort of education did he have?

LYON: He was interested in science and mathematics and was going off to MIT until his father invested his college fund in the stock market in 1929. So he stayed at home, attended Ohio State and got a degree in chemical engineering. He ended up getting a job with ESSO as a petroleum engineer even though it was the middle of the Depression.

Q: So, how did you end up in Frankfurt in 1951?

LYON: Well, my father wanted to go overseas, no doubt influenced by his father's WWI experiences in Europe. So he asked ESSO to send him overseas to the Arabian Peninsula where ESSO had a large concession. They refused telling him that he was a domestic engineer, not an international engineer. So he went and took the Foreign Service test -- this would have been in the mid-1930's -- and passed the written test only to be told by the examiners, "Why would we want to hire a chemical engineer from Columbus, Ohio?" So he quit ESSO, obtained seaman's papers, got a job on a freighter, and spent 18 months in Europe teaching himself French, German and Spanish. After passing the written exam again, he went into his interview and basically asked, "What language do you want to do the exam in?" So they took him.

Q: Well, what sort of a career did he have?

LYON: He was the epitome of a generalist. During the war he was the ambassador's aide in Lisbon for a time before going to the Azores as a consular officer helping American sailors off of sunken ships. He then traveled overland through Portuguese West Africa and then up to Rotterdam where he followed U.S. troops as they moved east. After the war, he studied Russian at Columbia University, meeting my mother there, before being assigned to Moscow.

Q: What sort of work was he doing in Moscow? This had to be in the 40's.

LYON: At this point, we are in the late 40's. He was a political officer, probably a first secretary. He was senior enough to have met Stalin; my mother actually kept the morning coat and top hat he wore to meet Stalin in the hopes I would become an ambassador -- unfortunately, in addition to the coat being a bit moth eaten, my father was taller and thinner than I was so I couldn't use it when I presented my credentials to the King of Tonga in 2003.

LYON: What I remember most about my parents' tour in the USSR was that he was our last Consul General in Vladivostok. He and my mother were just married so essentially they spent their honeymoon on the Trans-Siberian Railroad going from Moscow to Vladivostok.

Q: Yes, I have an interview I did with a man, I forget his name now, who was a consular officer in Vladivostok during the war. He talked about how awful it was there. Even though we were allies and pumping equipment into the place, still the KGB was very nasty.

LYON: My father was fairly quiet, but my mother was an imaginative, story teller. I remember her telling us about how the Russians had torn down all the buildings around the Consulate General in order to better watch its staff of my father and mother, and a one vice consul by the name of Bill Warwick. (My mother used to introduce Bill as the man she had spent her honeymoon with as they had been trapped together by a dock strike in Stockholm, my father having flown ahead leaving my mother to follow by ship.) The

Soviets shone spotlights on the compound all night long and had guards walking around 24-7 protecting the Russian people from the Americans. Lots of power outages and the like. I believe they were only there a few weeks before we closed the Soviet Consulate General in New York, they closed our Consulate General in Vladivostok, and my parents returned to Moscow by train.

Q: How did your mother and father meet?

LYON: They met at Columbia University. They were both living at the international house which was for students who had an interest in foreign affairs. My mother was getting a master's degree in occupational therapy.

Q: What is the background of her family?

LYON: Her maiden name was Nancy Otis Wilson. She was a distant cousin of Woodrow Wilson and was related to the Otis elevator family and William Gibbs McAdoo. Her grandfather was one of the Midwest's leading bankers, but lost everything during the bank crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, though family connections kept her father employed and she had a comfortable middle class upbringing.

Q: Well then I take it after Moscow your parents ended up in Frankfurt?

LYON: Yes. They spent five years in Germany in Frankfurt and Munich. My brothers were both born in Munich and I was born in Frankfurt.

Q: 97th General hospital?

LYON: Yes Sir.

Q: My eldest daughter was born in the 97th General.

LYON: It was a popular place for Foreign Service families, nothing like free obstetrical care.

Q: I understand that is now our Consulate General.

LYON: I didn't know that. I went by and visited the hospital on a visit to Frankfurt just to see where I was born, but that was a long time ago.

Q: That was my first post in '55 to '58.

LYON: Well again I was born in '51 so my parents were in Germany from '50 to '55.

Q: How aware were you of your surroundings?

LYON: I was only four when we actually left Germany so all I remember are bits and pieces. I remember I spoke German almost as well as I did English. This was back when Foreign Service families had German nannies. We actually brought her back to the States with us. I remember one of the big houses we lived in just because it was apparently owned by a Nazi general during the War. But just fragments like that, nothing terribly coherent.

Q: Well then, where did you go?

LYON: We came back to Washington for four years. I don't recall what my father's job would have been at that point, though I remember his office in the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House. We lived in Chevy Chase.

Q: I suppose by that time you were pretty much aware, how was it being a kid in Chevy Chase in those days?

LYON: I would think it was as close to idyllic as you could get. I mean, we lived in a nice house on a nice quiet street. I remember lots of kids, lots of dogs, days spent outside playing football, playing baseball and generally rough housing, good memories.

Q: Well then after four years there, where did you go?

LYON: We moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil. My father started out as the economics chief at the Consulate General, then became the political chief and deputy consul general, before being acting consul general for the last year of his five year tour.

Q: Well, you were there from when to when now?

LYON: From '59 to '64.

Q: What were you up to?

LYON: I was having a great time. Brazil was a lot of fun, I very much enjoyed the school that was there. Sao Paulo was a big cosmopolitan city lots of things to do for a ten-year-old. I consider myself as having grown up in Brazil.

Q: Was there any unrest or anti-Americanism going on while you were there?

LYON: Very little mostly, I think, because this coincided with Kennedy being president. The Brazilians in my memory absolutely loved him, partly because he was Catholic, but also because he was young, handsome and dynamic. I don't think Peace Corps had arrived by the time we left, but USAID was very active in Brazil at the time and the Alliance for Progress was in full swing. I remember when President Eisenhower came down to visit. My father was the control officer for his visit to Sao Paulo. I remember some demonstrations, but nothing that ever affected us as children. When Kennedy was assassinated, I think I was the first one in Sao Paulo to know. My father called me up and

said there are rumors about his being shot and asked me to get on the shortwave radio. That was when I heard that Kennedy had been killed. Brazil went into deep mourning. My parents were out for what felt like every night for a month, at memorial events, going to churches, my father speaking at different events.

Q: Well, during this period as you were growing up, was your family at all political? I mean I realize they worked for the government, but at home and talking?

LYON: To this day I don't know who my father ever voted for. You would ask him and he would simply say, "A man's vote is between himself and his conscience." It was very hard to draw anything out on him other than that he was a registered independent. I used to harass him saying it was like giving up half of his vote by not being able to vote in primaries. But he stayed an independent his entire life. He always voted but he never talked about politics. My mother was much louder and was one of those people who had migrated from having been fairly liberal in her 20's and 30's, into being more and more conservative.

Q: How much did foreign affairs intrude on your table conversation, home life at all?

LYON: I would say it did, but not very much, again I think because my father was so very quiet. We were in Brazil at an interesting time, ending with what was called the 'Revolution of 1964', which threw out a left leaning government and imposed a military dictatorship which lasted until the early 80's. I remember it well as one of my closest friends was a Cuban. When the first reports came out about the coup, he thought it was a Communist coup. I happened to be at his house, and he went into the closet and started pulling out all sorts of guns. His family had fled from Castro and he thought they would be attacked again and was getting ready for his father to come home to defend them. I thought it would be a good idea to go home, at which time I learned it was a military coup as opposed to one coming from the Left.

Q: On the academic side, were you much of a reader?

LYON: I was a huge reader. There wasn't much television in Brazil when we were there and my schoolmates were spread out over the entire city. So, I would say reading and sports were the two things I did the most for fun.

Q: Looking back on sort of your earlier years, any books or series of books that particularly struck you as memorable?

LYON: A long time ago. I would basically read anything I could get my hands on, from kids' books like *Bambi* to *Gone With the Wind*. The school library wasn't terribly large, and there was only one English bookstore in town and it carried mostly books from the UK. So I read everything from the Hardy Boys to their English equivalent, the Famous Five.

Q: What about in school, say elementary school, how were you as a student?

LYON: Helped by the fact that I was a native-English speaker, I was a very good, if often lazy, student. The school was a mix of Americans, Brazilians, and third country nationals, so those of us who were native speakers and who were coming from U.S. schools had a real advantage and gravitated to the top track classes. It was a very unusual school because the American kids were also seen as the cool kids, the ones with the best parties. As for sports, the Americans played basketball and baseball. Very few of us played soccer, the Brazilian kids were just too good. It was a unique school where you could be smart and cool and athletic all at the same time.

Q: Did you get any feel for Brazilian culture or society?

LYON: My street Portuguese was pretty good, when I tested at FSI I received a 2/2 which the linguist said was the most fluent bad Portuguese she had ever heard. My parents both spoke Portuguese, so we were out and about quite a bit, traveling around the country. A bunch of my closest friends had Brazilian mothers. So we very much felt that we were in Brazil. Probably never more so than when my best friend's Brazilian mother served up a roast Amazon River turtle for Thanksgiving one year.

Q: Did Sao Paulo have the equivalent of Carnival? One thinks of Rio but...

LYON: Sao Paulo's Carnival is looked down upon by everybody else in Brazil as the city and state re seen as a boring industrial business center. Outside some of the big social clubs, nothing special went on. TV would focus on Rio and Bahia. "Paulistas", for their part talked about Brazil being a train with a powerful engine and 22 empty cars, with Sao Paulo of course being the engine.

Q: While you were there, did the Foreign Service intrigue you as something to do or did that come later or what?

LYON: No, not at all. I think my brothers and I felt put upon by not being in the U.S. We couldn't eat ice cream for the first three years we were there because it wasn't pasteurized. There wasn't turkey for Thanksgiving. It was very hard to find teams to play baseball against. As you always do, you sort of focus on things you don't have. But retrospectively it was a wonderful childhood. The school, Graded, was far ahead of U.S. schools in many ways. It had great theatre and singing groups. For every boy's sport there was a girl's sport. The girls would go cheerlead at the boys' games and the boys would do the same at the girls' events. The president of the senior class, and Prom Queen, was a shot-putter on the girls' track team. Then I came back to the States and went to Leland Junior High School in Bethesda- Chevy Chase and there wasn't a single girls' sport. That said, the education I got at Graded wasn't very good, visa restrictions made it hard to get teachers and they had trouble importing foreign-language text books. So, I had trouble when I came back to the United States for a few years academically. But the esprit of the school and the culture of the school, made it a tremendous experience for me.

Q: Well then when did you come back to the States and for how long?

LYON: We came back in 1964 as I was going into eighth grade. My father worked roughly four more years at State, first on the Brazil Desk and then running the Citizens Emergency Center in what is now Consular Affairs. My mother did not want to go overseas again (and very much did not want to go to Recife, then a huge consulate general, when my father was offered the principal officer's job there) so he retired from the Foreign Service and moved first to Commerce before finishing up as a senior international economist working for the Secretary of the Treasury.

Q: Yes, and you started off at Leland Junior High?

LYON: One year to Leland and basically hated every minute of it.

Q: My daughter went there too. It wasn't a fun time for her either. It is a real problem for Foreign Service kids anyway, to come back to the U.S..

LYON: I came back and ran into a culture that said a boy who liked to read and liked to study, even one who liked to play sports and did all the guy other stuff, was a nerd or worse. Even though I came in with an A average, I was mid-tracked because I was coming from overseas, and I ended up in a class with the underachieving smart boys, basically the screw-offs. Anybody guy studied was a faggot and I just hated it. But I also found that I well behind academically. I had never written a composition, the school in Brazil didn't teach modern math. I ended up on the honor roll, but it took me almost the entire year to get my feet under me in terms of catching up to what they had been studying. Then I went away to a tough boarding school and had the same thing happen again.

Q: Well did you sort of move back into the world of books and sort of hide there?

LYON: I still read a lot but no, I didn't see it that way. I played little league baseball, joined the Boy Scouts, became a patrol leader right away because I had been a scout in Brazil. So no, I was always active. I loved to read, but I was also outside every chance I could get, playing sports and doing other things.

Q: Where did you go to boarding school?

LYON: Saint Andrews.

Q: And that is located...

LYON: Delaware. An Episcopalian secondary school

Q: Yes, a very good school. How did you find it?

LYON: I was last in my class the first semester. I just didn't have the academic background to compete. I remember three of my five teachers fighting about who could put me in an extra tutorial period for kids who were struggling academically. The English teacher won because he told the French teacher that I would never learn French until I learned English. It was a very intense academic school. I think they had only taken me because I was a Foreign Service kid, had lived overseas, and had had good grades and aptitude tests, but I had a tremendous amount of trouble just catching up in math and English.

Q: Do you feel though that the school paid attention "so we have got a problem here" and they were doing something about it.

LYON: If you were struggling, you were the center of the universe for the teachers. They were there because they wanted to teach. The class sizes were very small. I was never made to feel that I was stupid or that I couldn't do it. I ended up graduating fifth in the class, but it took four years to get there. I got up in the middle of my class my freshman and sophomore years, made the honor roll my junior year, and finally the top ten percent my senior year.

Q: What was the school like? I mean composition and physical things.

LYON: If you remember the Robin William's movie, The Dead Poets Society, it was filmed at St. Andrews, very much the traditional English boarding school, though located in farm country in the middle of Delaware. It was all boys, about 165 of us. They had a few eighth graders, but most of us started in the ninth grade. We finished with a graduating class of 45. It was intensely academic, with term papers or projects and three hour exams in every course starting in ninth grade. When you weren't studying it was sports, the school also emphasized athletics tremendously, so you were just kept going all day. The school believed football made men so everyone had to play football his first two years and participate in at least two different sports each year after that. For a tiny school, we had a number of state- and nationally ranked sports teams.

Q: Yeah, I went to a school like that called Kent. We spent four years sort of in prison, but they kept us busy the whole time.

LYON: The academic pressure was unrelenting, but it paid off. My mother made me take French (I wanted Spanish, figuring it would be easy) and I struggled through three years, barely scraping by, eventually ending up with a B, thinking I wasn't very good. Then I discovered that I spoke French better than kids who had studied five or six years in the public school systems because our program was so intense. I was speaking a high level of French, albeit not terribly well.

Q: Was there very much focus on current events?

LYON: The focus was history -- ancient history, European history, American history. In the upper classes, our Sacred Studies classes went into ethics, but more philosophically

than practically – very little on current events such as the Vietnam War or the civil rights movement. It was an ivory tower in just about every sense of the term.

Q: What about the world beyond. This is the height of the cold war, during Vietnam, how did this hit you?

LYON: Well off in rural Delaware we were isolated quite a bit, though of course we knew what was going on. I graduated in '69, so we were there during the entire build up and into the War in Vietnam. But with TV limited to Saturday and Sunday afternoons, very few of us were focused on the war. If anything, there was support for it and the perceived need to fight world communism.

The culture wars were just starting so we were starting to push back against the amount of religious instruction, the school dress code (jackets and ties) and insistence on short hair, and had a running battle with a headmaster we didn't like or respect very much. Given what was to happen with our age group in college, though, we weren't engaged politically very much at all.

Q: Was coming home from school difficult, I mean you really didn't have a gang to come back to did you?

LYON: No, so vacations were always pretty slow. I had a few friends from eighth grade and a couple of friends from school living in the area. Plus, my mother was always trying to get me on to the social list in Washington, the National Cotillion and the like, but without success as I didn't like those things at all.

Q: What sorts of things did you do during the summer?

LYON: I was a Boy Scout into 10th grade so did a lot of hiking and canoeing, including several weeks at the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico one summer. My parents rented a house in Rehobeth each summer for a few weeks. I took some summer classes, drivers ed and typing. My summers weren't terribly exciting.

Q: Well I assume you were, considering your family and all, you were pointed towards a university education.

LYON: Absolutely, I mean at St. Andrews 100% went on to four-year colleges. It was a given from the get go. Plus, don't forget, we had the draft.

Q: Yes. What were you looking at?

LYON: I was looking at small liberal arts colleges in the mid-Atlantic states primarily. I looked at several in New England, Williams and Wesleyan, but I just didn't like cold weather, and had just spent four years at an all-boys school in the sticks.

Q: You are right. If you don't like cold weather. I spent four years at Williams. That was a little bit...

LYON: Yes, phenomenal school, but cold weather in the middle of nowhere. My mother's father had actually gone there two or three times -- as a kid from a rich family, he would go there, get kicked out and then be re-admitted, I don't think he actually got a degree from Williams. I applied there, but focused on the Mid-Atlantic states and was fortunate enough to get into Swarthmore College.

Q: OK, well you were at Swarthmore from '69 to '73. What was Swarthmore like when you went there?

LYON: It was perfect for me as it met all of my expectations in terms of academics and in being a small enough school so an average athlete could play sports. Girls for the first time, which was great as St. Andrews had been all boys. Politically I went from moderately conservative prep school in the middle of nowhere to a school whose nickname was Kremlin on the Krum, the school being located on Crum Creek.

Q: It was Quaker wasn't it?

LYON: Yes it was. Most of the students and faculty were non-Quakers, but the school was founded by the Society of Friends in the 1860s, and was very much run on Quaker principles. It was also extremely liberal and played a major part in the civil rights and anti-war movements. A number of students were leaders in Students for a Democratic Society and other radical groups, even the Weathermen, and Swarthmore students had a role in organizing the big student moratorium in 1969, my first or second month on campus. Even as I became more political, I was hardly a radical, I think because my father was extremely reasonable and very hard to rebel against, "You want to have long hair and wear funny clothes, no problem, just study hard." But he presented it as this is for my good, not because he was ordering me to do it. I think from having been a Foreign Service kid and having been around my father and others with experience with communism, I had a fairly good appreciation of what would happen in South Vietnam if the communists won. For me, it wasn't the simplistic formula of, "We are bad; they are good; we need to leave". I was pretty conflicted by it all until the Pentagon Papers came out and I realized how we had manipulated events in Vietnam, and had pretty much created the crisis we were involved in. So towards the end of my time there I became more radical, but still not terribly so.

Q: You were there at a time when we were disengaging from Vietnam.

LYON: I arrived with the war in full swing and was there as we began to draw-down, to disengage and then finally graduated as we pulled out. I was part of the second draft lottery, I think I had a 195, which would have gotten me drafted except for my student deferment.

Q: Yeah I know. I was consul general in Saigon from '69 to '70. Sometimes there are different perspectives in this business.

LYON: Although I never served in the military, Vietnam was such an integral part of my growing up. I went to Vietnam, here I am jumping ahead, in 1988 as part of a refugee processing team focused on bringing Amerasian children to the U.S. Despite never having been there, I was having flashbacks because of the television coverage I had watched of the war intensified by the draft and the anti-war movement. I went into our old embassy compound in Saigon and saw those big round flower pots which our Marines were using for cover as they were firing back at the Viet Cong and felt like I had been there.

Q: Well it all played out. I went there just the year after Tet. Well, tell me about your time at Swarthmore -- were there many Marxist professors on the campus?

LYON: There were a few, and they were well known, but they were definitely a small minority. They were often highly visible, especially when anti-war demonstrations took place, but I would put them down as a handful as opposed to anything approaching a dominant group. The faculty was certainly liberal, with most being anti-war, but what I took away from them was that our society was worth saving, worth reforming.

Q: What were you majoring in?

LYON: I ended up majoring in history, but also studied political science, economics and international relations. I also undertook an informal concentration in Latin American Studies which was hard as Swarthmore, being a small college, offered few courses that touched on Latin America. One Political Science professor, Ray Hopkins, took me on and we worked out an informal program based on independent study and my commuting to the University of Pennsylvania to take Portuguese and Latin American history.

Q: Were you studying History because you enjoyed it or did you have a goal?

LYON: I did it because it interested me and I wanted to understand what had shaped the world around me. I didn't have any specific goals in mind, but saw history as preparing me for law school, graduate school, the Foreign Service and so forth.

Q: How about the student body? Was there a mix or was it pretty radicalized or what?

LYON: As I mentioned earlier, Swarthmore was a radical place in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to opposition to the Vietnam War and support for progressive initiatives such as the civil rights movement and women's liberation. My own class, though, was more mixed due to the admission office's reaction to a major African American sit-in the previous year during which the college's president, Courtney Smith, died of a sudden heart attack. The root cause of the dispute was that SASS (the Swarthmore African-American Student Society) felt the College wasn't doing enough to recruit black students. They were right in this. While the College was seeking out minority students, they were

totally inflexible with regards to their admissions standards, essentially ignoring economic and class differences: An African-American high school graduate could have been an A+ student, quarterback of the football team and played Othello in the school play, but if he had a 499 on one of his SATs, he wouldn't get in. There were academic reasons for this, as the average boards were probably in the 700's, but they were given undue weight.

I was proud of and indirectly benefitted from the College's response. President Smith's death led to a complete review of the school's admissions policies and to a realization that Swarthmore had to be more pro-active in attracting strong African-American applicants and to then do what was necessary to help them quality academically. This was done through college-financed summer school programs, a year at prep school, lighter initial course loads, mentorship programs, and the like. The number of black freshman immediately started to increase and they did well academically. As for me, I benefitted because it seemed clear that the school was also seeking a more moderate class even if we weren't quite as brilliant as some of our predecessors. We were also called Hargadon's revenge – Hargadon was the Dean of Admissions. We were hardly conservative, but we were certainly less radical than previous classes had been. We'd look at the classes ahead of us, wow, we are different from them. They were the giants, we were just regular students. I don't know if it was a coincidence or not, but while we did very well in terms of measures like getting into the top law and medical schools or the Foreign Service (I think five of the six of us who took the FS exam passed), we were also the first class in years without a Rhodes Scholar.

Q: What about the Students for a Democratic Society which was a radical left wing group.

LYON: There were a number of SDS members, even a few regional and national leaders when I got to school in 1969, fewer when I left. What I would consider the lunatic left was also represented. Before he turned to the radical right, Lyndon LaRouche's National Coalition of Labor Committees was active in Philadelphia and there was a chapter on campus; I ran into one classmate years later passing Larouchite literature out at a shopping mall in Maryland while another sponsored an anti-HIV resolution in California in the late 80's or early 90's.

But everything was non-violent, there was an alumna in the Weatherman, but I don't recall any members on campus. So I would say there was a huge variety and a lot of the students were more like me. They didn't like the war, but at first they weren't convinced the U.S. was totally wrong. I think that changed when the Pentagon Papers came out, they certainly turned me fully against the war. But our main job was to study. You had to study your tail off to succeed at school. And I was playing soccer, basketball and lacrosse so I didn't have a lot of free time.

Q: Let's talk a bit about race relations and all. I mean sometimes when you get a black movement at school many Black students ended up isolating themselves from their classmates. How did it work at Swarthmore?

LYON: We certainly had a fair amount of that. This was a time when Black students were fighting for both full integration and the right to maintain their identities. If I had to guess, I would say our class of about 300 had roughly 20 blacks. SASS lobbied the college to give them a social center and a lot of minority students hung out there in their free time. There were a number of Black players on the basketball team and I remember getting along well with them on the court. Then we'd go in and shower together, walk up to the dining hall together where the black guys would all go over to the corner of the dining room where all the black students ate and that would be it. So there was that kind of self-imposed wall between most, not all, of the black students and the white population. I don't remember a single racial incident on campus, but there was a separatism which could be fairly uncomfortable. I had a number of black guys I considered my friends, but I really didn't get to know any of them very well.

There was a student in my class from Nigeria named Sunday Nwosu who wrote a long letter to the school newspaper our senior year. He was saying, "I came to America because it was an integrated country. I came to America because it was one that brought people together, and I don't like what I have found here." He created a lot of campus discussion, but nothing really changed the rest of that year anyway.

Q: Not just black and white, but what was the dating pattern there?

LYON: The dating pattern? I can only think of one or two mixed race couples. Nothing happened to them at all. It was sort of an unwritten rule as opposed to an imposed rule. Blacks and whites certainly could date, they just didn't very often at all.

Q: Well how about the boy girl thing. What was the social life like?

LYON: Swarthmore wasn't famous for its social scene, infamous perhaps in that the standard joke had to do with library dates or study breaks. I was coming from an all-boys prep school, though, and thought it was great having girls around. We were there during a peak surge of the women's movement, of Women's Lib, of the sexual revolution, so everything we had learned from our parents' generation was being challenged. A lot of us dated in the conventional sense, but more, I think, simply hung out together in groups of friends – boyfriends with girlfriends or just friends of the opposite sex. What really formed my thinking for the rest of my life was the fact that women at Swarthmore were taken just as seriously as the men – there was absolutely no sense that they were any less intelligent or less capable or less ambitious.

Q: Well was Philadelphia much of an attraction?

LYON: It was, though perhaps not as much as it should have been. It was easy enough to get to with frequent commuter trains for the 30 or so minute trip. I probably averaged going in about once a month, usually on dates for movies or to hit Chinatown, occasionally for sporting events. I also took several courses at Penn my junior and senior years so I was back and forth a lot for classes.

Q: Well you graduated in what, '73?

LYON: '73.

Q: Then what?

LYON: I actually finished a semester early. I had originally decided to be a dual History-Economic major which would have kept me there through graduation. Two weeks into an economics theory class my senior year I decided I didn't really have a clue what the professor was talking about, switched to a history course on Africa, and decided to get a job rather than work Spring semester. I ended up driving a delivery truck, which along with three summers doing construction work, was the total of my work experience before the Foreign Service.

Anyway, I took the Foreign Service oral exam the week before graduation and much to my astonishment passed it.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions you were asked?

LYON: I do. This was back when the orals consisted of a single interview with three senior officers and the candidate so it was pretty intense.

Q: From '74-'75-'76 I used to be one of those three. We had different teams.

LYON: So I just missed you. The first thing I remember is that my girlfriend at the time, also a Foreign Service brat born at the 97th General Hospital, took the exam the day before I did and had come back laughing and saying it wasn't as hard as she had expected (she had passed) because she was an Asian studies major and all of her examiners had been Latin America specialists. This was not good news for me as I had a concentration in Latin American studies and figured I would get the same panel with officers who knew what they were talking about and would expect me to do the same. On the other hand, I still didn't feel nervous simply because I figured I had very little chance of passing. Not only had I not yet graduated from college, but my father -- who had a genius level IQ, a photographic memory and who had spoken eight languages -- had flunked the first time around. Plus, I had plans. My graduation present was a one-way ticket to London and a one way ticket home from where ever I ended up I the world. I had planned to hitchhike to Khorramshahr in Iran and just spend as long as it took to get there and then when I ran out of money (I had \$1,000) fly home. I probably was quite a sight. I had had my hair cut short because I was about to take off on this trip and everything I had on except for my underwear was borrowed. I was 21, I was taking the exam for the experience, and I knew I would flunk, all of which gave me a sense of confidence that I wouldn't have had if I had really thought I might pass.

Q: Yeah, that sense of what the hell.

LYON: Exactly. I mean I was taking it seriously, but I wasn't going to let anybody beat me up. The one question I remember was about Brazil's boom and bust cycle, something I knew a lot about. I was giving an example of how the just-starting boom in agriculture in the Amazon area was going to be a bust because the soil was very acidic and the rain would leach it out once the trees were cut down. One of the examiners interrupted me and asked, "You say it is acidic, what is the soil's pH factor?" My knowledge of the pH scale was limited to knowing that one end was acidic and the other end alkaline, so I replied something along the lines that the specific factor wasn't important, but that the soil was acidic. He went after me. I don't know whether my perception was wrong, but it seemed to me then that he had been assigned the "bad cop" role to put that kind of pressure on candidates to see how they would react. Because I wasn't nervous, I remember holding my ground, "It doesn't matter what the Ph factor is, heavy rains leach out the nutrients from acidic soils destroying them over only a few years and forcing farmers to move on and clear cut another area of the forest." It's always been my feeling that it was the way that I handled this exchange that led the examiners to take a chance and pass me.

Q: OK, well I take it then in '73 you passed the exam.

LYON: It was May 30 because we were leaving for Europe May 31 before the fares increased on June 1.

Q: Well I am just looking at time this is a good place to stop and we will pick this up the next time and talk about your European trip and entry into the Foreign Service.

Q: OK, great, let me stop the recording.

(Phone Rings) LYON: Dave Lyon.

Q: Hello Dave, Stu Kennedy here. Can we have at it?

LYON: We certainly can.

Q: Today is 1 February 2011. As I recall it we just finished with you taking the oral exam.? When was this again and how did it go?

LYON: I took it the end of May of 1973.

Q: OK, so they probably told you at the time whether you passed or not.

LYON: They did.

Q: How did you feel about that?

LYON: I liked the concept of not having to wait weeks or months for a decision, but was totally flabbergasted that they took me because, as I mentioned before, I didn't have any

real intentions of passing. Not to complain, but doing so really messed up my travel plans.

Q: How much did you want this? I mean was this just give it a try or did you really thirst after the job?

LYON: I wanted it, but was thinking several years down the road. I was only 21 when I took the exam and knew the average age for JOs was something like 29. I had finished my college coursework a semester early, but hadn't yet graduated. I was treating the exam process as an experience as opposed to a test.

Q: Well then so what did you do afterwards? What did they tell you and what did you do?

LYON: They told me they needed about half an hour to make their decision and put me in a small waiting room. After about ten minutes I looked down the hallway and saw my panel breaking up. I remember thinking, "Boy that was fast, OK I flunked." Then the panel chair called me in and told me I had passed.

Q: So what was the timing then; what did you do?

LYON: He told me I was at the top of the list, but it would take several months to complete my security clearance. When I told him I was leaving the next day for Europe and planned to hitchhike to Iran, he advised me not to do the latter as it would slow the clearance process down. This made sense to me, I had known the security process would be slow for anyone who had gone to college in the late sixties and early seventies, but I wanted to travel and figured that having passed the test I would just wait out the process.

I ended up spending two months in Britain, a month with my parents who rented a house down in Sussex, and month hitchhiking around the UK. Then instead of going to Iran where I would have been gone for six months, I ended up flying down to West Africa and spending a month hitchhiking around Ghana, the Ivory Coast and what was then Upper Volta.

Q: Well let's take a look at this trip. Was this your first look at some of these areas?

LYON: I had been to Europe several times, but had never really even thought about traveling to Africa, but a friend from college was in the Peace Corps in Liberia and wanted a travel companion that summer. She sent letters to a whole bunch of her friends inviting them to come down and travel with her to Ghana. So I sent her a letter back and said I would meet her in Accra – it's hard to imagine now coordinating something like this without e-mail. I joined a Marxist student group offering cheap summer charter flights from London to Ghana and we linked up at the Accra airport. We spent the month of August traveling to virtually every corner of Ghana, with a side trip to Upper Volta, before hitchhiking to Abidjan to meet up with her parents. I fell in love with West Africa, Ghana in particular, and it was about as fantastic a time as I had ever had.

Q: Well let's talk about Africa. This would have been fairly early in what some people called the discovery of Africa by Americans, which started in the 60's. Did you have much of a feel for Africa before you went there?

LYON: I had taken one African history course at Swarthmore, but really the only reason I went was that I had been invited to go. I had some knowledge of Africa, some interest in it, but I didn't start out planning to go there.

Q: Ok let's take a look from your eyes, what did you see? What was Ghana like?

LYON: It was doing very well in 1973, but in retrospect I would say this was the end of Ghana as the most successful country in Africa. They had just had a military coup. An Army colonel named Acheampong had just overthrown the democratically elected Busia government which had replaced the military government that had overthrown Ghana's independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah. Busia, an economist, had been unpopular because he had instituted a number of austerity measures so most people seemed to accept the new military government. Acheampong, who had launched a personality cult and whose pictures and slogans were everywhere, had reinstated subsidies on fuel and other commodities so people seemed to think they were doing fairly well.

Ghana in 1973 was a great place to visit. For backpackers like me, it was easy to travel around, it was cheap, people were welcoming and it felt safe. We mostly hitchhiked or paid to ride on the trucks and buses that serviced rural areas. We stayed at youth hostels, teacher training schools, or small hotels or guesthouses. I just fell in love with the friendliness of the Ghanaians, the color of their clothes, and the vibrancy of their different cultures.

Q: Did you get any feel for whither Ghana?

LYON: They were doing well and you could feel a national optimism. Ghanaians were proud that they were the first of Europe's African colonies to win their independence and saw themselves as the leaders of the pan-African movement. They had just completed a modern port, the Volta Dam was finished, and Kaiser Aluminum was building a huge aluminum smelter to use the dam's electricity. We at one point actually took a river boat up the newly formed Lake Volta from the coast all the way to north central Ghana. We paid next to nothing for an air conditioned cabin and good food. The bus lines worked, Ghana Airways worked, goods were available, there wasn't much of a black market.

Unfortunately, this didn't last thanks to Acheampong's stupidity, corruption and venality. Jumping ahead in my story, I rode my motorcycle to Ghana twice during my first posting in Lagos and was then posted there in 1978. Each time, I could see the economy deteriorating with fewer available goods, the emergence of a black market, and the breakdown of public services. But when I was first there, Ghana was a vibrant bustling place that looked like it was doing things right.

Q: Wasn't Ghana's market economy built around the woman running the markets and all that.

LYON: Yeah, the market mammies, still vivid in my memory for their colorful clothes, their energy and often their sheer size. You could feel their power as well as the vibrancy of Ghanaian women in general. This probably reflected the fact that Ghana's largest ethnic group, the Akan peoples such as the Ashanti, are matrilineal. Inheritances flow through the mother's family with maternal uncles traditionally more important in children's lives than their biological fathers. Women retain the support of their families after they marry, rather than being taken in to their husbands' families and becoming dependent on them.

Q: Was there much interest by the Ghanaians you met in you or in Americans in general?

LYON: There was, especially outside of Accra. We probably got to every corner of the country. In small towns or villages, it seemed like every child for miles around would be following us, watching what we were doing, with the bravest asking us questions about America. This was when African-Americans were traveling to Ghana in large numbers through programs like Crossroads to Africa, that were taking young African-Americans to Africa to explore their heritage. A large number of African-Americans had responded to Nkrumah's call for Pan-Africanism by moving to Ghana, many quickly returned to the US, but others had settled there.

Q: Had Alex Haley's book Roots come out? Was this an offshoot of that?

LYON: It hadn't come out yet, I think it was published in the mid-1970's, but there was considerable interest among black Americans about their heritage and where they had come from. It was sort of fun for us watching and interacting with them. We would run across these kids, mostly high schoolers with a few college students mixed in, with their Afros with the big combs in their pockets trying to relate to Africans with their hair cut short and either tribal or conservative dress. In many cases, guys like me, who had studied Africa a bit, fit in a little better than these kids coming out from the inner cities of the U.S.

There is a wonderful Ghanaian word for white person, "Brunei", usually heard when word was spreading through a village that there were new white people for the children to gawk at us. I remember running into two African-American college students in a small village shortly after they arrived in Ghana. One of them asked us what Brunei meant as it was being directed at them as well. We told them to sit down, then told them it meant white person, or, in their case, brown, not black, foreigners. They were offended at first, but then admitted that much as they found African fascinating, their brief experience there had made them feel more American than African.

Q: Well did you find with them, with the African-Americans that were running into, that there was a residue of the civil rights hostility against whiteness and that sort of thing?

LYON: Nothing noticeable to any extent. Occasionally we had the sense that an African-American was questioning why we, whites, were there, but mostly being American trumped color. We weren't buddy-buddy, this wasn't a time when blacks and whites mixed easily, but there wasn't any real hostility. We could certainly feel their excitement about exploring their heritage – I had felt very much the same way earlier that summer when I hitch-hiked all over Scotland, including a visit to my clan castle in the highlands.

Q: Does Ghana have sort of a Muslim north as so many countries in that area have?

LYON: The mostly Muslim Hausa-Fulani are strong in the north, but Ghana's dominant tribes – the Akan peoples, the Ewe, the Fanti, are predominantly Christian. There is an Islamic feel to the north, but Muslims are not nearly so important politically as they are in countries like Nigeria

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy, I mean now that you had your acceptance tucked away under your belt.

LYON: I certainly tried, but without success. In both Accra and Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, I tried to call on the consular officers. In Accra, I went to the Embassy, but they wouldn't let me in, giving me a very bad map to the consular section which was several miles away – I was walking and never found it. (When I got there in 1978 as consular chief, the first thing I did was replace that map with a better one.) When I was in Ivory Coast, I went in and tried to see the consular officer, but her staff wouldn't let me see her, they said she was too busy. She may have been over-worked or crashing on an emergency, but I remember thinking that I would never be too busy to see Americans.

Q: That is really remarkable. Did you get the feel that this was sort of the locals exercising power?

LYON: In Ghana it was the Marine Security Guard who sent me off to the consular section, but in Abidjan I certainly felt that way. When I went to Abidjan several years later for a consular conference, the same guy was there and I made a point of letting his boss know what had happened to me.

Q: So you also went to the Ivory Coast? Did you see a difference.

LYON: A huge difference. The French had never really left most of their former colonies and the Ivory Coast was just booming. Every key ministry had a senior French technical advisor sitting with the minister, guiding him and serving as conduits for French aid. We split our time in Abidjan between a rundown hotel in an African suburb, I think it was called Treichville, paying three or four dollars a night for a non-air conditioned room, and the Hotel Ivoire with its French restaurants, swimming pools, even an ice skating rink. You can imagine our shock when we walked into the rink and found a curling tournament going on. Despite these comforts, I didn't really care for the Ivory Coast. I didn't like the domineering French presence, despite its apparent economic successes. The Ivorians seemed arrogant and frankly just didn't seem to do very much. The French still ran the

ministries, Lebanese dominated commerce, Malians and Mauritians did most of the hard labor. My most vivid memory is of watching Ivorian border guards stopping a truck I was riding in and forcing my fellow passengers, all low-paid construction workers going home to their families in Mali, to throw enough money at their feet for us to continue our journey.

Q: Well then after going to West Africa you returned home?

LYON: Yes, I came back because I knew the longer I was gone the longer it would take for my security clearance. I had already called on the RSO in London, partly to inform him that I had joined a Marxist Ghanaian student group in order to get a cheap ticket to Ghana, and he had told me that the longer I spent traveling overseas the longer it would take to get my security clearance. So I came back in early September, checked in with the State Department and went in for my security interview.

Q: Did anybody question you about joining a Marxist group?

LYON: No, they just laughed.

Q: Well so did you have long to wait before you came into the foreign service?

LYON: It only took them two or three months to complete my security clearance. I think I was offered an appointment in late November and started A-100 the second week of January.

Q: So what were you doing sort of in between the trip and the joining?

LYON: I was dividing my time between visiting a girlfriend at Yale Law School and working construction in Maryland. I had a great time and in retrospect wish I could have stretched in out longer. Yale was great for a non-student who liked to sleep late, take study breaks and play as much basketball as he could. When I ran low on cash, I would hitchhike down to Maryland and work for a small construction company that knew me and that always needed casual laborers.

Q: Particularly at that time there weren't very many female Yale law students.

LYON: She was a very interesting woman. She was also a Foreign Service brat – we were actually both born at the Army's 97th general hospital in Frankfurt...

Q: My daughter was also born there.

LYON: ... though I didn't meet her until she transferred to Swarthmore during our junior year. Her initial plans were to join the Foreign Service, she passed the exam the day before I did, but she had done so well on her law boards and it was hard to even thinking of saying no to Yale.

Q: Well did you feel this was a parting of the ways? I mean...

LYON: We stayed together for a while in a long distance relationship but it didn't last. She ended up joining the Foreign Service after law school and did very well as an FSO. We actually ended up taking the retirement seminar together.

Q: So you came in January '74?

LYON: Right.

Q: OK, what was your A-100 course, your basic officer course, like? What about your colleagues, how did you get along with them?

LYON: We were a small group that bonded well together. I think we had something like 28 State and five USIA officers. Mostly white males, we had one black officer, one Hispanic, one Chinese-American, and five women. We had former military officers, lawyers, academics, at least one scientist -- my favorite background, though, belonged to a one-time SDS state chairman.

Q: That was the Students for a Democratic Society, sort of a radical student group?

LYON: Yeah, she had had a much more "interesting" security check than the rest of us.

Q: What were the age ranges, weren't you the youngest?

LYON: I think the average age was probably 28 or 29. There was one woman a year older than me and two or three others that were under 25. I think the oldest was a USIA officer in his mid to late 40's.

Q: So how did you find it as a course. I mean how well did it introduce you to the Foreign Service?

LYON: I was brand new to everything, I never even had an office job before as I wanted to be outside during my summer breaks and had sought out construction jobs. I remember the first form they asked us to fill out the first day of A-100. It asked for us to list all of our degrees, work experience, publications, awards and the like. It took me about a minute to complete. I sat there and watched everybody else scribbling away for what felt like an hour, but that was probably close to twenty minutes for more than a few of them.

Overall, I thought the course was pretty good and included a lot of information in only five weeks. I felt that I learned a reasonable amount about what I was getting into and a reasonable amount about the Foreign Service. The one session I remember most vividly was when our coordinator, Mike Yohn, brought in mid-level officers from each cone to talk to us about their work. I don't know if he did this on purpose or not, but he couldn't have stereotyped these guys better if he had tried. The political officer was nattily dressed with an affected Brahmin accent, the two econ guys were nerds, while the admin officer

looked like he had come out of the bowels of a GSO motor pool. Then the consular officer came in and screamed the entire time about how terrible it was that he and his consular colleagues were second class citizens and weren't really considered to be true FSOs. This wasn't news to me, but it really upset the other consular officers in the class who weren't aware of our cone's low standing in the Foreign Service of the mid-1970s. To his credit, Mike Yohn responded quickly, bringing over several more dynamic consular officers who gave us a picture of a rapidly professionalizing cone and reassuring us that we really were seen as FSOs and not glorified clerks like this guy claimed.

Q: Had they developed Consulate General Roslyn yet at that point?

LYON: No, that was perhaps a decade in the future, though the basics were in place. It was a four week course aimed at giving us an overview of consular law and regulations, but it didn't have the touches of ConGen Roslyn, the visa counters, the made up country, or its famous jail cell. It was long on lectures and charts, but I thought it was a decent course that gave me a general understanding of the regulations and how things were supposed to work. Some sections were pretty dry. The shipping and seamen regulations dated back to the 1800s and were incredibly detailed just in case we were supposed to sign sailors on or off American ships. I paid attention figuring this might happen in Lagos, but a friend on his way to Mali slept through the entire module. He naturally had a sailor come to his office his first month in Bamako needing assistance.

Q: Vietnam was still going on, though we had signed a peace treaty and our combat troops had pulled out of South Vietnam. Were you getting any information about what was going on there or was it pretty much out of sight, out of mind.

LYON: I'm sure it must have been addressed a bit in A-100, but frankly I don't remember anything touching on Vietnam. I don't think there were any jobs in Saigon or elsewhere in Vietnam on the list of jobs we were invited to bid on.

Q: When it came to your first assignment, did your travels around Africa give you a feel for "this is where I want to go" or not, or did you have other places in mind?

LYON: I very much wanted to see more of Africa. When I started the A-100 course there was only one job open in Africa for a first tour consular officer and that was in Lagos. So I put in for it, it was my only serious bid. Surprisingly, I ended up actually having to fight for it – some racial personnel politics were involved and my classmates were amazed I turned down jobs in London and Rome -- but I ended up getting the job I wanted.

Q: What on earth prompted you to turn down such sought after postings?

LYON: I wanted adventure and something different. I also knew that in London in particular I would have been vice consul #27 and would have spent my days interviewing Brits for visas and looking for lost luggage for Americans. I used to tell people that I hadn't joined the Foreign Service to go to f**\$#@ Copenhagen.

Q: OK, how did you go to Nigeria? There couldn't have been many direct flights in those days.

LYON: It was pretty easy, actually. I caught a Pan Am flight out of New York to Liberia, where I stopped and spent a few days with the Peace Corps volunteer I had traveled with the previous year, before catching the same flight to Lagos.

Q: So you were in Nigeria from '74 to when?

LYON: '74 to '76.

Q: OK, what was Nigeria like when you arrived there?

LYON: There were a lot of similarities with Ghana -- the same colorful dress, the same taxis and buses, similarly Africanized English, even the same basic government structure from having been British colonies. Lagos of course was probably four or five times bigger than Accra had been. It was poorer, very clearly poorer than Accra, more congested, larger slums. Nigeria's oil money was just starting to come in so you had extreme poverty next to big building projects. You had brand-new Land Rovers and Mercedes on horrible, congested roads.

My apartment had a great view of the city, it was also high enough up that the worst of the smells never, or barely, reached me. The city was located in a low-lying area between a sheltered harbor and a large lagoon. There was a vibrancy to it. People really knew the money was coming in. They felt that they were moving forward, but it wasn't nearly as comfortable or friendly a feeling as you had in Ghana.

Q: What was the consular section like?

LYON: It was the biggest in sub-Saharan Africa, but still pretty small, only 3 & ½ officers and maybe a dozen Nigerian employees. The consular chief was a mid-level officer, the deputy was a staff officer, more like a military NCO, there was my full-time junior officer position and a half-time position. The consul did American citizen services, the staff officer handled immigrant visas, and I was in charge of nonimmigrant visas. The workload was heavy and growing rapidly so we added a Foreign Service spouse my first year, a second junior officer my second year, and I was replaced by two officers when I left.

Q: What was the NIV workload? Where were they going; what were they up to?

LYON: I hadn't anything to compare it to at the time, but in retrospect it was probably one of the very toughest visa sections anywhere in the world. Nigeria was booming, but still desperately poor. It was English speaking, to a point, but was just discovering the U.S. You had legitimate businessmen and tourists looking virtually indistinguishable from ne'er-do-wells trying to sneak into the U.S. You had world-class students not knowing any better and wanting to go to diploma mills and dropouts with counterfeit

grades getting full scholarships to Ivy League universities. Fraud was rampant as any document – from grades to bank records to employment letters – could be counterfeited or otherwise falsified. Adding on to this were the sheer numbers of applicants and our inadequate number of staff and officers. We'd walk in to work early in the morning through hundreds of applicants so you felt the pressure build as you literally had to push through them to get from the street into the building.

I learned on my first full day on the job just how much pressure there was when the Consul abruptly stormed out of the office, went to the DCM and submitted his resignation. He had been sent out with conflicting instructions -- to crack down on visa fraud while improving the consular section's image with the public – and hadn't been able to reconcile the two.

So instead of having him sitting next to me teaching me how to conduct interviews and run my unit, I was all by myself facing about 150 visa applicants. Students were done by appointments and all the others were taken on a first-come, first-served basis. I didn't know this so was working my way slowly through the students while a great mass of increasingly irritated businessmen and tourists backed up in the waiting room.

I think I ended up interviewing non-stop from 7:30 in the morning until after 6:00 that evening. Making this even more fun, it was my 23rd birthday with my celebration consisting of a loaf of stale bread and a warm coke about three in the afternoon and several beers and mystery meat on a stick for dinner on my way home.

Q: Did you get any feedback for why your supervisor resigned?

LYON: I think it was a combination of things. He was a very smart and talented guy who has been doing well career-wise, but, in addition to having a near-impossible job, he seemed to be running into a bit of mid-life crisis. I had been staying with him and he fascinated me, I think he would have been a great boss. But he felt he wasn't accomplishing as much as he could have outside the Foreign Service – his brother, for example, had just published his first book. He wasn't a consular cone officer so I think he was taken aback by just how rough visa work could be in Nigeria. There was incredible pressure on him from within the Embassy to make the section run better, to be seen as treating bona fide applicants better, even as we were being overrun by fake students, fake businessmen and fake tourists. He had replaced a very strict disciplinarian, who frankly had not treated people well, but most of his efforts to humanize the process, to try and trust people more, just got him burned. INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, was sending us dozens of change and adjustment of status notices a week and was making it clear they thought we were doing a very poor job of weeding out mala fide nonimmigrants.

Q: Well of course one of the problems, and it lasted for some years, and I guess it is still there, the Nigerians are world class confidence people.

LYON: Very true. This guy was a good officer and had had a good career, he just got caught crosswise in trying to treat people better, basically by trusting them. He just got slammed by the desire of many Nigerians get to the U.S. and by the organized fraud rings that helped them do so. He couldn't handle the pressure and ended up resigning. Personnel in the Department talked him out of resigning and sent him off to Montreal whereupon about half of the officers in the embassy all submitted their resignations, most of them in French, as a joke on the DCM.

Q: Can you think of any, I mean did you develop any patterns or tricks on how to deal with this Nigerian non-immigrant mob.

LYON: It was a real challenge for me, this was my first job since graduating from college and I had never worked in an office before. I became NIV chief without a supervisor on my first day on the job. The acting CG was an experienced staff officer, but he had never supervised anyone before and in any event he was handling immigrant visas, American citizen services, and overall management. The only other officer was a part-timer who would come over from the Embassy several hours a day for NIV interviews, but he only had a little bit more experience than I had -- he was also pretty tough on applicants.

I got permission to hire several PITs, one of whom, Jeannie Scheel, was the wife of the regional security officer was extremely smart -- she later became an FSO and worked for me in Manila -- and I made her our anti-fraud officer. We basically tried to learn the tricks of the trade even as we were drowning under the weight of a growing NIV workload. Our biggest goal was to learn how to distinguish the growing number of legitimate businessmen, tourists and students from the exploding number of intending illegal immigrants. We knew exactly how tax documents were stapled. We could recognize counterfeit bank letters from the real ones by any number of small indicators, where initials appeared on the page from different branches. We developed relationships with the anti-fraud officers of all the major banks. I got access to the inner circle of the West Africa Education Council's evaluation system, so I could identify counterfeit grades and certificates. We learned that banks and other offices had poor internal controls, but that a letter to a senior manager, assuming he or she wasn't the person paid off to get the original document, would lead an honest answer as to the document's authenticity.

This worked pretty well until the Consul General's Nigerian secretary, a Mr. Lee, started intercepting our outgoing letters and providing us with counterfeit verifications. Fortunately, Jeannie discovered this and he was fired by her husband.

We were simply overwhelmed by student visa applicants. Nigeria's economy was booming and it made sense for good students to seek an American education as they had the connections to get good jobs back in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the youth unemployment rate was very high and a lot of kids were desperate to get out with the US replacing the UK as the favored destination. Visa mills also discovered Nigeria, charging high application fees and then providing I-20s, the student acceptance form, to anyone who paid the fee. It would have been nice if we could have let the U.S. schools' admissions offices tell us which were legitimate students and which weren't, leaving us to focus on

finances and the students intentions to return to Nigeria. The simple problem, though, was that they couldn't. Even the worst visa mill was an actual school authorized to accept foreign students and because Nigerians knew so little about the US, these schools attracted a small number of legitimate students with money. Similarly, even the best college and universities could be fooled by counterfeit diplomas and grades.

By the time our second visa rush season started at the end of 1974, we had a pretty good handle on who we would approve and who we wouldn't. We could weed out the counterfeit grades and bank documents so the main tasks were to determine if sponsors with money really intended to pay for the students' expenses and whether the students were going into programs that would prepare them for jobs back in Nigeria. I think a lot of these students stayed in the US, I mean I would have if I had been in their shoes, but at least we were doing a better job of sending real students rather than adding to the numbers of Nigerian taxi drivers in New York and Washington.

Q: I was just thinking, who was the ambassador?

LYON: My first ambassador was a USIA officer, an African American, and I want to say his name was Reinhart. He was replaced in 1975 by Donald Easum, who went on to be Assistant Secretary for African Affairs.

Q: I think John Reinhart.

LYON: That's right. They were both very good to the junior officers and included us in a lot of events. I only knew Ambassador Reinhart from work events, but ended up one of Ambassador Easum's doubles partners -- he was very good, I think he won the Nigerian senior championship one year, and while there were better players within the Embassy community than me, I was the only one willing to dive for balls on his cement court. He kept me on even after I set or at least tied a world record by hitting thee ambassadors in one set -- I got him behind the ear with a serve, the Turkish ambassador in the forehead with a slam at the net and the French ambassador in the backside as he moved away from me at the net.

The DCM was Oliver Crosby. He was very good, but also old school, at least to me, stern, tough and demanding. The front office wasn't very interested in the visa section, except for the image problems we could cause when we turned down the relatives of important Nigerians, but they treated me fairly and made sure I had the chance to experience other aspects of the Foreign Service

Q: Did they give you lessons, not lessons but rather the chance to see political or economic work up close?

LYON: Not directly, I was working 70 hours a week and just didn't have time for it. However, I ended up doing quite a bit on my own, having learned early on that well-placed Nigerians interceding on visa cases would tell me things that they would never tell other Embassy officers. When I left I must have had a chron file six inches thick of the

memos I had sent over to the Pol and Econ chiefs of information I had picked up. An Air Force colonel told me that the UK was refusing to sell them fighter jets and that they were going to buy them from the Russians; the deputy chief of the Central Bank told me that they were going to quietly let the Naira rise in value -- that sort of thing. In return the substantive sections of the Embassy were keen to keep me informed of what was going on and what they were interested in my trying to pick up.

Q: Could you get out and wander around the city and inhale the sights.

LYON: Nigeria wasn't the safest place in the world, but it was much better then than it became even a few years later. I had a motorcycle, and as long as I knew where I was going, I felt safe using it, even off to the bar and disco districts late at night. When I went on leave, I would often hitchhike, one year I hitchhiked all the way up to northern Nigeria to take part in one of the big durbars, tribal/religious events held by the Hausa-Fulani, the Muslim horsemen who dominate the West African Sahel. I ended up playing for the Nigerian national basketball team, the Flying Eagles, and traveled the country with them. On weekends I would get out and find a neighborhood I didn't know and just go walk through it and sort of get a feel for it. I'd walk into a pool hall and join in a game or two. I never felt any kind of hostility, Nigerians were curious about the US and welcoming to Americans.

Q. How did an American vice consul end up playing for the Nigerian national basketball team?

LYON: I'm 6'4", had played a year in college, and started looking for a team to play on after getting to Lagos. I joined a Lebanese league, then heard that there was open play at the Brigade of Guards, the unit assigned to guard the President, and, as I later learned, the core of the Nigerian Olympic basketball team. Two other Americans and I went over there, asked to join them, and mixed in well with them.

It turns out that the unit's commander, a Colonel Joe Garba, had been Mr. Basketball Nigeria in his youth and was trying to build up their Olympic Team. The problem is that he had done such a good job in recruiting players to the Guards team that they had no one to play against. He ended up creating a team of older Nigerians and expat Americans, many of whom were coaching at the state level for the Peace Corps or directly for state governments. We had four guys who played big college basketball in the US, plus several others like me who had played at lower levels. When we were all together, our front line went 6'10, 6'7" and 6'6" and we'd win by 25 points or more. The Nigerians were raw, but tall and athletic and it was some of the most fun I'd ever had playing. NBA hall of Famer Olajuwon hadn't arrived on the Nigerian team when I was there, but I spent two years banging into his predecessor, who was 6'8" and 240 to my 6'4" and 175. I even started one game against a touring group of Athletes in Action, an American evangelical team, so my only international "cap" was playing for Nigeria against the US.

Q: Getting back to your work in the Embassy, was there any rotation at all? Did you get the chance to work in other sections.

LYON: No.

Q: Not at all?

LYON: Nope, except for my informal reporting the job was purely consular. I can't remember asking to change jobs with one of the other junior officers at post, but I can't imagine any of them willing to take on my 12 hour days. The section added a full-time junior officer during my second year, but we were in the midst of a period of double-digit increases in our workload so there just wasn't any time to do other things.

Q: How was your new boss?

LYON: The Department was pretty quick in getting him, Tom Gustafson, to Lagos, I think he arrived by mid-fall. He was a political officer by cone, but had had some consular experience. We had an often tempestuous relationship, but he was very good to and for me. I was used to running my part of the office by myself and resented his efforts to put me back in the brand-new junior officer box. He was very hard on me, especially with regards to my drafting, but I came out of it a much better writer. He was someone who wasn't afraid to use the Area for Improvement section of an EER, but because he wrote up my accomplishments so well I ended up being promoted twice in my 18 months working for him.

Q: Were there any arrest cases or things of that nature?

LYON: The ACS workload wasn't overwhelming at the time, but there were arrests, there were deaths, there certainly were destitute Americans to help. These were normally handled by the section chief, though he was good at letting me learn from them. Our highest profile arrest case involved two oil company executives who were arrested after one of their employees jumped bail after a minor arrest -- I flew to Benin City to observe the trial, which pitted a sergeant on the local police force as prosecutor against the head of the Nigerian bar association as defense attorney. They were quickly acquitted after the defense attorney asked why the police had returned the passport of the original arrested employee, which they had kept so he couldn't leave the country, to him so that he could get it renewed ... and leave the country. My boss also hated death cases. He was a tough Korean War vet who absolutely refused to go the city morgue to identify bodies, so that job usually went to me.

Q: Oh good.

LYON: But it was very much of an NIV-centric section. I did run the immigrant visa section for six months and took on the ACS portfolio during the several months I was acting section chief my second year.

My most memorable ACS case was actually a notarial. The Nigerian Central Bank wanted to move several billion dollars from one account to another in New York in an

effort to avoid a major lawsuit. We got this cable from the Department late on a Thursday saying this had to be done the next day. It went on to say that although this had to be done exactly right they didn't feel the need to provide detailed instructions because section chief had once headed the notarials portfolio in the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs. This would have been fine, except Tom was on leave and I barely knew which side of the stamp to put the ink on. I ended up pulling an all-nighter making I didn't screw up a very complicated procedure.

Q: Was there much in the way of African Americans searching for roots or coming back to get a bride or that sort of thing?

LYON: Nowhere near to the extent I had experienced in Ghana. There was a resident African-American population, but Nigeria was seen as being pretty rough & tumble and a lot less welcoming to tourists.

Q: Were there any sort of political developments that sort of hit the whole embassy during the time?

LYON: It was a very interesting time to be in Nigeria. When I got to Nigeria it was at the end of the Gowon military dictatorship. He was the general who had seized power during a chaotic period immediately preceding the Biafran civil war and who defeated the rebellion and maintained Nigeria's integrity. From my perspective, he seemed to be a good, decent man, but he had lost control of his senior officers. All of the state governors and most of the Cabinet were military officers and the great majority of them were corrupt to extremely corrupt. This offended a group of younger, more nationalistic officers who overthrew him in a bloodless coup, I think it would have been mid-1975, and he was replaced by a charismatic young brigadier, a Muslim from the north named Mohammed.

What was interesting for me was I knew key principals on both sides of the coup. I had met two of Gowon's younger brothers, both majors, through a visa case, played squash with them at least monthly and had gotten to know their families, even dating one of the President's nieces. As for the coup leaders, the colonel who announced the coup after they had seized the radio station was the commander of the Brigade of Guards and the guy who recruited me for the Nigerian national basketball team.

The morning of the coup, I walked out of my bedroom to find my steward and his family huddled around the radio in the kitchen anxiously listening to my friend, Colonel Garba, announcing the coup and telling everyone to remain calm. The streets looked quiet and since I knew the apparent coup leader I figured I should ride my motorcycle over to the Embassy and tell them what I knew. I remember all the senior officers on the Country Team giving me inquiring looks as to why the most junior of the Embassy's first tour officers -- a long-haired, motorcycle-riding, 23-year old visa officer, no less -- was barging into their meeting. That changed when I told them I told them how well I knew the coup leader, telling them that he had been very close to Gowon, was a minority

tribesman (meaning he wasn't from one of the main three tribes who were serious rivals), and that I didn't think he was the brains behind the coup or its actual leader.

Sure enough, Brigadiers Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo were announced as leaders of the new military government while my teammate became the new Foreign Minister. So there I am the most junior officer in the embassy and the only one who knows the foreign minister. I went from playing basketball with him twice a week to once a month, but we were on a first name basis. I was often called over to the Embassy to meet with the front office or political section as they tried to figure out the new government. Their questions -- on topics like the relationship between Mohammed, a Muslim, and Obasanjo, a Christian, how the two were trying to create a new Nigerian nationalism, and what this meant for the US -- gave me my first insights into how an embassy tries to understand, analyze and report on internal political dynamics.

Q: Did anything else exciting happen when you were there?

LYON: Almost the same thing happened about six months later, in early 1976, when Mohammed was assassinated, though this time there was fighting in and around Lagos, especially over the radio station which was within sight of my 12th floor apartment.

Q: What do you mean "almost the same thing"?

LYON: The officer who killed Mohammed and tried to seize power was a Lieutenant Colonel by the name of Dimka. He was a nobody, the head of a training unit, but I knew him as he was an uncle of Margaret Dimka, ex-President Gowon's niece and the girl I had been dating. So I jumped back on my motorcycle, this time having to dodge some patrolling Nigerian soldiers, and rode over to the Embassy to share the info I had and my view that Dimka was trying to bring Gowon back to power. I then decided to scout around the city, but ran into a column of light tanks heading for the radio station and decided I'd better head home. I then had a couple of anxious days until Dimka was caught -- I had this recurring nightmare that he'd show up at my door seeking asylum. He was later executed and, while ex-President Gowon, then in London, was never formally implicated in the coup attempt, he was widely vilified.

Q: Did being only the guy who knew what was going on during these two coups change your status within the Embassy?

LYON: It certainly did. By then I was the second senior, of four, officers in a very busy consular section, probably working about 70 hours a week, so everyone knew I had a day job. But I became a favorite of Ambassador Easum's, that's when I became his doubles tennis partner, and was included in a lot more embassy functions than had been the case previously. There was some talk of bringing me into a public outreach program, focusing on the universities, but I just didn't have the time. It certainly helped my career as the DCM was my reviewing officer and adding comments on the two coups to my work in the consular section ended up getting me promoted twice in my two year tour.

Q: With the Cold War raging, what other countries were involved in Nigeria

LYON: The biggest influence was still Britain, Nigerians looked first to London and the British High Commission was large and active. Nigerians, though, were fascinated by the US so we were probably a close second. The Russians were active, but the only thing I remember is that the DAO was concerned about their increasing arms sales to the Nigerian military giving them influence over the government. I don't recall running into the Chinese and don't know if Lagos had relations with Taipei or Beijing. Nigeria's focus was very much on internal politics and on its increasing oil wealth.

Q: Did you get any high level visits from Washington because Africa was pretty much sort of sexy in those days wasn't it?

LYON: It was, but I am afraid I am drawing a blank on senior visitors, I don't recall being asked to support any visits, but then we were so busy in the consular section that it would have been hard for us to help.

Q: Did you sort of the consular officers form a little mafia within the embassy? Did you feel you were sort of being treated as second class citizens or not?

LYON: We only had two consular-cone officers, myself and the other vice consul, as the section chief was a political officer. I think there was a general tendency for people to treat us as second-tier officers, of not being the same status or quality as political or economic officers, but I made up my mind early on that I simply wouldn't accept this. This being the 70s, I was pretty scruffy, probably more so than the other male JOs, but I dressed the same as the political officers and always tried to carry myself as a diplomat. My basic philosophy was that I would treat my peers and mid-level officers with the same professionalism and respect as they gave to me. Since I was the one controlling the visa process, I had the whip hand in this since just about everyone in the Embassy needed me more than I needed them. I never felt that I wasn't as good as anybody else.

Q: I had this same reactions. Consular work is fun.

LYON: Yeah, and doing it well requires intelligence, common sense, being able to think ahead and being quick on your feet. So, no, I never allowed myself to feel that I wasn't every bit as good as a political officer or an economic officer. Given the demands of my job, I was probably better in a lot of ways, I certainly knew more about the actual workings of Nigeria than they did.

Q: How was social life there?

LYON: Lagos was a busy, bustling place so there was a lot to do especially if you were willing to leave the westernized center city for the "African" areas of town, the highlife bars in particular. The most challenging part of the social life was there were very few single western women compared to the number of expat men, in large part due to Nigeria's booming oil sector. I was one of the few westerners who dated Nigerian

women, but I found most of them to be either unappealing super sophisticates or poorly educated girls who couldn't hold a conversation. So I spent most of my time working, playing basketball, tennis and softball, and chasing after Western women.

Q: Well then did what were you thinking about doing after this?

LYON: My first plan was to look for another consular job in Africa, I enjoyed the work and found the continent fascinating. Then under a year after having been promoted from FS-8, step 1, to FS-7, I got promoted again. The problem was that I was still on language probation and was in danger of losing the second promotion. Since I already had a 2/2 in Portuguese, PER offered me a job in Recife, Brazil, preceded by 12 weeks of language training. I was absolutely thrilled with being able to go back to Brazil and wasn't upset at having my tour in Lagos curtailed by two months to get there. So I packed up my air freight, I didn't own anything really, and spent ten days traveling overland from Lagos to Dakar, via Bamako and Timbuktu, taxiing directly from National Airport to FSI to start Portuguese.

Q: So when did you go back to Washington and for how long?

LYON: Recife was agitating to get me there quickly so I deferred home leave and was only in DC for the essential training I needed, 12 weeks of Portuguese and the basic admin officer course. I think I got to Brazil in the late summer to find the principal officer position vacant and my predecessor welcoming me to post one day and my seeing him off the next. I still remember the thrill of the first cable sent out over my name, it was something like, "From Lyon to Kissinger -- have assumed charge."

Q: What was the post like and who was the principal officer? Was it a consulate general or a consulate?

LYON: When I lived in Brazil as a child, Recife had been one of the largest consulates general in the world, reflecting USG concerns that poverty in the northeast could destabilize our major ally in Latin America. My father had actually been offered the principal officer position there, but my mother had put her foot down, she had hated our visit to Recife in 1962 and was concerned about schooling. By the time I got there, though, it had been reduced to a two-officer consulate, plus a Branch Public Relations Officer, or BPAO, and with the national Peace Corps office located a few blocks away. The Consul was Marvin Hoffenberg, an economic officer who had had several previous tours in Brazil.

Q: What exactly were your duties in Recife?

LYON: I liked to call myself the Deputy Principal Officer of a two-person post. In fact, I was the third-ranking officer there as we also had a very good USIS officer, Ramon Garces, who was senior to me though not in the chain of command. I managed a small, but full-service consular section, all of the administrative functions, and, after we lost our FS secretarial position, the communications unit. In one of the few times I ran across my

father's legacy, the outgoing secretary, Gus McEachern, had worked with him in Germany when I was born.

Q: How old were you when you lived in Brazil as a child and were you able to revive your childhood Portuguese?

LYON: I got there when I was eight and left at 13.

Q: Oh so you had gotten a pretty good start?

LYON: I had decent street Portuguese. I could talk to the maids. I could talk to the neighborhood kids. I could watch TV. But, I went to an American school, joined an American Boy Scout Troop, we went to non-denominational protestant church with services in English, and nearly all of my friends were American or half-American. I studied it a little bit in college and when I took the Portuguese test during A-100, the linguist told me it was the worst fluent Portuguese she had ever heard in her entire life. She gave me a 2/2, telling me my comprehension was close to a 4, my ability to get my point across was a 3, but that my grammar and syntax were terrible. I was a very lazy student at FSI, I was a bit burned out from Lagos and I knew they would give me a 3/3, which they did, but I arrived in Brazil with pretty good Portuguese.

Q: Ok, how are you on time. Do you want to talk about Recife now?

LYON: No time, I have a dentist appointment in about 40 minutes.

Q: OK, well we will pick this up how stands you next week?

LYON: I'm actually off for an Army war game in D.C. next week so it will have to be the week after that. How about 1 PM Eastern time on Thursday, the 17th.

Q: Yep. Thank you.

Q: Hi, Dave, Stu here.

LYON: Hey Stuart, how are you?

Q: Are you ready for another go around?

LYON: I am, thank you.

Q: I'll make my announcement here. Today is 23 February 2011 with David Lyon. David we had gotten to your going to Recife. You were in Recife from when to when?

LYON: 1976-1978.

Q: Ok, could you describe the situation in Brazil itself and its relationship with the U.S. We will then move on to your actual tour in Recife.

LYON: All right. Brazil at that time was nearing the end of the military dictatorship that was established in 1964, my last year in Sao Paulo. In '76 they were moving very gingerly back toward democracy. The military government had actually established two political parties. They didn't want a multi-party system, so you had the government party which was called ARENA, and then they lumped all of the opposition parties -- left, right and center -- together into the Movimento Democratico Brasileiro, or MDB.

It could be quite fun watching the Generals moving by fits and starts towards a democracy they didn't really want. One of their decrees was that anyone could run for president in the first "open" election as long as they had been a four star general. So the MDB went out and found a comparatively liberal, for a General, retired officer and ran him for president. All of a sudden you had a real presidential election. I think ARENA won fairly easily, but its candidate suddenly had to run a real campaign, kissing babies and all. So it was an interesting time to be in Brazil, watching this shift back to what has since become a relatively vibrant democracy.

Q: How were relations with the United States at the time?

LYON: They were relatively cool, and in fact part of this was due to an incident that happened in Recife just before I got there, when an American journalist, I think he was a stringer for Time, was arrested by the army and beaten fairly severely. I don't know if he was tortured, but he was certainly beaten. The consul, his name was Richard Brown, actually went down and forced his way into the prison and demanded to see the American in question and to provide him with consular protection. This offended the Brazilians tremendously and that offended Henry Kissinger who was Secretary of State at the time and who didn't want to let little things like tortured Americans stand in the way of a strong, anti-communist, U.S.-Brazilian relationship. So the consulate in Recife was in hot water with the local government and Brown was in hot water with Henry Kissinger. To its credit, the State Department supported Brown, in fact I think was promoted a year or two later. But locally, we weren't very popular -- they made it hard for us to do the little things like get ID cards or drivers licenses, but the new Consul, who arrived a few weeks after I did, started restoring relationships very quickly, building on the good will Nordestinos had toward the U.S. and Americans.

Q: At that time during the 70's how stood Recife in Brazil. What was its role?

LYON: Recife was the primary city of Brazil's northeast, the poorest area of the country. There had been a bad drought a few years before and a lot of people in the "sertao", the dry, marginal farming areas in the Northeast, had picked up and moved to the cities, especially Recife. I would say it was a city of about 2,000,000 people of whom no more than 10% could be described as middle class or above. There was a small business or landed elite, a good many civil servants, both state and federal, a professional class, small middle and working classes and a large number of people from the countryside basically

scrambling for work. Despite the poverty it was reasonably safe, primarily because Brazil still had a military government with more of a focus on law & order protecting the monied classes over the political rights of what called the marginais, people without steady jobs, often living in favelas whose freedom of movement was restricted by their inability to get identity cards.

Q: Was the post in Recife faced with different challenges than the other U.S. posts in Brazil? Were the politics more left-leaning?

LYON: From my perspective, politics throughout the Northeast were very much focused on local, bread & butter issues. There were anti-government feelings, but major demonstrations were almost non-existent and even student protests were rare. This was due to the fact that the military government had cracked down extremely hard on dissidents, mostly students and intellectuals, but also some professionals and unionists, when protests broke out in the mid- and late-60s. The Brazilian crackdown didn't get the same attention as in countries like Argentina, as it focused more on arrests, beatings, jail sentences and making it hard for former protesters to get jobs, rather than torture and murder.

There was a large police presence in Recife and other northeastern cities, backed up by military units, though you rarely saw the latter. My sense was that the local elites in the northeast were firmly in control, supporting and being supported by the military government. Most of the young people I knew were more focused on getting jobs and getting ahead than they were on political dissent. Plus, the economy was going fairly well and the government was slowly but clearly moving towards restoring democracy.

Q: Did Recife cover Amazonia?

LYON: No, we had a one-person consulate in Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon, and a consular agent who reported to Belem located in Manaus. (One of the best months I spent in Brazil was acting consul in Belem which gave me the opportunity to study a completely different area of Brazil, I flew up to do a required inspection of the consular agency in Manaus and discovered I had met the agent when my family took a cruise up the Amazon in 1963.) So we basically had the entire bulge of the northeast, going north to Amazonia, west to the Pantanal wetlands and south to Bahia. Poor, many regions sparsely settled, not a lot of American presence outside of the coastal cities.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

LYON: He was a career officer by the name of John Crimmins. I don't remember his ever coming to Recife, probably because it was a political and economic backwater at the time, and I never met him on my two trips to Brasilia. His DCM, Richard Johnson, came several times and became a bit of a mentor for me.

Q: How heavily did the hand of the embassy rest on your post?

LYON: Not terribly. The rivalry was between a mid-sized embassy in Brasilia and the large consulates general in Sao Paulo and Rio, both with extensive consular districts, broad portfolios, experienced admin officers and headed by senior officers. The small posts were pretty small, and non-threatening potatoes in comparison. I remember calling the admin officer in Rio with a question and discovering that I had more authority to make various small decisions than he did. I remember thinking how funny this was since I had had all of two weeks of admin training, and none at all for our communications operations. As for consular work, my mentor was the chief of section in Rio, Peggy Barnhart, who was a wonderful source of information and advice, but who never tried to run my operation.

Q: Oh joy. Brasilia was not in the picture at that time?

LYON: It was very much in the picture politically, but it was isolated off in a new city in the interior while Sao Paulo and Rio were located in Brazil's major cities.

Q: So you were the communicator as well?

LYON: Much to my surprise, yes. Both officers at post were in a hurry to leave and since the new consul couldn't arrive for several weeks, they told me that I should cancel my communications training as the secretary handled all of the classified message traffic and the post was losing its classified capability. When I got to Recife, the outgoing vice consul told me they had made a mistake and that it was the secretary whose position had been cut and that we would be retaining the capability. So I ended up getting a few hours of OJT on the HW-28 tape machines and our one-time pads from Gus before she left post. I became reasonably proficient with incoming classified messages, but not so much transmitting our occasional outgoing cables.

Q: How did you find your relations in a small post? Sometimes they can be great and sometimes they can be not so great.

LYON: I had a good relationship with Marvin Hoffenberg, a very nice man, though it often seemed that we operated in different worlds. He had a large district and focused on political, economic and commercial issues while I handled consular, admin and communications duties. He wasn't one for mentoring, but I learned a fair amount watching him operate in a culture he understood extremely well. The other two parts of the post -- our BPAO and the national Peace Corps office -- were also pretty autonomous, though worked together smoothly when called upon to do so. I had good relations with the BPAO and with the Peace Corps director and his staff. But most of my life was outside the office.

Q: What with your street Portuguese and all, how did you fit in there?

LYON: It was funny because I am 6'4" and very light complexioned, so I was probably the tallest, whitest guy in the entire city. But if I stayed at a moderately superficial level I spoke like a Brazilian, though one without a regional accent. I had grown up in Sao

Paulo, most of my teachers had been from Rio, and I was living in Pernambuco, so I had this funny mélange of three very distinct Portuguese accents. All in all, it was very easy living in Brazil in the mid-1970s. Brazilians are an open, warm-hearted people and like Americans. My Portuguese was easily good enough for the visa line and for making friends and building a social life.

My Portuguese sounding better than it actually was could also get me in trouble. My boss, Marvin, spoke much better Portuguese than I did, but he had a very flat American accent. So we would go to meetings and in the introductions I often sounded much better than he did. It would be embarrassing because people would start talking to me and not to my boss. It was embarrassing because he was my boss, but most of all it was embarrassing because often when they got into technical topics, especially regarding the economy, I would lose what they were talking about.

Q: Were you married at the time?

LYON: No, I arrived single and ended up meeting my wife, Maureen, in Recife. She was a nurse and had gone into the Peace Corps after serving in the Army during Vietnam, She had finished her three year stint as a Peace Corps Volunteer and was the Peace Corps Medical Officer responsible for volunteers spread over northern and northeastern Brazil. We made quite a pair as she was a beautiful, short, very tan Portuguese-American. She looked completely Brazilian and spoke Portuguese better than I did, but with a California accent. We confused people all the time.

Q: Was there much in the way of consular work?

LYON: It was a small, full-services consular operation covering the six states in northeastern Brazil and probably took up about 40% of my time. Nonimmigrant visas was our main focus, but we processed immigrant visas, probably about 50 each year, and were responsible for several thousand local American residents and a small number of tourists. I had a single FSN -- who had been there for so long that she was known as "Berenice do Consulado Americano" -- who knew more about consular work than I ever would, but who made it interesting by having seemingly picked up one bad habit from each and every one of my predecessors. I think she knew every processing shortcut ever invented, but she also knew the district inside and out, I don't think I ever had to meet someone she didn't already know and hadn't already talked to about the problem or issue I was raising.

Q: Brazil was pretty poor at the time, did you have problem with illegal immigration or visa fraud?

LYON: And the Northeast was the poorest populated part of Brazil, but, much to my surprise, not really. My predecessor was an economic officer who really wasn't that interested in consular work and he had caused some concern in Consular Affairs with his extremely low refusal rate, probably less than 2%. I was actually sent out there with instructions from CA to get tough on visas, something, after two years in Lagos, I was

fully prepared and equipped to do. But what I discovered when I got there was that people from the Northeast who wanted better opportunities looked first to Sao Paulo, Rio or Brasilia rather than thinking about migrating overseas. I tightened visa policy quite a bit, but still had a relatively low refusal rate, probably around 10%. I can only remember one case of immigrant visa fraud, involving a pastor trying to use a religious visa in order to take a factory job in the US, and only that because of the pressure I got from my boss who felt I should be lenient on a man of God committing fraud where I felt the opposite.

Q: Were there any areas where people did want to migrate to the States. Here was this huge, poor country but I can't think of Brazil as having much of an illegal population in the US...

LYON: I think the visa pressures back in the '70s were more intense in Rio and Sao Paulo, both large and poor cities with economic winners and losers and the recipients of internal migrants from all over Brazil. I don't think there were large pockets of Brazilians in the US then, but there certainly are now. The couple that introduced me to my wife -- he was a Brazilian assistant Peace Corps director and she was a former volunteer, immigrated to St. Petersburg, Florida. Every time we visit them, I am amazed by the size of the Brazilian population in south Florida, most legal, I assume, but with many illegals as well. I imagine the same is true for New York and LA.

Q: What was your social life like there?

LYON: After Nigeria it was wonderful. Recife was a very poor, but with a wealthy upper class and a growing professional middle class. I lived right on a 25-mile long beach which started right outside the city in probably the best housing I ever had in the Foreign Service. There were scores of restaurants of all types and lots of bars and nightclubs. Brazilian women are phenomenally beautiful and they liked American men. My workload was pretty light, probably the only time in my career I only worked a 40-hour week, so I spent a lot of time at the beach and played a lot of basketball, nearly signing up to play for one of the local teams -- its coach visited me in my office and offered me the local equivalent of \$1,000 a month to play amateur basketball. It was a very pleasant place to be.

Q: Did you run into any sort of security problems?

LYON: No, not really. The period of intense political violence in Brazil was essentially over when I got there and there weren't any terrorist incidents in country that I can remember. The Consul's armored car was shot at on one occasion, but the shooter was a drunk who had felt that Consul's guest that evening, a soap opera star, had been flirting with the shooter's eight-month pregnant wife. We were trained in counter-terrorism procedures and were certainly alert to what could happen, but we also had only three unarmed guards at the Consulate and felt free to move around the city as we chose. I had a motorcycle instead of a car, but felt perfectly safe throughout the entire Northeast, taking only normal security precautions, principally making sure I knew I was going and avoiding the worst slum areas.

Q: There was no reflection of the time when Burke Elbrick had been kidnapped and that.

LYON: I think Ambassador Elbrick had been kidnapped in the very late 1960s, seven or eight years before I got to Recife and during the peak of resistance to the military government that had seized power in 1964. By 1976, the government had succeeded in repressing dissent while simultaneously improving the economy and making the first moves to restoring democracy. The military government had a fair amount of legitimacy for having restored stability and for its economic stewardship while its opponents, chiefly students, had been jailed, cowed or co-opted.

Q: Well then did you have sort of the normal consular relations one develops with the police or the local authorities?

LYON: Relations were quite strained when I got there in 1976, primarily due to the incident I mentioned earlier where the consul had intervened very forcefully to protect an American who had been arrested and beaten by the military. This led to both a political coolness towards the consulate and a host of administrative problems for everything from getting local drivers licenses to importing household goods. Fortunately, Marvin Hoffenberg spoke excellent Portuguese, understood Brazil and Brazilians, and had very good inter-personal skills so we were back to normal relations within six months of our arrival.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing there?

LYON: Brazil was one of the first Peace Corps programs and in the 60s and early 70s we had hundreds of volunteers all over the country. By the mid-1970s, however, Brazil had advanced economically, especially in the south, to the point where volunteers weren't really needed and were becoming more and more expensive to support. The Peace Corps national headquarters had recently moved to Recife and some 60 volunteers were spread over the northeast working in everything from public health to micro-finance. The program closed completely a few years after I left.

Q: Was there any lingering Brazilian opposition to the Vietnam War?

LYON: Not that I can recall. Saigon, of course, had fallen the year before so the fighting was over. I can remember talking with young people who were more questioning about the war than critical of it while the military government, which had taken power in what they presented as an anti-leftist coup, would have been supportive of our anti-communist efforts anywhere in the world.

Q: Did people in the Northeast or other parts of Brazil look more to the U.S. or Europe?

LYON: The Northeast was very pro-American as there was a widespread sentiment that Washington cared more for Nordestinos than Brasilia did. After the 1964 coup, and because of our fears that a leftist movement could arise in the heavily populated, but very

poor northeast, then-Consulate General Recife became one of our biggest overseas posts, hosting a large AID presence, military attaches and intelligence offices, as well as supporting a large Peace Corps program and Alliance for Progress initiatives. The result was that while the upper classes still looked to Europe as much as to the U.S, the middle classes and most of rest of the population were very favorably disposed to America de Norte.

Q: Were there other consulates there?

LYON: There were only three or four real, as opposed to honorary, consulates. I frankly don't recall having done very much with them though the Consul certainly would have. The Portuguese would have been there, probably the Spanish, I think there was an Alliance Francaise.

Q: Well then were there any developments such as visits of anybody of any importance there while you were there?

LYON: It was a pretty quiet place when I was there except for an incredibly hectic six-week period in 1976 when we had two Navy ship visits, the consul being shot at, two American picked up and mistreated by the military, and a presidential visit led by Rosalyn Carter.

Q: Wow, that's a lot for a small consulate to handle. Let's start with some more detail on the shooting. Was it pretty apparent from the beginning that it wasn't terrorism?

LYON: Not right away, in fact our first thinking was that it wasn't so much an terrorist act or assassination attempt as an anti-American gesture. It turned out that the shooter happened to be out at the same restaurant as the Consul and his wife who were dining with a Brazilian TV star had his wife. The shooter, who had had quite a lot to drink, became convinced that the movie star was making eyes at the shooter's heavily pregnant wife, I imagine it was the other way around. So he followed the Consul's party out of the restaurant, got a gun out of his glove compartment, and shot at the Consul's armored car which accelerated away after his bullet hit the trunk area. Honor satisfied, the guy went back inside, finished his meal, and paid for his meal with a check that had his address printed on it. He woke up in the morning to see eight-column newspaper headlines saying someone had tried to kill the American consul. The guy then took off for a neighboring state where a cousin was a senior policeman and turned himself in. As soon as the Brazilian prosecutor determined that the shooter was simply defending his wife's honor, all charges were dropped, which was fine with us.

Q: OK, let's talk about the ship visits. Sometimes these things can be great or a little hairy. A bunch of sailors landing on the Brazilian shores and all those beautiful babes.

LYON: You would think so as Recife had been a fairly busy hub for the US Navy, some of our missile tracking ships would stop by periodically and I think one was even based there a few years before I got there in 1976. But I can only remember one sailor who got

into enough trouble to need our help. He felt that a cab driver had tried to run him over, so he kicked in all four doors of a VW bug. We got him out of jail and sent him down to his ship's next port of call. For the most part, the ship visits were pretty easy, just a lot of admin stuff to do. The same was true for periodic C-130 visits flying down to the missile testing area near Ascension Island. My main task was to find out where the British Caledonian stewardesses were staying and to book the C-130 crew into the same hotel. In return, they would bring me fresh blueberry pies and almost fresh American pizza.

Q: And Rosalynn Carter?

LYON: Her visit in 1976 was the most interesting part of my tour and the only time I worked as hard as I had in Lagos. Georgia and Pernambuco are sister states and the sitting governor of Pernambuco had stayed with the Carters on a visit to Atlanta. The First Lady was on a goodwill mission to Latin America and decided to add Recife to her itinerary. She stayed at the Governor's mansion, but the rest of her party, I want to say 70 or 80 people, including the Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs, AMB Todman, State's deputy Chief of Protocol, and a dozen or so journalists needed local accommodations.

This was quite a group for a small consulate in a poor regional city to support. The Consul handled State and the local government, the BPAO all the press arrangements, and, as the consular/admin/communications officer I got everything else. I was a terrible communications officer, I had never received any training and I think we sent about one short classified cable a quarter. Shortly after the visit was confirmed, the Consul gave me a three-section classified cable which took me something like 13 hours to transmit. A good example of the logistical problems we faced was that the party wanted something like 20 dedicated international telephone and telex lines -- the best hotel in town said they had one and the local telephone office said they had a two-year backlog in requests and couldn't help -- I think we ended up finding about seven lines total. We ended up mobilizing everyone we could find, the Peace Corps director was in charge of baggage and my now-wife was the medical officer for the visit, and somehow we got through it all without any problems.

What made the visit especially interesting is that the week before Mrs. Carter arrived, the Army had arrested two Americans, a Catholic priest and a Mennonite missionary, on charges of subversion. We were never given any reasons for the arrests -- the two were running a soup kitchen in a poor area of the city -- but they had been roughed up and treated very badly. I don't this was tied into Mrs. Carter's visit, more likely a general had heard about the two and believed they were communist agitators. We got them out of jail a day or two after we learned of the arrests. Their arrests and abusive treatment got a fair amount of press exposure and Mrs. Carter decided she would meet with them in the Consulate to demonstrate President Carter's commitment to human rights. The local military was angry about this, and the state government embarrassed -- our response was to tell them that if they didn't want this kind of coverage they shouldn't arrest and mistreat innocent Americans -- but given the circumstances there wasn't anything they could do about the meeting and follow-on international coverage.

Q. How did you find the First Lady?

LYON: I thought she was absolutely wonderful. She was warm. She was friendly. She was very concerned about these two missionaries. I liked her quite a bit.

Q: I've often thought she had a better reputation than her husband, at least during his presidency.

LYON: She certainly had the better personal touch. I ended up meeting President Carter twice, once in Rio when I was supporting his visit several months later and again after his presidency when I went down to Plains with my boss, Princeton Lyman, to brief him on a trip he was taking to Africa. He was very different in public than in a small meeting. In Rio, he was stiff and formal, clearly, to me, uncomfortable with being in the glare of public attention. But in Plains, with just the two of us, right in from the peanut fields in jeans and muddy boots, he was warm and personable.

Q. You said one of the missionaries was a Catholic priest. What was the Church like in the northeast in the mid-1970s?

LYON: There was an internal battle going on between clergy and bishops who supported the landed elites and government and a smaller group of liberals. I became good friends with the Archbishop of Recife, Dom Helder Camara, a leading proponent of what was known as Liberation Theology. He was a wonderful man, everything I would hope a priest to be. The first time I called on him at his palace, instead of pomp & circumstance, I found a plainly dressed cleric working in his kitchen helping feed the poor. I think his most memorable quote was something along the lines of, 'When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.' He was always battling the government and most of Brazil's Catholic hierarchy, almost always for the right reasons.

As a funny aside, towards the end of my tour I asked my wife, then a Peace Corps nurse, to marry me. She was a Catholic and wanted the wedding to take place in a Catholic church in California. When the parish priest learned that I wasn't Catholic, he said I needed to get instructions for marriage from him or another priest before he would do the ceremony. I went to Dom Helder who said he would be delighted. He opened our first meeting asking me if I understood the vows and sanctity of marriage. When I said he did, he clapped his hands and said, "Good, now let's talk politics!" I sent three long cables, one for each our "counseling" sessions back to the Department explaining his views on liberation theology and his battles with the military government and Catholic hierarchy. Even more fun, he then wrote up a glowing report of my prospects as a husband and father. When I gave the letter to the officiating priest, a young radical and supporter of Cesar Chavez, he nearly fell of his chair as Dom Helder was one of his idols. I went from being a non-Catholic he didn't know to very important groom in about ten seconds.

Q: Well how it sounds like when you get a military rule you often get the military police side which can be pretty thuggish. Was that true where you were then?

LYON: The Army's main focus when I was in Brazil had shifted from crushing subversion to maintaining security, presented in the guise of law & order, and fostering economic growth as the regime started to move slowly to a restoration of democratic rule. A major focus was on keeping the slums under control, our two missionaries got caught up in this. Other than the two missionaries, I can only think of two cases involving the Army and Americans. The more serious was the arrest of the Time magazine stringer I mentioned earlier. The other was just before I left when a very large, very gay, newly arrived African-American Peace Corps Volunteer was arrested after urinating on the Military College's exterior wall. He wasn't mistreated, and we got him out quickly, but Peace Corps decided he would be better off in a more tolerant city and transferred him.

Q: Well then, it sounds like you were doing some courting in Recife as well as working?

LYON: I was chasing after my wife the second year I was there, but she only accepted my proposal towards the end of my tour. We were married in California and then returned to post to pack up and get ready for a direct transfer to our to our next post.

Q: What was her background?

LYON: Her father, Frank, was a Portuguese-American born in the U.S. of two immigrants from the Azores. Her mother, Joyce, was a war bride from Australia. The family farm was near Hollister, a small farming community about 30 miles inland from Monterey. After the war they discovered the farm wasn't big enough to support my father-in-law, his brother, their growing families, and their mother, so Frank, who had gotten his fighter pilot wings at the end of WWII, went off and became a crop duster, a few years later starting his own ag air business which the family still runs today. My wife was the second oldest child, the oldest daughter, of six. She joined the Army while in nursing school in Oakland, serving three years in Okinawa at the end of the Vietnam War, one of her last duties was in treating POWs coming home from North Vietnam. After the Army, she joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to Brazil as a public health nurse.

Q: Well where did you go? You left there in '78 - '79?

LYON: We left in '78.

Q: Where did you go?

LYON: To Accra, Ghana.

Q: You couldn't get yourself away from Western Africa. Was this at your choice or what?

LYON: Well it was both. I had a difficult time with my onward assignment. It was interesting. This was before e-mail obviously. It was \$7.00 a minute to call Brazil, and I felt pretty much ignored being off in this little two-officer post. So finally I sent a cable in to my assignments officer. I had bid on a number of African jobs -- I had bid on jobs all over the world -- so I told her that I would take any mid-level consular job in Africa whether I had bid on it or not. I discovered later that I had already been penciled in to go to Zambia only to have that overturned when the officer I would have replaced was stabbed by his wife in a marital fight and had to leave post abruptly. They had to fill it immediately because of the fighting going on throughout southern Africa at the time. Then the woman going to Ghana resigned suddenly from the Foreign Service to marry a Senegalese diplomat she had met in London. So Ghana popped up and they said do you want it. Having hitchhiked around Ghana and having enjoyed the place immensely, I just grabbed it. I was very happy to go there, though my new bride was a bit ambivalent as she had hoped we would be going to Australia.

Q: Why Australia?

Lyon: My wife's mother had been an Australian war bride. I had had a line on the vice consul job in Melbourne only to discover that my first boss from Lagos would again be my boss so I yanked my name back.

Q: So you went to Ghana in '78.

LYON: We did a direct transfer from Recife and got to Accra in summer of '78.

Q: And you were there how long?

LYON: Two years.

Q: Two years. Ok, Ghana in '78, what was the situation?

LYON: It was pretty sad. When I had spent a month there in 1973, it had been absolutely magnificent. There was almost no black market. Everything available in the markets. You could travel cheaply. You could travel easily. I had motorcycled over twice during my tour in Lagos and you could see the economy getting worse and worse. By the time I got there in '78, the economy was pretty close to rock bottom and it hit rock bottom while we were there. You had a very corrupt, very incompetent military government under a guy named Acheampong who had taken over just before I had arrived there in '73, and had promised good clean government. His slogan had been something like, "I am not the smartest guy in town, but I will give you good honest government." And then he proved to be incredibly stupid and totally corrupt.

Under Acheampong, the economy had simply collapsed. Ghana's economy was built on cocoa, but the government was taxing it so heavily the cocoa farmers were either burning their trees for charcoal or smuggling it out through the Ivory Coast and Togo, often paying to use Army trucks. There was tremendous economic mismanagement. The black

market rate was 30 times the legal rate. There was very little available in the stores, long lines would queue up just because people saw a line and figured something might be at the end of it. One time we had saved enough gasoline for a drive in the country where we visited a village with enormous fields of tomatoes rotting on their vines -- there was no gas or trucks to take them to market and the roads were so bad they would be tomato sauce when they arrived. We couldn't afford to eat out very much -- our ambassador had made it clear the black market was absolutely forbidden, but when you did you would find a big beautiful menu and then have to negotiate with an embarrassed waiter to find the few items they were actually serving. If a Ghanaian invited you for dinner, you knew that he and his wife would have spent weeks scouring the city and calling in favors to find soda, beer and the meal essentials. It was just so very sad.

Q: What was your job?

LYON: I was chief of the consular section.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

LYON: There were two when I was there, both named Smith. The first was Bob Smith, Robert Smith. The second was Tom Smith.

Q: We have interviewed both of the Smiths.

LYON: I believe Tom Smith passed away a few years ago from throat cancer.

Q: Do you remember his wife, Jane?

LYON: I certainly do.

Q: She worked for our association for some time.

LYON: That's right because I saw her when I was back at FSI a few years ago.

Q: So what were they like, the Smiths?

LYON: They were very different, but very good. When I became an ambassador I tried to model myself on what I had seen Bob Smith do, I consider him to have been the best ambassador I ever worked for, while also adopting some work habits I had learned from Tom Smith. Bob was absolutely phenomenal in terms of running the country team. You knew exactly who was in charge, and you also knew that he was interested in what you were doing. He had an easy managerial hand, but played it superbly. Tom Smith was very different, much more formal and traditional. What I learned from him was the art of preparation -- managing people wasn't natural for him, but when you met with him you felt that he had gotten up early that morning and prepared a checklist of things he was, or thought he should be, interested in. Ed Holmes was the DCM while I was there and he and his wife, Mary, were both wonderful. The embassy was the tightest embassy I ever

served in. People liked each other. People supported each other. Families supported one another. There was almost no pulling in different directions.

Q: Well, looking at Ghana at the time did the United States play any role or were we just as most embassies are, passive observers?

LYON: At that time, Ghanaians were still Britain-oriented, though the US was becoming more attractive both as a political and economic model and as a destination for tourists, businessmen, students and would-be illegal immigrants. The embassy was in a very key area of Accra -- it was built when State was looking for signature architecture and was strikingly modeled on an upside-down chief's palace on stilts. So we were very visible in the country.

A military coup had taken place just before we arrived and Acheampong had been replaced by the head of the Army, a general by the name of Akuffo. I imagine he and his lieutenants were just as corrupt as Acheampong, but they also seemed a good deal more competent. I know the Ambassador, DCM and our Political Counselor, Ed Perkins, were working with the military trying to guide them back to civilian rule, but for my first year in Accra I was focused almost completely on trying to fix a broken consular section that had been overwhelmed by a growing workload and long staffing gaps.

Q: On the consular side what was your main work?

LYON: It was a full-service consular section, but nonimmigrant visas were far and away the biggest part of it. Ghanaians were discovering the opportunities that America offered and there was tremendous interest in going there. Unfortunately, the dismal state of the Ghanaian economy meant that the wherewithal for legitimate tourism, business and study just wasn't there for many, if not most, of the people seeking visas -- at least in Nigeria there was oil money and more and more people could afford trips and had legitimate reasons to return home. In Ghana, people were smart and increasingly desperate to leave to find work or to send their children abroad for a better life. So misrepresentation and fraud were facts of life.

Maureen and I had a rude introduction to visa fraud in Ghana on our flight from New York to Accra when we sat near some 30 newly-married couples, the men all Ghanaian, the women all African-Americans from New York City. They obviously didn't know who we were so they were very frank in talking about what they would say and do to convince the Embassy they were all legitimate married couples in order to get the "husbands'" immigrant visa petitions approved. The "husbands" were all living illegally in the U.S. and a visa broker had arranged their marriages to poor women who were receiving several thousand dollars each, and free, roundtrip tickets to West Africa. Within three or four days of my settling in to my new office, there they were in front of me filing immediate relative petitions. A few recognized me and knew they were in trouble, the others were highly indignant that I would even question their marriages and relationships. I turned them all down, forwarding the denied petitions to INS in New York with a

report, the women returned to the US, and the men had to stay in Ghana. It was a very immediate introduction to the amount of fraud we would have to be dealing with.

Q: How did you deal with the fraud? I mean did you have the equivalent to a local fraud squad or anything?

LYON: When I got there, the consular section was in a very passive mode as there had been a four-month gap between me and my predecessor. It was a small section. I was the only full-time officer, though I was assisted 10-20 hours a week by one of the junior political officers who would also take over for me if I left town. I had a very good, locally-hired American secretary, Kay Day, who was the Admin Officer's wife, and perhaps a dozen Ghanaian staff, or FSNs. We couldn't really trust the FSNs with anti-fraud work, so I relied heavily on Kay.

My tour in Lagos was very helpful to me, first in having served in the epicenter of West African visa fraud and second by the fact that many of the official and banking documents were the same, based as they were on the UK model. What I did was to educate myself on the formats of virtually every single official document in the country, from birth and wedding certificates to secondary school exam results (administered from London) to bank and tax statements. I even knew where the staple holes should be on legitimate company registration forms. I went over the literally thousands of change and adjustment of status forms sent to us by INS over the past few years -- completed by Ghanaians trying to stay in the US past the validity of their visas -- looking for patterns and helping me size up new applicants simply by talking with them and reading their body language.

Q: You must have had a very high refusal rate...

LYON: There were a lot of legitimate travelers and some absolutely outstanding students getting full scholarships to top universities, but some days it felt like we were turning everyone down. I would hazard a guess that our overall refusal rate was in the 40-50% range, with the percentage of issuances pushed up by the fact that under the visa reciprocity schedule we were issuing short validity visas. The rate was much higher in what we considered the silly season, mid-January to early March when the student rush was over and few legitimate travelers would be considering winter trips to the U.S.

Q: Did you come under any pressure from the Embassy to issue visas to businessmen to foster trade between the U.S. and Ghana? Or was there nothing to foster?

LYON: Until Ghana's economy collapsed under Acheampong, there had been a growing trade relationship with the U.S. -- it was rich country with cocoa, other agricultural exports, lumber and gold -- but by the time I got there this had declined considerably. We had a part-time commercial officer in the economic section, but I imagine she spent as much time trying to help American companies recover debts as she did looking for new trade opportunities. As for visa applicants, aside from a small number of wealthy businessmen, most of our B-1 visa applicants were either fakes or traders looking to go to

the U.S. to buy used goods and clothing to sell in markets - I would always have fun taking visitors to the Bruni-weho (spelling is phonetic) markets where used clothing was sold -- Bruni-weho means "Dead White Man" as Ghanaians couldn't believe people would give away or even sell perfectly good clothes.

Q: Did you run into problems with people using different names to get new travel documents?

LYON: Yes, this was a major problem for us. Birth registries were kept at the local level so a refused visa applicant could go home and, with or without a bribe, get a new birth certificate, perhaps in their mother's name or by borrowing the name of a relative, both common and often legitimate occurrences. Unless you were lucky and someone recognized the person and could find his or her earlier file -- and we did have one FSN with a near-photographic memory who could do this -- you ended up having to adjudicate the case anew. I tried to counter this by reading body language, by picking up accents, knowing who was well-educated and who wasn't, and by not taking documents for granted.

My favorite case was a young man with mental problems whose reasonably well-off family basically wanted to get rid of him to the U.S. where they thought he would be taken care of. They got him a passport identifying him as something like Prince William, with Prince his given name. Using counterfeit exam results, they got him a full scholarship to your alma mater, Williams College, one of our top liberal arts colleges. He basically came to the interview drooling and babbling and I picked up the counterfeit exam results. I turned him down whereupon Williams basically went nuts, first writing me, then the Ambassador and then their two senators, all attacking me for undercutting educational freedom. After writing them back multiple times, I finally send Prince William to the doctor who performed medical exams for prospective immigrants. He sent Williams a long, clinical letter setting out the Prince's psychological problems and limited mental abilities. Williams did have the decency to apologize to me while also sending copies of their letter to the Ambassador and their senators.

Q: How did Ghanaians take refusals? When I was in Yugoslavia there were people from Macedonia who simply wouldn't leave the office if their applications were denied. I remember a number of peasant ladies who would just sit there and wouldn't move. They were pretty heavy too.

LYON: In both Lagos and Accra we interviewed over an open counter. There were no booths, no security windows. You tried to set up an area where you could talk to somebody and they wouldn't be overhead by everybody in the waiting room, but we had inadequate space in congested embassy annexes. In Accra, I had to design a counter dissecting our waiting room at a diagonal simply to get more counter space.

As a general rule, most Nigerians and about 98% of Ghanaians were very polite with very few arguments. (The one exception to this were the "tribe" we called "Been-to"s, i.e., folks that had "been to" the US or UK and who could be quite assertive. We had two

Nigerian applicants come across the counter in Lagos, one trying to grab his counterfeit documents, the other attacking an officer, I had to deck one, the other was subdued by several of our staff. Now that I think of it, our only really big arguments in Accra were with visa-shopping Nigerians -- Ghanaians are really wonderful people and much easier to deal with.

Q: Did you get involved in any field trips at all?

LYON: I traveled quite a bit, both personally and for work. Within the Embassy I was known as the guy who knew his way around the country the best, having been there three times before my posting. With all the economic problems, getting around Ghana wasn't easy, the roads were terrible and there were constant gas shortages requiring you to take gas cans, on one instance a gas barrel, with you or arrange to fill up at government depots, which could be spotty. The DCM and I combined on one long trip -- visiting wardens throughout Ghana on my orders and consulting with the Embassy in Ouagadougou on his -- and we spent more time on logistics than we did actually travelling. I remember driving into Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, towards the end of the trip and literally watching the screws holding the van's internal panels in place unscrewing from all the bouncing and jolting on an absolutely terrible road, which happened to be Ghana's major north-south highway

Q: Did you have very much of a warden network in Ghana? I would think that having well-connected Americans throughout the country who could get the word out to their fellow Americans of coups or other instability would be very important..

LYON: There weren't a large number of American businessmen outside of Accra, but there were well-established missionaries throughout the country. Many had their own radio nets, some even had airplanes. I spent a lot of my time developing contacts among wardens and potential wardens, making sure they knew that we were available to them, and be pushing information out to them, and making sure they were willing to do the same for other Americans living near them. It was hard to set up something I had confidence would actually work given Ghana's telephone network had collapsed, but it actually worked fairly well during an abortive and then a successful coup.

Q. What was your most difficult trip?

LYON: We had a Peace Corps volunteer die in Half Assini, a small fishing and administrative town on the Ivory Coast border, about as far from Accra as you could get, but a town I had visited twice. The volunteer had died after a fight, it wasn't murder as he was an alcoholic who developed a subdural hematoma several hours after being punched in the head. I had to go there several times because it turned into a very messy case that the Peace Corps director, if anything, had made worse, having alienated both the local officials and the volunteer's family.

I had to spend about a week in Half Assini negotiating the return of the volunteer's effects, convincing the local medical examiner, an Indian who wanted student visas for

his daughters in return, and getting the local clerk to issue a death certificate so I could take possession of the remains and get them off to the US. It sounds terrible to say, but my most favorite moment in the Foreign Service was when the acting town clerk in Half Assini tried to hit me up for a bribe to issue a death certificate. I asked the Peace Corps director and a police sergeant who was helping me from the regional capital out of the room, told the clerk who I was while explaining diplomatic immunity to him, and then told him that if he didn't give me the signed death certificate in 30 seconds I would beat him to a pulp with my fists. It took him ten seconds to sign it and give it to me. Not sure if I would have hit him, but it was fun to put diplomatic niceties aside and just bully a guy who wouldn't do his job without a bribe.

I then had to take two Peace Corps inspectors, both political appointees, back to Half Assini for an investigation into the death. I still remember the look on their faces when I gave them their bucket of very muddy well water on our check-in at the government hostel, explaining it was for washing, brushing teeth and flushing their toilet, and that they'd get another one the next day, unless they wanted to walk about 500 yards to the communal well. I also had fun with them in Takoradi, the closest mid-size city and a port, when against my advice they wanted to go to the hotel bar. The word quickly got out about three white guys at the hotel bar whereupon every hooker for 25 miles showed up - - one girl was so angry that we weren't interested that she pulled a switchblade on the Peace Corps Deputy Inspector General and told him she would carve him up if she found out he had ended up with someone else. They decided to go back to their rooms and have room service.

Q: This was during the time when the phenomenon of the book and TV series Roots had hit and gone through the United States which brought an awful lot of African Americans coming back, particularly Western Africa to look for their roots. Was that hitting Ghana?

LYON: I could really see this when was hitchhiking around Africa in '73 as Ghana was the epicenter of African-American travel as it was friendly, welcoming, English-speaking and had adequate tourism facilities. There were hundreds and hundreds of African Americans, kids of all ages, young adults, older people. By the late 70's that had dropped down considerably partly because of Ghana's economic situation. I will give you an example. The last few months there, Mayor Morial of New Orleans came on a trade mission, I think there were 27 people in their delegation. They were staying at the nicest hotel in town. The day before they arrived, the hotel manager came to the embassy administrative officer and said, "Look, for me to be able to help these people, I need 27 bars of soap, I need 27 rolls of paper towels, and I need 27 light bulbs." That is how bad the economy was. Morial actually had a very mild heart attack while he was there and went to the best hospital in the country. His doctor came to the embassy and said, "Look, can you please give us some Valium?" Ghana's economy was so bad that the embassy was starting to pay its employees with rice brought in from Togo. My wife who was the commissary manager was having meat flown in from Kenya. So the economy had just about hit rock bottom.

Q: Oh boy. With all this, did you keep your particular attraction toward Africa or not?

LYON: I did. Even with Ghana and all of its problems, the Ghanaians were some of the finest people I've ever met. They were educated. They were sophisticated and more worldly than the Nigerians. They didn't have chips on their shoulders. Even with all of their problems, they had confidence in themselves as a people. So I liked them and Ghana quite a bit. Again I found it exciting being on a country team on my third tour and there was just so much going on, from run of the mill instability to two coup attempts, the second one successful, followed by a brief return to democratic rule.

I loved doing consular work in Africa, the freedom provided by being in a small section in Lagos and then being my own boss in Accra. I was never a guy for reading regulations or following set procedures, I liked the pressure, I liked the free-for-all nature of work in West Africa.

Q: What do you mean, can you give me an example?

LYON: I already mentioned the sad case of a Peace Corps volunteer dying in Half Assini, a small coastal town on the Ivory Coast border. Another time involved the arrest of an American tourist, his crime was traveling with two sophisticated cameras. His Ghanaian traveling partner had smuggled us a note he had written to us out of the prison in her underwear. It came to the duty officer on a Saturday late afternoon and when we repeatedly struck out in our attempts to contact MFA or police duty officers, I went out in the middle of the night in an official vehicle, flying an American flag, and basically pounded on the huge metal door of the Special Branch prison until the guards let me in and after some haranguing on my part, allowed me to see the American and make sure he was OK.

Q: You said earlier that during your "first year" you could only focus on the consular section, did something change for your second?

LYON: During my first year there was way more consular work than a single officer, backed up by a part-timer from the political section, could handle. At the beginning of my second year, the Department assigned a full-time vice consul, Clark Crook-Castan, which let me take over as the back-up political officer. As the political chief, Ed Perkins - - who went on to be the first African American ambassador to South Africa -- was away from post quite a bit I ended up handling both jobs for several month-long periods, my first real experience with reporting and analysis.

Q: Was Jerry Rawlings a figure at the time?

LYON: Before he launched his first, abortive, coup, he was an unknown. He was only an Air Force flight lieutenant, the equivalent of a major, I believe, and while one of the defense attachés may have met him, I don't believe anyone in the Embassy knew him. The only information we had on him was from a three or four year old visa application; I had refused to shred old applications for exactly this purpose and kept boxes of them in an out-of-the-way storeroom. He had been selected for a military training course in the

US, but, if I remember correctly, had canceled at the last minute. I later picked up a rumor that the reason he had canceled was he had become demoralized when he stopped off in Britain to see his illegitimate Scottish father only to be rejected by him.

Rawlings' first coup attempt was an utter failure and he and a few co-conspirators were locked up. He then escaped and with other mid-level officers from throughout the Ghanaian military overthrew the military government led by Major General Akuffo.

Q: How did we view that?

LYON: With a lot of trepidation. The Akuffo government had been relatively easy to work with and was a huge improvement over the Acheampong regime. The coup leaders were all mid-level officers who weren't known to the Embassy. Their rhetoric was nationalistic and anti-corruption, but also anti-colonial and often socialist -- Rawlings himself proved to be incredibly charismatic. From the beginning, Rawlings walked an interesting line between left and right, talking radical and surrounding himself with strong leftists, but also keeping the military intact, under the leadership of more senior officers, as a counter-balance to the leftists. I was a strong supporter of his from the beginning, mostly because I had seen how Ghana had been knocked to its knees by bad governance and corruption, but not everyone in the Embassy felt the same way. I thought he was honest and charismatic, others were concerned he might fall under the influence of the Soviets.

One reason I was a bit more relaxed than others in the Embassy was that I had a wonderful source living in the NCO barracks in Accra, a white American woman living with her in-laws with her two little children while her husband, who I had given an immigrant visa to, looked for work in the US. While the Army's senior officers were telling the Embassy that the Army was a cauldron of seething anger and resentment, that the troops were being fed a diet of left-wing propaganda, and that soldier families were running out of food and key staples, I knew from her that the exact opposites were true. Salaries were being paid, food provided, and military discipline under mid-level officers and NCOs was being enforced.

Q: Was he going at all after corruption?

LYON: That was Rawlings's primary focus from the beginning. He was a mixed-race Ghanaian from a minority tribe (I think the Ewe) so he didn't have a traditional power base. He headed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the country by charisma and force of personality. His themes were: We have to stop corruption, we have to stop incompetence, we have to stop inefficiency, we must run the country for the benefit of all Ghanaians. One of his first initiatives was to review recent and current construction contracts and then, for the majority of these that had never been completed, call in the contractors and ask "Why haven't you done it?" One contract, the re-paving of the major coastal road going east out of Accra, had been put out seemingly annually, with large payments to construction companies, who pocketed the money and didn't do any work other than pay off senior government officials. Rawlings dragged the offending

contractors in and frog-marched them up and down the main military parade ground, in front of the cameras, telling them, “You start your projects now or you are going to be back again doing this tomorrow after spending the night with us.” Work started on the coastal highway immediately and it was finished in only a few months, also in front of the cameras.

There were excesses under Rawlings, mostly in the days after the coup when he ordered a number of former military leaders executed after rushed military trials – including Acheampong and Akuffo, I didn’t shed any tears for Acheampong who I had seen do terrible damage to Ghana -- and many others arrested and held without charge. It was a time of uncertainty for us as many of our contacts, including the chief of police who was a good friend of mine, were summarily replaced and we had difficulty interacting with their replacements, even if we knew who they were.

Fortunately for me, one of Rawlings’ main confederates was a naval officer who I had met shortly after my arrival when I over-turned a visa refusal for one of his brothers. The brother was intellectually challenged and his well-connected family -- another brother was Kofi Annan, then a senior UN bureaucrat – had wanted to send him to a radio & TV school in the US and then hire someone to run a store for him in Accra. The TDY consular officer hadn’t looked beyond the kids’ grades and verbal inarticulateness and had summarily turned him down. I issued the visa, he went to the US, got his diploma, and came back to the store his family provided to him. I didn’t know his coup-leader brother well, but was able to go to him for help once or twice during the unsettled early days after the coup.

Rawlings was enormously popular with the common people both for his rhetoric and for getting things done. He then followed through on his earlier promises by calling for free elections and then stepping down when Dr. Hilla Limann was elected president in late 1979. Rawlings returned to power in 1981, a year after I had left post, leading a coup against what he termed Limann's economic mismanagement.

Q: What was the reputation of Nkrumah when you came back there?

LYON: I would say that he was certainly seen as the father of the country. Given its current problems in the late 1970s, there was an awful lot of nostalgia in Ghana for the end of the British rule and the beginning of the Ghanaian rule. Ghana was the first black African state other than Liberia to get independence, and, perhaps along with Kenya, was the richest and most developed country in sub-Saharan Africa. It had a school for the blind, a school for the deaf, teachers and nursing sisters in small towns, even villages. I saw this in 1973, but when I got back in 1978, the school for the deaf was closed, the school for the blind was closed, it's clearly marked yellow bus parked in front of the shuttered school without any wheels or engine block. So there was this sort of perception of what they had lost at the end of colonial days and he beginning of independence. Despite his economic mismanagement, Nkrumah was, I think, seen in a very positive light as the man who negotiated Ghana's independence.

Q: How stood the role of the British embassy at the time?

LYON: I remember it as a high commission and I don't recall if Ghana, despite its military government, was member in good standing of the Commonwealth. The Brits were still the major diplomatic mission in Accra with the Americans close by.

Q: Ok, well maybe this is a good place to stop and pick it up the next time. Is there anything more to cover?

LYON: I'm sure there is, but nothing comes to mind.

Q: You left in 1980?

LYON: Yes.

Q: Where did you go?

LYON: On a direct transfer to Manila.

Q: Ok, well we will pick this up in 1980 when you are off to Manila. Before we finish, I am wondering, do you live far from the Pebble Beach golf course and have you ever played there?

LYON: Pebble Beach is way too expensive for my tastes – and talents. By the time you add in a caddy and a cart you are into the high six hundreds for a single round. I like golf, but I like golf that is between \$20 and \$60.

Q: OK, anyway, today is March 8, 2011, with David Lyon. It is 1980 and we are off to Manila. What job did you have and did you push for it or did the Department come to you as it often has to do for the tougher consular jobs?

LYON: No, I had a very strange time on that assignment cycle. Part of it was that I didn't understand the basics of lobbying for jobs, a task made harder by the fact that we had no telephone communications from Ghana.

Q: What would you have been, an FS-3, roughly the equivalent of a major, right?

LYON: Correct. I was having a hard time bidding as a new FS-3 looking for a section- or branch-chief job from a post where I had no communications other than official cables. I was bidding on jobs all over world, mostly hardship posts, without success. When I was finally able to call my assignments officer, from a training course in Athens, I asked her, "What happened? I sent you my bid list with 17 jobs on it all over the world, all in hardship posts, and I haven't heard anything." All she did was come back and ask, "How would you like the NIV deputy job in Manila." I said, "Well I am a consular section chief right now. I don't know if I want to go be a deputy branch chief." he came right back with, "Well, how about the IV branch deputy job, the biggest IV section in the world." I

was tempted, but gave the same answer. Without missing a beat, she offered me the NIV chief job. In five minutes the negotiations had gone from NIV deputy to IV deputy to NIV chief, from two O-3 jobs for an O-3 to an O-1 position. So something in the back of my head is whispering something is wrong in Manila. She then played me like a fish, saying, "Look it would be sort of embarrassing to put your name forward on this. You are a brand new three. It is a tough FS-1 position. But since there is nothing else out there that you are willing to take, I am willing to put your name forward." Long story told short, I checked with my wife after getting back to Accra, bid on the job, and got in about two days, I can still feel the scars the hook left in my throat.

It turns out Manila had basically collapsed. It had always been inadequately staffed, but when the Philippine government removed an exit tax the floodgates opened as people who had put off travel for financial reasons suddenly felt they could afford the trip. The section had simply been overrun by the increased demand. The Bureau of Consular Affairs had sent out a consular assistance team that really dug into the problems and proposed a number of drastic solutions.

Q: I remember hearing about that, it was almost unprecedented what they did.

LYON: Yeah, they ended up breaking several assignments on the spot. The Consul General, Blaine Tueller, stayed on but they pushed out several of the people working for him, increased the number of officers significantly and increased language training for the junior officers. With all the turmoil, officers in the know were staying away -- I was not in the know and got the NIV job in the center of the mess.

Even with a direct transfer, I was one of the last of the reinforcements to arrive, getting to Manila in early October. Even though the worst of the summer rush was over, it was the biggest mess I had ever seen. But at least Blaine had assembled a good staff, with Charlie Brown as deputy CG, Dick Mann as IV chief and Dick Crehan as ACS chief, all outstanding officers.

But it was an incredible mess. It was taking an unprecedented, for 1980, three or four weeks for qualified people to get their visas, with as many as three separate visits to the Embassy, a real hardship for people living outside of Manila. You had to come in person to get an appointment, then come back in three or four weeks for your interview. If you were successful, the visas wasn't ready for two more working days. We had these huge crowds outside the embassy every day being organized by the local police who were busy were selling admission to the embassy. TV crews were there almost every day looking for incidents to film. It was a real sore spot in the American-Filipino relationship. In fact the Philippine government used our poor treatment of visa applicants as justification to demand higher rents for our military bases at Clark and Subic. Even with my experience in Lagos and Accra, it was just really a shocking situation to step into. I remember opening a drawer in our supply room to find hundreds of unanswered congressional inquiries into denied visa applications -- they were supposed to be answered with a letter from the Ambassador in something like three working days. The junior officer who had been tasked to do them was so overwhelmed by other duties he had simply hidden them.

Q: Oh God! In the first place you were there from when to when?

LYON: I got there October of 1980 and stayed until the summer of 1984.

Q: Well now let's talk a bit about the Embassy. Who was the ambassador when you arrived?

LYON: We had three in the four years I was there, all career officers. Ambassador Richard Murphy was there when I arrived.

Q: Dick Murphy.

LYON: Yeah. And there is a funny story on that because he had been a college friend of Tom Smith who was my ambassador in Ghana. When I got the job Tom very nicely wrote a letter to Ambassador Murphy introducing us. Three quarters of the letter was all about my wife, Maureen, who had been very active in Accra, running the commissary, organizing Christmas parties, helping newcomers - a real dynamo within the Embassy. The last paragraph went on to say something like, "Oh, and by the way Maureen is coming with her husband, David, who is a pretty good consular officer."

Q: Dick Murphy and I came into the Foreign Service together in the A-100 course. How was he to work for?

LYON: I was pretty far down the food chain, but I thought he was pretty good. He didn't get involved in daily operations at all, did very little to harass us given the intense pressure he would have been under on visa delays, but he basically came to us and said, "You have got to fix this guys, what do you need? I'll try to get it to you." Otherwise he left it to CA and the consular section.

Q. What about his wife, who I remember as being a real force in her own right?

LYON: Our first year in Manila was our first and only experience with what had been the traditional ambassador's wife, the one who would call up senior and mid-level officers' wives and task them to support official functions. She did it pleasantly, but she also made it clear she was in charge.

Q: So, how was Blaine Tueller as Consul General?

LYON: Blaine was an excellent consular officer and probably the nicest and kindest man I ever worked for. The problem in Manila was that he was simply too nice. Instead of screaming bloody murder and demanding help from the front office and CA, he would take more and more work home himself. He was a very good guy to work for. I like independence, I like being told OK, this is yours to run. Go run it and tell me if you have a problem. That was how he treated me and I enjoyed that quite a bit, though, again, I would have liked more screaming and yelling aimed at getting more resources.

Q: With all the problems facing you in the NIV branch, what did you choose to focus on first?

LYON: I knew that if I could reduce and then end the backlog, everything else would pretty much take care of itself. The problem with making everyone, no matter how well connected, wait three weeks for their visa is that anyone who knew anyone who knew someone in the Embassy would try to do an end run. We ended up spending more time handling exceptions, many of them legitimate -- for example urgent business meetings, the start of school years, etc. -- that we couldn't reduce the backlog for routine cases. I convinced my staff, and then the Embassy front office, that if we could throw everything we had at the backlog, our workload would actually go down. We added a few hours to our workday, we ran six days a week, and within a month, helped by the end of the summer rush season, we had pretty much eliminated the backlog. No matter how busy we got after that, we wouldn't permit another one to develop.

Q. That is impressive, what did you choose to focus on next?

LYON: We had a whole new crew of junior officers, only one of whom had had any previous visa experience, and intellectually he was the weakest of the bunch. I hated the idea of officers applying wildly different standards -- no one should get a visa only because he saw an easy officer or be denied because she saw a tough one -- so we focused on developing consistent standards that everyone could buy into. A big part of this was anti-fraud training so that officers could identify and follow-up on suspect cases.

Q. Are the visa fraud stories coming out of Manila on the mark?

LYON: Very much so. I thought I had a good handle on visa fraud from Lagos and Accra, but the Filipino version was equally pervasive and a lot more sophisticated. Any kind of document could be obtained for a price -- one of our biggest training tasks was getting junior officers weaned away from looking at documents to interviewing applicants -- and many travel agencies, some of which advertised the presence of former visa branch FSNs on their staffs, actively coached prospective applicants on what to say or not say, what to wear, some even rented out jewelry and other accessories. We and the police busted one agency which had learned how to remove the photographs from Filipino passports and then used out of work actors and actresses to come in and apply for visas -- if they were successful, they'd reverse the process and the actual traveler would take off for the US.

One totally illegal travel agency, run by a guy with the wonderful name of Nonoy Bala, actually stole a visa stamp from the Mexican consulate and used it to prepare applicants to apply for transit visas to the US. I spent my last 18 months chasing Bala and actually got him arrested several times only to have his protectors in the police bail him out.

Adding to this was a widespread view that as a former colony, Filipinos were entitled to go the US. This made it hard to get serious cooperation against visa fraud, though we

made some headway against it by repeatedly stressing that we wanted to issue visas to legitimate travelers, but that the large number of intending illegal migrants forced us to look at everyone carefully.

Q: How did you find your Filipino staff?

LYON: Extremely hard working. I would say almost entirely dedicated to trying to do the best job they could for us. You had occasional bad apples, people were fired off and on the whole time I was there for trying to figure out ways to make money on the visa process. But 90% of them were dedicated hard working folks. I had two or three fantastic FSNs working for me, I'm still in touch with one, Tonette Bonifacio, who easily was one of the best FSNs I ever worked with, and I could not have made it through without them. They were as important as our officers because of the way they kept everything running. Things would just simply fly apart if any one thing didn't work right and I relied on them to keep things moving along effectively.

Q: How did you find the vice consuls working for you?

LYON: They were a really good group in Manila. I think probably the strongest bunch I ever worked with. After the near collapse in 1980, State went out of its way to send good people to Manila, and, for the first time, to give them adequate language training. The group of NIV JOs I inherited included a West Point graduate, a professional psychologist, my anti-fraud family member from Lagos, and several other highly qualified officers. I was a little bit nervous when I got to post to discover that at 29 I was the youngest officer in the entire section. In actual fact, though, this seemed to work in my favor as we were essentially of the same generation, they were impressed by my having earned my spurs in Lagos and Accra, and, frankly, they were desperate for strong leadership.

I ran the Consular Section's junior officer program as we wanted to ensure our fifteen or so JOs experienced different facets of consular work. Everyone moved between NIVs and IVs and our consular cone officers also spent time in American Citizen Services. But we also made clear that the officers who worked the hardest and did the best work got the best jobs inside the section for at least their last six months at post. For example, about halfway through my tour, Mac decided to replace our mid-level anti-fraud officer with a junior officer, supervised by me, who would be the best of the JO group and who would come in for the last 6-8 months and run our large AFU. At the end of their tours, we'd give them an honor award and replace them with the best officer from the next cohort. We got incredible work out of these officers -- two of the four who worked for me went on to be ambassadors.

Q: OK, do you want to sort of describe some of the situations you had to deal with? Not just the consular cases but how you managed this job.

LYON: I think the first was in getting rid of our NIV backlog which dramatically improved both our internal workload and the Embassy's public standing. We had the process down to two days by the end of the year and then, after a new Consul General,

Vern McAninch, arrived, he gave me both the order and the extra resources to guarantee people same day, walk-in, interviews with visaed passports released the same day. Closely related to this was an improvement in our physical plant. With help from the Front Office, and with the eventual cooperation of, and money from, the Management Section, we rebuilt our work area, added interview windows, put windows on the street for handing out forms and visaed passports, and added roofs and drinking fountains to what had been very basic, unsheltered waiting areas for visa applicants.

Q: I assume when you arrived you were getting all sorts of requests from the chief of the political section etc. for legitimate cases, but trying to bypass the system.

LYON: With our long backlog, these requests were almost overwhelming when I first got to post and the Consul General, the deputy and I probably spent as much time handling legitimate requests, and rebuffing unqualified ones, as we did trying to do our core jobs. This was about the time that CA came out with its general guidelines for referral systems, which systematized and tracked incoming requests for expedited visa processing, and we were one of the first posts to put one into place. Any officer within the Embassy could initiate a request, which had to be for someone the officer knew personally, preferably an official contact, which then went through his or her section or agency chief, to the Consul General's office for logging-in, to me for issuance or denial. In addition to being faster, it was also highly attractive in that qualified applicants didn't have to come in person to the Embassy.

The CA system worked fairly well, but only relieved some of the pressure on embassy officers in that it was not designed for friends and non-immediate family members of officers' official contacts. To remedy of this, I designed a second-tier system for people the referring officer couldn't vouch for personally, but was under pressure from a contact to assist. For example, say the political counselor is being harassed by the head of the America's Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on behalf of his wife's nephew. The political counselor doesn't care about the visa applicant, he just wants to get an important contact off his back; the contact may not care that much about the visa applicant, he just wants to get his wife off his back. In these cases, Embassy officers would complete a form saying why they were referring the applicant -- the form was designed to allow the referring officers to say good things about their contact rather than the applicant, who they generally didn't know -- which would then be presented by the applicant during the normal interview process. Our vice consuls were trained to praise the referring officer if they could issue the visa and to take the blame if they had to deny the application. Along with the regular referral system, these second-tier referrals -- we called them Referral Forms 1 to differentiate them from Referral Forms A without letting contacts know they weren't the real deal -- were very effective in helping Embassy officers deal with the pressure they were under to help contacts' friends and relatives.

Q: What were the patterns of nonimmigrants that you were seeing, both good and bad?

LYON: It really was the good and bad. There were a huge number of qualified applicants, but it also seemed that just about everyone else saw the US as the land of

opportunity. I don't remember the visa refusal rate, but it had to be in the neighborhood of 30% to 40%, and that includes the folks coming in and get their visas renewed. Our biggest challenge as a visa branch was recognizing legitimate applicants from future illegals, and my biggest challenge as a supervisor was in training my officers to do so.

One tool we increasingly relied on was a post-designed return/non-return survey where we would devote anti-fraud resources to see which business and tourist visa recipients had returned to the Philippines and which had stayed in the US. We would have FSNs call applicants, using the personal info on their visa applicants, and if they couldn't speak to the person directly, they would say something like, "Hi is Rosie there?" and the person answering your phone would say, "Who is calling." "This is Flo, her friend from church." We'd then either get confirmation that Rosie was out shopping or, too often, "Oh no, Rosie is in the United States. She got a great job after getting her tourist visa."

The surveys couldn't dictate whether individuals would get visas, but they did give us an idea of what constituted ties to the Philippines and/or what people were telling us because they thought it would help them get visas. We learned things like whereas young, single women were more an overstay risk than young, single men, married women were more likely to return than married men. It even let us identify areas where people seemed more intent on migrating to the US than on returning home -- the provinces around the two big military bases became notorious for this.

Q. With statistics like that, your officers must have loved single-entry visas?

LYON: They certainly did, though our visa reciprocity schedules allowed for multiple entry visas for as long as 48 months, and breaking them of this habit, this crutch, was one of my toughest jobs. I found that when our vice consuls weren't completely sure somebody was qualified, but couldn't articulate a reason for turning them down, they would issue a single entry visa. The problem, of course, is that if the applicants weren't planning on coming back, a single-entry was all they needed. If they were legit, they would just have to go through the hassle of applying again, adding unnecessarily to our workload. To combat this, I added the validity of the visa to the other information on the return/non-return surveys. Sure enough, single-entry recipients were significantly more likely to overstay than those getting multiple entry visas. As a result, I told our officers to be tougher, but when they were convinced applicant were qualified, to issue multiple-entry visas. A few resisted, so I then started reviewing not only our daily refusals, but also our daily issuances, coming down on officers hard if they couldn't give me a specific reason for limiting a visa's validity.

Q: Did Philippine nurses fall within your purview at all?

LYON: I have scars to prove it! Literally the week before I got to Manila, Consul General Tueller put a complete hold on Philippine nurses getting nonimmigrant work visas. He did this because of an enormous fraud industry that had grown up around the need for foreign nurses in US hospitals -- without any form of standardized tests, Filipino fraud rings had perfected submitting fraudulent documents to US employers who

dutifully ran them through the Department of Labor and INS. But since there were an awfully lot of legit nurses, the suspension ran me into a hornets' nest of angry hospitals, especially those in inner cities, furious congressmen (US and Filipino), and frustrated visa applicants, many of them actual nurses.

The suspension met one Blaine's goals by forcing Washington to move forward with establishing standards for foreign nurses -- standards that soon evolved into a test administered by the CGFNS, or Council of Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools -- but in the meantime we were facing an incredible mess. I convinced him to let us resume taking applicants from nurses after my wife, a former Army nurse, and several other spouses with nursing training, put together a long list of simple questions our officers could ask applicants claiming to be nurses. Our questions couldn't differentiate very well between well and less-well trained nurses, but there were very good at weeding out the total fakes. That bought us some time before the CGFNS exam was instituted.

Q: You were in Manila during the period where a number of consuls general ran into real trouble. I think at least one went to jail, but I know several were recalled. What was your take on this?

LYON: Starting with Blaine Tueller's replacement, Vern McAninch, I think three of the next five were recalled mid-tour, though I think only one faced criminal charges. Three out of five were dismissed from the Foreign Service, starting with McAninch.

Q: Yea, Vern McAninch had a tremendous reputation and yet he fell into this. As a former consul general in Seoul, I used to hate to go to the ambassador's cocktail parties because I was far more important than the ambassador for a lot of his guests who would corral me on visa cases.

LYON: That was Manila in spades. Did you know Mac?

Q: No, I had met him but I didn't really know him. What was he like?

LYON: For CA, Mac was the ultimate fireman. When there was a fire, when there was chaos, when there was a crisis, he was sent to fix it -- Bogota, Santo Domingo, the Jonestown mass suicides, Seoul before your time there -- and he was simply outstanding. I never met a better consular officer in my life. He came out of Waco, Texas, a farm boy. He joined the army, scored really high on various tests, was made an MP at the end of WWII and later joined State as a security guard, I think in Israel in 1948. He then joined the Foreign Service as a clerk, put himself through night school, got his degree, became a consular officer and made the senior Foreign Service in maybe 11 years.

Mac arrived in Manila the summer of 1981 and it was like a thunderbolt hitting both our operations and how we were seen by the Filipino public. I don't think I was resting on my laurels, but I was probably more impressed by what the NIV branch had accomplished during my first ten months at post than on what it still needed to do -- Mac disabused my on this and kept on setting tougher and tougher processing goals for us.

With me on the inside running our NIV operations, Mac became the ultimate outside guy, giving speeches, being interviewed on TV and radio, attending just about every event he could (and as CG, he could attend any event he wanted), always talking about how our job was to issue visas quickly and efficiently to qualified applicants. He had this incredible empathy with the Filipinos. He treated them like people, he treated them with respect, as a big burly guy, "John Wayne" was one of his nicknames, they just loved him. Mac changed the way the consular section and Embassy were seen in Filipino society. We weren't the bad guys, we had to deny some visa applicants, but we saw our job as helping qualified ones. We started getting better support from the Filipino government and civil society, including the police. The government changed its focus on demanding rent for Clark and Subic from the visa process to misbehaving US servicemen.

Q. So what happened?

LYON: Three things, I think. The first is that he was just a soft touch, an easy visa officer who liked to trust people. The second is that all of his social obligations made him an easy mark for people out to help "their" people whether for social obligations or cash. The third was that he very simply got bored -- the fire was out, the crisis over -- and I fault CA for leaving him there too long. He wasn't needed in the office, the place was running really, really well under deputy CG Ed Wilkinson and the three branch chiefs, so he was always on the outside, always representing us, always putting himself in the way of people wanting his help with visas.

Mac and I got along extremely well except where it came to NIV adjudication standards, where I was a good deal more strict, and my insistence that we keep backdoor processing to the minimum necessary. During the time I was in Manila, our main anti-counterfeiting tools was known as a counterfoil, a detailed adhesive stamp that would go under the actual visa that was stamped into a passport. By regulation, they were controlled by the NIV chief and while line officers had to have them, I refused to give any out to other officers, including Mac, which drove him crazy. He would take in cases through the back door, approve them, but then had to send them to me for the counterfoils, giving me the chance to come back at him when I thought the visas were issued incorrectly.

Q. McAninch was not known to take things like that lightly, what did he do?

LYON: He showed his true bureaucratic brilliance. Two years in to my three-year NIV tour, when the branch was working really well, he offered me the IV job, a much bigger job, probably the #1 consular branch chief in the world. Having never really done IVs, I said no thank you. He then put into my OER, my evaluation report, that he was very pleased with my work to date and that he was trying to decide if I had what it took to take over the IV job. I didn't see any choice but to say yes. A good officer took my place, but Mac got his counterfoils.

Q: Yeah, I always thought it was really a tragedy because here was somebody who as you say was bigger than life. We all looked up to him.

LYON: Unfortunately, while I felt CA deserved some of the blame for not moving him when the crisis was over, he deserved what he got. He had made some very serious mistakes in judgment. His much-younger Filipino girlfriend, a famous singer, was selling visas through him. He didn't know, but he refused to listen to people trying to tell him, I think his ego simply blinded him. She'd take money from someone she didn't know, then tell Mac the person was a schoolmate, or a nephew. Our anti-fraud officer caught on to this shortly before I left post in 1984, but Mac wouldn't listen to him. Then DS entered the picture, opened an investigation and found enough to force his retirement.

Q: Well now what was the political situation in the Philippines when you were there?

LYON: Our four years spanned Marcos at the height of his powers -- he was probably the single most impressive politician I have ever seen -- to Aquino's assassination in 1984 and the beginning of the end of the Marcos regime. But Marcos was incredible. I would be at home watching the news of a speech he gave the previous day, and he is speaking Tagalog, and I knew he was speaking directly to me. He had that kind of ability on television, that kind of charisma, that kind of focused attention. But he was getting older, Imelda was getting richer, and he wasn't able to control her or many senior members of his government. In our last year, there were serious demonstrations all of the time and the political processes that led up to his being deposed a few years later were well underway.

Q: Did the Philippine government officials go after you for visas and that sort of thing?

LYON: All of the time, it was one of the hardest parts of being the NIV chief in Manila, tougher and more sophisticated than what I had run into in Nigeria and Ghana. We had only been at post a few weeks when the Mayor of Manila sent over this huge ham with all the trimmings, no visa request attached. We didn't know each other so I had a feeling of what would be coming next. So I donated the entire banquet to a local orphanage under cover of a letter saying the donation was from the mayor and myself -- the nuns were happy, I didn't receive any more gifts from the Mayor even after we came to know each other a bit, he didn't like "wasting" his money on orphans. It was events like this that led me to make a decision that as NIV chief I was going to be the inside guy and I was going to fix the visa process and make it work -- I could do this because there were very few people in the Philippines that I needed to curry favor with; I didn't have to have someone in my debt to get them to help me out, my title alone would get their immediate attention.

Mac and other embassy officers, including me when I became the American Citizen Services and Anti-Fraud chief in 1983 after a year running the IV Branch, didn't have that luxury. Officers who needed local officials help on cases involving American citizens were immediately hit with, "I can help you, but what are you going to do for me?" In this regard, having a boss like Mac, with his contacts everywhere in the country was an incredible help. One time I got involved in a very high-profile -- for us, not the Filipinos -- where we needed immediate judicial help to fix a very a serious problem. I struck out at the normal bureaucratic levels, it was not a popular case. Mac called the Chief Justice, I had lunch with him the next day, and he gave orders for the American to be released.

Another time, the government was allowing anti-American protestors to block the street and sidewalks just outside the embassy. The DCM tried and failed to get them moved, the Ambassador failed to get them moved, Mac made one phone call and presto they had to move across Rojas Boulevard and its eight lanes of traffic. Mac may have run his own visa operation, he may have been too easy for my taste, he may have crossed the line with perks, but he knew everyone and could call on anyone in the country to get something done.

Q: How did this kind of pressure affect your staff?

LYON: I'll tell you a funny story to answer that. I really tried to encourage my JOs to develop outside interests, to look for experiences that would help them later in the careers, to say nothing of giving me unique examples to use in the OERs. Two of them became friends with University of the Philippines students, UP is the most elite school in the Philippines. They were being invited to parties, they are going and meeting all these young people, student leaders, and doing all kinds of interesting stuff. They are excited about it and providing the political section about their views of what young Filipinos are thinking. Then one day they both missed a party they had said they would be attending. A few days later they were at a local restaurant and a student they had met but didn't know came over and said he wanted his money back, saying he had paid \$20.00 to go to the party that they had skipped. The guys the JOs had thought were their friends had been selling tickets to students and other young people wanting to meet American visa officers.

Q: Oh my God!

LYON: You can imagine how demoralizing that was to a junior officer.

Q: Oh yes.

LYON: It was most intense on us visa officers, but every single person at the embassy was under the same kind of pressure. It was the most intense environment I have ever been in. I went on the very popular "Good Morning Manila" morning TV show and was told they had had seven million people watching. We did a night-time TV show answering visa questions and they had a dozen people on phones taking questions from callers. You got people calling in correcting us on minute sections of visa law. They knew it better than we did because of generations of Filipinos migrating, legally and illegally, to the US. We had been their liberators, then conquerors, we had been their colonial overlords, we had fought and died with them, we had a very special relationship with them.

The strangest moment I ever had, though, was at a labor symposium where I was one of two keynote speakers, the other being a very senior Filipino congressman and friend of mine. As it happened, the symposium took place right after a Filipino congressional delegation had been held up in the US by an over-zealous immigration officer, forcing them to miss their connecting flights -- the focus of the investigation was a 90 year-old

Senator, a WWII hero, who the immigration officer thought was too old and senile to really be a senator. This turned into a huge brouhaha in the Philippines and my friend, the other speaker at the symposium, had bitterly denounced the U.S. for an hour on the floor of the Congress: We were rude, we were nasty, we called our mothers-in-law by their first names, all manner of cultural invectives. The next day we're on the same podium and I have no idea what to expect: I am 30 years old, and he is 60, he is a senior congressman and I am a mid-level bureaucrat. So in front of some 300 people and not a few journalists, he denounces us for requiring tests for Filipinos (i.e., nurses) who want to get a visa to work in the US. He then turns to me and says, "How can you do this to your children? How can you treat us, your little brown brothers, as you do foreigners? We belong to you, we shouldn't have to take these tests. "We belong to you. We are part of you."

Q: Oh God! What could you possibly have said?

LYON: I couldn't answer the emotion, so I gave a nuts and bolts explanation of how the system worked, emphasizing that we were always happy to issue visas to our good friends from the Philippines.

Q: Well you say at one point you were in charge of the fraud section.

LYON: Yes. I worked with it closely as NIV and then IV chief, but I took it over my last year when I ran American Citizen Services. As I mentioned before, the anti-fraud officer was one of our top JOs, plus we had five Filipino investigators and several clerical staff. I probably spent more than half my time on anti-fraud issues as I had a very good passport officer and a very good citizen assistance officer, both more experienced than I was and not needing very much, if any, supervision.

Q: What sort of cooperation or lack thereof did you have in trying to break up frauds? Were the police cooperative?

LYON: Yes and no. There was a general perception that Filipinos ought to have free access to the US and that we were bad guys in trying to stop them. Our ability to elicit cooperation certainly improved after McAninch's arrival and by the time I took over ACS and AFU in 1983, we were enjoying pretty good, if uneven, cooperation. Basically, if you could get to a disinterested person, say in a bank or a document issuing office, and by disinterested, I mean someone who wasn't paid off to issue the fake documents, they would let you know if it was real or a fake. But if the head of the office had been paid off, or if the offending applicant or his or her travel agency, had high level protection, it was much, much harder.

I spent a lot of my time going after the illegal travel syndicates that were deeply involved in visa and passport fraud. The most notorious of these was run by a guy named Nonoy Bala who was a very sophisticated counterfeiter and all around crook. We knew who he was, we knew where he worked, we knew what he did, but counterbalancing all of this was the fact that he was personally protected by a very senior officer in the Presidential Security Command, Marcos' personal bodyguards. We kept on using our contacts in the

police to file indictments against him and his protector kept on getting him released from jail, pending future court dates, which Bala would then ignore. I then had the idea of searching court records to find cases where he hadn't shown up for court proceedings in the past and having him re-arrested for contempt of court -- it was harder to get bail when he had already essentially skipped bail. I had a lot of fun one time when I learned that Bala's protector had moved him from jail into a PSC guest house. I took a local TV crew by the house, filmed him there, and got him thrown back into regular jail. We never smashed him, but by the time I left he was a lot less powerful than before.

Q. Did you ever feel you were in danger?

LYON: We were tipped off once that he wanted to come after me. This tied in to a meeting one of his underlings had requested with me, claiming he could turn in evidence against Bala in return for a visa to the US. I went to the meeting in a public square with several armed plainclothes guards with me and several Marines and an Assistant Regional Security Officer in a van nearby. The guy wasn't dangerous, but neither was he of any particular use.

About a year into my tour I was tipped off by our Regional Security Office that I was on a communist sparrow squad's hit list. They didn't know why, but I figured their thinking was that knocking off the American visa chief would be a popular thing to do. A few weeks of months later, a guy got caught in our housing compound putting what looked like a bomb outside our bedroom window -- it turns out to have been a dummy bomb, presumably they were seeing if they could get on to the compound safely, which they thankfully couldn't, and didn't want to get caught with the real thing.

I was probably just being young and stupid, but I didn't take any of this very seriously, beyond varying my routes and times and trying to stay alert to what was going on around me. Nothing else ever happened.

Q: Were you getting visa referrals from Marcos or Imelda?

LYON: They were above my pay grade. If they had cases, they would use intermediaries to hit up the Ambassador or Mac. I don't know if Mac knew Marcos himself, but he certainly did Imelda, I remember one front page newspaper photo showing the two of them dancing the night away. Eventually, the cases would come to me, if only for the counterfoils, and I frankly don't remember any that I either tried to block or had to hold my nose while issuing.

The most notorious, and I suppose in some ways the funniest, high-level visa intervention was by Cardinal Sin. Despite his wonderful name, he was both the number one Catholic priest in the country and a very strong pro-democracy advocate, eventually forming part of the people-power group that helped bring Marcos down. Anyway, he and our chargé, Jim Rosenthal were at the airport waiting to greet the Pope who was flying in for an eagerly awaited Papal visit. Literally as the Pope's plane was touching down, the Cardinal turned to the chargé and hands him two passports with completed visa applications,

telling Jim the cases are both good ones and highly urgent. About an hour later, I get a panicked phone call from the consular duty officer who had been handed the cases, I think this was a Saturday, with a request to get them approved right away. She told me they were sympathetic but terrible cases. The applicants were little kids whose parents had gone to the US the year before on tourist visas and had stayed illegally. I passed the word of the refusals on to Mac who backed us up, albeit reluctantly. Not sure when the chargé passed the word on to the Cardinal -- I would think it would have been after the Pope had left, but then again I would have thought the Cardinal would have been too busy to hit us up on a bad visa case at the exact moment of the Pope's arrival.

Q: Did you feel sort of, you and others, but you know at your level did you feel the hot breath of inspectors or people from the security side of our State apparatus breathing down your neck? Were they all over the place too or not?

LYON: No, the entire system seemed to be working to help us fix Manila, not nit-pick us. We had a formal inspection late in my tour and we came through with flying colors. The section was running very well, but, in my mind at least, the inspection team was flawed in having only a junior FS-1 consular inspector looking over the operation of the world's most senior consular officer. I got the sense that he wasn't really looking for flaws in, or fights with Mac.

The RSO wasn't looking over our shoulders at all, but was going out of his way to be helpful, especially concerning access to the consular section. The one big dust-up we had with them was, in retrospect, pretty funny. They got a bomb threat so they opened the internal doors to the visa unit and something like 200 visa applicants came streaming in. But they were also very helpful in pushing admin for money to improve our facilities, including building secure windows along the street to hand out forms and visaed passports. In general, the RSOs knew that we were under the gun, and they knew we were doing what we had to do to get things fixed. So there was no suspicion of us, no looking over our shoulders on visa adjudications.

Q: What about congressional pressure?

LYON: That was another story altogether, especially in the early days when we were facing long processing delays. A huge numbers of incoming congressional inquiries on visa cases were very time-consuming to answer, I think I've already mentioned the JO who simply stuffed hundreds of them in the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet and then transferred out without telling anyone. I think, though I'm not sure, that congressional replies were no longer signed by the Ambassador, but they did go out under Mac's name so they had to be very good. I designed a number of boilerplate responses which cut down the work a bit, but then Mac showed his true genius. We had one "funny" little consular officer, an older woman, very knowledgeable and experienced, but someone who would do six interviews a day because she would do them very, very carefully, examining and double-checking every single thing. She was useless on a visa line, so Mac made her head of the correspondence unit. She was superb. This was Mac's genius. He would look at somebody, talk to them for a minute, and he would put them where

they would be the most effective. So all the congressionals went through Betty, taking an enormous burden off the branch chiefs.

Q: I assume your visa officers had to do a certain amount of mental profiling when somebody came in, how did that work?

LYON: When an officer is doing as many as 150 interviews a day, he or she has to start with some profiling, the trick is to have evidence or at least information backing up where you are starting from and then give the applicant the chance to overcome an initial bias against him or her or, on the other hand, to lose whatever advantage the first glance gave them. We used our return/non-return surveys extensively as they gave us information on what age/gender/residence groups seemed good or bad bets. I tried to train my officers to use all their powers of observation: When someone walks up to the window are they wearing the rented watch? Do they look comfortable in their clothes? What kind of accent are they speaking with? How old are they? Then ask the questions to see if you are right or wrong. You don't have time for everybody to start out with question A and run through question Z. You can start in the middle. This guy looks pretty good. He is well dressed and so forth. OK, let me see your credit card. If they don't have one but are claiming to be a successful businessman, now you dig a little bit deeper. Where we got beaten up the most was for being very tough on young single women. Fortunately, we could then turn around and show through issuance/denial stats that we weren't as bad as people thought while also using our return/non-return survey to show that young, single women led the pack in not coming back as promised. Basically, I think we did a pretty good job in using common sense over stereotyping.

Q: I sympathize with you having done this myself. It's a fine line between useful profiling and lazy stereotyping.

LYON: Exactly, it was tough and you had to be careful, but the time pressure was so intense. I told all my officers to look beyond age, gender and documents to body language. I had one of my weaker officers, an older staff officer, who just never figured this out. I remember one day we had a team from FSI at post filming interviews for the consular training program. They picked him at random rather than asking me who to focus on. He was interviewing a very attractive woman in her late 20's who said she was going to the States on business. She had a big stack of papers and he fixated on them immediately. He would look at a paper and you could see her rise up on her toes and suck in her breath in and when he turned the paper over, she would visibly relax and let out a low "Ahhhhhh". He ended up turning her down, but it took him six minutes where if he had looked at her at all, it would have been so obvious the documents were fake. I don't know if FSI used the clip, but I did as a vehicle to teach my officers that documents were only a vehicle for making a decision, not the be all to end all. Look at the applicant, do they understand what is on the paper they are presenting? What is their body language? Figure out what is simple nervousness at being interviewed by a stranger and what is fear at being caught. One of our vice consuls was actually a psychologist so she would give training talks on the Filipino psyche and how people react under the kind of stress the visa process was putting on them.

Q: You know you are pointing to one of the things that I have talked to people who have served in various posts and I have done the same thing. You can say bad things about visa mills, but at the same time for young college grads who have just become officers, they can present some very real intellectual challenges, to say nothing of teaching JOs how to deal with the public and each other.

LYON: Exactly. You are 100% right especially about NIVs in particular being intellectually challenging. Anybody can do visas badly, but to do visas well you have got to think about it. You have to understand people. You have to know something about the local culture. So I tried very hard to give my JOs an intellectual context, to challenge their intellectual and problem-solving skills, to draw on their previous experience, as with the psychologist. Despite the workload, I included in every job description the requirement for a research paper on some aspect of the visa process -- it made their jobs more challenging, but also, in almost every case, let me talk about something in their EER over and beyond hacking visas. I had such an incredible group of officers in Manila. I bet there are probably more ambassadors out of that group of vice consuls there any similar group ever.

Q: Thinking of myself and my fellow junior officers at my first posts, most of us had had essentially a coddled existence. I mean you are taking your exams. You are smart and you pass the foreign service exam, and all of a sudden for the first time in your life somebody is looking you in the eye and lying to you. You know they are lying. Some people just can't take this.

LYON: This is a real problem with the biggest danger being that they end up not trusting anybody. There was tremendous fraud in the Philippines, but also a lot of very legitimate travelers who deserved to be treated with respect and as efficiently as possible. But how could we differentiate? We had one group of counterfeit nuns. After we uncovered that scam, the Catholic officer who had issued them visas, wouldn't trust anybody he was so disillusioned.

Making this worse was the fact that it often seemed we couldn't trust anybody no matter how prominent. We had one leading, generally anti-American, newspaper columnist who every year would take 30 or 40 young men to the States for martial arts tournaments. He had been doing this for years. We got a tip off that these guys were fakes. We happened to have a vice consul with black belts in three different martial arts. So we brought the applicants into the waiting area on a Saturday, took them one-by-one into an office we had cleared out, and made them demonstrate their martial arts skills. Of the 30 people who showed up, 26 didn't even know how to set their feet for basic moves. We turned them all down, but more importantly we went to this columnist and said, "You stop attacking the U.S. You stop this stuff or we are going to release your scam to the media and totally discredit you." We told our USIS chief and political section chief after the fact and they were amazed that the visa process could actually help them rather than cause them trouble.

Q: How did you get along with the US Information Agency folks, especially the guys handling the press?

LYON: Pretty well in general, they were professionals with an enormous portfolio in the Philippines, a country that had not only been an American colony, but which was a close trading partner and the host of two major US bases. We would try and give them a head-sup when we were aware a potential PR problem was looming, but we probably surprised them more often as not.

Where we ran into problems with USIS, from my perspective anyway, was when they failed to appreciate that the visa function was an important foreign policy issue between the US and the Philippines and that the man on the street cared, and knew, more about visas than he did any other US-Filipino issue. I'll give you an example. We were unrolling a new procedure for handling not only nurses but all manner of other temporary workers coming to the US -- the people who needed more than simple tourist or business visas. We asked for help in settling up and publicizing a press conference. The Press Office simply wasn't interested -- they probably had a CODEL (congressional delegation) coming in on bilateral business, it wasn't because they were lazy. We pressed them, they said there wouldn't be enough interest and we were on our own. I took it over, got a hotel to provide a function room, wrote and put out a press release, and we ended up with over 60 reporters, three television crews and over a dozen radio stations all of whom ate up what the Consul General had to say. I probably forgot to tell the Press Office about this and they were more than a bit irked when the Ambassador asked them about the prime time TV coverage and front page newspaper headlines we had received. Don't remember being ignored again after that one.

Q: Well David what about sex? I mean if you have particularly young male officers unmarried and all, and you have got young ladies who want to go to the States, this is not always the greatest combination. How does...

LYON: It was a concern, and it was something we looked out for, but it also didn't seem to be a major problem. I'm not aware of any cases of officers trading visas for sex, but a number of them, both married and single, were certainly enjoying the local bar scene and the popularity of American men among Filipinas.

Avoiding even the appearance of sexual impropriety or other favoritism was one reason we implemented a totally random system in terms of which officer would interview which applicant. When I got to Manila, each window had its own line and you could see which officers were seen as being easy and which was hard as applicants tried to maneuver their way towards the former and away from the latter. An easy officer would be seen sitting down at a window and the whole building would seem to shift as people headed for him or her. I changed this right away so that a single snake line fed first-time applicants into all of the available windows. I also made sure that officers didn't own individual cases by setting up one or two windows, staffed by our most experienced officers, for return applicants. We at first always used window #7 for this, but when word got out that the officer there was always an ogre -- after all this was for applicants who

had already been refused at least once so the refusal rate was quite high -- we had to move it around as well. But the key was that officers had no control over who they would interview. I didn't do this to reduce the temptation of sex -- my thinking was to avoid ownership of applicants and keep the process impersonal -- but it probably had this effect.

One funny exception to this was when the first Filipina Playboy centerfold showed up in the waiting room to apply for a visa. We became quite popular -- both the Admin Counselor and the DCM, escorted by the Consul General, coincidentally showed up to inspect our waiting room -- and so I decided we should pull her out of line and assigned my most married, most mature junior officer to interview her, figuring it was probably an easy case. He came bursting into my office a few minutes later saying he had turned her down because her parents and something like a dozen siblings were all in the US and that she had just been arrested for "defaming" Filipina womanhood. Normally, I tried not to take over cases, but on this one I immediately had someone call her up and had her come back for another interview. I decided to issue to the visa on the thinking that if she wanted to immigrate it would have been very easy to do so, that the court case was just great publicity for her, and that where in the US she would just be another pretty girl, in the Philippines she was a celebrity and hopeful movie starlet. To her credit and my disappointment, she showed up wearing baggy jeans and a sweatshirt.

Q: Going back to Vernon McAninch, were his visa contacts and relationship with his girlfriend becoming the talk of the section?

LYON: I've talked a lot about Mac's brilliance as a manager and as a PR person for the Consular Section and Embassy, but there was definitely a flip side. He enjoyed being an A-lister, of being invited to all the major events, to the Palace, of being attractive to beautiful women. He took advantage of moving me out of NIVs to insert himself into the visa process, running a second visa line out of his office for important contacts and, of greater concern, anyone an important contact wanted a visa for. It became a morale issue; it was an issue within the section certainly. JOs were working like crazy at the front windows and people were slipping in behind them and getting visas. Mac liked helping people, he liked being someone well-connected people could go to for help, and he was a very liberal visa officer. He had a big heart. But it meant that people were getting visas who shouldn't have and nobody was in a position to monitor what he was doing. I don't think Mack ever took a penny for helping someone, but he loved the perks of knowing the rich and famous. So the older officers including myself saw outside persona as very much a two-edged sword, not necessarily proper, but with some positive benefits. The JOs saw it as being almost entirely bad and he lost their respect and support.

Q: Moving to a completely different scene, how did you and your wife find the social life in the Philippines?

LYON: We enjoyed it a lot, though I was always sensitive to the understanding that we were popular because I was the visa chief, not entirely because of my charm and good looks. I was very careful about accepting invitations from people I didn't know, but we

developed a small circle of very good friends. We have a couple visiting us this week who were the son and daughter of our closest friends in Manila, a well-to-do but not political family who never asked us for a thing. I remember one of our worst summer/student rush season days looking up to see our friend standing at a window with her daughter who was applying for a visa to go to Wellesley -- they had been in line for four hours, but had never called to ask for a favor. They could have called me and it would have been the easiest interview in the world. Both parents had both gone to US universities, as had at least two grandparents, her older brother was at MIT. No question of finances or of intending to return to the Philippines. But they did not want to presume on our friendship, did it the right way, and remain some of our closest friends. Other friends weren't quite so circumspect, but were usually careful never to push requests past immediate family members, which we both appreciated and, frankly used as a litmus test for moving from being friends to close friends.

We naturally also did a lot of stuff within the embassy and international communities. I played softball in an international league and reasonably high-level amateur basketball. My wife was first the deputy general manager of the Embassy Association -- which had restaurants, a swimming pool, tennis court, a PX and a commissary -- before moving over to become the Peace Corps Medical Officer. Our son and daughter were both born in Manila so all in all we ended up having a very rewarding tour.

Q: Did you have much connection with the political section and the economic section at all, the officers there?

LYON: Yeah, the visa process pretty much had them have me on speed-dial. I basically required them to come to me -- they were not allowed to go harass junior officers on visa cases, though they certainly could ask them for advice on the process. There was always some friction -- no one likes not being able to help a contact who has asked for help -- but all in all I think we had a good relationship with other embassy sections. They all understood that I had set up systems -- most important the two-track referral system I discussed earlier -- that could let them do their jobs with a minimum of hassle. And they knew that if they really had a problem they could come see me directly and I would help if I could.

But there was also an understanding that we wouldn't tolerate trading visas for unqualified people for information. We caught one officer from another agency having basically having traded a number of visa referrals for information. We took this to the Ambassador and had him thrown out of post; he would have been arrested in today's climate. Back then he was just told to leave.

All three of the ambassadors I worked for were supportive of the Consular Section, but Ambassador Armacost was the best. He was there the middle two years of my four year tour. He made a point of inviting junior officers to functions, making sure they knew they were diplomats as well as consular officers and encouraged other senior officers to do the same.

Q: What was the attitude of your political officers towards the Marcos regime? Did it change while you were there? Did you feel this outfit was on its way or? How did you feel about it?

LYON: I can only give you general impressions as I wasn't on the country team and frankly I didn't have time to read the classified reporting very often. When I got there in 1980, Marcos was the reality, he was in charge and he seemed to me to be a masterful politician. He had been the first Filipino president to be re-elected -- even with all their power and patronage, all of his predecessors had been voted out of office. Without any direct knowledge of this, I don't think he was terribly corrupt, though people around him, especially Imelda, certainly were -- I think he was in it for the power.

He was still in good health when we arrived, but seemed to age quickly with Imelda taking a more prominent role. He didn't seem to know what to do with the budding opposition movement, which, by the time we left in 1984, was able to put tens, even hundreds of thousands of people on the street in anti-Marcos demonstrations. We ended up leaving shortly after Benigno Aquino, Marcos' main rival, was assassinated as he stepped off a plane on his return to Manila after his de facto exile in the U.S. That killing, almost certainly organized by the Marcos regime, if not by Marcos himself, spelled the beginning of the end for him.

Q: Well you left there in 1984. Where did you go?

LYON: I came back to Washington and took a job as the Deputy Director of Regional Affairs in the Bureau of African Affairs.

Q: OK, Well we will pick that up then the next time. That was a great interview on your time in Manila.

LYON: It was a very interesting time and it certainly made my career. I showed up there as a brand new FS-3 and ended up being promoted twice in four years, going from being a journeyman consular officer almost to the senior ranks.

Q: David?

LYON: Yeah, hi Stuart, how are you ?

Q: All right. Where did we leave off?

LYON: We had finished my time in the Philippines, but after we hung up I realized there was one major management issue that we hadn't addressed and probably should, namely some of the very first steps in automating the immigrant visa process.

Q: Well sure, but first let mention that today is 5 April 2011 and I am speaking with David Lyon. David, go ahead, tell us about Manila's early experience with IVACS, which I think stood for Immigrant Visa Automated Control System.

LYON: By way of background, Manila at that point was the largest immigrant visa issuing post in the world. More were issued in Mexico, but by several different posts. We were issuing probably in the neighborhood of 30,000 to 35,000 immigrant visas a year in Manila and had several hundred thousand pending cases, nearly all of them involving people simply waiting their place in line until they could apply for visas. When I took over the IV operation in late 1982, I think it must have been eight or nine officers some 60 FSNs and a number of local hire Americans.

The IV chief during my first two years in Manila was an officer named Dick Mann who was one of the best consular managers I ever worked with. He was simultaneously managing this enormous, high-profile operation while transferring hundreds of thousands of paper records into IVACS while separately microfilming millions of supporting documents, all with the goal of getting us out from under probably hundreds of tons of paper files.

When Dick transferred, Consul General McAninch wanted me to take over the Immigrant Visa unit, something I was reluctant to do simply because I had very limited experience with IVs -- we had issued maybe a few hundred a year in Lagos and Accra -- and none with computers. Mac, as I think we have talked about before, was one of the great consular managers and personnel manipulators in the history of the Foreign Service. He manipulated me into the job and I found myself giving myself in crash OJT courses in IVs and automation.

I spent the next 15 months building on what Dick Mann had stated. My main accomplishment was to link the computerization and microfilm processes -- this hadn't been done properly at the start -- remember, we were the lead post for IVACS as well as the only post then doing microfilming -- and we were in danger of not being able to connect computer files with microfiched supporting documents. We had to back up the bus, so to speak, in order to create a new computer field for the microfilm locator number.

Thankfully, this period coincided with the installation of an upgraded Wang computer system which both forced us to pause a bit and greatly increased our data entry speed when we restarted the process. Previously, the data entry process had been so slow that perhaps the dozen Embassy dependents we had hired to transfer data from index-sized cards into the system brought knitting and books to work to fill the time between hitting enter after completing the case and having it accepted by the system. The upgraded system was so fast that I was able to set up a pay by the piece operation, where they were paid not by the time worked, but by the number of files they entered. We had some of these ladies jump from doing 25 or 30 files a day to sometimes more than 300.

For quality control -- which was very important given the fact that a data entry mistake in a key field like the last name or date of birth could cause a record to be lost, perhaps forever -- we then set up a system where all the files were checked by the FSN staff for accuracy. If the data enterer made a really minor mistake, they wouldn't get paid for that

file; if she made a larger but not crucial mistake, they wouldn't be paid for five cases; a major mistake, such as a misspelled last name, they would be docked ten. Too many mistakes, and we would have to let them go. The result was a perfect combination of speed and accuracy.

Q: Were you known as the Simon Legree by the people there?

LYON: Not really, after some initial resistance, they realized they could make a good deal more money than under the old system and that they could work at whatever speed they were comfortable with.

The funny thing, bureaucratically speaking, was that Dick Mann had been runner Consular Officer of the year for conceiving the system, I was runner-up the next year for increasing data entry speed and for linking IVACS to the microfilm project, my successor then didn't win anything for junking the microfiche due to difficulties with ensuring that it would keep the needed 10-20 years for some categories of IVs, such as the siblings of American citizens.

Q: Well David, on that note let's move on from the Philippines. With four consular tours overseas to start your career, it must have been time to come back to the Department. What was next for you? .

LYON: I had now been in ten years, all in consular jobs overseas, so I was looking to go back to DC, preferably to a political job and preferably in African Affairs where I had extensive contacts. I was lined up to get one of AF's FS-2 desk jobs when I was very unexpectedly promoted to FS-1 in the fall of 1983 -- all of a sudden I was a near-senior officer who had never served in Washington, had no political experience on his resume, and was wanting one of the larger country desks.

Q: Sorry to interrupt, but didn't you only join in 1974? How did you ever get promoted so quickly?

LYON: It was a real stunner, even with all the challenges in Manila, I hadn't certainly hadn't expected it. In fact, the Embassy personnel office didn't even call me when the list came out as they couldn't believe it -- one of the officers stopped by my office to make sure there wasn't another David L. Lyon in the Foreign Service. As for why, I've always assumed it was because for three of my four tours I had taken the hardest jobs I could find and then done well in them. Add in some dumb luck and there I was, a thoroughly inexperienced and some would say unprepared FS-1.

Q: So what happened with AF?

LYON: AF was understandably reluctant to bring on such an inexperienced officer into an O-1 position so I was thinking I would have to start all over again and go for the dregs of the jobs at my new rank. But I then I got a phone call from Jeff Davidow, one of AF's rising stars, asking me to be his deputy in AF's Regional Affairs office. After asking him

what exactly a regional affairs office did, I asked him why he was calling me. It turned out they were trying to shake off an unqualified but persistent FS-1 they didn't want and needed quickly to find someone at rank. I jumped at the chance and found myself deputy director of a busy office handling such transnational issues as refugees, human rights, political-military affairs, and relations with non-African states such as European donors, the USSR and Israel.

Q: You were doing this from when to when?

LYON: I was an AF/RA from '84 to '86. I was deputy director my first year, then, when Jeff Davidow moved downstairs to take over the Southern African account, I was acting director for my second year, which was a phenomenal experience for me.

Q: Let's take some of the issues. What were some of the issues that you particularly were involved with?

LYON: One of the few things I was not directly involved in was the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa as this was being handled directly by Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker, the front office, and a small group of senior officers, including Davidow. As Crocker masterfully mediated between the ruling white and restive black communities -- it was called constructive engagement -- AF/RA handled regional and multilateral issues, including refugees, human rights, political-military affairs, congressional affairs, the UN and other international bodies, and relations with key outside states such as the Europeans, Israel and the Soviet Union.

Q: One crisis I remember from the mid-80s was the evacuation of Ethiopian Jews from Ethiopia where they were being persecuted by a new leftist government allied with the USSR. Given your portfolio, were you involved in that?

LYON: We were, though most of this was extremely hush-hush and coordinated out of the Front Office, principally by my boss Princeton Lyman, but I had a secondary role even speaking once with Ollie North. Even though this was before he became famous, then infamous, you knew you were speaking to a power within the NSC.

Q: Talking about the Falasha thing, they were Ethiopian Jews, right?

LYON: Ancient Jews, the Jewish community in Ethiopia, going back millennia.

Q: What was your impression of how this operated?

LYON: It was very hush-hush. I am not even sure what the classification level would be right now. But North was basically very covertly coordinating with the Falasha, the Israelis, elements of the Sudanese government, even some at the top levels of the Ethiopian government, and the US Air Force in getting the community mobilized very quietly to move to landing strips where aircraft were able to come in covertly to pick them up and get them out of the country.

Q: How did you find AF as a bureau? It must have been incredibly busy with constructive engagement, Namibian independence and managing affairs with, what, 45 countries?

LYON: It was really an outstanding bureau to work for. Chet had had his team in place for several years and kept it almost intact for my two years there with the only front office change involving Chas Freeman taking over as PDAS from Frank Wisner -- both were brilliant in terms of conceptualizing what needed to be done and in laying out what they wanted from the various office directors. The two deputy assistant secretaries -- Princeton Lyman from AID and career FSO Jim Bishop -- were also outstanding, with detailed knowledge of Africa and American interests there.

The front office team divided up the continent both geographically and functionally which could have posed problems if they hadn't worked so well together. Jim Bishop might oversee West Africa, but Princeton would have responsibility for human rights, refugees and AID matters there. When Jeff Davidow moved downstairs to take over Southern African Affairs in mid-195 and I became acting Director, I worked for Princeton Lyman, took most of my day to day my marching orders from Jim Bishop, but had frequent direct contact with PDAS Freeman. This could have been confusing, even chaotic, but they were such a cohesive team that I never felt conflicted in what I was being called upon to do.

Not that there weren't the occasional silly season issues. My favorite was when I was tasked with blocking Upper Volta's official name change to Burkina Faso because this would have left a left-leaning country as president of the UNGA for two out of three terms -- one under its originally colonial term, then again under its new name, which meant something like Land of the Brave. I failed, but not without a valiant effort.

Q: I have interviewed Chet Crocker, and one of the things he noted was that one of his principal opponents was the CIA. And how he had to have more or less his own intelligence operation to find out what the CIA was up to. This was when Reagan's man, I can't think of his name right now...

LYON: Not Casey?

Q: It was Casey, was basically pursuing a different policy, so he had to slog through that sort of thing. Did you pick up any of that?

LYON: Not the CIA per se, I didn't do much on the intel side, but this certainly fits with the resistance I saw to Chet's policy throughout a conservative Republican administration. Chet was in a very unusual situation as a career Africanist -- generally a pretty left-of-center bunch -- working for the Reagan administration. Chet was absolutely brilliant and he knew what had to be done to bring about a peaceful transfer of power from whites to black in South Africa. He had our absolutely support, and general support from the 7th Floor, this was under Secretary Schultz, but most, senior administration officials were clearly skeptical that this could be done without widespread bloodshed,

with perhaps the emergence of an anti-American regime, some to the extent of preferring to shore up the apartheid regime of President de Klerk.

This meant Chet had to walk a wide variety of minefields. There were constant rumors that he would be replaced by a more conservative assistant secretary who would put the brakes on constructive engagement and reverse other of Chet's progressive policies towards Africa. In response, many senior and mid-level career officers let it be known that they supported Chet completely and would leave the bureau if they found themselves working for someone looking to keep the status quo in southern Africa. So I know Chet was having to fight all sorts of bureaucratic rear guard actions and it is to his credit and South Africa's benefit that he succeeded in fighting them off.

Q: I take you more or less signed up with the Crocker Crew.

LYON: Oh very much, Chet was a strong leader and like many others in the bureau I was captivated and motivated by his vision of a peaceful transition in South Africa. I wasn't sure it was possible to achieve without a civil war, but Chet's commitment and intellect carried us all along. I would say he had the active support of 90% of the officers in AF -- I mean intellectual support and commitment, not just picking up a paycheck every day.

Q: What about the African Bureau? You were saying you found this to be both a cohesive bureau and also a lot of fun. I mean these are smart people.

LYON: They were. It was a very good experience for me. I learned a tremendous amount -- remember this was both my first domestic assignment and my first time doing political work after ten years of consular work overseas -- from some very smart and dedicated bosses and colleagues. Stepping in as acting Director for an entire year also gave me an entirely different perspective of both the Department and what is now called the Inter-Agency.

Q. You have talked about AF's successes while you were there, what about failures? There must have been some.

LYON: There were, of course. One in my immediate portfolio had to do with the selection of the Africa representative for the UN Security Council. I and we had been complacent that our choice would win the informal vote, but we were ambushed at the last moment and another country, less friendly to us, was chosen. One of the biggest battles they handed to me was that of trying to oppose the first of what is now a standard annual State Department publication called the Voting Practices at the United Nations, where every country is rated on whether or not they voted with us or against us. One intent of the report, a major one, was to then correlate support or opposition to us at the UN to American assistance and diplomatic support. Chet Crocker was concerned that this would put African countries in undeserved bad light given that most considered themselves as non-aligned, many were Muslim, almost all were poor, and some were nominally socialist, and in response to pressure from within these blocks often opposed us on many relatively unimportant resolutions when in fact they were positively disposed

to us and could be successfully lobbied on more important issues. I spent a year fighting against the report bureaucratically -- within State and with AID and the NSC, and actually got the report shelved. Alan Keyes, the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organizations, and the originator of the Report, then went behind the Department's back to conservative senators and congressmen and had the report written into law.

Q: Alan Keyes was one of these political loose cannons wasn't he? He was a very conservative African-American if I remember correctly, even ran for the Republican nomination for president in the 1990s, right?

LYON: From my perspective, and I think from most career officers, he certainly was. He had been an FSO for a few years, but left and joined one of the more conservative think tanks. He never amounted to much politically -- losing his race for senator from Maryland and not getting any traction for the presidential nomination, but he was a very powerful assistant secretary because he was very closely tied to the Reagan administration as one of their very few visible African-Americans. So after losing a very nasty knock-down drag-out fight -- it went at least to the Deputy Secretary, if not the Secretary -- he undercut the Department by going to Congress.

Ironically, as an ambassador many years later, I used the book and its information to drive home to the four foreign ministers I worked with (the fifth country, Kiribati, was not a member of the UN) the importance of supporting our positions. A government would come to me with a request for assistance or support on a regional issue, and I could pull the book out and point out that one of the few contact points between them and the US was in the UN and that they didn't do a very good job in supporting us there. This got some traction and several countries, including Tuvalu where their UN rep was the Prime Minister's brother, started voting with us more often. So it has become a useful tool, but from the African Bureau perspective it is probably very much a two edged sword as Chet feared.

Q: You were in AF when the AIDS crisis became a national and international issue. How was it regarded in the AF of the mid-1980s, how actively did the bureau get involved in understanding and combating it, and did you have a role in this?

LYON: Yes, as important, very, and yes. This was very much in the early days of the epidemic, or, better said, in the public's awareness of the crisis. The NSC formed an Inter-Agency Working Group, I think in early 1985, to study the international scope of the epidemic and to begin to formulate a U.S. response. I was chosen to represent AF on the WG and was also asked, informally, by the Bureau of Consular Affairs, to keep them informed of possible travel consequences, whether for American citizens or for visa applicants.

Q. What was generally known about AIDS when you started and what did you know?

LYON: I probably knew more than most people as my youngest brother had been diagnosed with AIDS two years previously so I had talked extensively with him and had read about the virus. This put me ahead of most of the non-CDC personnel on the WG as AIDS and its causes and transmission were not well understood generally. Most people knew it was transmitted sexually, but believed it was almost exclusively a disease of gay men and intravenous drug users. I remember we were told about AIDS' "four H's": Homosexuals, Heroin Addicts, Hemophiliacs, and Haitians. The first three were pretty clear, but the disease's impact in Haiti was at first not understood at all while later becoming one of the first indicators that central Africa was AIDS' original epicenter. Because they speak French, Haitians were employed extensively in Zaire and other central African French-speaking countries and thousands were there or had been there early in the AIDS crisis, bringing the virus back to Haiti.

Interestingly enough, one of my main jobs on the WG was to make sure that no U.S. government entity ever speculated that AIDS originated in Africa. There was a growing believe, even consensus, that it had, but it wasn't an established fact. More importantly, we had large research teams working in Zaire and Zambia and had been essentially told by presidents Kaunda and Mobutu that, "If you make any claims that this disease originated in Africa we will close your programs down." There was tremendous sensitivity in these countries even as what was known and the "slimming" disease was starting to ravage their populations. It was a homosexual disease, it was a drug addicts disease, it was sexually transmitted, it may have come from monkeys. So I would go to meetings and fight with scientist and doctors who were focused on AIDS, not on political issues. I would tell them that they could believe it, they could talk about it, they could do the research, but they couldn't, if they were USG-affiliated, say it had originated in Africa, that we had to be vague or we would lose access to Central Africa.

Q: You mentioned you also represented Consular Affairs, or CA, at this time. What did you mean by that?

LYON: The WG was primarily focused on policy issues, on gaining and maintaining access to research sites in Africa, and on building a knowledge base for public health policy in the US. It did not normally include anyone from Consular Affairs or, if I remember correctly, INS. At one point, though, one agency, don't remember which one, rather abruptly put forward a proposal to augment the existing medical test requirement for immigrants by also imposing one on nonimmigrants, starting with students, exchange visitors and temporary workers, but potentially extending to business people and visitors. The existing test at the time, the Western Blot, was known for false positives and may not have been available in many countries. Imposing this requirement would have inconvenienced millions of people without detecting more than a handful with AIDS -- the world public health danger at the time was Americans going overseas and infecting foreigners, not vice versa.

I notified CA which CA quickly designated an officer to attend the next meeting. We drove over together and on the way, we did some back of the envelope doodling on the numbers involved. When we got to the meeting, the CA rep was quickly called upon, but

she, without warning, simply said that as a consular officer who had served in Africa and worked in AF – and most importantly was on the working group -- I would be speaking for CA. Fortunately, our doodled numbers showing the millions of people inconvenienced by having to take the test to stop a few hundred infected people from coming to the US, were enough for us to be able to carry the day.

Q: What about the other African hot spots of the mid-80s - I always think of Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone – were you involved in any of them while in AF? What about Charles Taylor in Liberia for example?

LYON: We are back a long time before most of those crises. Somalia was a comparatively stable dictatorship under Siad Barre, I don't recall any major crises in Sierra Leone, and while Liberia went through a major political upheaval during my time in AF, it was a coup led by an army first sergeant Samuel Doe, the first successful coup against the Americo-Liberian elite that had ruled Liberia since the first freed slaves were taken and resettled there in the 1840s.

The Doe coup was quick and while violent it was not followed by a civil war so we didn't get involved in an evacuation of the many Americans living in Liberia. However, it did get me involved in perhaps my biggest policy battle within AF. Normally AF/RA, as a functional office within a regional bureau, did not get involved in the affairs of individual bureau countries. What made Liberia different was the fact that the Americo-Liberian elite had very close ties to the African-American elite, having traditionally schooled their children in historically black colleges and universities. The Doe coup, led by a senior indigenous NCO, was the first successful effort by the indigenous tribes to take power away from the Americo-Liberians. The Congressional Black Caucus immediately took up the Americo-Liberian cause with the Department, calling on the US to repudiate in especially strong terms the Doe coup and to take steps to restore the original government. This got me and my congressional affairs hat tossed into the policy arena.

I felt the AF front office **was** about to cave into this pressure and sought to delay any decision in support of the deposed government. The Doe coup had been violent, people had been killed, but I felt we were in danger of ignoring the fact that the Liberian government had always been dominated by a small, non-indigenous elite, one which had instituted a slave system in the 19th century that had only been abolished by the US Army during WWII when we maintained a large air base outside of Monrovia. I felt that we would be better off calling for an end to violence and for early elections rather than demanding the restoration of an exploitative, minority elite. After some back and forth, the Front Office accepted many of our points and moderated its response to the Black Caucus.

Q: Well you left there when?

LYON: The summer of '86.

Q: Did you move to a different part of the bureau or...

LYON: No, I went to the National War College.

Q: You were there from '86 to '87 then.

LYON: Right.

Q: How did you find the War College?

LYON: It was one of the best years I ever spent. It was intellectually stimulating, both because of the curriculum and because it was my first time in a mostly military environment. Plus your time was your own, it took a lot of time, but you could usually work when you wanted to, not the daily grind in the Department, 8:00 to 6:30 every single day, plus coming in on weekends and the like. So it was a really outstanding year.

Q: How did you find you fit into the mix? How were you treated as a State Department person?

LYON: Very well. I think there were 16 of us so we made up about 10% of the class with an FSO or two in each of the core sections, or home rooms, along with an equal number of other USG civilians from mostly national security agencies like the FBA, CIA and Justice. There were certainly a few military guys who didn't like us, but most were receptive and very interested in learning from us just as we were in learning from them.

Q: Did you find that there was a variety of approaches to particularly international problems from different branches of the military and the civilian agencies?

LYON: I think the biggest thing that comes to my mind was the use of military force. Every single one of the soldiers and Marines and all but one or two of the Air Force and Navy guys had been enlisted men or junior officers in Vietnam when the military was in danger of tearing itself apart with drug problems, racial problems discipline problems, morale problems, you name it, and of course then being treated so badly in the U.S. when they came back from the war. So most were very hesitant, and this was the Powell doctrine before Powell enunciated it, to apply military force to problems overseas. The FSOs weren't so much eager to deploy force as they were willing to do so. DOD was simply another instrument of national power. We had it. We should use it if we needed to. So that probably was a constant area of discussion and argument the whole time I was there.

Q: I assume you did some travelling as part of your course?

LYON: We took a number of trips within the U.S. and then at the end of the year we took a major trip to India and Pakistan. The domestic trips were a great opportunity to get down and see bomber wings, get on the nuclear submarines and learn how the military is postured.

Q: Tell me about the India-Pakistan trip. What did you come away with from there?

LYON: This was in 1987 so it was at the tail end of the Cold War, but the specter of the Soviet Union was omnipresent, especially in Pakistan. We were treated very differently in the two countries, pretty much consistent with how important the US was strategically to them. The Pakistanis rolled out the red carpet for a bunch of mid-level officers, though we were accompanied by the War College's Vice President for International Affairs, Ambassador Jay Moffit. We spent an hour with President Zia, we spent an hour and a half with Prime Minister Junejo, we spent lunch and part of an afternoon with the Minister of Defense, while travelling we were hosted by corps and army group commanders. Everywhere we went, out would come the maps showing Pakistan as being in an unfriendly neighborhood, with the Soviets looming, with Moscow supporting India and lusting after a warm water port, and with the US-Pakistani alliance a major bulwark against Moscow's intentions.

Q: I gather your reception in India was different?

LYON: To put it mildly, absolutely. The Indians didn't think they needed us, they very much saw themselves as leaders of the non-aligned movement, their ties to Russia notwithstanding. We were treated nicely, but entirely consistent with who we were. We were briefed by the #3 on the Americas Division of the Foreign Ministry, by mid-level staff of the Ministry of Defense, by colonels when we visited military bases. It was fine, but quite a come-down.

LYON: Our briefings by Ambassador Dean Hinton in Islamabad and Ambassador Dean in Delhi were a highlight of the trip, though perhaps not in the way they intended. Our first stop had been Pakistan and Ambassador Hinton sent off a glowing cable of our reception there and how this emphasized the close relations between Washington and Islamabad, in his view our most important partner in the region. This arrived in Delhi just as we touched down mid-evening. We were supposed to go directly to the hotel, but were diverted to the Embassy where Ambassador John Gunther Dean launched into a strong, ad hoc diatribe, the basic point of which was that India was and should be the lynchpin of American policy in South Asia.

Q: How did you and your military officers take this?

LYON: The FSOs knew of the long rivalry between the two Ambassadors and we were having trouble not laughing. Our military colleagues' were somewhat bewildered and more than a bit shocked at having two such senior diplomats take each other on in front of a bunch of mid-level officers.

Q: How were the Cold War and the USSR treated at the War College?

LYON: One of the constant underlying debates at the War College was the constant argument about whether or not Gorbachev was really different from his predecessors. Was he changing the Soviet Union for the better -- making it less belligerent and more

democratic -- or was he simply trying to out-Reagan Reagan, to impose his own spin on Moscow's actions rather than trying to end the Cold War. We had two Soviet experts on the faculty and they took diametrically opposite views on this question.

Q: What was the topic of your thesis?

LYON: I chose to look at Mozambique, specifically how a successful insurgency led by FRELIMO expelled the Portuguese, but was then almost immediately bedeviled by a rural insurgency led by RENAMO. I was very interested to see how FRELIMO which had used a rural insurgency to beat a European Army, had lost touch with a large segment of the countryside which allowed for the rise of RENAMO and a major civil war. Much of the war was tribal, but there was also resistance to FRELIMO imposing a Marxist-style government in Maputo.

LYON: This unexpectedly got me caught up in partisan politics and gave me my first brush with Jesse Helms, a positive one at that.

Q: Jesse Helms -- a positive experience -- that's unusual for an FSO -- how so?

LYON: I had wanted to interview the FRELIMO representative in the US -- a professor at Howard University -- but was unable to get permission from AF to do so. The reason was simple -- FRELIMO may have represented legitimate tribal and regional interests, but it had been established by the Southern Rhodesian security services and was being supported by South Africa. All of a sudden Jesse Helms decides that FRELIMO is really a freedom-fighting organization and demands to know why the USG is ignoring such natural allies against a Marxist regime. I get a call from the AF front office, not telling me about Helms but suggesting I see the RENAMO representative as quickly as possible. I did, we had a very informative meeting, after which I discovered that my name had been given to Senator Helms as the State Department liaison with FRELIMO. That one meeting was it for my work with RENAMO, but it put me in good odor with Helms' office which later proved useful in Bangkok.

Q: So where do you go after graduating in what, 1987?

LYON: Deciding on my next assignment was one of those pivotal career moments. AF wanted me to return to Accra as DCM where at 36 I would have been one of the youngest DCMs anywhere in the world, a great opportunity and one that would almost certainly have led to my staying within AF for the bulk of my career and probably getting a mission within a few years. But CA was offering Consul General Bangkok which was also highly attractive for both personal and promotion reasons. I was leaning to Accra, but my wife, as wonderful and supportive as a Foreign Service spouse can be, did not want to return to Africa, once was enough in her mind especially since we were raising a young family, so we chose Thailand.

Q: So you were in Bangkok from when to when?

LYON: From '87 to '91.

Q: When you went there what was the situation in Thailand?

LYON: It was a pseudo-civilian government headed by a General named Prem Tinsulanonda. He had originally taken power in a military coup, but by the time I arrived he had been elected democratically. Thailand had the trappings of a civilian constitutional monarchy, but the Army was the power behind the throne and the government.

Q: Well then who was your ambassador when you arrived?

LYON: Bill Brown.

Q: I have interviewed Bill.

LYON: He was one of my favorite ambassadors. He was outstanding when it came to consular affairs. We had 27 Americans in prison when I got there, seven of whom had had been diagnosed as being HIV positive. So we were working with the Thais to essentially work a very quiet release of these guys to get them back to the U.S. Ambassador Brown would go to the palace to meet with the King's private secretary, then call me up in the evening to update me on the status of their royal pardons -- which eventually happened. He was that kind of ambassador. I just thought the world of him.

Q: Yeah, he has had some very tricky assignments in Taiwan and Israel during Desert Storm and all that. But you don't hear his name ringing down the corridors of power, perhaps because it is so common.

LYON: That may be, but he was outstanding. I found him very down to earth and practical. He would grab a thought and walk you through it, explaining why he was doing something or asking for guidance on what he should do. I worked for a lot of very good ambassadors, but he was one of the best.

Q: Well when you arrived there as consul general what were your major priorities?

LYON: Well one of the biggest ones involved those Americans in prison. DEA was working very hard with the Thai police to intercept people in Thailand because the jail sentences were longer, and the judicial system a good deal faster. So DEA and the Thais were picking up, I don't want to say large numbers, but good numbers of usually young Americans for smuggling heroin or large amounts of marijuana. They didn't fool around with a guy with a few marijuana cigarettes or anything. The Thais were smart. They didn't give the death penalty, as Singapore often did, for smuggling drugs, but they gave very long prison sentences, 50 years, even life. Then eight or ten years later they would very quietly give them royal pardons and get them out of Thailand. This gave them the deterrent effect of the long jail sentences, but avoided the international criticism of having death sentences. So we were very active with the Thai, with DEA working to get traffickers arrested and with us making sure that those who were received fair trials and

adequate treatment when in prison before or after sentencing. The only time we interceded on behalf of Americans seeking royal pardons was with the HIV+ prisoners though I also had the lead in negotiating a prisoner transfer treaty.

Q: Did your HIV-positive inmates bring the virus with them or were they infected in prison?

LYON: It was impossible to tell, but I imagine a combination of both. HIV was just becoming noticed in Thailand and prisoners certainly had access to drugs and sex in prison. One thing about Thai prisons was that if you had money, you pretty much could get what you wanted from special meals, to semi-private quarters, to drugs and I am sure to sex partners of either gender. We had one guy who was receiving a VA disability check of \$800 a month, probably more than anyone in the prison earned except for the warden. You would go and see him and he would give you a real sob story about how tough it all was and then half an hour later you would run across him in the guards' mess eating lunch with them.

Q: What were conditions like in Thai prisons?

LYON: I used to describe them as rough but not brutal. Americans weren't subject to beatings or rapes, but the prisons were crowded, diets were inadequate, and there was limited access to medical facilities. We had a full-time American employee, an Embassy spouse named Marcia Pixley, whose only job was to stay in constant touch with the prisoners to ensure they had access to medical care and had enough money to supplement their one prison-provided meal a day. Many prisoners were receiving money from home, but for those who didn't we had a loan program, I think it was for \$100 per month, to ensure they could buy food at the canteen. They would sign promissory notes and when they were pardoned or released, their passports would be limited solely for return to the US until they paid the loans back to the Department. An officer would meet with every prisoner every three months, but Marcia was there every week making sure no one slipped between the cracks. She was absolutely outstanding, developing important working relationships with key people throughout the Department of Prisons.

We had a very interesting time when a retired US Army general, frustrated in thinking we weren't doing enough to help one of his former subordinates, a sergeant who had tried to smuggle something like 50 kilos of heroin to the US in his household effects, get a pardon. The general had cooperated fully with the police in getting the sergeant convicted, but was appalled to discover that all the big fish in the scheme either had escaped justice or had already served their sentences while the sergeant, only a mule, was still in prison. He contacted one of the major news shows, can't remember if it was 60 Minutes or 20-20, saying we were neglecting American prisoners who were living under unbearable conditions. The network request for access came to the ambassador who passed it to the DCM who passed it to me. I remember telling the DCM, his name was Joe Winder, that we were going to get hit with one of two findings: the first being that we were neglecting these poor Americans in these horrible prisons with the other that we were wasting American taxpayer money in coddling drug traffickers. He just laughed and

said, “No, they are going to say we are wasting American taxpayer money while neglecting the needs of American citizens.”

It actually turned out all right. The show's researcher came to us and proved to be a pretty sensible young woman, a former Peace Corps volunteer with experience in the 3rd world. We spent a lot of time with her, introduced her to key prison officials who allowed her access to prisoners for interviews. After a week, she came to me and said, “There is no story here; I am going home.” I said, “What do you mean no story? There is a great story here. We are doing a great job.” She said, “That’s true, but we are not interested in that. I’m only here because we thought there was a story about you guys not doing your jobs.”

Q: Did you have a Prisoner Transfer Treaty?

LYON: We negotiated one while I was there. The Thais were reluctant, they didn't want to look like they were knuckling under to the US, but they also were anxious to reduce the number of foreign prisoners. It went through my last few months at post and one of the last things I did was take part in the ceremony transferring the first prisoners back to the US. It was actually pretty funny. The four guys in question went from having coffee with their warden, all on a first name basis, but then the Bureau of Prisons officials walked in, put them in handcuffs and walked them out, all very professional and totally impersonal.

Q: What about your routine consular work? How busy was Bangkok at the time?

LYON: The Thai economy was booming in the 1980s so we had a rapidly growing NIV workload as well as increasing numbers of American residents, businessmen and tourists. I had two very capable American Citizen Services chiefs -- Ed Wehrle and Steve Pattison -- so I spent most of my time managing the increase in NIV workload. No matter how busy we got, I wanted to avoid any kind of backlog for visa interviews – it takes less time to do them right away than to get caught up in appointment and crowd management, to say nothing of all the special requests that come flooding in if it takes weeks to get a visa. With one or two brief exceptions, we were able to do this throughout my four years in Thailand. It was probably one of the best experiences I had in terms of managing a large complex operation with an adequate staff and no trouble recruiting excellent officers.

Q: Well what about Bangkok and the sex industry. Did that impact on your operation?

LYON: Not as much as in Manila because we didn’t have a military base in country. There was a large sex industry, but it wasn’t leading to young GI’s marrying bargirls and coming in for immigrant visas. We did have the sex industry and it affected our work in a number of ways.

Q: How so?

LYON: One of the most difficult problems I worked with involved a large American-run pedophile organization in Bangkok. Have you ever heard of a man named Howard Ruff?

Q: No.

LYON: He was a very successful Mormon entrepreneur, financial advisor and author. He is the one who wrote the book, How to Profit From the Coming Bad Years, with its focus on precious metals over the stock market. While in Bangkok the previous year, he had toured a boys' home run by a fellow Mormon, had been impressed, and had used one of his newsletters to raise funds for it. It was a real organization that actually did some good work -- the wife of one of the Embassy's senior military officers was actually on its board -- providing room & board and some job training to some of Bangkok's many street children. However, just before Ruff sent in his first check, one of his own employees called him and told him that the man who ran the center had sexually abused him when he had been a Boy Scout and the man had been a troop leader or volunteer.

Ruff used his considerable resources to look into these allegations, determined they were true, and came to Bangkok to do something about it. He came to me and said, "Look I am just coming to tell you, I am not asking for help, I just want you to know that in the next two or three days several Americans are going to be arrested as pedophiles. I know that embassies have to provide assistance to arrested Americans, but I want you to know that these guys are as guilty as sin." Sure enough a day or two later the Thai police arrested two of the pedophiles filming sex acts with a number of naked boys. One turned out to be one of the founding members of NAMBLA, the North American Man Boy Love Association, who drummed up the clientele, while the other was a travel agent who put together the sex tours. The raid missed the ring's leader, the boys' home operator who provided under-age sex partners to the visiting pedophiles. Ruff spent the next year ensuring he was brought to justice, involving everyone from Jesse Helms to Jack Anderson, as he kept pressure on the Thais to take action.

Q: Oh God! In addition to the horror of pedophilia, this must have put you in a difficult situation.

LYON: It did. I had to balance our obligations to Americans arrested in Thailand with not doing anything to interfere with an ongoing, mostly behind the scenes, police investigation in a country which, frankly, did not put a lot of emphasis on sex crimes involving poor street children. We immediately sent a consular officer to visit the two arrested Americans, providing them with a list of local lawyers, and we visited them periodically while they were in prison awaiting trial. I also went through a Thai college classmate of mine, a senior aide to the Chief of Police, and let her know of Ruff's background, his interest in the case, his extensive contacts throughout the USG, and his insistence that they conduct a thorough investigation, including checking with Interpol. I kept in close touch with Ruff, or rather he kept in contact with me, but my only direct involvement in the case was going behind the scenes to block the alleged pedophile from, of all things, speaking at the annual Cub Scouts' banquet -- I ended up having to take his place.

Q: So what finally happened? Was justice done?

LYON: It took about a year, but the ringleader was finally arrested and convicted. He only served a short sentence, but he was then expelled from Thailand while also becoming the subject of an Interpol record which would make it much harder for him to set up a similar organization in another country. I understand he was later arrested in the US for sexually molesting a young boy, but don't know the final disposition of this case. One of the two other arrested Americans was returned to the US to face pedophilia charges, the other was convicted and served a prison sentence in Thailand.

Q: I was wondering, I'm just curious, did you have an American ending up in the street with no clothes after Suzy Wong had taken his...

LYON: Perhaps, though not as much as one would think. The sex industry was surprisingly well organized with bar owners, police commanders, the girls and their customers all trying to avoid major scandals. Certainly tourists at a bar might discover, well into their evening, that they were being charged \$30 a drink, or \$300 for a cheap bottle of champagne, and that there were very large men at the door refusing to let them out unless they paid their bill. But those places didn't want the bad publicity of beating people up, they were looking to intimidate, not maim. Since the customers didn't want a scandal, usually negotiations settled the issue, often with the "assistance" of the local police who were, of course, well compensated by the bar owners. So it was a constant problem, but, with a few exceptions, it wasn't a serious problem. Much more time consuming for us were the effects of the easy availability of hard drugs, heroin in particular, and the fact that Thailand was an attractive destination, with easy entry requirements, for all manner of foreigners with mental or emotional problems.

Q: We need to move on, but can you give me examples of these?

LYON: We had a young American business executive from NYC tack on a quick visit to Bangkok after a business trip to Tokyo, score some very pure heroin, probably his first, and die in a five-star hotel from an overdose. Then there was a mentally disturbed Vietnam vet who decided to walk to Vietnam from northern Thailand to find a former girlfriend and got picked up by the Vietnamese army in Cambodia. He sparked all manner of POW/MIA reports before we learned who he was. We not only did not have diplomatic relations with Cambodia, but we did not even acknowledge its government, so it took some six weeks of negotiations through the Vietnamese Embassy in Bangkok for me to get him released. It was actually pretty funny as the Cambodians went from demanding full diplomatic recognition for releasing them, to government to government talks, to a formal request by the USG, to, when they realized just how crazy he was, to pleading that his mother come and get him.

Q: I was wondering, was the sex trade in Thailand, and for that matter tourism in general, mainly centered on European and Japanese travel.

LYON: I think so. It was cheaper for a Japanese man or group of men to fly from Tokyo to Bangkok, play two rounds of golf, go to a massage parlor and enjoy several good

meals than it was to play a round in Tokyo. There were parts of the red light district where Americans weren't welcome, for Asians only, in part because the locals saw AIDS in particular as a Western, not an Asian, disease. So with all of its different facets, the sex trade was all around you all the time.

Q: You have mentioned AIDS twice, was it a big problem and were the Thais doing anything about it?

LYON: When we arrived in 1987, the Thais were basically in denial over AIDS, with most Thais, in and out of government, generally seeing it as a Western, a Caucasian and African, disease. By the time we left four years later, they were well on their way to being one of the most successful countries in combating the spread of HIV.

Q: Why was that?

LYON: A number of factors were in play, but in my view the most important was a well-known and extremely charismatic family planning expert by the name of Mechai Viravaidya who recognized early on the dangers of HIV/AIDS in a sexually free-wheeling country like Thailand. Mechai, or the Condom King as he was popularly known, had worked with USAID, the Thai government (RTG) and NGOs for years advocating condoms and safe sex in terms of preventing unwanted pregnancies and STDs. Mechai turned his charisma, popularity and organizing efforts nearly full-time to AIDS in the late 1980s. He was joined very shortly thereafter by the Royal Thai Army which discovered that a frightening percentage of its mostly teenage recruits -- I don't remember the number, but it was in the high single digits or low-teens I believe -- were found during their enlistment physicals to be infected with the virus. Of particular alarm to the RTG was that this was true not only of boys and young men from Bangkok and Chiang Mai, but also from rural areas throughout the north and northeast with heterosexual transmission, mostly through brothels, seen to be the primary cause. The combination of the Army, the RTG, USAID and other IOs and NGOs, led by Mechai, who became a government minister in 1991 (for an interesting ministry, that of Tourism, Information and AIDS), resulted in a number of early government programs that blunted the rise in AIDS, though it continues to be a major problem in Thailand as elsewhere.

I remember reading later studies showing the incidence of HIV rocketing up in Bangkok and then leveling off and falling where in other countries, like Papua New Guinea or throughout Africa, the increase in new infections just kept on going up for many more years. Mechai, I believe, deserves the most credit for this, followed by the Thai Army and RTG and international health and development agencies like USAID.

Q: I believe you left Bangkok in '91 so you would have been there during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and then Operation Desert Storm. You were a long way away from the Middle East, but did the war affect you very much?

LYON: We were there for both events and they at first simply led the Embassy to review and update its security plans and procedures, and the consular section to refine our

warden network and ability to communicate with resident and visiting Americans,. Later, though, Saddam Hussein actually used Thailand's easy entry procedures and reputation as an R&R point for Arabs as well as Americans and Europeans, to infiltrate a number of fedayeen into Bangkok with the goal of attacking the Embassy on the onset of the actual invasion of Iraq.

Q: I remember hearing that when I was in the Philippines. What exactly happened?

LYON: We were fortunate in that a local Arab resident, I believe he managed one of the hotels the attackers were staying in, overheard details of the plot, was horrified, and came and spoke to Embassy intelligence and security officers. His doing so probably prevented a massacre with heavily harmed fedayeen, probably numbering in the teens, storming the Embassy and overrunning the two Marine Security Guards on duty. The Embassy immediately contacted the Thai security services who acted with great dispatch arresting, I think, some 15-18 men and forestalling the attack.

The problem was that the Thai did not recover many weapons and no one knew if they had arrested the entire group. The Embassy went on immediate war footing, soldiers with heavy machine guns appeared at all our housing compounds, the school was closed, the warden network activated, a strong Travel Warning issued, and I sent consular officers to the international airport to notify incoming American tourists of the danger. A Thai Army company was bivouacked at the Embassy compound and nearby Ambassador's residence and the Army patrolled the areas around western diplomatic compounds and tourist areas. When the International School reopened – after considerable debate by its board, of which I was a member – Army jeeps preceded and followed its buses to and from school for several weeks.

Thanks to the RTG's fast and decisive actions, there were no security incidents and if there were any at-large fedayeen they chose to either return to Iraq or disappear into Thailand. The travel warning stayed in place for several weeks, but then things started to return to normal

I do have two funny stories for you, if we have time, with one of them involving none other than Betty Tamposi.

Q: Oh God, not her, but go right ahead, especially since it is her.

LYON: The first resulted from the fact that Thailand's tourism industry was hit hard by the threat of the attack as well as by our, and other governments', travel warnings. The RTG understood and was totally cooperative, and most hotels and tourism associations were supportive. We had one local American hotelier, though, who started calling and badgering me to lift the warning almost immediately. About the third time he called, and we are talking within a week of the planned attack, I couldn't help myself and started humming the theme to Jaws – as you will remember the town council lifted the swimming ban much too early under pressure from the tourism industry and several unfortunates were then eaten by the Great White. This shut him up long enough for me to

hang up on him and when he called the Ambassador to complain, the Ambassador couldn't help himself from laughing himself silly. Did not hear back from the hotelier.

Q: Now on to Betty Tamposi, who was of course our boss as Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, a political appointee none too popular among the rank & file.

LYON: I am sure all of us have a few Tamposi stories, I do, but this is a great one.

The Arab informant came to the Embassy in the evening so everything happened overnight at first with an exceedingly high security classification, one most officers, including me, did not have. The first I learned of it was when was woken up about 3 AM by a literally screaming Betty Tamposi. She had seen the first intel reports and had somehow jumped to the conclusion that the Embassy was only concerned with protecting its own and was violating the no double standards policy.

Kennedy: A policy put into effect after the Lockerbie plane disaster requiring embassies to provide the same information to private Americans as they do to the official community.

LYON: Correct, but in this case all traffic – again probably Top Secret codeword – was focused on identifying and eliminating the threat of attack. So, here Betty is spewing highly classified information over an open international telephone line to a guy who had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. The only thing that saved me was that my wife was the Embassy's Community Liaison Officer, the person who would have been at the forefront of any security directives to official personnel, and she didn't know anything about it either. Betty didn't quite say "Never mind", but I could hear her being talked down by one of her FSO staffers and I mollified her by saying I would look into it immediately and that I fully understood the No Double Standards Policy.

Q: So that was it for Bangkok?

LYON: Not quite, as my last week was interrupted by the Department's determination that the leading candidate to be named Prime Minister in a new coalition government was a drug trafficker and should be persuaded not to take the post. Since I was heading off to my next job in the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, and our position was that we would publicly announce that even if he were named Prime Minister we would continue to deny him a US visa due to his drug ties, I was elected to go with Ambassador O'Donohue, who was also finishing his tour, to deliver the news. The only other time I had run across the individual in question was when I was helping a close friend of mine, an MIT-educated Filipino I had met in Manila, leave the country quickly after he received death threats for having crossed the would-be prime minister by exposing a crooked business deal. It was not a pleasant meeting. We delivered the message, were on the receiving end of an angry response, heard two days later that he was no longer being considered, and then left the country.

Q: And joined the drug war full-time?

LYON: Right, I came back to be an office director in INM, the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters.

Q: Ok, well we will pick it up then.

Today is 28 April 2011 with David Lyon. David, before we move on, something I read in the paper yesterday reminds me I have a very quick consular story from when Madam Nhu died, the dragon lady of Vietnam.

LYON: Sure I remember her.

Q: In early November of 1963, her husband and President Diem were assassinated during a coup and she was purported to be in Belgrade because there was an interparliamentary union meeting and she was lobbying delegations on behalf of her husband. I got a cable, I was chief of the consular section in Belgrade, telling me Madame Nhu might be applying for a visa to the US. It basically said, "Don't refuse her, but see if you could dissuade her from coming to the United States" What in God's name did they mean by that? Here I am dealing with the dragon lady of Southeast Asia and saying, "Madame Nu, do you really want to come, it is kind of cold in the States." They were afraid she would raise hell because she could have.

LYON: About the coup and our failure to support her husband?

Q: Yeah, but that is how you cover your ass by saying we tried, but the consul in Belgrade couldn't deliver or something. Anyway, we left you when you had just given the likely next prime minister designate the bad news that if he became prime minister we would publicly announce that he was banned from a visa due to drug trafficking ties and then you felt fortunate to be on the next plane out. What was your next job again?

LYON: I came back for a near total career change, taking over INM/T, the Office of Transnational Affairs in the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters.

Q: You did that from when to when?

LYON: '91 to '94.

Q: All right, would you talk a bit about the bureau. It was a fairly new one at the time wasn't it?

LYON: INM [Note: now INL for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement] wasn't a particularly new bureau, but INM/T was virtually brand new, I was its second office director. INM had been beaten up in a major inspection a year or two previously for loose internal controls, especially regarding its Air Wing, and one response was to create a new office for more direct oversight.

Q: Not many people know the Department has an Air Wing, could you describe what it was and what it did?

LYON: At the time, we had some 55 aircraft – mostly helicopters and spray planes – operating in South and Central America working on crop eradication and drug interdiction programs. A large aviation program in Colombia was largely autonomous from us, though we provided some support, but we managed aircraft, logistics and training programs in Guatemala, Belize, Peru and Bolivia.

Q: Thank you, please go on.

LYON: By State Department terms, the Air Wing's budget was quite large with a major aviation support contract and an inventory well over \$100 million in aircraft and spare parts. When he took over INM, Assistant Secretary Mel Levitsky, an outstanding FSO and manager, had undertaken a significant reorganization of the Bureau, bringing in terrific new Controller, Mike Ryan, and setting up INM/T to oversee the Air Wing directly. INM/T had been in place about a year and included not only State's aviation program in Latin America, but also our counternarcotics coordination with the UN and other international organizations, European programs, coordination with other donor countries and some complex odds and ends like interdicting chemical precursors and money laundering. I think they included these other more standard diplomatic initiatives in order to more attractive to senior officer bidders. But I would imagine I spent a good three-quarters of my time on the Air Wing.

Q: Mel Levitsky was in charge at that time?

LYON: Right.

Q: Would you talk a bit about him and how he operated.

LYON: Happy to. I had not known him before, but he was one of the best bosses I have ever had. He could think the big picture, how to frame our international counter-narcotics policies to gain support at the White House, on the Hill and with other agencies such as DEA and DOD, how to mobilize and motivate a large and diverse staff of FSOs, civil servants and military officers, and how to enlist the support of other countries, whether donors or aid recipients. But equally important, he was also a superb manager. He knew there were strong legal and moral reasons for making sure his large budget was spent on a rational basis. He felt very much accountable for the hundreds of millions of dollars, a lot of money in State Department terms in the early 90's, he was entrusted with. He and his top deputy, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, or PDAS, Grant Smith, ran the bureau very efficiently. Office directors had a lot of authority, but we knew exactly who our boss was and what he expected of us. Staff meetings were used to coordinate policy, iron out differences between offices, and link resources to goals. It was a very good bureau to work in and I learned a great deal from Mel and Grant.

Q: Did you have any feel for how the bureau worked within the bureaucracy?

LYON: Great question, as you can imagine there were a lot of actors in the counter-narcotics arena, not all of them very good at playing with others. Mel spent a lot of time asserting himself and our mandate and priorities. Within the building, we worked most closely with the Bureaus of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA), East Asia and Pacific Affairs (EAP), and what became the Bureau of South Asian Affairs. For my part, I worked closely with WHA and the Bureau of European Affairs (EUR), and the Bureau of International Organizations (IO). The relationships were generally good, though with many of the usual friction points between regional and functional bureaus as we worked out our different mandates and goals.

LYON: Outside of the Department, Mel and our principal interactions worked with a broad range of cabinet and sub-Cabinet agencies including the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), a number of DOD offices, Treasury, Customs and a great deal of contact, and often friction, with DEA. This was a tough group and I know Mel was forced to bring all his diplomatic and managerial skills, plus his elbows, to the table to make sure we had the support we needed to manage our programs effectively. His and his successor's jobs were made easier when a State Department reorganization put us under a new Under Secretary for Global Affairs, former Senator Tim Wirth, who could help run interference for us within the building and at the sub-cabinet level with other agencies.

Q: Well let's talk about your overall job before we move to Latin America. What other aspects of transnational issues were you working on?

LYON: INM/T handled a real potpourri of issues that transcended national boundaries. My non-Air Wing side of the office was pretty unusual, in that I only had a single FSO, first Dennis Linskey and then David Rogus, who served both as my deputy and as chief of our Global Affairs Division. We then had perhaps a half dozen civil servant specialists, some on loan from agencies like Customs, who handled specific portfolios ranging from money laundering, chemical precursors, demand reduction assistance programs, UN programs and donor coordination, counter-narcotics programs in Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former USSR, even K-9 drug dog training.

As for the Air Wing, we had perhaps a dozen civil servants and just over 20 military officers, or PASAs (Participating Agency Support Agreement) officers spread out between my office in the Department, Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, and aviation operations in Central and Latin America. I had a GS-15 as my principal aviation advisor while our depot at Patrick Air Force Base was managed by first Colonel Terry Branham and then Colonel John Binkley, both highly experienced Army aviators. Overseas, we had a senior FSO based in Vienna, where the UN Drug Control Programme was based, and Army lieutenant colonels managing our programs in Guatemala City, La Paz and Lima. It was quite an operation, I remember one month where I spent two weeks in Latin America – spending two days on a Bolivian navy ship far up the Amazon, flying over coca fields in the Upper Huallaga Valley in Peru in a Huey gunship, visiting a recently busted cocaine lab in the Peruvian jungle ... and then coming home for two days before

taking off for a UN conference in Vienna. It took everything I had just to keep up with everything we were doing – fortunately we had some outstanding officers handling most of our portfolios.

Q: I wonder if you could explain for somebody who is reading this later, what was money laundering at the time?

LYON: Oh great, let's start with an easy one. I think the USG and international partners were just starting to focus on hitting drug traffickers where it hurt the most, their money. Our efforts at the time were spearheaded by future Secretary of the Treasury and President of Harvard University Larry Summers. Summers, then a Treasury Under Secretary, pulled together a team of money laundering experts, including Rayburn Hesse of INM/T, who was, in my opinion, absolutely brilliant, and used them to invigorate the recently established Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental organization established in 1989 by the G-7 and based in Paris.

The FATF has since broadened its focus to include terrorist financing, but in the early 1990s, it was primarily working on attacking the drug trade. Its, and our, guiding philosophy was that you shouldn't devote all your resources trying to intercept cocaine or heroin shipments, and to a lesser degree marijuana shipments, to the U.S. and other recipient countries as the actual drugs were so cheap to produce that losing individual shipments really didn't matter all that much to the cartels' bottom lines. But if you could go after how they moved their money and could seize their profits and operating cash, you could really start to hurt them. FATF efforts were the origin of our current requirements for banks to report any transactions over \$10,000 in holdings by Americans in foreign banks. It was incredibly technical work and frankly my main job was to run interference for Rayburn, who as I said was brilliant, but who was also, to put it diplomatically, fairly short on tact.

Q: Well where stood Switzerland at this time?

LYON: This was some time ago, so I can't speak for certain, but I believe Switzerland was still protecting its banking sector and making it very hard for foreign police to drag information out of its banks. I know that one of the issues the FATF was working on was convincing the Swiss to impose controls and safeguards on the movement and deposit of narco-related funds, but think it took the post-9/11 era before the Swiss began to move in this direction. I don't recall if Switzerland was a founding member of the FATF, but I do remember the FATF-Swiss relationship as involving constant negotiations about bank secrecy and the need for transparency if drug money laundering was to be seriously impacted through international banking cooperation.

We had a similar program going for intercepting what were known as precursor chemicals from getting from producer countries, such as the US, Germany and Japan, to drug labs in Latin America, the Golden Triangle or central Asia. Again, I had an outstanding subject matter expert working for me on this, a retired FSO, who worked closely with the DEA, Commerce, and a number of UN and other IOs to track the

ultimate destinations of key chemical exports to make sure they weren't being re-routed to drug producing countries that did not need them for legitimate purposes.

Q: What about in the banking thing. What about all these so called banks in the Cayman Islands and all around. Were these just hand off points where the money had to eventually go to a real bank or what.

LYON: Shell banking was a real problem for us as they were lightly regulated, if at all, by generally very poor countries which were willing to license and then ignore foreign-owned banks in return for relatively modest fees. Nauru, one of the countries to which I was ambassador a decade later, was a tiny Pacific Island country, had registered several hundred foreign-owned banks, we thought most were Russian mafia, all "housed" in a small office, and, aside from collecting fees and "taxes" totally ignored by the government. Nauru had no interest in responding to international pressure on crime- and narcotics-related money laundering, but did close most if not all of its shell banks under US pressure after 9/11.

Eventually, though, large amounts of money had to go from shell banks into the formal banking system and gradually the US and FATF ramped up the regulatory and legal pressure on countries to scrutinize large cash flows coming in to their banks from overseas. If I recall correctly, and I may not, the main weapon we used was access to the US international banking system – being denied access could be a death knell for banks with any pretensions towards legitimate or even quasi-legitimate international commerce. Again, though, it took 9/11 and the compelling and agreed-upon need to interdict terrorist financing that really got countries to cooperate, whether Switzerland or Nauru.

Q: Well then turning to ARA you were in INM from '90 to '93 was it?

LYON: '91 to '94. While INM/T had a broad functional and regional portfolio, because of the Air Wing, I devoted most of my time and attention to supporting counter-narcotics programs in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Q: What was the situation? Where were the problems?

LYON: I'll start off on the management side, then move to what we are trying to achieve. The Air Wing was quite possibly the biggest single non-administrative program in the Department with 55 aircraft, an inventory of over \$100 million, an annual budget in the range of \$55 million, three major aviation contracts, and some 300+ USG and contractor personnel based at Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, our logistics and maintenance hub, and four countries in Latin America. My immediate predecessor, who had established INM/T, had done an admirable job in starting to deal with some major management problems and I was fortunate to benefit from his efforts.

We had just brought on a new prime contractor, DynCorp, to replace one that had been savaged by a State audit for poor inventory controls and shoddy management practices, and we had greatly expanded the number of military aviators and logisticians from DOD

under a Participating Agency Support Agreement (PASA). I believe we were perhaps DynCorp's first major Department contract so they sent their best people to us, as did DOD as part of its contribution to President Bush's War on Drugs.

My job was to make sure that these resources were provided to country narcotics teams in Peru, Bolivia, Guatemala, Belize and Ecuador and that we provided secondary assistance to an already robust aviation program in Colombia. I was always on the road, probably averaging a short trip to Florida every month one or two trips long trips to Latin America each year, as well as visits to Europe for UN or NATO meetings.

Q: By State standards that was a huge operation. What exactly was the Air Wing trying to achieve?

LYON: We had two primary goals. The first was to provide aviation support to on-the-ground counter-narcotics programs, whether by aerial eradication of opium poppies, as in Guatemala, the occasional, it was a low priority, spraying of marijuana fields in Belize, and transporting and protecting indigenous personnel who were ripping out coca plants in Bolivia and Peru – neither country allowed aerial spraying -- and assisting DEA cocaine interdiction efforts. Our second objective was to build up host nation counter-narcotics capabilities, as INM had done in Colombia. We worked with the Bolivian Air Force and the Peruvian and Guatemalan national police forces, training pilots and helping them establish logistics and maintenance hubs and procedures.

Q: Tell me more about these PASAs, as you called them, the military officers on loan to your program. Where did they come from and what did they do?

LYON: I don't think it was a big secret that State had had trouble in the late 1980s managing a paramilitary aviation program spread over much of Latin America. We simply didn't have the aviation and logistics expertise to do this. After we uncovered serious inventory control problems, millions of dollars of missing parts, Assistant Secretary Mel Levitsky made the decision to ask DOD for assistance. DOD provided the Air Wing with just over 20 officers and warrant officers, headed by a full Army colonel, first Terry Branham and later John Binkley. I had an Army lieutenant colonel logistician, Gerald David, and a Marine budget officer with me in INM/T, we had two or three PASAs, headed by Army lieutenant colonels, running our aviation programs in Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia, with the rest, including Colonel Branham, stationed at Patrick Air Force Base, supervising the DynCorp contract and providing support downrange. I found the PASAs, the majority of whom were Army aviators, to be absolutely outstanding and major contributors to our being able to get the program back on track.

I'll give one quick example of what the PASAs provided to us. In Guatemala, DEA wanted the capability to operate at night, which we then didn't have. Colonel Branham, who had led the first Apache squadron into Iraq at the start of the first Gulf War, brought in his night-vision officer from that operation who ensured we had the right equipment, the right safety and operational procedures, and oversaw pilot and air crew training.

Within six months, we were able to provide this capability to DEA and the Guatemalan police.

Q: Was it dangerous work?

LYON: It was, though not for me, of course. We were operating in the cartels' backyards with the additional complication being that our primary operating area in Peru, the Upper Huallaga Valley, was also a hotbed of the Maoist revolutionary group, the Shining Path, which was increasingly using the cocaine trade to raise revenue. We essentially operated out of a military Forward Operating Base at a village called Sta. Lucia, with a walled perimeter, guard towers and usually a company each of Peruvian Army and paramilitary police providing security. I didn't think I have ever paid so much attention to an initial security briefing as I did at that base, especially when I learned that my job during an attack was to carry mortar rounds to one of our defensive emplacements, the first time I'd ever been tasked with something quite so kinetic, and then, if we were overrun, I should make it over the west wall so I could float down the river hopefully to safety.

Our dozen or so spray planes were all turbo-charged and had armor-plated cockpits to protect the pilots from ground fire and we used armed Huey gunships to escort the spray planes and transport and escort the workers who were pulling up, by hand, coca plants.

During my three years in INM/T, we had three helicopter crashes, two of them with fatalities. The first was due to engine problems, with the Peruvian pilot handling a hard landing well enough to avoid personnel injuries, but considerable damage to his helicopter. That night, despite a near total lack of visibility, the Peruvian Army insisted on air coverage for their platoon guarding the site, and one of our Hueys struck a high tree and crashed, killed the three Americans and two Peruvians on board. A year later, also on the Upper Huallaga Valley, a 60-year old contractor pilot -- at the time we were having to reply principally on Vietnam vets -- passed out while doing emergency evasion training and crashed his Huey, killing both people on board. Visiting the family members of the Americans who died flying for me may have been the most emotionally draining moments of my time in the Foreign Service, though all understood that their loved ones had died while doing dangerous work that they loved in service to their country.

In looking at the underlying causes of the accidents, we determined that the sub-contractor providing our civilian pilots was overly reliant on Vietnam era pilots who were getting rather long in the tooth. We tried to institute US Army aviation physical fitness standards, but ran into US law and our lawyers said we couldn't do this due to age discrimination issues. So instead, we had the sub-contractor that was providing aircrews and maintenance personnel, shift their recruiting efforts to focus more on younger pilots just finishing up their 20 years in the military.

Q: Was Colombia the major effort at the time?

LYON: Colombia's was INM's largest program, but its aviation program had already advanced past the point of needing the kind of assistance the Air Wing specialized in.

The NAS (Narcotics Assistance Officer) in Bogota, ran a huge multifaceted effort, but I was only involved in it peripherally, making one visit with some of my senior aviators taking a look at their program, which was working quite well. We also, of course, worked with them on our various transnational issues, such as chemical precursors and money laundering.

Q: I hadn't realized Guatemala was a source country for opium poppies. Tell me about your program there.

LYON: I probably spent more time on this part of our aviation program than any other. If I remember correctly, Guatemala had not been a source of opium poppies until some South Asian chemists working for the cartels in Colombia decided to branch out on their own in Guatemala. Guatemala's mountainous terrain is ideal for producing opium and very shortly there were something like 20,000 hectares, almost 50,000 acres, under production. We had already shifted our spray planes to Guatemala when I arrived in INM, and shortly we had 11 of our 12 Thrush in country as well as a number of Bell 212 helicopters who served armed convoy and if necessary rescue missions, fortunately, the latter was never required. We and the Guatemalan police were never able to stamp out opium production, but I believe we were able to stop its expansion and knock back production considerably.

Q: Turning to Peru, was the Shining Path working with the drug producers or were they on their own.

LYON: Both. As that point, I don't think they were producing drugs directly, but they like so many other insurgent groups had early on realized that providing protection for local drug producers, and occasionally shaking them down, would be a financial bonanza for them. At this point the Shining Path was still a fairly strong organization, but even though we were working in one of their major operating areas, they generally stayed away from us because we were heavily armed. One of their MOs was to use local villagers as screens, for example, when attacking a police station. This wasn't a problem for us. The one time they had come after us, it was before I took over, our helicopters simply popped up over the screens to take on the guerillas directly. They would take occasional potshots at us, but for the most part they just stayed away. I always felt that this was partly because we weren't causing their drug production too much harm and partly because our presence gave them an excuse to demand protection money.

Q: How about in Bolivia. What was the situation from your point of view?

LYON: We had a strong program in Bolivia nested within a very active NAS. Bob Gelbard was ambassador to Bolivia at the time – he later took Mel Levitsky's place in INM -- and he had a lot of influence with the Bolivian government. What made our job interesting was that it wasn't illegal to grow coca in Bolivia, just to turn it into cocaine.

Q: Your kidding, right?

LYON: Nope. The Bolivian government was aware of the political clout of the growers, from the cartels to the tens of thousands of peasant producers and their communities. It was doing everything it could to find legal uses for coca, from tea, which was actually served in the Embassy cafeteria, to toothpaste. But basically it was used to produce cocaine. I remember one time when Colonel Branham and I were leaving our main base in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and coming across a peasant lady, bowler hat, cigar and all, drying her cocaine on our access road, we actually had to drive around her, after stopping for a picture with her and her leaves, as she ignored us completely.

Our focus in Bolivia was less on eradication as it was in working with the Bolivian army and police, and with DEA, in breaking the production cycle. I remember interrupting an orientation flight during my first visit to Bolivia to divert to a recently discovered cocaine lab in the jungle. We got there just as the police were getting ready to set it on fire so I had a chance to look over a large, but pretty simple operation, complete with using barefoot boys to crash the leaves and mix them with sort of chemical paste. I remember seeing the sores on their feet and calves from the chemicals.

Q: Then Ecuador, was this an important link ?

LYON: At that point we had a narcotics assistance section at the embassy in Ecuador and would have been working with the government of Ecuador, but I had very little to do with it directly. I believe we sent over some aircraft for one mission, as much to see if they had the capability to work with us.

Q: I have interviewed, I can't think of her name now, but a foreign service officer who spent an awful lot of time getting the Ecuadorian army and police to cut out a lot of river traffic with cocaine.

LYON: That doesn't surprise me as our NAS's were active wherever they thought they were needed. I actually spent three very interesting days with the Bolivian Navy on an interdiction cruise on the upper tributaries of the Amazon. We had provided them with several Boston whaler patrol boats to intercept shipments coming down the river. Our only success on that cruise was intercepting some smugglers with the eggs of endangered turtles, but spending two night on a mother ship, without any lights for hundreds of miles, was one of my most vivid memories, with jungle sounds and the Milky Way on full display. What made the trip sad, though, was that gold mining further up the river system had used mercury which had then killed every fish in that part of the river so we ran across deserted villages whose people had had to move up smaller tributaries to fish.

Q: I imagine as you dealt with these various governments there must have been a constant refrain of if you damn Americans would stop buying this stuff we wouldn't have a problem.

LYON: All the time, though this was often coupled with a practical realization that the rich and powerful Yanquis were going to do what they thought they had to do to stop supplies even as their people provided the demand. We tried to accompany our

enforcement-heavy supply reduction efforts with active demand reduction programs in key countries in Latin America, the Middle East and the Golden Triangle. This fell under INM/T and was handled by a very capable civil servant, Thomas Browne, who coordinated training and other assistance programs for host government demand reduction programs.

Q: Was Mexico much of a problem for you then?

LYON: Mexico was like Colombia in that its aviation and other anti-drug programs didn't need the kind of help INM/T could provide, though, again, we worked with them on specialized issues such as money laundering and chemical precursors. I remember the NAS was assisting the Mexicans in an active opium eradication program, which was one reason production spilled across the border to Guatemala.

Q: How did you feel with you were dealing with ARA, as what is now the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, was then called? Did you feel you were getting good support?

LYON: We did. Mel Levitsky worked very hard at this, and his second deputy was Chris Arcos who had been ambassador to Honduras and was an old ARA hand. Latin American programs were handled out of INM/P which had two of its three divisions handling Latin America and we worked closely with it and its director, Bob Perry. There were certainly policy and program disagreements, especially on where scarce resources should go, but I don't remember any significant disconnects with ARA. We worked closely with them in interacting with outside offices such as the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy and of course DEA. I think we had more problems with DEA than all of the other offices and agencies we worked with together added together.

Q: And why was that, what made DEA hard to work with?

LYON: Much of it probably boiled down to the differences between policy and program offices like ours and law enforcement. DEA resented the fact that we controlled the air assets they needed to move around the countries we were in. For our part, we insisted on this so there was foreign policy oversight of aviation operations. A good example of why we had this policy was when DEA somehow arranged for the loan of an Air National Guard Blackhawk. The next we knew, it had used its machine guns to stop a fleeing boat which was believed to be carrying cocaine. The problem was that DEA did not have host nation authority to operate without local police, and they had gone out on their own. Fortunately, the boat was carrying bales of cocaine and not children being taken to school, but this did cause our embassy in that country a major headache.

My biggest problem with DEA was that I felt that in jockeying for resources within DEA and from other agencies, they would make wildly ambitious claims of what the requested resources would enable them to accomplish. When they fell short of these goals, they would blame their interagency partners or local counterparts for the shortfall. One example of this was in Guatemala, when they suddenly announced that they were being

hindered in meeting their interdiction targets because our helicopters, Bell 212s, couldn't fly at night and that they needed to bring in military aircraft. They had never asked us for this, but as I mentioned earlier, we quickly developed the capability. When we were ready to go, though, DEA suddenly announced it wasn't safe flying at night in Guatemala's rugged mountainous regions – their goal had been control over their own aircraft, not actually flying at night. I flew down to Guatemala to take part in a final training mission – that was a highlight of my career flying through mountain passes and past venting volcanoes after midnight, then low enough to the ground to tell cows from bulls with our night vision goggles. DEA ignored that back-handed slap aimed at them, but when we started to train the Guatemalan police to undertake night missions, DEA quickly decided to take part rather than allow the Guatemalans, and us, to take credit for drug seizures.

Q: Then did you get involved with the interdiction of the missionary plane that got shot down, I think it was in Peru?

LYON: That was well after I left INM and in any event wasn't something we were involved in. The missionary plane was shot down by a host nation fighter plane that had been vectored in on the missionary plane, which flying a route frequently used by similar looking light aircraft ferrying cocaine, by a DEA spotter plane. If I remember correctly, it was a tragic mistake mostly due to miscommunications among the three aircraft.

Q: Did you feel you were making any progress?

LYON: Yes and no. We felt we had halted the expansion of opium production in Guatemala and had knocked it back considerably and had contributed to reductions in coca production in Peru and Bolivia. But at the same time, we knew that opium production was going strong in Mexico and Colombia and that coca production had simply shifted back to the ungoverned areas in Colombia. I basically felt we were doing what was asked of us, even winning some of our battles, but we were hardly winning the war. I recall seeing statistics to show that even as we, the USG with our partners, had dramatically increased our destruction of crops and were interdicting more and more drugs headed to the US, supplies in the US were remaining constant. In other words, the cartels were meeting demand and were not unhappy with the price going up due to our efforts.

This was one reason the USG was shifting in the early 1990s to attack the cartels in their pocketbooks, by making it harder to transfer and launder the huge amounts of cash involved. I mentioned the Financial Action Task Force earlier which had the lead in mobilizing national governments to better control their banking institutions.

Q: Did you feel that you were trying to turn back the tide with a broom, or how did you feel about it?

LYON: Well it was a tough job and I was focused almost entirely in doing it as well as I could rather than on the big picture of the US drug epidemic. It became increasingly clear

to me during my three years in INM that no matter what we did -- and we did an awful lot, including DEA, Customs, the State Department, our many host nation partners everybody together -- that the cartels had sufficient resources and freedom of action to be able to meet the demand for drug in the United States and other developed countries. In my mind, echoing Congressman Rangel's arguments, it became an issue of raising the cartels' costs of doing business, whether by interdiction & eradication efforts or counter-money laundering initiatives, to force up the price of narcotics and hopefully reduce demand somewhat. So it turned into a let's try to force the price up so it is not readily available to as many people in the U.S. as opposed to let's stop it.

This point of view was shared by many members of the Congressional Black Caucus who, in my opinion, were the main force in Congress driving for more resources for counter-drug efforts, whether demand reduction and treatment in the US or the supply reduction work we were doing overseas. I remember Congressman Charlie Rangel in a meeting telling us, "Look, you white boys'," basically he was polite about it, "come from upper middle class suburbs. You tell your kids if you do drugs they could ruin their nice comfortable lives. You say, 'You get addicted to something you are not going to get a good job, you may not get into the right country club, you have a lot to lose so just 'Say No'." He went on to say, "But how do I tell the 15 year-old son of a 30 year-old mother, a boy who has never met his father, who has dropped out of a lousy school system, and who has no job prospects, 'son stay away from drugs they will ruin your life'." It was the Black Caucus and other inner city congressmen that were putting the pressure on to keep the supply reduction program strong. They would say, "Look guys we have tremendous demand reduction programs in the U.S. but nobody else can keep the drugs from getting into the U.S. besides you." It was very interesting to me watching this aspect of the U.S. political dynamic work.

Q: Did you ever just think, "What the hell, why don't we legalize all of this and it can probably be controlled better that way than through law enforcement?"

LYON: Mel Levitsky and later Bob Gelbard certainly had to address this issue quite a bit, not so much as directly with drug legalization folks as with the media. I'll certainly admit to feeling this way about marijuana, we really didn't spend much time on cannabis, but I didn't when it came to cocaine and heroin. I had known people who were able to live normal productive lives while using cocaine, but others who had ruined their and their families' lives by losing themselves to the drug. After visiting the free needle exchanges in Europe, and seeing what heroin had done to addicts even though they could benefit from liberal welfare payments and free medical care, I was opposed to legalizing heroin. I remember Mel Levitsky pointing out that drugs were illegal in the US and we had two million drug addicts, but that booze was legal and we had many more millions of alcoholics.

There was also a question in my mind of how you could control the legalization of harder drugs. If a snort of cocaine or needle of heroin was legal for adults, how could you keep it from say 16 year olds, or pregnant women, or people suffering from mental disorders, or

others who might not be able to control their addictions or their actions? You put on any controls and immediately a black market would spring up to meet unmet legal demands.

So it is a hard problem, which frankly I mostly ignored. Like many of us in INM, I took the job because it sounded to me like it was the most challenging one available, an office directorship with lots of resources. I had a \$50 million a year budget, an inventory of well over \$100 million in aviation assets, hundreds of people working for me in six different countries. I was going to do the best job I could do in what INM, the Department and the administration was asking me to do.

Q: Did you have much dealing with Congress?

LYON: I had some, but as a general rule the INM front office took on most of the work with the Hill. I supported their efforts, knew the major players, and was responsive to requests for information and meetings by congressional and Senate staffers, but outreach was not a major part of my job.

Q: Well then in '94 whither?

LYON: I actually didn't get my onward assignment until several months after leaving INM as the assignment process that year for me was complicated by a plunging promotion rate for white males and the fact that I was nearing the end of my seven-year window as an OC. As you'll remember, when Clinton came into the White House and Christopher to State, they dramatically increased the focus on diversity, looking to improve assignment and promotion possibilities for female officers as well as minority ones.

Q: I certainly remember that, if I recall correctly, the promotion rate for white males was cut at least in half, if not more than that, for a number of years.

LYON: That's correct. It wasn't done by overtly jiggling promotion numbers, but by making a concerted effort to move women and minorities into the kinds of jobs where they would be most competitive for promotion – ambassadorships and DCM positions overseas and deputy assistant secretary and large office directorships in the Department. I didn't have a serious issue with this in theory, but it ended up posing a serious problem for me. I had been promoted to OC in Bangkok and then got presidential performance pay for two years before it went away for budget reasons. Then I had taken this huge, demanding job in INM so I figured I was all set only to get passed over my first two years.

So I came out of INM nearing the end of my window to make MC and ended up in a long drawn out negotiation with the assignments folks about an onward posting. I had divided the available jobs into three groups. The ones where you busted your tail and might get promoted, these big DCM positions and deputy assistant secretary jobs; the ones where you would bust your tail and wouldn't get promoted, like the one I was in; and then the ones that were easy and wouldn't get you promoted. I decided I would only take one

from Column A, a really hard job and maybe get promoted, or from C, an easy job I wouldn't get promoted. I turned down some smaller office directorships in EAP, and the political counselor jobs in Brasilia and Panama, and by August, when I was chairing a promotion panel, I still didn't have a job.

Q: So what happened? Obviously you ended up being successful...

LYON: Even when I was in this long stare-down with HR, CA was having difficulty filling jobs in China, including the Consul General job in Beijing. The job, if not the location or language, was attractive to me, but my wife and kids, now teenagers, were dead set against going to China so I hadn't expressed any interest in it. I finally had a long talk with my wife about the fact that if I didn't get into a promotable job I was going to end up being kicked out of the Foreign Service in my mid-40's with two kids entering high school. She thought about it and reluctantly gave me the go-ahead for Beijing. I think I put my bid in on a Monday and got the job two days later. So I finished my summer promotion panel and then started studying Chinese in September of '94.

Q: Again for people who are unfamiliar with the system and all, in the Foreign Service, especially for senior officers, there are certain jobs that get you promoted and other jobs that don't get you promoted. A lot of the ones that get you promoted were being essentially reserved to increase the Department's diversity at the more senior levels.

LYON: Right. As I mentioned earlier, the focus was on putting women and minorities into the kinds of tough jobs where, if they were successful, they would have a greater chance of being promoted. Three years later, I served on the senior promotion board looking at who should be promoted from OC to MC and you could still see the pain it was causing white males who normally would have been promoted, but who were either in danger of being kicked out for Time-in-Class, or TIC, reasons, as I had been, or were actually leaving the Foreign Service despite having productive years ahead of them. The female and minority officers being promoted were perfectly qualified, the worst you could say about them was that they might have gotten the really tough jobs a few years earlier than they would have otherwise, but the effect on white males was significant. My junior officer class, perhaps 80% white male since we joined in the mid-1970s, like many others from the same general time period, was slaughtered. These officers were by and large as qualified as anybody else. Of the 20 or so of us that were still active in the late 1990s and early 'oughts, only two of the men were promoted into the Senior Foreign Service and I was the only one to make MC.

Q: Wasn't there a law suit filed, I think by an officer who had had an assignment as a DCM broken in favor of a female officer? I have interviewed the officer in question, I think his name was David Pierce.

LYON: I knew David fairly well from this period. I don't think he had been formally assigned, but he did have a handshake on the DCM job in Finland, only to have it broken in favor of a female officer. If I remember correctly, the pressure to do this came directly from Secretary Christopher. David did a tremendous amount of research, he talked to me

among many others, compiled a large amount of evidence of the assignment cycle being manipulated, and filed suit. I don't think he won although there may have been some sort of settlement.

Q: You know these conflicting interests. It is very discouraging if you find yourself in the place as the wrong gender or skin color or what not.

LYON: Then again, the Department didn't exactly have a stellar record where women and minorities were concerned. Didn't female officers who got married have to resign into the early 1970s? My junior officer class of 33 had five women, I think one of the largest groups ever, and one black officer and one Hispanic officer. I think both female and minority officers were clustered in the admin and consular cones for many years. So it wasn't a problem with past discrimination being remedied, it was the pain that fixing them abruptly, in an up-or-out system, that was so difficult.

I remember I took the one week retirement seminar when I was in INM, probably in 1992 or 1993, so I would have been 40 years old sitting in the retirement seminar as an OC. The people who were trying to put the seminar on were trying to make it this wonderful transition ...we were moving on to something exciting, had finished wonderful careers and were ready to enjoy a life of leisure and perhaps part-time work. I think about 95% of the FSOs in the room were being forced out or in danger of being forced out, and they were responding by saying, "Well the hell with you. I am here because they are kicking me out." It was a sour, angry bunch.

Q: Before we go on, how did you make to MC under these conditions? One minute you are facing being TIC'd out, the next you are on the OC to MC promotion panel. I know the number of senior consular slots increased dramatically when we were in the Service – I believe there four MC-equivalent positions worldwide in the 1970s, but how did you get across during this diversity push in the mid-1990s?

LYON: I remember the same thing about only four top-level consular jobs, I think they were in London, Paris, Mexico City, a DAS job perhaps. It all started changing in the late 1970s, with Barbara Watson, a wonderful woman and tremendous assistant secretary, deserving tremendous credit for it, with later assistant secretaries like Mary Ryan, Joan Clark, Ruth Davis and Maura Harty continuing to press for recognition, and rank, for consular chiefs with big operations. We had a number of very strong assistant secretaries who did a great deal for the consular profession.

As for me, I benefitted from a Department-wide new emphasis on "global" jobs, plus my new boss, Chris Arcos, had a flair for writing memorable EERs. I was also able to feed in the information to the OC to MC promotion panel that I had been assigned as Consul General in Beijing and was indeed a real consular officer despite having been out of cone all but one tour in the past ten years. With that, I received the only consular cone promotion that year, I heard later that something like a dozen OC consular officers were then forced to retire for time in grade reasons.

My wife immediately asked me if we still had to go to Beijing since she had only agreed to go because we needed for me to get a promotion. She knew the answer, but made me jump through all the hoops, starting and ending, pretty much, with the fact that we had signed on the dotted line.

Q: All right, I assume you needed language training for Beijing?

LYON: Two very long years.

Q: That is an awful lot of work to go for a post wasn't it?

LYON: It was, and they downgraded the requirement and only gave one year of language training for my successors for that reason. Frankly the decision was correct, mostly because I don't think I went to a single meeting with a Chinese official where they did not have an interpreter with them, as did I. A single year would give an officer enough Chinese for salutations, chit-chat and the ability to get around the country, take taxis and the like. The three officials I dealt with the most all spoke very good English – they were graduates of the University of Michigan Law School, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Cambridge respectively – and my Chinese was decent, but we always used interpreters, most of whom did not speak English as well as the officials did. It could be quite funny with the two principals correcting their interpreters, “No, I didn't say that, I said ...” All you really needed were the salutations, some comprehension, and the ability to get around in China which one year of training does.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good place to stop.

Today is June 9, 2011. David?

LYON: Good morning Stu, or should I say good afternoon.

Q: Its blazing hot here, but I imagine its better where you are.

LYON: 56 right now and overcast. I was actually in Quantico working for the Marines two weeks ago so I got my fill of an east coast summer, though I got out before your current heat wave set in.

Q: Yeah, I just came back from Pasadena last weekend to see my granddaughter graduate. It was beautiful. All right. We talked a little about Chinese training and you are consul general in Beijing. You were doing that from when to when?

LYON: I studied Chinese from '94 to '96 and was in Beijing from '96 to '99.

Q: How stood our relations with China while you were there?

LYON: I won't say they were terrible, but it could be pretty tense. I think frankly a lot of it was on our side as many in the US, especially on the right, seemed to be looking

around for a new boogey man to focus on. The USSR was gone and we weren't quite sure what to do without an enemy or adversarial rival to focus our attentions on, and here was another communist country growing fast and beginning to flex its muscles a bit.

Our ambassador was Jim Sasser who had been Senator from Tennessee for three terms. He arrived at the same time I did and quickly decided to devote much of his time and effort to exposing congressmen and senators to China, to getting them to understand it as a real country with legitimate aspirations for economic growth and improving the lives of its people, not one that was seeking to step into the Soviet's role as our main adversary in a new cold war.

Q: Well then let's talk a little about the embassy first before we move to what you were up to. What was the embassy and embassy living like at that time?

LYON: Embassy life and work in the late 1990s were in a word terrible, the worst office and living facilities I had ever seen. The Chinese had relaxed their policy of forcing all diplomats to live in Chinese government compounds – foreigners still had to live in designated compounds, but embassies could build their own or move their folks into privately-owned buildings. These were expensive, though, so the USG was still housing its personnel in three Chinese-government compounds, built, according to legend, by the Russians as a gift to the Chinese people back in the early 50's and complete with things like exterior plumbing, with pipes running along and across the sides of many of the buildings.

As I mentioned, my family did not want to go to China, but our arrival, I think, was worse than they had expected. We arrived on a hot, humid night in August and drove in from the airport through a smoky, acidic mist hanging over the city. My kids brightened a bit when they saw multiple golden arches, McDonalds had restaurants all over the city, but I could see the dismay on my wife's face as we drove through this huge mega-city. We entered the Jianguomenwai diplomatic compound with its something like thirteen blocky high rises, a concrete playground and a few bushes and trees, entered a pretty stark foyer and got into a reasonably smelly elevator. I opened the door to our apartment, my wife took one look and burst into tears. I was something like the third most senior officer in the Embassy, and we theoretically got one of the nicer apartments, but it was our worst housing since joining the Foreign Service. Ugly terrazzo flooring, the entry foyer was filled with an armoire as the place had no built-in closets, with a straight shot through the foyer to the dining room and into the master bathroom. Three bedrooms, a small office, a dining room that could seat 12, and a living room off the dining room. We ended up using our suitcases as auxiliary closets and stacking them on the armoires, I was the only one tall enough to then reach them without standing on a chair. Altogether, pretty grim and a horrible way to start a tour.

Q: Housing like that couldn't have been good for family or employee morale.

LYON: It wasn't. I actually I told the story of my wife on our arrival during a C-Span interview, not expecting it to be carried, but it was shown worldwide. We ended up

getting e-mails from places as far-flung as California and Copenhagen telling Maureen that I had called her a crybaby on international TV. Conditions were so bad, she didn't even mind, especially since I had also given her credit for being a pretty tough lady – growing up on a small family farm in California, serving as an Army nurse during Vietnam, then as a Peace Corps volunteer in northeastern Brazil before marrying me and supporting my work and later raising a family in Africa and around Asia. In her mind, any mother would have burst into tears seeing such horrible living conditions, knowing how unhappy the kids would be and how crowded we would be. She did an incredible job making a life for us in Beijing and in helping our kids adjust to very different conditions than they were used to.

Q: How many kids did you have and what were the ages?

LYON: A boy and a girl, then both in their early teens. My son, Nathan, was going into high school and my daughter, Jo, was finishing middle school.

Q: What sort of high school did they have?

LYON: The Beijing International School was very good academically with good course offerings including the international baccalaureate, but was seriously over-crowded with temporary classroom buildings and very few student amenities like sports facilities. A good number of extra-curricular clubs, but only varsity sports teams which really limited participation. My son tried out for volleyball. The coaches encouraged him to, but he wasn't good enough for the varsity and there was no JV, so he never played volleyball again. Maureen actually jumped into this vacuum and played an instrumental part in establishing the Beijing Baseball Association to give kids something to do outside. We had to go to another school and pay to have their playing fields upgraded for baseball, but by the time she was finished we had some 300-400 kids playing tee-ball and baseball in the spring and fall. I was a coach and it was a lot of fun, especially seeing my son enjoying himself playing a game he loved and missed.

Q: What about the city? Could you get around in the city, the family and all?

LYON: We could, other than the language, which wasn't a problem for me while Maureen and the kids quickly picked up enough street Chinese to get around, and bad traffic, there were almost no barriers to getting around. It was safe for us and the kids, very little petty crime. Taxis were easy, were cheap, were plentiful. Exploring the city was a lot of fun, everything from ancient temples to the building where the Flying Tigers had their HQs and during WWII. We got there just as China started to move quickly from communism to a more mixed economy. In 1996, for example, most of the restaurants were state-owned with mediocre food and terrible service. When we left only three years later, nearly all restaurants were privately owned, had good service, and often served truly excellent food.

Q: All right now, your title was consul general?

LYON: I was actually Consul General and Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs, the latter diplomatic title actually built into the law to ensure section chiefs were at the right protocol ranks to deal with senior Chinese government officials who were very rank conscious.

I managed Beijing's consular section while overseeing the consular operations at the embassy's four constituent posts and, for my last year, in Mongolia. I was probably in the air roughly monthly, traveling to Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang and Ulan Bator, I remember joking that I was traveling too much to ever go anywhere. That was certainly true outside of the five cities I mentioned, I think in three years I took three non-business trips, a train to a beach resort used by high Party officials and where the Great Wall meets the sea, a flight to Xian with visiting relatives, and the extension of a work trip to Guangzhou to take the family by train to Hong Kong.

Q: Let's talk about the time in Beijing. What sort of section did you have.

LYON: It was one that I would say was very close to being overwhelmed. I had been working closely with my predecessor, Arturo Macias, while I was studying Chinese with him focusing on trying to keep up with a visa workload that had been going up some 20-25% a year, without any increase in staffing, and with my working on trying to recruit replacements for officers who were finishing their tours. Recruiting took a lot of my time given the language requirement and the China posts' poor reputations.

Q: Why the disconnect between workload and staffing, shouldn't that have been obvious to the Department what with the annual consular package providing current and projected workload statistics?

LYON: That was how it was supposed to work, but remember that on top of the Department's chronic difficulties in getting Congress to authorize and fund more positions, this was during the Clinton administration's efforts to cutting back the federal workforce. I don't believe State lost many, or any, junior or mid-level positions, but it was certainly having trouble getting new ones, which meant added consular positions for the China posts had to come out of hide, from the Department or other missions.

And the language requirement for most mid-level positions, two years, was a real complication, with the HR assignments folks, and often CA itself, focusing on the ability to speak Chinese over relevant experience, skills, even abilities and competence. My two deputies, for example, were both political officers, perfectly competent and with good Chinese, but they had limited consular experience, forcing junior officers to step up and for me to pay much more attention to details than I would have had to do otherwise. Early on, for example, a first-tour junior officer wrote an unnecessary advisory opinion request on a visa case. His boss, one of the political officers, without the knowledge that this question had been answered multiple times in the past, but with the info not yet added to the regs, simply edited it for style and syntax and sent it to the Department which answered with a modestly polite message reminding us of how to suck eggs.

Not that their political skills weren't a real help. My ACS chief, MaryKay Loss Carlson, did a magnificent job negotiating protocols for Americans adopting children in China. The processing and visa issuances were out of Guangzhou, which did wonderfully compassionate things like set up a crèche-like waiting room for parents who were at the end of a long, often stressful journey, but it was MaryKay who ran interference for them with central government ministries in Beijing.

Throughout the country, I think had something like seven officers in Beijing, 12 or 13 in Guangzhou, where we issued immigrant visas, four in Shanghai and one each in Shenyang and Chengdu. I probably spent more time on staffing than anything else during my three years – the numbers should have spoken for themselves, but really needed to be amplified over and over again – and believe that when I left we had increased staffing by some 50-60%. In Beijing, for example, I was able to add two mid-level positions, one an NIV deputy and the other an anti-fraud officer, and two junior officer slots with two more in the pipeline.

Q: Were the physical facilities as bad as your housing?

LYON: If anything they were worse. Rumor had it, that we had taken over the Pakistani embassy when they moved out for something better and had allowed it to deteriorate further. The consular section was in an annex, catty-corner across the street from the Chancery and along a busy tourist street, Silk Alley, with scores of small shops and often hundreds and hundreds of shoppers and vendors milling around with our visa applicants. Inadequate work space, a horrible waiting room – we really presented an awful picture of America to visa applicants, almost all of whom had to wait for hours for interviews.

Q: Was there any light at the end of the tunnel while were you were there or did it pretty much continue that way?

LYON: Both the staffing increases and new building took two or three years to bring about, but fortunately, for us anyway, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 slowed our workload increases down into the single digits for several years. I was also fortunate to have the support of Ambassador Sasser, and of an excellent DCM, Bill McCahill, and two superb admin counselors, Pat Hayes and Chris Runckel. All were aware of how the visa process was becoming a blight on the US-China relationship, as well as a horrible working experience, especially for our junior officers.

The problem on the NIV front was that we were dealing with huge crowds with large numbers of both fully qualified applicants and others who were trying to get into and stay illegally in the US. Given the rapid changes taking place in China, it was also very hard for officers to determine, during very short interviews as each officer had to interview well over a hundred people a day, who was qualified and who wasn't. The guy with the rustic accent and poor fitting clothes, might be a budding tycoon, the well-dressed one with a detailed banking portfolio might be totally bogus. I had never had a situation where my line visa officers were under so much pressure and I felt a real obligation to them to improve their working conditions and experiences in China, running interference

with them, dragooning officers from around the embassy, with Bill McCahill's strong support, to give them help on the line, looking for outside opportunities for them, say supporting a visiting CODEL or working for a bit in the political section during our quieter periods, but it was never enough and I always felt guilty of what we were asking of them.

Another problem was that our locally-engaged staff all worked for the Chinese government instead of being hired and paid by the Embassy. They were assigned to us by the Diplomatic Services Bureau, or DSB. We knew that some of them were actually spies and we knew that all of them were reporting back to the Chinese security service about what was going on inside the embassy. Some were fairly good; most were indifferent; some were not very good. This drove most sections in the Embassy crazy as the DSB was using us to train their employees in English and modern office practices before assigning them elsewhere, including Chinese embassies overseas.

The visa function gave me considerable, but not absolute, protection against this as I could argue I needed good people to give good service while also having in reserve the threat of slowing down visas for Chinese government officials if I didn't get my way. There was also the advantage that workers in the so-called workers' paradise had few rights. For example, when I was able to get rid of a long-standing, but obsolete, visa processing step, I moved all my worst employees into that unit and then abolished it, sending them back to DSB where they were sent on to other jobs in NFA or within the Chinese government. I waited several weeks, then requested new employees to bring us back to up our personnel ceiling.

But it was hard not having control over our own staff. One case illustrates this. We were never able to get the MFA to understand that we could issue visas ourselves to cultural groups that would be performing only at Chinese facilities and without tickets being sold for their performances, but that if they had public performances, we had get clearance from INS and I think the Department of Labor before visas could be issued. When one grope looked they would miss their trip, the MFA called our senior NIV Chinese employee and told her to get the visas issued or she and her husband would lose their jobs, housing and medical care. She told a JO that the visa chief had authorized the issuances and then turned herself in, weeping, after the performers arrived in the US.

Q: My God, what did you do besides fire her?

LYON: I decided she had had no other choice and forgave her. But the next time a really important cultural group came over from the MFA, their passports became lost in my safe until their travel deadline had passed. I told the MFA that if they ever did anything like that again, they could forget any form of cooperation from us and that the more important the delegation, the slower we would process its applications. To my knowledge, it never happened again.

Q: You've talked about everyone else, but other than your travel, not much about your work demands. It doesn't sound like you had much fun, other than making things better.

LYON: I don't think I had ever worked as hard as I did in Beijing, consistently 70-80 hours a week, up at 4 AM, coming home for dinner then going back to the office, ignoring my family, with everything made worse by the fact that in the short-term at least I didn't feel that I was getting everything done that needed to be done. I used to tell people I felt like that little Dutch boy at the dike, except that I had all of my fingers and toes, as well as my nose, plugging holes with the water pouring over the top, rising up to my waist and with alligators chomping on my rear end.

But I had known what I was getting into, and I knew I was making a difference, albeit slowly. My JOs, though, didn't have this perspective and their difficult working conditions probably wore on me more than anything else. They were unhappy and while they weren't in revolt, they clearly had expected more well-rounded first-tour experiences than what they were getting. I remember the first day I had had all of my JO positions filled, it was the day shortly after Christmas when I had returned to Beijing after seeing my mother who was dying of cancer. Half an hour after I had met the newest officer, a tandem couple, both outstanding officers with tremendous potential, walked in and said they were resigning. They just couldn't stand it any longer. They stayed through the winter, and CA quickly got me one replacement, a JO with fluent Mandarin thanks to his time in Taiwan as a Mormon missionary, but it took months before I could get the second position filled, adding to the pressure on the other line officers.

I want to say that of the first six junior officers who departed the China posts after my arrival, three did so by resignation, in large part to their unhappiness with their first experiences in the Foreign Service.

Q: You mentioned your front office was quite supportive, but what about consular affairs back in Washington?

LYON: I could not have made it without the strong support of DCM McCahill and Ambassador Sasser.

As for CA, it was a hard slog for me. They were under workload pressures from posts all over the world and new positions were extremely hard to come by. I remember dealing with our primary analyst in CA/EX on the consular package who chose to focus on past workload statistics while trying to ignore our projections for future growth. After months of long analytical e-mails -- and I can use and abuse statistics as well as anyone -- and late night phone calls, I finally got her on my side. I was fortunate that Mary Ryan came to post for one of our periodic high-level meetings with the Chinese on consular and visa related issues so she had a chance to see first-hand how bad our working conditions were and the sheer number of applicants we were dealing with. She threw her weight into getting us new positions and resources, as did Ruth Davis, her deputy, or PDAS.

I remember Mary Ryan brought back five or six senior consuls general from around the world for a meeting with the new Undersecretary for Management. It was a woman political appointee, I don't remember her name. We all described our situations, which

were different except for a near universal need for more line officers. The new U/S was skeptical and chose to turn to me to basically ask, “Well what are you going to do to get your work done without additional staff?” I answered, “I am going to ask for additional staff, additional money and additional buildings.” She said, “Well you can’t have it. What are you going to do?” I replied, “I am going to ask for additional staff, additional money and additional buildings, because you can’t handle a rapidly growing country of 1.2 billion people with 15 NIV officers and the facilities we now have.” We went back and forth several times with the same question and same answer and our conversation got a bit heated, which is what Mary had wanted, so she let it go on for a bit more before taking back control of the meeting. Mary later apologized to me for putting me on the firing line, but said she had to make her new boss understand that there were limits to doing more with less and that posts like those in China had far exceeded these limits.

Mary was able to get the undersecretary on our side and by the time I left China we had nearly doubled the number of line officers at the China posts while adding or improving office space as necessary. We completely rebuilt the visa unit in Beijing . We literally turned it inside out, turning the old waiting room into work area and a large outside space into a new, high-ceilinged and air-conditional waiting room. We brought in new computer systems, and started to schedule appointments through a local bank that was also collecting visa fees for us.

But, back to your question, it was only during my last six months at post that I started to feel we had turned the corner. And then the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit by a NATO missile and everything was turned upside down for my last month at post.

Q: I certainly have questions about Belgrade, but I'd like to stay with visas and customer services for a bit longer. The customer service aspect of visa operations is often ignored. It happens in other countries too. If people want to go to the United States and get brusque treatment or have to stand in a crowd because we don't have enough people, this really sours things, and it also creates bad press. It has repercussions way beyond just the poor visa applicant.

LYON: The first thing I would do for any new arrival or VIP visitor was take them on a tour of the visa section from the perspective of visa applicants. On my first tour with DCM McCahill, we started out on the street with a huge crowd of visa applicants waiting patiently in the heat under the control of the People’s Armed Police or PAP. The PAP was a paramilitary police force charged with providing internal security, including to embassies where their jobs included protecting the state from people having too easy access to western and other diplomats. PAP guards were posted everywhere in the diplomatic quarter, probably every 20 feet around our buildings.

We then entered the consular compound and saw the large crowd of patient applicants standing in the sun without any shelter or drinking fountains or facilities before entering the hot, crowded consular waiting room. It was perhaps 90 degrees outside and very humid with Beijing’s lovely acid mist. The waiting room air was so bad, however, that the visa applicants had propped open the door to the outside to get “fresh” air inside.

Even more helpfully for the purpose of our tour was the fact that sticking out among the large number of Chinese visa applicants was the very tall vice president of the American Chamber of Commerce, a lawyer, with one of his major clients, the CEO of a Chinese corporation, both standing in line drenched in sweat. The DCM asked them how long they had been there – and they said they had only been there four hours as they had had a Chamber of Commerce driver hold a place in line for them on the street until we opened our screening gate at 7:30.

Q: Didn't you have a special process for American companies and frequent travelers?

LYON: Not when I got there, no. This was the first thing I set about remedying, though it was barely first among a host of other problems that were causing us processing or public relations problems.

The biggest problem was that doing visas in China was just plain hard. As I mentioned earlier, China's rapid modernization and economic growth had led to a huge spurt in the number of qualified visa applicants, but its uneven development and sheer size meant that there were still hundreds of millions of people in poverty with many of them looking for opportunities overseas, with attractive opportunities being as limited as earning a few dollars a day as a dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant or sweat shop in the US. The same was true for students with truly outstanding students heading off to top programs in the US being outnumbered by applicants seeing admission to any American school as a way out of China.

I knew we had to screen visa applicants carefully and had no trouble with a high refusal rate as I thought it appropriate. I did object strongly to treating people badly. But morale was so low that our junior officers didn't always see it this way. I remember being amazed to encounter resistance from two of my JOs to an idea I was proposing to Admin to put up sun and rain shades over our outside waiting area – their logic was unsuccessful visa applicants would be more likely to reapply if their first or earlier experiences hadn't been miserable ones.

Q: Well did you get complaints from the Chinese government or the press?

LYON: All the time, though one of the advantages of being in a country with a government-controlled press was that if you could get the right people in government on your side, the press would do as they were told. I worked very hard at establishing a good relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Consular Affairs, especially with its Director-General, Peng Keyu, making sure he understood that I understood that we really needed to step up our game, especially where the treatment of Chinese visa applicants was concerned. But his colleagues throughout the government and state-owned corporations weren't shy in hammering on their embassy counterparts for assistance on visa cases or just to vent their displeasure. This could be very hard on our junior officers who at one point stopped going to the embassy cafeteria because they were constantly being hectored by their colleagues on visa cases. I turned it to our advantage, though, by using it as one of my arguments to get "volunteers" from other

sections to staff our visa line on a regular basis. The DCM was fully supportive and actually insisted on approving our weekly roster of outside interviewing help to make it clear to section chiefs that the program had his full support.

Q: And what did you work out for a referral system?

I instituted the same two tier referral system that I had put into place in Manila and Bangkok which took some of the pressure off Embassy officers by allowing them to help contacts they knew were legitimate applicants and to appear to help friends and relatives of contacts and friends that they didn't know personally. Combined with a new AmCham referral system, we were able to make life much easier for our embassy colleagues as well as qualified visa applicants while at the same time reducing the number of people we were having to screen and interview each day.

Q: All right, what was, let's talk about the visa situation. What was the visa situation from your perspective?

LYON: Well as I said earlier, the overwhelming thing was the sheer volume, the number of people who were applying for visas at all five posts. The problem was you had a huge and growing number of absolutely legitimate people who we wanted to go to the U.S. for business, for tourism, to visit relatives, certainly to study. While I was there we went from second or third in the world for numbers of foreign students to faraway being first – I think we had something like 60,000 Chinese students, almost all grad students in the US when I left in 1999, low by today's standards, but very high for that period. But then a lot of other people came to think that if you got accepted at an American school you could get a visa, come to the States and, regardless of whether you actually matriculated or graduated or not find a way to stay. So there was a tremendous problem separating legitimate students and those wanting to migrate illegally. As I talked about earlier, the same was very much true for tourists and business people, though they were if anything harder because you couldn't fall back on somewhat standardized transcripts and academic records.

Because most factories and businesses in China were state owned, we also had a unique, at least in my experience, program for the employees of these companies who received government passports – “waiban” or “foreign office” passports -- for international travel. These passports did not confer any form of diplomatic or consular immunity on their bearers, but by long-standing precedent they did not have to apply in person as their passports would be delivered to us by the Foreign Ministry. We did have the right to call individuals or even entire groups in for interview and to deny anyone we felt questionable.

At first we were highly suspicious of many of these groups, both because we recognized many of the trips as boondoggles for some if not all their travelers and because we suspected that some travelers had essentially paid bribes to be included on the delegations. You might have a group of middle-aged engineers going over for training on

a piece of new American equipment accompanied by two young “accountants” and/or “assistants” who, when interviewed couldn’t explain anything about the trip.

A great deal of suspicion had developed over the years about the waiban system and when I got there we were spending a great deal of time trying to winnow legitimate waiban travelers from people trying to sneak into the US. My sense, though, was that the MFA was not in on the fraud and had a vested interest in making the program work, mostly by keeping us happy. I felt many of the “hanger-on” might not have been going for true business reasons, but were intending to simply see the US and then come back to China – they might have been rewarded for their work, being given incentive trips, or have been the CEOs’ cousin or girlfriend – it didn’t matter to me as long as their intention was to visit and return.

So I ordered the type of return/non-return survey I had had done in Manila and Bangkok, having our employees give offices and homes cold calls weeks after the applicants in question were supposed to have returned, not saying we were calling from the Embassy, but using info on their applications to pose other questions. My junior officers were surprised, and I was gratified, to find out that our waiban travelers were considerably more likely to return than were the people who had received B-1/B-2 visas for business and tourism. We continued to call in waiban applicants for interviews, but were able to raise our standards for doing so which reduced our workload and smoothed relations with the MFA.

Q: You must have spent a good deal of time being the psychiatrist to your office staff.

LYON: It certainly felt that way, though I have to admit I often felt like they thought of me as the guy in the slave ship beating the drum while they broke their backs rowing. No matter how tough it had been in Manila and Bangkok, I always felt I’d had a good connection with my line officers. But the work was so much more overwhelming at the China posts, and the living conditions so much worse, that the junior officers, especially my first two years, just weren’t sure I was on their side. Part of it was me, I was absolutely dead set, for example, against allowing any kind of backlogs to develop. I knew that this actually reduced out workload – by avoiding all of the requests for special treatment that well-connected applicants and Embassy officers would make if it took weeks instead of days to get a visa – but the line officers hadn’t seen this happen so were more focused on the work right in front of them, which was so often just too much to bear. I tried to reward their efforts, but other than great, well-written EERs full of examples of their hard work, the fact that we really never had much of an off-season, where they could slow down or get experience in other sections, made this hard to do.

This started to change for the better in 1998 when we added two mid-level visa officers and two line officers who came under the supervision of the new visa chief, Jim Levy, a very strong officer. We got more automated. NIVCAPS, which if I remember right was the Non-Immigrant Visa Computer Assisted Processing System, was upgraded and started working much better. Jim set up a system through a local bank to collect application fees and schedule appointments. People needing interviews could get them

the week they initiated their applications, usually the next day. By the spring of 1999, we had opened out new visa section and for the first time I thought we were treating applicants properly. Then NATO went and bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade and everything went to hell in a hand basket.

Q: I do want to talk about the bombing, but before we go there, what about American Citizen Services, especially the and protection of Americans in China?

LYON: We had a small ACS unit headed by an outstanding political officer, MaryKay Loss Carlson. She hadn't had a lot of prior consular assistance, but was an incredibly quick study. She was supported by a part-time vice consul, an American consular associate, Jemma Bishop, and four or five Chinese staff, including one of the best consular assistants I had ever worked with. When the MFA "transferred" him to work in their embassy in Rangoon, I used my power-of-the-visa to demand and get a good replacement for him.

Surprisingly, our ACS caseload was manageable despite the rapid growth in US-China trade and investment. I think part of this was due to China's strict visa regime which kept people out unless they had acceptable, to the Chinese, reasons for coming to China as well as adequate funds. We certainly had illnesses, injuries, deaths, and the full range of non-emergency services. Arrest cases could get complicated as often they were the result of commercial disputes with the Chinese partners or competitors using their influence with the Communist Party and local government to use the police and courts to put pressure on Americans to give in to their business demands. Often the arrestees were Chinese-Americans. Fortunately for them, and us, when the US-China consular agreement had been negotiated, I want to say in the very early 1980s, almost immediately after diplomatic relations were established, we had successfully insisted that Chinese who naturalized as Americans would be treated as Americans under Chinese law, guaranteeing us consular access to them should they be arrested.

Our biggest single ACS issue in China had to do with international adoptions. The visas were processed and issued at the Consulate General in Guangzhou, but coordination with the Chinese government took place in Beijing and was coordinated brilliantly by MaryKay Carlson. This could be tricky as the Chinese government, indeed the Chinese people, were of two very different minds on the adoption of Chinese babies by foreigners. On the one hand, there were lots and lots of unwanted baby girls who had been abandoned by their parents who had wanted their one child to be a boy – their sheer numbers seriously over-burdened local governments who had inadequate number of orphanages and didn't want to spend the money to fund more. On the other hand, the Chinese are an incredibly proud people who hated admitting to the world that they couldn't care for their own babies. MaryKay kept her ear very close to the ground working with dozens of US adoption agencies, trying to anticipate and head off Chinese objections and roadblocks to the program, with great success.

I don't know if you have spoken to Ed McKeon, the Guangzhou consular chief when I got to Beijing, or Steve Coffman, who took his place, but the adoption visa system Ed put

into place and Steve took over was absolutely wonderful. It was more like a day care center than a visa interview area. Nervous, stressed-out new parents would walk in and find cribs, toys, mobiles hanging from the ceilings, brightly painted walls – interviews were done in the waiting area over tables. The first thing the vice consul would say was, “Hi Mom, hi Dad, how are you and your baby doing today”. You could just see the tension draining away as the new parents realized they were both home free and almost home with their new babies.

I actually ended up winning the 1997 Thomas Jefferson award in large part due to the work that Ed McKeon had done in Guangzhou, supported by MaryKay Carlson and me in Beijing, in terms of making the adoption program work so well.

Q: You talked about the parents being stressed, was this because of corruption, people asking them for bribes, or ostensible birth mothers showing up at hotel rooms asking money to keep them from demanding their children back?

LYON: Not really, it was more that after a long slow bureaucratic process they were in a very foreign country, very close to achieving their goals and scared that something might come up that would derail their hopes. I am sure there was corruption within parts of the Chinese adoption system, but it was very tightly controlled and included in the high fees being charged to the US agencies and passed on to the adoptive parents. There may have been some cases of late in the process shakedowns, but if there were they were handled by the agencies or by consular officers in Guangzhou.

Q: When I was in Seoul back in the 70's we had the same thing and the same attitude. I think ambivalence about passing along babies to other cultures is the norm rather than the exception.

LYON: I agree. The Chinese sense of superiority over all other cultures was also at play, so you had both adoption agencies and adoptive parents constantly reassuring the Chinese government that their children would keep their Chinese names, would study Chinese, and were being taught Chinese traditions. Overall, it was just a beautiful program. Go down to the White Swan Hotel, which was where the consulate general was located in Guangzhou, and you'd walk through the lobby and you'd these brand new parents with strollers holding their babies, their faces beaming. It was a totally feel good part of our work, the more so for an adoptive father as I am.

Q: You mentioned earlier that your ACS workload was mitigated somewhat by China's strict visa regime. Were there any examples of the other extreme, where being in a large communist country with an authoritarian government caused you more problems?

LYON: The most difficult were arrest cases, often, as I mentioned before, of Chinese-American businessmen being pressured by their ostensible partners. The problem for them and for us is that the Chinese judicial system is highly opaque as it serves rather than regulates the Party. We had a lawyers' list like any other consular section, but even good defense lawyers were limited in what they could accomplish. We'd be sure to have

an officer at court proceedings to make sure the judge knew the Embassy was watching, but our ability to intervene was highly limited. I don't recall more than one or two Americans getting jail time, but I am sure a number lost their investments due to informal plea bargaining to get their accusers to drop their charges. There was another case where an American driver killed a pedestrian and was arrested and held until the family agreed on restitution. But for the most part, the Chinese police preferred not to arrest foreigners.

In terms of the humorous, at least once a year an American would arrive and proudly present his Taiwanese visa to immigration authorities at the airport, having failed to specify to their travel agents which China they were going to and somehow having the airline check-in agent mess up. The Chinese would deport the traveler, but usually only putting him up at an airport hotel for a day or two, guarded round the clock by immigration officers who would enjoy room service at the traveler's expense.

Then there was North Korea ...

Q: North Korea? In what way?

LYON: We didn't have an embassy in Pyongyang, though the Swedes acted as our protecting power and would bring to our attention Americans who had run into problems, say smuggling bibles in or trying help smuggle people out. It would then be our job to provide whatever assistance we could, usually through the Swedes or the Chinese Foreign Ministry. We knew the Swedish charge' well – he would make quarterly visits to Beijing and meet with all Embassy sections having business or interests in North Korea – and I had excellent relations with the Director-General of MFA's Department of Consular Affairs. They were often limited in what they could do, but almost always tried to help us out.

I'll give you an example. We had one American, I think he was a Korean-American, who was arrested having entered North Korea across the Yalu River. After several weeks of four-sided negotiations, the North Koreans agreed to release him, but only to an American consular official who was to come halfway across a Yalu River bridge to meet the American and his heavily armed police escort. Since you could never trust the North Koreans not to make a scene, it was a tense moment as our political officer in Shenyang, Chris Kavanagh, married to my superb consular officer there, Julie, crossed the bridge for the handover. I remember we were all linked-in getting live telephone reports of the handover and everyone, especially Julie, was tremendously relieved when Chris and the American returned without incident.

Q: Did you have much else to do with North Koreans. I mean were they coming to us or would the Chinese take them and eventually let them go to South Korea?

LYON: It was a mix of things depending on who they were, what they were trying to do and how deeply they were able to get into China before being discovered. The Chinese turned back as many as they could back at the border although they knew that people fleeing would be arrested and shot if they were caught re-entering North Korea. The ones

that made it to Beijing or other cities, were, if I understood it correctly, usually allowed to go into safe houses before going on to South Korea through a third country, in other words not directly.

We were in Beijing during an absolutely bizarre intra-Korean incident sparked when one of the great philosophers of North Korean communism, who had helped Kim Il-Sung develop the ideology of Juche, or self-reliance – or, in my thinking, “starve to death for the great leader” defected to the South Korean Embassy in Beijing. Given that this was analogous to Thomas Jefferson defecting to the Brits after the Revolutionary War, the North Koreans went absolutely insane. First their security guards tried a frontal attack on the South Korean compound, leading to an inconclusive gun battle, and then, after the Chinese put guards around the South Korean chancery, the North Koreans tried digging a tunnel under the street to blow it up. The Chinese army had to get in between the two and after several months the Chinese quietly allowed him to travel to South Korea through a third country.

Q: Were you involved in any other regional issues?

LYON: Towards the end of my second year, as part of its initiative to have lower-ranking consular officers in isolated posts come under the oversight of more senior officers, CA asked me to take on responsibility for the consular section at our embassy in Outer Mongolia. I took this on in October 1998 and one of my great management failings in the Foreign Service was that I didn’t get there for my first visit until February, 1999, when Ulan Bator was very, very cold – I think it got up to minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit on my only sunny day. What I found was a smart but inexperienced second-tour consular chief who knew her job, but who was having trouble with her relationship with the Front Office. I didn’t have to get very much involved with her running of the section, and fortunately the DCM had worked for me for a brief period of time at a previous post, so I spent most of my time in Outer Mongolia helping the two of them establish a better working relationship. The consul had become very defensive in her visa adjudications and had to be made to understand that Embassy officers, including the DCM, had every right to enquire about cases and that sometimes they could provide her with information useful to her decisions. I also had to make sure that the DCM understood that she was in charge of the consular section and visa decisions, unless totally unfounded, were hers to make.

I found my week in Ulan Bator absolutely fascinating. After decades of being a Soviet satellite, Outer Mongolia was spreading its wings, looking to democracy and capitalism ... and to the United States for guidance and help. Outer Mongolia’s president had just given a speech where he said they had three neighbors, Russia to the north, China to the south, and the U.S. in spirit. We were responding by stepping up trade and assistance efforts, including to the military. While I was there I attended one of the first meetings ever of the Ulan Bator Rotary Club, not something you would have expected to find in the home of Genghis Khan even in 1999.

Q: What were the city and embassy like in 1999? I remember talking with one of the officers who was there a few years earlier I think they turned a bathroom into an office by putting a plywood cover over the bathtub to create workspace.

LYON: It was much better when I got there, but it was still a work in progress with a compound littered with shipping containers and temporary buildings. As for the city, it seemed very Soviet to me. Big government buildings surrounded by squat cement apartment blocks, statues of Soviet tanks in public squares, interspaced with round traditional Mongol tents called gers. When I went back some eight years later, to take part in a UN peacekeeper training program, it was very different, more capitalist, more Central American than central Asian, with new construction, many many more people, and enormous traffic jams.

Q: Going back to China and visas, what about people who overstayed their visas in the States? Did the Chinese give you a rough time on deportations?

LYON: With one major exception -- boat people -- we weren't really into the large-scale deportations at that time and the Chinese were usually cooperative when people were deported who had proof of identity and citizenship. I don't recall many cases where we had trouble with visa overstays being returned for this reason.

The biggest issue we dealt with the Chinese was the issue of Chinese boat people. This landed squarely in my lap. Every year, the Coast Guard or Navy would stop two, three or four boats with scores or even hundreds of Chinese migrants mixed with in with many fewer people who might have valid asylum claims.

Every time this happened, we would go into this enormous Kabuki dance with the Chinese where we sought to return the economic migrants to China as quickly as possible while holding back potential asylum cases so we could review their claims. No doubt in my mind that my colleagues at MoFA enjoyed this more than any other aspect of our relationship, making us jump through always different hoops before taking their people back. Their basic message wasn't logical, but it was consistent, "Well the boat is either a refugee boat or a migrant boat, you can't have it both ways. If they are economic migrants, we'll take them all back, if they are refugees, you keep them all." And of course we wanted it both ways so we would throw up all manner of smokescreens in return.

We just could never figure out how to actually count the number people on a boat -- the boats were crowded, it was hard to tell one person from the next, the names were complicated, we were focused on their welfare first and counting them later. So we'd provide a high estimate of the number of people on board and keep it fuzzy even after we were well into determining who, if anyone, might have valid asylum claims. We'd then pull off the ones who might have valid claims and finally come up with an accurate number comprising only of the economic migrants on board.

The Chinese would spend this time looking for ways to make life complicated for us. They steadfastly refused to deal with the International Organization for Migration, or IOM, as Taiwan was a founding member. This meant we had to make our own travel arrangements, chartering aircraft, providing temporary shelter and the like. Then the Chinese would start putting funny conditions on the return. One time they said since this was a state to state transfer, and you want to return them to Chinese soil, you have to initiate the trip from American soil, knowing full well that this would lead to a flood of immigration lawyers descending on the ship if it went to an American port. So we returned serve by re-opening the old Marine facilities on Wake Island, an American possession not subject to US immigration law. We flew them all to Wake Island and housed them there until the Chinese accepted them back.

The same tactics got me caught up in a three-way negotiation with Mexico after the US Coast Guard apprehended a large ship off the coast of Mexico heading north to California. The Mexicans were adamant about not allowing them to land and our Ambassador in Mexico City, Jeff Davidow, my boss from AF days, kept telling me to do something, as if I had more sway with the Chinese than he did with the Mexicans. Meanwhile, the Chinese absolutely refused to accept them for at least a week due to Chinese New Year.

Q: Being caught between Jeff and the Chinese couldn't have been fun. What did you do?

LYON: We ended up chartering a very slow plane and flying it at low speed the wrong way around the world so that it left Mexico on the Mexican deadline and arrived in southern China the day after the New Year celebrations ended. I felt guilty as I was told conditions on the DC-10 were only marginally better after several days of travel than had been conditions on the smugglers' boat. But we got them there.

As an aside, I now meet often with Chinese students at a local graduate school, and once with my son's class of mostly Chinese post-secondary students in Australia, and I always tell them this story. These kids were usually born about the time I got to China and know nothing of the conditions there in the last 1990s. They express total disbelief that this ever could have happened until I just casually remark that for many young people wanting to leave China, student visas have replaced smugglers' boats. I get a lot of "oh, yeah" looks and people generally stop arguing with me.

Q: That leads right into my next question: What was the Chinese government's perspective on the many Chinese students who decided to stay in the US after their studies?

LYON: I was always surprised by official Chinese seeming disinterest in the large numbers of their best students choosing to stay in the US. We estimated that we took something like a third of the graduating classes of the top four Chinese universities and that perhaps 10% had come back to China to live and work after finishing their studies. My personal take was there was a view that many more would eventually come back, bringing with them both degrees and practical experience in key industries. The Chinese

really didn't care about their students staying in the U.S. I remember one senior academic, a Chinese, telling me that Chinese were Chinese wherever they lived and that when China needed them, or China's economy had developed far enough to provide them with good, high-paying and rewarding jobs, they would be back. I don't have any figures, but my sense is that this has started to happen, pushed along by the Chinese government's willingness to let them keep and use their US passports and by tax holidays where their income can be tax-free for five years.

Q: You mentioned earlier that the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade happened at the very end of your tour. Can you explain what happened?

LYON: I don't know if I can explain it, I certainly never saw any highly classified after-action reports, but I can give you the perspective of someone who was on the ground throughout the crisis. It was a real shock to my system, not that I was injured or traumatized in any way, though it was one of the most challenging periods of my career, but because I had been feeling pretty good about myself – I only had a month to go on my tour and everything was finally coming together the way I had wanted. Our new building was up, new equipment was in, new officers had arrived or were arriving, and we seemed to be hitting on all cylinders. Then suddenly everything got turned on its head and my last weeks were a mad scramble to deal with the large-scale Chinese reaction to the bombing, everything we had to do to protect the American community in China, damage to our building, not being able to work for ten days in the early peak of our visa season, and then trying to put things back together.

Q: When exactly was the bombing and when did you learn of it?

LYON: It was in early May 1999. I had woken up about 4:30 AM and had gone into my home office to get some work done. I turned on CNN to see live video of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade burning. The thing I remember most was employees climbing down a long ladder from the burning second or third story. I called the ambassador right away and he had just been notified by Washington. He called an Emergency Action Committee meeting for 7:00 or 8:00 that morning.

Q: Before we get into your on-the-ground perspective of what happened in Beijing, exactly what happened in Belgrade?

LYON: There is a truly excellent New York Times' piece on this so I don't think I'll be running into any classification problems. Basically, it was a combination of over-zealous targeting, human error and a target verification process that broke down. The military was under intense pressure to use aerial bombing to bring the Balkan wars and Serb ethnic cleansing to a close, but there simply weren't that many high-value targets in such a small country as Serbia which was, in any case, using large numbers of shadowy, and hard to target, paramilitary organizations in their attacks on Croats and especially on Bosnians and their capital Kosovo. Normally, targets were selected by the military and verified by an intelligence agency. In this case, and I am sure a few others, it was the intelligence agency that identified the target using out of date information showing that

the building housing the Chinese Embassy and staff apartments actually belonged to a national security organization. Because the verifiers were the ones selecting the target, no one thought to double-check their information and the raid was carried out with several bombs successfully hitting the building. I believe three Chinese diplomats were killed and many more injured.

Q: What a screw-up. Did the Chinese believe us when we said it was a mistake?

LYON: Absolutely not, the subsequent rage and attacks may have been government managed, but they reflected the very real anger of Chinese everywhere, from Singapore to Hong Kong to the Peoples Republic itself. You have to remember, this was when we were at the top of our game, the world's only super-power; people just didn't believe we could make mistakes like this and for whatever reason thought we had done so deliberately to teach the Chinese some sort of lesson about our power and their weakness.

Q: Thank you for that, let's get back to the situation on the ground that Saturday morning.

LYON: It was the strangest experience I ever had. Because access to international news outlets and the Internet was so tightly controlled, no one in China outside the foreign community and the Chinese government knew that anything had happened. It was perfectly peaceful going to the Embassy for the EAC meeting yet there we were in internal crisis response mode. I had already called in the entire consular section, the Americans, in order to activate our emergency warden system to warn Americans to hunker in place. In the EAC, were speculating on what had happened – was it a missile that got knocked off course, an anti-aircraft missile that had plunged back to earth, or was it Milosevic that set off the explosion in an attempt to blame us? This was quickly settled, though, when one of the Defense Intelligence Agency sergeants came to the bubble and told the Defense Attaché that DIA HQs was on the phone asking if we knew the address of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

That settled it for us, we, or NATO, were the ones responsible for the attack. Discussion then turned to what the Chinese government was likely to do and what we should do in response, both politically and in order to protect American citizens. A number of our China-hands were speculating that with the tenth anniversary of the massacre at Tiananmen Square coming up the next month, the Chinese government, which had already announced a number of measures to avoid anniversary-related demonstrations, such as closing universities early and banning public assemblies, might elect to downplay the attack for fear that demonstrations against us might morph into demonstrations protesting the June 1989 massacre.

I'm not saying we were dumb, but the Chinese outsmarted us on this. I understand that the top leadership had gotten together very shortly after the bombing and, while we were trying to figure out what they might do, they were deciding what to do. Basically, they decided that a major reaction against the US for killing innocent Chinese would actually be an excellent way to blow off steam, especially among students, before the Tiananmen

anniversary. Who killed innocent Chinese in Belgrade -- the Americans. Who supported the anti-government demonstrators at Tiananmen -- The Americans. How to show the Chinese rage against people who killed innocent Chinese -- Demonstrate against the Americans, not the Chinese government which only sought to protract its people from -- The Americans. They would release all the pressure being built up against the Communist Party and direct it at us, letting it burn itself out before the Tiananmen anniversary.

We got our first taste up this in the early afternoon when several thousand students from Beijing's elite universities, the ones under tight party control, began arriving at the Embassy. I ordered our consular officers, who were in a poorly defended building across from the Embassy to go home while the senior staff, political officers, a number of communications personnel and Marines basically barricaded ourselves inside the Chancery and waited to see what would happen.

For a time after the several thousand students arrived, it went peacefully and pretty much as we expected. They organized themselves and began marching around our block of buildings which also included several other embassies. They had anti-American banners and were chanting slogans and denouncing us as they passed in front of the chancery. A number of students had bullhorns which they used to lead their fellows. Several then stayed in front of the embassy to read lengthy statements on the attacks and strong criticisms of the US and the war in the Balkans which were dutifully played out on Chinese live TV and on tape by CNN. The whole event seemed very choreographed and for a time we thought our optimistic view of the Chinese response might be accurate -- the students would express their outrage, TV would show thousands of demonstrators defending the Chinese people, and then the students would disperse and go home, many of them probably to work on their US student visa applications.

Q: But that didn't happen did it? I remember it being much worse.

LYON: No, you are exactly right. I don't know if the degeneration of a peaceful demonstration into a full-on riot was planned by the Chinese government, I suspect it was but never saw or heard of any proof of this, or if it happened more or less naturally as demonstrators got their blood up or as other Chinese who were angry after watching the local TV coverage joined them.

By an unfortunate coincidence, every sidewalk in the blocks around the Embassy had just been torn up with thousands of cement paving tiles having just been delivered, but not yet installed. When thrown on to the ground, these tiles broke into fist sized rocks, perfect for throwing. By mid-afternoon, about the time we thought things might be breaking up, the first rocks started to fly. With the Embassy almost on the street, with only a roughly six-foot high metal picket fence protecting it, we were within easy range of the rock-throwers. The Chinese People's Armed Police, or PAP, our usual exterior guards, were there, but they were mostly skinny little 18 year-olds without body armor or even helmets. Their orders seemed to be, throughout the crisis, to simply keep people out of

our compound, but to let them do anything they wanted from the street, starting, but eventually not ending, with the rock-throwing.

This may not be politically correct, but these students were the worst rock throwers I had ever seen. There is perception in China that a student cannot get into an elite university unless he or she does nothing but study – no sports, no extra-curricular activity, just school, study and tutors. Well these students bore that out, I don't think one rock in ten cleared the fence and actually hit the building, we were actually laughing, commenting the guys looked like girls throwing with their wrong arms.

Even with the rocks, we didn't feel in any particular danger, though files and hard drives were being organized to be destroyed if the situation worsened, and after an hour or two the demonstration started to break up. We waited a bit and then some of us began to go home, though not the Ambassador, key political officers, IT personnel and the Marines. I ended up walking the Ambassador's secretary to our compound about half a mile away and while there were still hundreds of students milling around, and I stick out in China being 6'4", we didn't encounter any hostility. Two students even stopped us and asked me if the Consular Section would be open on Monday so they could apply for their student visas. I ended up going home and taking my family to a nearby restaurant, a TGI Fridays that had just opened.

When we came out of the restaurant, however, we heard a loud roar coming from the diplomatic quarter. I called the Embassy and learned that thousands of other university students, from second-tier and technical schools, were arriving at the Chancery and beginning what would become a round-the-clock demonstration/riot that was to last over five days. These kids could throw rocks and even as the PAP bulked up their presence, they were allowing not only rock throwing, there were actually reports that the police were handing out rocks to the arriving students, but several firebombs, acid, paint and feces. There were several periods where the demonstration turned into a riot, with students rolling over and burning cars and throwing rocks at nearby embassies as well.

Q: Goodness, how did the Ambassador react to all of this and how did the Embassy function under siege?

LYON: Ambassador Sasser was a smart, savvy guy and he had an excellent DCM and Country Team to rely on. He quickly decided that he and other key political officers would remain in the Chancery and that I should set up an adjunct embassy in our housing compound as we had representatives from most sections and agencies working there. He would coordinate with the Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while I would have the lead for working with the American community, our four constituent posts, all of which were also being subjected to demonstrations and riots, other agencies at post, and families. We had to operate out of my apartment for a day or so, my kids went to stay with friends and my wife, Maureen, a former Community Liaison Officer, added her expertise and judgment to our efforts. After that, we moved into three vacant apartments, one for the consular section, one for management officers and the other for our reconstituted country team.

It was by far the strangest crisis-response I had ever been involved in for two reasons. The first was that even as the area around the Embassy was essentially a combat zone, with thousands of chanting demonstrators, rocks and debris everywhere, the occasional burning car, Marines in full battle dress, and with Embassy personnel destroying hard drives and burning files, the rest of the city was absolutely normal. You could look out my living room window and nothing was amiss. Go to the back kitchen window and you could hear the roar of the crowds and occasionally see drifting smoke. The CCP was orchestrating and encouraging anti-American riots, but when we called up o order extra phone and fax lines, they were delivered immediately.

The second was that this was the first major crisis where everything worked. In my past experience, the first thing coup makers did was either seize or knock out TV, radio and telephones while the same usually happened with earthquakes or typhoons. Not here, as we had telephone service, cell phone service, faxes, a very slow internet and Chinese and Department e-mail.

This was great in helping us do our primary jobs of warning and assisting American citizens and coordinating with the constituent posts, but it also added immeasurably to the amount of time required to do so. I'll give you an example. By the second or third day, MaryKay had expanded our warden system e-mail list to several thousand Americans. This let us broadcast information and warnings quickly and easily. The problem was that a large percentage of our recipients would then e-mail us back telling us they were OK. We then had to wade through each and every one of these messages to make sure there weren't people responding to say they were in trouble and needed our help. We staffed the consular office 24/7, and most of us were turning in 20-hour days, though unlike our colleagues at the Embassy who were eating military rations, or MREs, and sleeping in their offices, we had access to our homes for meals and beds.

There was one funny story involving our ration-eating colleagues at the Chancery. Monday or Tuesday the Ministry of Foreign summoned the ambassador, but he refused to leave the Embassy, basically saying, "You come to me." So the vice foreign minister came to see him and all of a sudden the crowds simply melted away. Enterprising staff figured this would be the case and called out to Dominos and ordered a bunch of pizzas. Right behind the foreign minister's limo as it picked its way through the rubble on the street came a Domino's Pizza delivery van which dropped off something like a dozen pizzas.

Q: With nation-wide anger like you were facing, there must have been a lot of incidents involving Americans. Were any badly injured?

LYON: We were amazed at about how few there actually were. Americans both took our warnings to hunker down to heart and showed very good judgment in keeping low profiles. There was one instance of an American getting elbowed to the head waiting to get on an elevator in his office complex, we had to reach out and request the assistance of university officials in several instances to ask them to make sure American students on

their campuses weren't harassed, they readily complied in every instance, and there were other cases of Chinese individuals reacting to protect American friends and colleagues. The only instance of implied violence was, in retrospect, quite funny. A cab driver asked his prospective fare, an Australian, if he was an American. The Aussie couldn't help himself and answered in his thickest Australian accent, something like, "Sure Mate, I really sound like an American." All the cab driver heard was an affirmation, so he knocked the guy down and held a knife to his throat before, national honor satisfied in front of a small crowd, he drove away leaving the Aussie shaken but unhurt.

I think another reason for the lack of violence against individual Americans was that both the Chinese government and people seem to have decided it was our government, and NATO, that were the targets of their anger rather than American citizens.

As a result, almost the rage was focused on the Embassy and two of its consulates general, those in Chengdu, in central China, and Shenyang in the northeast. The much larger consulates general in Shanghai and Guangzhou were protected by the city government in the former and by being located in a major tourist hotel in the latter. But Chengdu and Shenyang were in standalone compounds that were also assaulted by thousands of students and demonstrators. It was a lot more frightening than in Beijing as some students were able to get into the compounds trying unsuccessfully to set the consul general's presence in Chengdu on fire and actually getting into at least one residential block where our employees locked their families in closets and drove out the students with baseball bats. Again, perhaps because of restraint on both sides, no one was badly hurt.

The Ambassador made one courageous decision that gave us a very good window into the actual thinking of many of the demonstrators. He asked for volunteers from our younger Chinese-American and Asian-American officers to actually join the demonstrators as they marched around the Embassy area in order to gauge the true level of anger towards us and whether or not this might turn into more serious violence. They picked up true anger, but also a high degree of party "encouragement" as many were there because they were told to be there. Mixed in with anti-Americans diatribes were students wondering whether this would affect their chances of getting visas to start their graduate studies at American universities that summer.

Q: Could you carry on any routine consular activities?

LYON: Only emergency American Citizen Services, which we did through our ad hoc consular section at our housing compound. All of our officers plus volunteers from other sections and agencies, became ACS officers, handling the phones, meeting walk-ins at our gates and bringing them in, on a few occasions taking Embassy cars and visiting Americans who were frightened for their safety and wanted escorts to move to hotels, and monitoring e-mail traffic. They did magnificently, I was very proud of them.

I knew that we were going to be hit with a barrage of pent-up visa demand when we did reopen so I tasked my visa chief, Jim Levy, with getting ready for this. We had been

working on an appointment system, tied in to having a local bank take-in and process visa application fees, and Jim did an outstanding job rushing both into practice before we reopened.

Q: OK, how long did the demonstrations last and did they end abruptly or just sort of wind down?

LYON: It stopped abruptly after Vice President Hu Jintao went on television, I want to say Wednesday evening, thanked the students thanked the students for expressing the rage of the Chinese people, and basically said enough had been done. I think two small groups of demonstrators tried to get to the embassy the next morning but the police somehow seemed to have learned how to turn people away and dispersed them peacefully.

My visa chief, Jim Levy, and I went over to the Embassy that afternoon to inspect the damage to the consular section – our new waiting room had been hit and dented by its share of rocks, and to start figuring out when we could reopen. While we were there, a police officer came up to us and said the district commander would like to see us. We followed the Ambassador's lead and asked him to come to the Consular Section to inspect it with us. He showed up pretty quickly and without any pleasantries told us we had to reopen immediately. We waved at the damage -- piles of rocks in the courtyard and street, burned out cars, broken windows, paint smeared on the walls -- and asked how and why. He left the first to us, but said that he and his officers had been under tremendous pressure from visa applicants, especially, and ironically, students who had travel plans or summer enrollment deadlines. I don't think we laughed out loud, but we made it very clear to the commander that the place was such a mess it would be a week at the earliest before we could reopen for visas and that he was just going to have to deal with irate applicants. He didn't go away happy, but he did go away and shortly thereafter some Chinese work crews arrived and started clearing out the area in front of the consular section's compound, though not the area between us and the Chancery which was on a perpendicular street and which had suffered most of the damage.

We kept the consular section closed the rest of that week. Our new building had been dented and scarred by rocks, but it wasn't nearly as bad off as the main embassy and as I said we had a real incentive – a huge backlog in applicants, many facing deadlines, such as summer admission dates for colleges – to re-open for business. Jim Levy moved quickly to adapt and expand our nascent appointment system and I think we were aiming for the next Tuesday or Wednesday.

The early afternoon before the day we were set to open, though, I got a call from the DCM telling me that we were not to open until the police re-opened the street directly in front of the Embassy so that people could see the damage that had been done to our Chancery. I squawked, but quickly contacted the district police commander and told him that if the street wasn't opened by mid-afternoon, we would not be able to start visa processing the next day as I had hoped. He squawked, but said he would look into it. When our deadline passed, Jim Levy came up with the brilliant idea of posting what are

called “big character posters”, a term going back to the Cultural Revolution, high up on one of our external walls facing the street and essentially saying, “when the police show us our streets are safe, we will reopen for visas”. The street was reopened within the hour and almost immediately people were walking in front of the Chancery, gawking and taking pictures. We got back on track pretty quick, although with a waiting list of several weeks at that point as opposed to our earlier same day service.

Q: Did any of the students, did our officers look them in the eye and say, “Did you throw a rock at the embassy?”

LYON: It was worse than that Stu. My officers were all angry with what had happened, but I also had one officer with a photographic memory. She recognized faces and remembered names even for people who had applied months earlier and now were in using assumed identities. She was also a young Asian-American who had infiltrated the demonstrators so she had seen many of the rock throwers close up. I had to convince her and her fellow line officers that throwing rocks was not a ground of ineligibility and that while I would allow them to make individual students sweat a bit, especially if they could pull interesting information out of them for reporting cables, we couldn’t turn them down if they were otherwise eligible. We tried to maintain objectivity on this, but it was hard when you knew the person had been baying for our blood the week before was now standing in front of us wanting a visa. We had to keep in mind that for every person who was wild eyed and screaming with rage there were several others thinking, “I have an exam next Tuesday, I have to study, I need to apply for a visa from these guys, why did they have to make me come here?”

Q: What about the weeks after the bombing and demonstrations?

LYON: While we continued to advise Americans to keep a low profile, it became apparent fairly quickly that the people took the government’s request to calm down pretty seriously. It felt a bit surreal walking down quiet streets to my gym just over a week after they had been filled with thousands of anti-American demonstrators. Our last big event in Beijing, just over a month after the bombing and riots, was a black tie American Club dinner/dance on the Great Wall. It was catered by one of the large international hotels, which clearly put on a bit more security than was normal, but went off without a hitch.

Q: Before we leave China, what was your greatest frustration during your tour?

LYON: It had to have been staffing, pulling new positions out of the Department’s hide, convincing CA that consular and diplomatic competence were more important than language skills, and finally in actually getting journeyman and mid-level officers to actually bid on China jobs.

Q: I get the first two, but why were officers avoiding the China posts, I would think that places like Beijing and Shanghai would draw bidders.

LYON: I wish. I started recruiting folks for the China posts when I started language training and was still at it my last weeks at post. They had simply developed a very bad reputation among consular officers for huge workloads, inadequate staffing and lousy facilities and housing. There was a perception among FSOs generally that the China posts were not terribly officer or family friendly. Part of this I could understand as there was a real emphasis on tooth over tail, using scarce funds for badly needed officers rather than decent housing or even support staff. Stapleton Roy was a true China-hand, dominating the China posts over a twelve year period, first as DCM, then Deputy Assistant Secretary overseeing China, then as Ambassador. He was born in China of missionary parents, spoke fluent Chinese, and very frankly didn't need very much support, leading him to assume no one else, or their families, did as well.

The second post-related problem was that many China hands almost seemed to enjoy self-sacrifice and were often conspicuous in the wearing of their hair shirts. Conditions had been so much worse, so what if they still weren't very good as long as they were better. Awards were hard to come by. The Mission awards committee decided that no one would receive an individual award after the bombing and demonstrations, but that they would lump everyone together for a Group Superior Honor Award. Nice, but not what a lot of people deserved, both for recognition and promotions.

After having run into a terrible assignment cycle my first year at post, I decided to get in front of the process. I was able to get HR in the Department to give me the names of every mid-level consular officer still in the service who had ever studied Chinese. I broke these officers into three groups, those with good enough language skills, either a 2/2 or 3/3, to get to China without any additional language training, those who would need a year or less, and those that would repeat the course.

I focused on the first two groups, sending out something like 90 e-mails identifying jobs they might bid on, extolling all of the improvements we were making, and talking up a very good promotion rate after the first evaluation cycle where I had been everyone's rating or reviewing officer. I filled exactly one job after this effort, with at least a dozen officers writing back to me to say that they had had such a bad first experience that they had promised themselves and/or their families that they would never return to China. I went back to several of them, and filled another job or three, but in general I had to turn to officers without China experience to fill our jobs.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop. What is it '99?

LYON: '99 right.

Q: Where did you go?

LYON: Melbourne, Australia, as principal officer.

Q: All right, well we will pick that up then.

Q: Today is 22 June 2011, 70 years ago when Hitler told his generals, “Fellows I have got a slam dunk for you. Why don’t we invade Russia.”

LYON: I am watching a very interesting Time Life series on the war, a lot of footage never seen before. It includes Hitler playing with the children of his inner cabinet, and some very interesting scenes showing how normal life could be even for homicidal psychopaths trying to conquer the world.

Q: Well let’s see, we left off you were leaving China and heading for Australia. I’m assuming there wasn’t any language training for you?

LYON: Nope, although a little bit would have been useful.

Q: You were there from when to when?

LYON: From ’99 to 2002.

Q: Tell me about Melbourne, it was a fairly big post wasn’t it?

LYON: No, not really, barely mid-sized in terms of staffing, but a huge district, the entire central core of Australia from saltwater crocodiles in Darwin to Arctic research stations in Tasmania. NIV requirements for most Australians had been eliminated several years before and IVs were issued in Sydney for the entire country. I had half a dozen State FSOs, a Foreign Commercial Service officer, two American support staff and perhaps a 2 locally engaged staff. There was also Defense Contract Management Agency office, co-located with us and headed by a Navy commander, working with the Australian military on refurbishing American aircraft we were providing or selling to Australia, a variety of defense purchases by the Australian military, and coordinating annual expeditions to the Arctic. The consular chief was my deputy and the DCMA officer, Commander Barbara Bell, one of the first female aviators, call sign name, of course, being Tinker, acted as well as an informal defense attaché.

One unique aspect of Melbourne was that we had a locally-engaged Management Officer, Louise Veenstra, an Australian. It was part of a Department experiment – the HR chief on Canberra was also an Australian – on hiring host country nationals in developed countries as management officers. From my point of view it was a near-total success, not only saving us money, but giving us someone with strong management skills and a deep well of local experience to draw on. The only downside was that she only had a low-level clearance and couldn’t be given any material above Limited Official Use, but this never came into play except when I asked that some sort of classified material be injected into a table-top emergency response exercise put on for us by a Diplomatic Security team.

Our focus was on promoting American business and assisting American companies, providing consular services to Americans and students, representing US interests in three states and one federal territory, building relationships with local and national politicians,

and maintaining close relations with the Australian union movement as the largest unions and the national Australian Council of Trade Unions were based in Melbourne.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

LYON: I actually had three ambassadors during my tour. Genta Hawkins Holmes was the first, finishing up her three year posting. Then I had Skip Gnehm for one year before he was pulled out to go back to the Middle East after 9/11, he was one of our leading specialists in the Arab world. Skip was replaced by Tom Schieffer a political appointee, close friend of President George W. Bush and brother of CBS' Bob Schieffer, for my third year.

Q: All right. How were relations with Canberra?

LYON: If you are asking about US-Australian relations, they were very good. Skip Gnehm put it right when he said he had spent his entire career doing diplomacy in very difficult places where there were serious issues or we weren't getting any help. He said for the first time he was dealing with a close ally that had its own views on key issues, but that stood shoulder to shoulder with the U.S. when it counted the most, for example after 9/11. My take is that the Australians shifted their security framework from the UK to the US during WWII, saw us as being the bedrock of their security, and were willing to contribute to keeping that relationship strong.

This doesn't mean they were passive minor partners. When I got to Australia in the summer of 1999, Australia was in the process of leading an effort to help East Timor, a primarily Catholic former colony of Portugal's, secure its independence from Indonesia, and looking to us for reassurance while simultaneously involved in a major spat over a protectionist move by President Clinton to assist the US lamb industry from Australian and New Zealand imports.

The East Timor operation was fascinating. The Australians took a large risk in alienating Indonesia, a large, populous neighboring country with a complicated relationship with Canberra, but nonetheless committed much of their military assets to forcing the Indonesians to relinquish their control of East Timor. At the same time, though, they were more than a bit unsettled doing this on their own as they had become used to marching with us, perhaps a half-step behind when it came to military operations. There was a good deal of uneasiness in the press, combined with criticism of the US for not being there for Australia when they had been with us in Korea and Vietnam. In actual fact, though, we were doing quite a bit behind the scenes, sharing intelligence, letting the Indonesians know, through a call from Secretary of Defense Cohen to Indonesian Armed Forces Chief Wiranto, that while Indonesia was a friend, Australia was a close treaty ally, and that it wasn't a coincidence that we had an assault carrier battle group loaded with Marines sailing over the horizon. We also provided all manner of indirect support, from body armor to drinking water to a headquarters element as the Australian Army no longer had the ability to coordinate a multi-battalion, multi-service operation. Everything ended

up well, but I don't think we ever got the credit we deserved in helping the Aussies as they had always helped us.

Going on simultaneously was a major trade splat as we had just imposed a tariff and quota on Australian and New Zealand lamb coming into the U.S. Lamb and sheep are to the Australians as cowboys and cattle drives have been to us, and they went absolutely ballistic on that with the lamb crisis pushing aside East Timor in the press.

Q: Well going to the lamb tariff, I mean obviously these things are political. Why were we doing that?

LYON: It was domestic politics all the way. If I remember right, and this may not be the full story, President Clinton was trying to head off a major protectionist initiative in the Senate, I believe it had to do with steel, and needed the support of a small group led by Senator Baucus of Montana whose sister happened to be a lamb producer. In order to get Baucus' group's support, he imposed a three-year quota and tariff on Australian lamb. Domestic politics, and more than a bit of political corruption, and it totally infuriated the Australians. And of course it also stunk as we, the world's major proponent of open markets and free trade, turn around and slap this tariff and quota on an industry operating without government support and producing excellent cheap lamb. It didn't cause huge damage, we're talking probably tens of millions of dollars here, but it was a slap at Australia's heritage and image of self, and, of course, of their image of us.

Q: Well during the time you were there did it, was it resolved.

LYON: It was a staggered tariff and quota with the former dropping and the latter rising each year so the issue gradually went away. The Australians eventually brought their sense of humor to bear with the lamb industry using it to promote more domestic consumption. It didn't hit their economy very hard and the issue slowly went away, except when government officials wanted to put US diplomats on the defensive concerning trade issues, for example when we were seeking relief for American farm exports that were being blocked by both real and imaginary quarantine concerns protecting Australian agriculture. I believe Australia and perhaps New Zealand filed a WTO complaint which was resolved in their favor just as the quota & tariff period ended.

Q: And how were the relations between Melbourne and the Embassy in Canberra?

LYON: It varied somewhat depending on the ambassador, but generally speaking they were very good. We weren't big enough – like say Rio or Sao Paulo in Brazil – to be a rival to the Embassy's reporting or management officers, and we were pretty good at running our own affairs within our budget. There was a bit of friction when Ambassador Schieffer came on board as I'm not sure he really knew what to make of constituent posts and was a bit more of a micro-manager, wanting to do things like review our lists of guests we were taking out by plane to see transiting American aircraft carriers. He also instituted a daily conference call with the three principal officers, making it mid-afternoon Eastern Australian time which happened to be mid-day in Perth. The

Ambassador never really realized how much we did over lunches with contacts and was always irritated when the Perth Principal Officer was at lunch rather than joining in the call. But he was a smart, very capable guy and otherwise was an effective chief of mission.

Q: I'm assuming public speaking as a major part of your job. Aside from East Timor and the lamb issue, were there any constant themes you were asked to talk about or respond to question on? I assume that you were called upon to speak all the time on any subject, but did this always come up?

LYON: Security issues and the US-Australian alliance were constant themes over and beyond East Timor. Australia was totally committed to their alliance with us and while they were reasonably sure of our commitment to them, they were always seeking reassurance. My speeches and talks always addressed this and Q&A sessions always came back to it. But while I found my outreach efforts to be pretty effective, nothing beat the presence of major US Navy ships in attracting Australians' interest. Putting on my amateur psychologist hat, I think this was because the solid grey hulls reminded them that we were there for them in WWII, were there in front of them right now, and would be there in the future. I never missed a chance to hold a representational event on a visiting USN ship and they were always extremely well attended, while seats on COD (carrier on board delivery) flights out to passing aircraft carriers were guarantees of close personal relationships for years. I took one left-wing union leader out to the USS Constellation and he went from a skeptic of the US to my best mate, even calling me Comrade Dave a few times. (And yes, the leftist union leaders were calling each other comrade in 1999, often at their favorite pub, the Trotsky.)

But the most contentious questions always related to agricultural trade, most notably our farm subsidies. Australians did not provide a lot of subsidies for their agriculture and were and are competing with us all around the world on a wide variety of agricultural products from beef to grain to nuts. Put simply, they hated our farm subsidy programs and never missed the chance to beat me up on them. Fortunately, for me, they weren't exactly pure on the subject of agricultural imports, over-using their phyto-sanitary concerns about protecting their crops from foreign pests to curtail foreign, U.S. competition. I'll give one example. Our seasons for growing table grapes were opposite one another so there was a real market for grapes during the Australian winter and early spring. The government preferred off-season production even if it was expensive. They used the existence of a North American pest, the glassy-winged sharpshooter I think it was called, to justify keeping our grapes out. This was a political decision over-riding their own quarantine specialists who said we were taking adequate measures to eliminate the pests from our exports. So, while I got pummeled frequently, I was able to fight back.

After 9/11, of course, Afghanistan and then Iraq became constant subjects for talks and for Q&A sessions after talks on other subjects.

Q: Melbourne is a major destination point for immigrants from all over the world, a real multi-cultural city. Did that impact your work?

LYON: Exactly right, there were sub-communities of immigrants all around Melbourne, as well, of course, in Sydney and Perth. Australia had encouraged massive immigration from Europe after WWII and there were huge communities of Italians and Greeks in addition to the traditional sources from the UK. More recently, large numbers had arrived from other areas in the Balkans with relatively new communities of Croats and Slovaks. Australia had only abandoned its Whites-Only policy in the mid-1970s, but when I was in Melbourne something like 5% of the Australian population had been born in Asia. As for Americans, I remember reading once that Australia was the only country in the world with a net inflow of Americans compared to outgoing emigrants to the U.S. We could literally see Australia changing in front of your eyes. My family was very much part of this changing mosaic. My mother-in-law had come from Queensland to California in 1946 as a war bride, both of my children remained in Australia after Maureen and I left in 2002, becoming Australian citizens after graduating from Melbourne University and now living in Melbourne. And my wife obtained Australian citizenship a few years after I retired. It is very American in terms of a melting pot bubbling away right in front of your eyes.

Q: Well most of the places where immigrants are coming from all have grudges against the United States one way or another. I mean did that manifest itself in demonstrations or problems?

LYON: Mostly by the fact that both the Consulate General building and my residence had 24-hour Federal Police protection and I had a bodyguard team assigned to me first for all public functions, then, after 9/11, for every time I left my house, whether to go to work or walk the dog. The Australian thinking was that Melbourne had many different ethnic communities with one or more of these almost always mad at the US for something, whether they were Serb, Muslim, or Chinese, or native or non-native activist groups protesting US policies and actions. The Federal Police took the view that if their security presence reduced a modest chance of something bad happening against us, it was worth the time and resources. The team assigned to me was extremely professional and I am still good friends with several of them.

Q: How about American tourists; did they get in trouble there or not. Was that a problem particularly?

LYON: Not really. It happened obviously and we had an outstanding consular section that responded well to Americans in trouble. We also had excellent cooperation with the Australian police and judicial authorities. There is a real affection for Americans as a people in Australia and many Americans who found themselves in trouble were more likely turned over to us as being thrown into jail. This was especially true during USN ship visits. The cops would often pick up drunk & disorderly sailors and quietly drop them off near their ships, often doing so in a way where the shore patrol officers would simply see sailors staggering towards them rather than being dropped off by police cars. With as many of five to six thousand sailors pulling into a port, usually Hobart which would accept our nuclear carrier battle groups coming back from the Middle East, there

were a few more serious cases, including two sexual assault related arrests. Even in the face of justifiably critical press coverage, the Australians were amenable to allowing us to prosecute the men in the U.S. under our Status of Forces agreement. We would make sure to publicize the military proceedings against the sailors which in both of the cases I mentioned resulted in much longer sentences than would have been handed down by an Australian court which let Australians know that we took offenses by American military personnel in Australia very seriously

The most complicated welfare and whereabouts case we had were actually in East Timor where three UN workers, including an American, were burned and mutilated by one of the paramilitary groups. My consular chief, Paul Fitzgerald, and quite possibly the best consular FSN I have ever seen, a Sri Lankan-Australian named Chris Henricus, did a magnificent job in taking over a horrible case that had been bungled by the UN.

Q: I imagine your focus was on Melbourne, but what other parts of Australia were part of your jurisdiction and what were your primary responsibilities?

LYON: The three consulates general divided up the country and my district consisted of the central core of Australia, the states of Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. It was a great territory to cover, from penguins and Arctic research in Tasmania to salt water crocs and the jungles of the Northern Territory. There was considerable American investment in the district – Ford and Caterpillar outside Melbourne, General Motors in Adelaide, Duke Energy in Tasmania, among many others, so there was work to be done throughout the district. I was probably in Adelaide quarterly and Tasmania semi-annually.

Our main focus in Melbourne was on providing consular services, assisting existing and prospective American companies, we had a very active Foreign Commercial Service office under a very capable chief, Mitch Larsen, coordinating with state and local governments as well as with state and national unions, universities and think tanks, and establishing relationships with federal legislators when they were in their home districts. Through our Defense Contract Management Office, we also maintained close relationships with Australian military units throughout our district.

It was a wonderfully diverse portfolio with just enough stress, for example when a newly elected Labor government in Victoria starting putting pressure on local American companies to cut costs or raise wages, to keep things more than just interesting.

Q: My perception of the Australian labor movement was that it inherited many of the more pernicious aspects of the British post-WWII labor movement. You know quite left wing and not very responsible and very socialistic. Was that true by this time or had things changed?

LYON: There were elements of that when I got to Melbourne and it was certainly true into the 1980s, but it was actually a Labor government in the 80's that made the huge decision to take on the unions and force them to moderate their demands and start to

become partners with companies rather than adversaries. Even under the conservative, decidedly pro-business Liberal-National coalition under Prime Minister John Howard, there was probably more cooperation than active confrontation with the unions.

The labor unions and the Labor Party itself are actually heavily fragmented among competing factions and there is by no means a united labor movement. Shortly after I got to Melbourne, I called on a former Labor Party state premier (or governor) who had my head spinning as he described the historical roots of the five major factions within the Labor Party as well as the behind-the-scenes and open bloodletting that occurred among them in selecting candidates and a party platform. The spectrum ranged from the very few remaining hard-left unions, whose members met at the Trotsky Pub and still called each other Comrade, to the left-wing unions, usually industries, like construction, where there was no foreign competition, to the more moderate unions on the right who were involved with industries, such as car manufacturing, that competed internationally. The left-wing unions were ready to drop their gloves at any time to fight for higher wages or better working conditions while the right-wing ones were much more likely to be saying, “Hey boss, how can we do this better so the factory can stay open and we can keep our jobs and maybe get salary increases.”

A good example of this was when a state union was taking an unusually hard line against a major American corporation which had a large factory outside of Melbourne. The union had misjudged the company’s commitment to the factory, Australian wages and benefits are high, and the CEO, a good friend of mine, told me he was flying back to the US to recommend that they close the factory and simply import the equipment they were making and selling locally. With his permission, I called the national leader of that particular union and explained what was happening – he had been under the impression from his state union counterpart that they were certain the company would capitulate to their demands. He trusted me and when the CEO got off the plane in the USD, there was a signed agreement from the union accepting all of his terms.

I was helped in this in that the national Labor Party was just as committed to the US-Australia alliance as were the conservatives. There was some skepticism among the union rank & file, especially on the left, but under Kim Beazley, who was the Labor Party leader while I was in Australia, there wasn’t any doubt as to where the Labor Party stood vis-a-vis the U.S. Kim was eminently approachable, we once walked halfway across Sydney talking after one of his speeches.

Q: How did your wife find life as the spouse of a principle officer? Was it an easy adjustment for her, all the entertaining and social demands?

LYON: Maureen is a people person and an outstanding hostess so our social life and obligations were no problem for her in Melbourne or later in Fiji. Her biggest adjustment was not really being in a position to work, At earlier posts, she had spent the first four to six months helping the kids adjust and setting up our home life before getting a job. In Manila, she had been a large recreation association’s assistant general manager and then the Peace Corps Medical officer, in Bangkok she was the Embassy’s CLO, and in Beijing

she was an HR specialist. But in Melbourne, she chose to focus on charity work and became the President of the American Women's Auxiliary of the Royal Children's Hospital, an executive, not an honorary, position, helping raise a half million dollars annually through a gala American community ball, golf tournaments and general fund raising. She, and then we, also ended up becoming good friends of the hospital's patron, Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, Rupert's mother and one of the finest individuals either of us has ever met. I'm no fan of her son, and her husband was no different, but she had devoted her life to helping those in need.

Q: You were in Australia from when to when?

LYON: From 1999 through the summer of 2002.

Q: How did 9/11 hit you?

LYON: It hit us very hard. I had already gone to bed, with my wife staying up to watch West Wing on TV. When they broke in with coverage of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center, I got a hard elbow in the ribs. About five minutes after the second plane hit, the phone started ringing – the Embassy, members of my staff, the Federal Police. Additional security was sent over to the house and I don't think anyone slept. We were instructed to close the next day, but I went in along with our consular section officers, our senior ACS specialist and our Australian admin officer. We activated our warden system. Basically telling Americans to be cautious, but not warning them to stay at home. But other than that we didn't have very much to do so everyone went home except for me at which point I was enveloped by an incredible wave of compassion and support from the Australian public.

We were on the top two floors of a commercial building with a significant set-back from St. Kilda Road, a major city thoroughfare, basically a small, open-to-the-public, plaza. I first got a hint of the incredible public support we were to receive from Australians when I noticed large numbers of people coming by, eventually probably several hundred, and milling in the plaza. Then I saw the beginnings of what would be an enormous collection of flowers and mementos forming next to our flagpole. Against the advice of my security detail, I went down to investigate and found that people were bringing flowers, teddy bears, WWII replicas of American planes and tanks, medals, you name it, and leaving them there to show they were with us.

I was pretty well known, plus I had my security with me, and people started coming up and simply hugging me. Some of the mourners even noticed that we didn't have any condolence books and went to a local store and bought some, along with a supply of pens and a small table to put them all on. I was down there for several hours and by the time I left I was emotionally drained, my shirt was thoroughly tear-streaked, we had thousands of signatures, and a massive collection of flowers and mementos. No sooner had I gone back up then the fire engines arrived, a long column of them slowly flashing their lights in support of the NYPD. I went back down and proceeded to be hugged by scores of fire fighters – the Australians train with us and during major rural fire emergencies they

deploy to the US or receive the help of American fire fighters in Australia – many of them openly crying. It turned an all-day and well-into-the-night vigil at the consulate. Australians kept coming by the hundreds to provide their condolences and show their support for Americans, with candles appearing as it got dark and with fire trucks coming by periodically with tier lights flashing. By the time I went home, I could barely walk straight or speak coherently as it has been a tiring, but more to the, an emotionally draining day.

LYON: One of my most moving experiences after 9/11 involved the annual Australian Rules Football championship breakfast held by the left-wing labor unions. I had gone the previous year, but as the 2001 event was only two weeks after 9/11, I was going to decline my invitation. I received several calls from union leaders asking me to attend so I changed my mind and went. Kim Beazley and several other national Labor Party and union leaders were there, but the main audience was some six hundred rank & file union members -- construction workers, longshoremen, miners, the hard guys, not our natural boosters. We first had what was for me the quietest, most somber moment of silence I had ever experienced before the head of the Firefighters, Peter Marshall, a friend of mine, got up to say a few words and to read the Fireman's Prayer. He broke down into tears trying to read the prayer so I stepped in and finished it for him before we received five minutes of thunderous applause.

The next weeks were and are a blur for me, with our putting on enhanced security combined with frequent speaking engagements as Australians held events to commemorate the victims of 9/11 which included several dozen Australians. I spoke to over a thousand people at Melbourne's Anglican cathedral and when Ambassador Schieffer visited, he spoke to over 12,000 people at Premier Steve Bracks' multi-cultural memorial service for the 9/11 victims. The Ambassador gave a brilliant and moving speech, without reading from a text or even referring to notes, one of the finest I have ever heard and one that received deafening applause.

As you'll remember, just about a week after 9/11 came the mailed anthrax packages to the FBI and other government offices. We ended up instituting new security and access procedures while it seemed like the Victorian police's anti-bomb and SWAT teams almost lived at the consulate, I'm going to guess that we had to evacuate the building at least twice a week for a month, always for false alarms – like a mailed-in visa application packet from a farmer who had recently handled chemical fertilizers. All but one of the building's other tenants quickly moved out, with the sole remaining company, a PR firm, first running a full-page ad in the paper about how tough they were, showing a bulls-eye with an arrow through it and the caption that they were neighbors of the American Consulate General. About three days later, they moved out as their staff started refusing to come to work.

Q: Goodness, well I guess that's both scary and amusing. How about your own staff?

LYON: The pressure on them was overwhelming, but they did magnificently, both Americans and Australians. Everyone faced risks and worries at work, but the Americans

also were receiving almost too much emotional support in public – they might be on a tram and someone would hear their American accent and come up and hug them with everyone in the car joining in one way or another. We ended up engaging some counselors to come in and be available to employees to talk things over. The pressures eased a bit as we got back to work, but remained for some time. It put tremendous stress on some of our younger officers who were not used to that.

Q: If I remember correctly, Australia was quick to join our efforts in Afghanistan.

LYON: Yes they were, very quickly dispatching special forces units to join ours and later sending warships, aircraft and regular Army forces. They held an enormous Church service in Melbourne’s Anglican Cathedral to send off several Navy ships and some Army units with Kim Beazley, the Labor Party leader, prominently in attendance to show his support for the Howard’s government’s decision to join us. There was complete support for us in the press.

Q: Let’s say before 9/11 how was President Bush, this would be Bush II, viewed in Australia?

LYON: He wasn’t liked. Many people saw him as representing much of what they didn’t like about American culture, you know, the cowboys, the macho, the right-wing rhetoric, the neo-con view of the world. At the same time, they considered their alliance with us to be their security cornerstone while Prime Minister Howard became one of President Bush’s strongest partners and supporters. So they were supportive of the U.S. but they didn’t necessarily like President Bush.

Ambassador Schieffer was instrumental in building on Australia’s instinctive support for us and in giving everyone, including me, a more nuanced picture of the President. He was very much a “Friend of George” having been a co-owner of the Texas Rangers with him and was an early and strong supporter of his runs for Texas governor and then the presidency. He was a help to us because he made it very clear that while President Bush might not be a raving intellectual, he was a smart capable guy and not just a puppet of Vice President Cheney and the Neocons. Defending many of the administration’s policies wasn’t easy for me, and having an Ambassador whose views I could cite as being from someone who was close to and supportive of the President was a great help to me.

Q: How did you handle defending policies you didn’t agree with?

LYON: I remember giving a speech about six weeks after the inauguration in which I said that President Bush wasn’t breaking abruptly with President Clinton’s core policies, in part because he knew he hadn’t received a mandate for change in his narrow, and contested, election victory. The very next week, he proved me wrong, walking away from Kyoto, pulling us out of a UN de-mining protocol, I think announcing a decision to withdraw from an anti-missile pact with the Russians. I hated these decisions, but it was my job to represent the US government and its policies. I handled this by describing

policy decisions and implantations, what made us take various actions, rather than trying to convince skeptical Australians that we were right and their misgivings were misplaced.

Q: I can't remember, was Ambassador Schieffer the first political appointee you worked for? What were the obvious differences between him and your first two bosses in Australia?

LYON: He was the second, Ambassador Sasser in Beijing was the first – he had been a three or four term senator from Tennessee before Clinton appointed him ambassador and, with his extensive USG experience, he was pretty easy to work for. As I think I mentioned earlier, Ambassador Schieffer wasn't an easy boss as he didn't seem to care why we did things, did not appreciate many of the representational duties of an American diplomat, and was more of a micro-manager. At the same time, he was very effective on the bilateral aspects of his job, had a strong relationship with the Howard government and could be a brilliant speaker.

I saw first-hand the differences between a career chief of mission and a well-connected political appointee during our two major trade disputes with Australia. Genta Holmes was our Ambassador during the lamb clash I talked about earlier. She was a strong and influential ambassador, but she couldn't punch through the State Department chain of command to influence the White House or Congress to stop the lamb tariffs. Three years later, though, when President Bush was looking to implement tariffs and quotas on overseas steel, Ambassador Schieffer picked up the phone, called the Secretary of Commerce, who was a friend of his, and said, "If you don't take Australia off your list, I'll call George tomorrow morning." He made the right policy call, Australia didn't deserve to be on the list what with its strong labor and environmental policies and comparative lack of government subsidies, and he had the political clout within the administration to get his way.

Q: Absolutely. This is something that is often overlooked. Of course we do have our political ambassadors who are just somebody who has given support to a Senator and you know sort of a throwaway. Then there are other posts, like Canberra, where you might get someone particularly close to the President.

LYON: Exactly. Genta was a very good ambassador, but her ability to influence the White House or Congress was decidedly limited where Ambassador Schieffer could just reach out and touch someone to get something fixed or done to his satisfaction.

The flip side to that, in my opinion at least, was that Ambassador Schieffer saw himself more as Bush's ambassador to the conservative and very supportive John Howard government and less to Australia as a whole. He quickly established good relations with Prime Minister Howard and his Cabinet, but seemed reluctant to do the same with the Labor Party's Beazley, the Labor Party shadow cabinet, or union leaders. I think his first real meeting with Beazley was in an airport transit lounge and it took the Embassy's Labor Officer and myself months to get him to come down and meet with key union leaders, one of whom, Bill Shorten, went on to lead the Labor Party. The Ambassador

wasn't rude to them, but he just never seemed interested in them, in his mind, his job, especially after 9/11, was to build and keep Australian support regarding Afghanistan and the War on Terrorism.

Q: What about our military establishments out in the middle of the outback or something? I know they are tied into intelligence gathering and sharing, but otherwise they seem very opaque. Did you get involved with that business at all?

LYON: I chose not to. I had the clearance to do so, I knew its commanding officers, and I saw some of their end products, but I just didn't see the point of trying to insert myself, as one or two of predecessors had tried to do, into a complex relationship involving the US military, the Australian Ministry of Defense, various intelligence communities, and several offices at the Embassy.

Q: How did the Australian government and people view China while you were there? As a market? As a political or demographic threat? After all, Australia is huge with a small population and lots of empty land.

LYON: Canberra's main regional concern in the late 1990s was with Indonesia, also a huge country with a large population, predominantly Muslim, dwarfing Australia's, and much closer to home. As I've mentioned before, it was a tense relationship when I got to Australia in 1999 due to Canberra's decision to intervene and help East Timor gain its independence. Indonesia responded, in part, by reducing its efforts to stop alien smuggling, mostly boat people from the Middle East who were transiting Indonesian waters, and sometimes ports, while trying to seek asylum in Australia. I found Australians acutely conscious of this large Muslim archipelagic country immediately to their north, though they weren't exactly sure what to do about it when relations turned sour. I don't think they saw Indonesia or Indonesians as an immediate threat, more like a potential one especially if Muslim extremists gained a foothold in Indonesia or became able to influence government policy.

The Australians had a very pragmatic view towards China. My sense was that it was a realization that Australia was in the Asia-Pacific and had to deal with China's growing influence and political clout combined with pure naked greed at the business and export opportunities China offered. I was at a big business dinner in Melbourne when the news came in that Beijing had won the 2008 Olympics, besting Paris. There was jubilation in the room and I remember playfully asking the CEO of Australia's semi-government/semi-private telecommunications company, Telstra, "What, you didn't think you'd have had a chance to land major contracts in Paris?" He just laughed, already thinking of rewiring Beijing.

I don't think China had yet surpassed the US as a trading partner for Australia when I was there, but it was certainly threatening to do so. China seemed to be buying just about everything Australia could grow or dig out of the ground and was becoming a major source of investment in Australia's burgeoning natural gas developments. There was some discussion in academic and national security circles about whether, and to what

degree, China might pose a future risk to Australia, but my sense when I was there was that most Australians saw China as more of an opportunity than threat.

This contributed to what I considered one of Australians' few moral lapses – generally I found them to be a compassionate and caring people. But I remember being irritated when I would get the sense that Australians, business people in particular, would almost happily throw Taiwan under the bus if this would advance their business interests on the mainland. (I need to note that this did not seem to extend very far within the Australian government, at least in the late 1990s.) I responded to this by working into my foreign policy speeches the American commitment to an Asian-Pacific island nation -- democratic, capitalist and western oriented – with a much larger power looming over them. Aussies would assume I was talking about them and then usually became very unsettled when I said it was Taiwan. My point was simply that they weren't giving another thriving democracy with an open economy the same kind of support they expected from the U.S.

Q: Given what you are saying about Australian indifference to Taiwan, why did Canberra decide to intervene in East Timor?

LYON: Some of it was proximity, East Timor is just a few hundred miles north of Australia in their immediate front yard as you might say. But much of it had to do with the simple fact that Australians felt the Indonesians had been mistreating the Catholic Timorese since seizing the former Portuguese colony in the 1970s. The generals in Jakarta, who had significant economic interests in East Timor, were cracking down on the region's growing pro-independence movement and I think the latter captured the Australian press and public's imagination as the little guy fighting the bully. The presence of large natural gas fields between East Timor and Australia also figured in the government's thinking, though I don't know to what degree.

Q: What about relations with Great Britain?

LYON: The UK may have ceased being Australia's primary security guarantor during WWII, but it was still front and center when it came to the Australian psyche, from cricket to rugby to tea to the fact that Queen Elizabeth II of Britain is Queen Elizabeth I of Australia, whose picture is on Australian currency and whose portrait is everywhere. The Queen visited when I was in Australia and drew enormous crowds wherever she went. I remember one of the high points of my time there was going up to one of the regional cities where I was asked to sign the official guest book only to find that I was signing directly across from this enormous "Elizabeth R", the R standing for Regina. I was sorely tempted to sign an equally large "David L", but decided it would be too easy to tear out my page so contented myself with signing my name more legibly than I normally did.

With the huge waves of non-British migration since WWII, though, the ties are starting to weaken. Enough pressure built up in favor of becoming a republic, for example, that PM Howard felt obliged to schedule a national referendum on keeping the Monarchy. Skip

Gnehm was Ambassador then and he just loved it, essentially telling us, “This is the most fun I have ever had. We have absolutely no interest in it other than watching the Australians go crazy”, which they certainly did with dueling newspapers and every major figure weighing in forcefully. Retaining the Monarchy won every state, Victoria was the closest with a margin of only 1%, though this had a lot to do with how Howard, an ardent Monarchist, drafted the referendum presenting a single Republican governance model which drew a great deal of criticism, rather than allowing a simple “yes – no” vote on keeping the Queen.

With over 5% of Australians being Asian, and with significant numbers of Italians, Greeks, Turks, and Middle Easterners, I think there will likely be another referendum in perhaps a decade and that this one will lead to Australia becoming a Republic though one retaining many close ties to the UK.

Let me close with a final story – do you remember the Mel Gibson movie “The Patriot”?

Q: Yeah.

LYON: It was very anti-English as Mel Gibson, an Australian by birth, of course, rallies a South Carolina militia against the depredations of English dragoons. The Australian American Association had an advanced screening at one of Melbourne’s historical theaters with something like 2,000 people in attendance. When I was introduced before the show, everyone clapped, but when my guest, the British Consul General, was introduced, nearly everyone booed.

Q: Ouch!

LYON: It was all good natured fun, more for me though than for my British friend

Q: How did Tasmania fit into the situation at that time?

LYON: We had some big American companies investing in Tasmania – Duke Energy was building a two-way power transmission cable between the island and the mainland so that Tasmania could export power when its dams were full and import it when they weren’t – but my main involvement there was with Navy ship visits. Conventional ships could pull in anywhere they could fit, but our nuclear carriers were not allowed in to Melbourne or Sydney, so their Australian port calls, highly sought after by crews, especially after long deployments in the Middle East after 9/11, were limited to Perth/Fremantle in the west and Hobart.

What made this interesting was that Tasmania was the greenest of Australia’s six states with many of its politicians opposed to any form of nuclear power, especially on warships. But they were trumped by the sheer economics of having thousands of liberty-starved American sailors in town for two or three days. One time I accompanied the Australian Foreign Minister on a flight out to the USS Abe Lincoln after which we slept on board before sailing into Hobart where we were met by both a welcoming committee

and several dozen sailboats protesting our visit. The commanding Admiral hosted a reception for city leaders where the city's Lord Mayor apologized to him for not having been part of the welcoming committee as he had been captaining one of the protest boats.

Q: That reminds me of when I was consul general in Naples when the mayor who was a communist kept asking if we could we get more ships to visit.

LYON: Exactly, and I am sure for all the same reasons.

Q: You talked about WWII changing Australia's security focus from the UK to the US. Was that celebrated in any way?

LYON: I got to Australia in the late summer of 1999 and almost immediately began receiving invitation to attend or speak at Coral Sea dinners for the next May. I knew a fair amount about the battle, the first time we had stopped a Japanese naval thrust, except for the fact that the Coral Sea was just off the coast of Queensland. We had seen the Japanese fleet's move as just a part of the overall Japanese advance – the Australians had seen it aimed directly at them and have never forgotten the battle or the sacrifices made by the US Navy or the loss of hundreds of American sailors. These dinners were a moving testament to the ties between the US and Australia and I made every effort to get to as many as I could each year.

Q: Did you get any big visits, presidents, vice presidents?

LYON: Canberra and Sydney got many more USG-related visits, but Melbourne drew its fair share of international meetings and private visitors. We had the World Economic Forum one year and it drew hundreds of high level participants as well as thousands of anti-globalization demonstrators. There was an elaborate cat & mouse game between the police and demonstrators coming out on top more times than not, including when they were able to stop a river boat trying to evade street blockades and pelted its passengers, including our Ambassador, with packs of yoghurt and rotten eggs. High-ranking private VIPs included ex-President Clinton on several occasions, Bill Gates, and a number of corporate CEOs. But visits were not a major part of our workload.

Q: How about the universities? Were they leftist or anti-American?

LYON: The only one that I can recall having a really leftist faculty was Australian National University in Canberra, which I worked with only occasionally.

But this might be a good time to mention that the entire Australian political spectrum is to the left of ours. So Howard was considered a strong conservative in Australia, but to me he would have been a very moderate Republican in the US. Taking this into account, most of the universities and their faculty were well to our left, but at the same time, like the Labor Party, few questioned the value of the US-Australian security relationship. They might criticize our domestic and foreign priorities or policies, but not our pre-eminent role in the world or the Asia-Pacific. We did a lot of work with the universities

and their students and while we would receive criticism we rarely, if ever encountered hostility.

As for university administrators, they were focused on attracting international students, which they saw as a way of compensating for falling levels of government financial support. We had thousands of Americans studying in Australia, most on junior year abroad type programs. The University of Melbourne, one of the top schools in the country and where both of my kids studied, was in the process of moving from a British style institution and curriculum to more of an American one and was one of the first to start recruiting large numbers of overseas, particularly Chinese, students.

Q: How was New Zealand viewed in Australia?

LYON: The Australian constitution actually includes provisions for New Zealand to join Australia as a state, the two countries and their peoples clearly have a very strong relationship, their sports teams are unmatched rivals, and there is virtually unfettered movement between them[. At the same time, I found that many Australians looked down on New Zealanders for taking advantage of Australian job opportunities and liberal welfare system. Melbourne in particular was home to tens of thousands of expat Kiwis at all levels of society, many of them with talents and ambitions that exceeded what New Zealand could offer. At the other end of the economic scale, there was a huge hullabaloo shortly after we arrived when Australia announced that New Zealanders could not apply for welfare benefits until they had lived in Australia for at least six months. As for new Zealanders, I found that many looked down on Australians for being too American and too capitalistic.

Australia was clearly unhappy with New Zealand's decreasing security posture which they felt was putting too much of a burden on them. New Zealand abolished its combat aircraft wing when we were in Melbourne and backed out of a joint effort to develop and build a new class of frigates. From Wellington's perspective, they are a long way from potential enemies, but as far as Canberra is concerned the Kiwis are simply devolving the responsibility of their security to the Australian military – and ours, of course.

Q: My granddaughter is going to spend a semester at one of the universities in New Zealand. God know why but...

LYON: Oh she will love it. It is a phenomenally varied and beautiful country and the people can be quite friendly.

Q: How about you and your wife, how did you find social life in Melbourne?

LYON: I don't think we have ever enjoyed the social aspects of my job more than in Melbourne. It is a huge prosperous city with an international bent and only a moderately sized consular corps of which the American Consulate General was a clear number one, my license plate, for example, was CC-001, approached only by the Brits, who were CC-002. We were welcomed into virtually all circles and government, business and social

leaders were always very approachable. Our next door neighbor, Ron Walker, was Treasurer of John Howard's Liberal Party. The first year we were there, we received an invitation for a very early Christmas party. My wife, who had a conflict, decided not to attend and I didn't push her as we both figured that it was so early that it was just for neighbors. I walked in and ran into the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, virtually the entire Cabinet and leading local politicians. Outside of work, Melbourne was just an incredible place to live. Its restaurants were outstanding, the city is the events capital of Australia with comedy festivals, food festivals, fashion festivals. The Australian Open is there, the big golf tournaments are there. The Australian Rules Football season is a huge cycle of its own. So you are very much part of all that, all the while engaging with Australians who are a sociable, wonderful and friendly people.

Q: Your kids went to school there?

LYON: They finished secondary school at Melbourne's Wesley College and then went on to the University of Melbourne which I think was the only university in Australia to make the top 100 of world universities. They got a very good education at both places and my wife and I were delighted that their university tuition was only \$7500 a year for each. They both stayed in Australia after graduating and now have dual citizenship. My daughter, Jo, is married to an Aussie who happened to have been one of my son's friends in Beijing, while my son, Nathan is teaching post-secondary school. It's hard having them so far away, though this does give us the excuse of visiting often.

Q: Well then you left Melbourne in 2002.

LYON: Right.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop. Where did you go?

LYON: I was nominated as ambassador to Fiji, Nauru, and Tuvalu. I left Melbourne in mid-June 2002 to go back and get ready for my Senate confirmation hearings.

Q: OK, well we will pick it up then.

LYON: All right.

LYON: Good morning Stu.

Q: Today is June 27, 2011, David, a rather cool day for late spring, sort of cloudy with some sprinkles which is June weather I will take any time.

LYON: We're in what is called the June gloom here with daytime temperatures in the high 50s and lots of fog.

Q: Let's see, when did you leave Melbourne?

LYON: We left in June of 2002.

Q: Do you know any of the work that went around your appointment as ambassador After all, white male consular cone ambassadors were few and far between in our generation.

LYON: Very true, I want to say Mike Marine was the only one of my peers to get a Mission though I am sure I am forgetting someone. I had gone through the ambassadorial chase already during my Beijing tour and Melbourne was pretty much a consolation prize for not getting a mission. I made the short list for a number of countries including Kenya. In fact I had just hit the send button on an e-mail expressing interest in Nairobi when we got the news the embassy had been blown up. During the early part of the 2002 assignments cycle, I was penciled in to go into the Pentagon as the foreign policy advisor for one of the joint chiefs as I had again missed on available COM jobs and my sense was that the system figured Melbourne had been a suitable reward for Beijing. Then my former boss in Australia, Mike Owens, tipped me off that the person initially chosen for Fiji hadn't made it through the Senate confirmation process and recommended I go for it.

Q: Do you know what the problem was?

LYON: No, just that his name was withdrawn and that he continued within the Foreign Service. This time around, all of the stars aligned themselves in my favor. Mary Ryan was still at the height of her powers as Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, Ruth Davis, her deputy when I was in Beijing, was Director General, and Maura Harty, another consular officer, was Executive Secretary. And all of them went to bat for me. I ended up being lined up against two political officers and basically the people backing me told their peers, "OK, here is everything our guy has accomplished, show me what the other guys have done." So I got the nod for Fiji.

Q: In the first place you were there from when to when?

LYON: I think I found out I had gotten the job in April of 2002 and left post in mid-June on the hope of having my hearing before the August Senate recess. We actually left only a few hours after attending a major American community charity ball hosted by my wife's organization, The American Women's Auxiliary of the Royal Children's Hospital, where we were the co-guests of honor and I was the speaker – in the hopes of having a hearing in early July. However, "my" Senator was John Kerry who was busy putting his machine into place for his 2004 run for the presidency. He basically left four of us sitting in Washington twiddling our thumbs until mid-December. Relaxing, lots of time to prepare, able to take a full home leave in August, on per diem in DC, but stressful as we kept on having to change TDY apartments and we had not brought any fall, much less winter, clothes with us.

Q: So what did you do when you weren't on home leave?

LYON: I had a small cubicle in the Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Island Affairs division of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and the support of a very good

desk officer, Sherry Holiday, who made her files, library and contacts available to me. I was able to see anyone I wanted within the USG – AID, Treasury, the intel agencies, Commerce, etc., so I was able to read in quite a bit about the South Pacific. The problem, though, was that when you are an ambassador-select, you can't go outside the government as this would presume upon the prerogatives of the Senate which hadn't yet confirmed you in your position. This prevented me from calling on academics, other experts on the region or the ambassadors of the four countries I was heading to. I'd head down to my cubicle every morning, read up on cable traffic, attend USG meetings on the region, sit in on ad hoc promotion boards, support temporary task forces, spend time in the gym working out, and basically hope that Kerry would either schedule a hearing or delegate it to one of the other SFRC senators. No luck on the latter, though, as one of my colleagues was heading for Cambodia and Kerry, of course, had an interest in Indochina. For a while it looked like we would be stuck in DC over the Christmas recess, but Kerry finally scheduled the hearing for mid-December, just in time for us to be conformed before the holidays.

Q: Well how did the hearings go? Were there any problems?

LYON: It was a very interesting hearing to both watch and take part in. There were four of us: myself, career officers heading to Cambodia and Brunei, and a very controversial conservative congressional staffer nominated as the first U.S. Ambassador for East Timor. We expected Kerry to show great interest in Cambodia and to perhaps go after the East Timor nominee who had been a thorn in the side of congressional Democrats for years. I was actually told informally by one of Kerry's aides to expect only a few pro forma questions, presumably, I thought to give him time for Cambodia and, hopefully, since I didn't like the former congressional staffer or his politics, for East Timor. However, it didn't work out that way at all. Clearly a cross-partisan deal had been made behind the scenes, with Senator Hagel appearing only for the East Timor nominee who Kerry handled with kid gloves.

I was the fourth to read my prepared statement and was then surprised first to hear that Kerry was taking us in reverse order for his questions and second that he had a good fifteen minutes set aside for me. He then hit me with eight questions which were very good. They were drawn from conversations I had had with his staff, and related to such key issues such as the racial situation in Fiji and the monarchy and democracy in Tonga. It was all going well until he asked an environmental question having to do with the horrific impact that rising sea levels were having on Tuvalu, one of the lowest lying countries in the world. I had a brain glitch and instead of using the material provided by my desk officer, which I personally agreed with, I flipped back to the very bland response towards climate change that I had had to use while representing a Republican administration while in Melbourne. Senator Kerry then beat me up for several minutes on the administration's willful ignorance on climate change. I remember feeling stupid for making a mistake, bad because I agreed with Senator Kerry's position, and, for a moment, concerned when he momentarily started calling me "Mr. Lyon" instead of Ambassador-Select Lyon. He then apologized to "Ambassador-Select Lyon", noting he

understood career officers hands were often tied while representing administration policies, before moving on to Brunei.

Q: What sort of an embassy did we have in Suva?

LYON: For a regional embassy covering four countries, later five with the addition of Kiribati, it was fairly small having dropped in size after the end of the Cold War losing several State positions, a small USAID office, some intel capability and a Peace Corps program. We were pretty heavily stretched with only myself, the DCM, one reporting officer, three consular officers, two management officers, a Regional Security Officer, and one IT officer, plus a very capable Office Management Specialist, Rosmary Patterson, who I had brought with me from Melbourne. Our reporting officer handled political, economic, public affairs and commercial duties, assisted a few hours a week by one or both of our consular section junior officers. Our only non-State elements were Peace Corps programs in Fiji, which was reestablished in 2003, Tonga and Kiribati and a one-officer, two-NCO Defense Attaché office handling not only our five countries, but also Papua New Guinea and the three overseas French departments, Tahiti, New Caledonia and Wallis & Futuna. Our Regional Security Officer and Consular Section were also responsible for covering the three French departments with the incumbents also accredited to France. I spent much of my time trying to establish badly needed positions and, with the help of other embassies in the Pacific, was finally able to get the Department to approve regional positions covering Oceans, Environment & Science issues as well as Public Diplomacy, though neither was filled before I left post.

Q: How much attention did you get from the Department? Many visits from the Bureau of East Asian Affairs or other offices?

LYON: Not a lot, and frankly one of the things I enjoyed most about my job was that I was usually left alone to do it. We certainly got help from the desk and bureau when we needed it, but for the most part we were pretty much on our own, what with the wars in the Middle East taking up so much attention. We had two visits from different deputy assistant secretaries, the second, by an Armitage protégé, Randy Schriver, went a long way in helping us get our regional OES and Public Diplomacy positions approved, as well as several visits by our two desk officers.

Q: Well what were your consular officers doing?

LYON: Our actual statistical workload didn't justify three positions, but with a huge district, some 12 million square miles, five countries and three French departments, we had a lot to do. We were assisted by a consular agent in Tahiti, but with the need for at least semi-annual consular visits to Tonga, which had a small expat American community, some tourism and several thousand Tongan-Americans born in the US to Tongan parents, and the need to be ready to fly off anywhere in the district due to consular emergencies, there were times when we were scrambling. But when we were fully staffed facing only routine work, I was able to have one of the vice consuls take on the commercial portfolio with the other helping out on Public Diplomacy Issues. The two

junior officer slots were good training positions, lots of varied responsibilities as well as the chance to be the lead for one of our smaller countries.

Q: What about American sailors, I am thinking about Ma and Pa in their sailing boat with three kids sailing around the world or something. Any shipwrecks? Piracy?

LYON: Savusavu on Fiji's second island of Vanua Levu and Vava'u in Tonga are major sailing destinations and layover ports during non-sailing seasons and bad weather with scores of boats at anchor in both places at any time during the year. I am sure my consular section got involved with them, but nothing came to my attention that I can remember in terms of anything more than routine consular assistance. Our consular agent in Tahiti was also available to provide consular assistance to boaters, but again I can't remember anything out of the ordinary.

Q: How about ship visits, was there much DOD interest in your district?

LYON: We only had a few to Fiji, one, I think, to Tonga, and one to Kiribati for the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of Tarawa. They were well received, but after 9/11 the Navy was pretty busy and I think more focused on port visits for their sailors' sakes rather than flying the flag in third world countries. After 9/11, we had to fight to hang on to our single-officer Defense Attaché office. The Marines actually pulled their attaché position in 2003 with only a few months' notice. I understood why the Marines were doing this, they were busy in the Middle East, but I was concerned about a total lack of intel coverage for such a huge area of the world. Fortunately, DIA and the Army agreed with me and after only a short gap our position was filled by a very capable Army lieutenant colonel. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq also led to an understandable reduction in other DOD activities in the Pacific, though we were still able to arrange for limited visits by Seabee construction teams and the occasional military training teams.

Q: Were there any district –wide issues you would like to talk about before we move on to discussing individual countries?

LYON: I think one issue that merits some discussion related to the International Criminal Court, our decision not only not to join, but also to undermine the ICC by reaching what were called Article 98 agreements with as many countries as we could convince, cajole or bully. We had had a major role in creating and shaping the ICC, but the Bush administration, neo-cons in general and many Republicans did not like the idea of international agreements that might curtail our freedom of action, much less have the authority to bring American officials before the Court for decisions that might have been contrary to international law, such as it was. It was my sense as well that with our actions in the Middle East, specifically the invasion of Iraq, many administration officials, foremost Dick Cheney, were worried that the ICC might act against them after they left government.

Article 98 was a provision under the ICC charter which allowed bilateral agreements between countries, signatory or not, not to comply with ICC subpoenas against each

other's nationals. Under Secretary John Bolton, not my favorite neo-con, had the lead within the Department with the goal of negotiating as many Article 98 agreements as possible, and with the authority to grant or withhold to individual countries Department resources as he saw fit. In this, he also had the backing of Congress which passed a law denying US military assistance to countries that did not comply, a law that had multiple waivers for allies and significant security partners which essentially took off the table NATO countries and countries actively involved in assisting us in the Middle East. This left smaller countries, such as the ones in our district, as prime targets.

Article 98 agreements presented me with perhaps my most significant moral dilemma under the Bush administration. I supported in principle the concept of multilateral institutions such as the ICC and did not like our having opted out of it after having had a major role in its creation. I did not put Article 98 agreements on a front burner and as a result was summoned to Under Secretary Bolton's office where he very nicely but very directly applied the screws for us to make this a top priority. I gave the issue a lot of thought, understood it was my job as a Foreign Service Officer and ambassador to carry out administration policy, and decided this was not an issue meriting a decision between complying and resigning. My discomfort over the issue remained, however, so when I assigned the task to my DCM, Hugh Neighbor, I told him that I would raise the issue with each government's prime minister or foreign minister, advising them of the military and assistance consequences of not reaching Article 98 agreements with us, but would leave the actual negotiations to him.

Hugh grabbed the issue with his usual focus and energy and within a few months we had agreements in place with all five of our countries. Fiji signed reluctantly, its Foreign Minister Tavola had been an early critic of the Iraq Invasion, mostly because failing to do so would have killed a nascent military assistance program we were building with them. Tonga, an early member of the Coalition of the Willing and a troop provider to coalition forces in Iraq, signed quickly, while Tuvalu and Kiribati basically signed on because we asked them to nicely. Hugh showed his real talents, though, with Nauru which was not opposed to an Article 98 agreement in principle, but which showed itself totally incapable of moving it through its bureaucracy and legislature. Hugh decamped to Nauru and spent a full week literally walking – and here I mean walking as taxis in Nauru were few and far between -- the agreement between various government offices, getting officials to sign off on them, taking it to the legislature, getting them to pass it, and then accompanied a clerk carrying the agreement to the President's office for him to sign.

Going five for five when the Department was anxiously focusing on the number of agreements reached, as a means of putting pressure on other countries, got us some appreciation I didn't really want. An award was proposed for me, but I deflected it to Hugh who justifiably received a Superior Honor Award for his efforts.

Q: OK, thanks for that overview, why don't we move around your district country by country focusing first on Fiji and then moving on to your non-resident countries. I would assume that in addition to being your regional embassy's home base was also your most important account.

LYON: Correct. Far and away the largest and most diverse of the Pacific Island economies, active in international organizations and home to a number of regional organizations, Fiji pretty much set the tone of the entire region. It was made clear to me in my consultations, that one reason the Department was so concerned about Fiji was that its coup culture and ethnic divisions might spill over into other countries.

Q: Let's lead off with the basics, its geography, its people, a bit about its history.

LYON: Fiji is located over 1,000 miles to the northeast of New Zealand and consists of some 300-plus islands, roughly half of which are inhabited. Most of its roughly 850,000 population live on the adjoining large islands of Viti Levu, where Suva is located, and Vanua Levu. With the exception of two small areas of Polynesian stock, its people are Melanesian, probably having settled the islands from Papua New Guinea over three thousand years ago, but with a mixed Melanesian and Polynesian cultural heritage due to trade and warfare with countries such as Tonga. Fiji was discovered by a Dutch explorer in the mid-17th century and was taken into the British Empire in 1874 before receiving its independence in 1970. During its century of colonialism, it adopted many British traits, among them a parliamentary system, but the Empire's most significant decision vis-à-vis Fiji was the importation of tens of thousands of Indian agricultural workers to farm enormous sugar cane plantations and work its sugar mills. We'll come back repeatedly, I am sure, to the problems caused by the resulting racial mix.

Q: Was there very much contact between the tribal Fiji you have described and Americans?

LYON: American whaling ships were in the South Pacific in the early 19th century, followed by merchants and missionaries. The first official exploration voyage, the Wilkes Expedition, visited Fiji in the 1840s and prepared voluminous notes on the region. In the 1850s, there was a prolonged commercial dispute which actually let me claim only somewhat spurious credit for the US having had a major influence in pushing Fiji into the British Empire, and, by extension, to the formation of modern Fiji.

Q: Oh, how so?

LYON: In the mid-1850s, the warehouse of the American commercial consul in Fiji, a trader and businessman, burned down and his neighbors looted his wares on the not-unreasonable logic that if they didn't take it, it all would be burned. The consul used his influence in Washington to have a bill presented to Fiji's paramount chief, Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau. An American warship stopped at Fiji, invited the chief on board for lunch, presented him with a bill and then clapped him in chains when he refused to pay, partly on the not unreasonable grounds that he didn't have a treasury. Threatened with being taken back to Boston for trial, he signed a promissory note for the debt and was released. He then forgot about the entire thing, the US Civil War intervened, but in the late 1860s, another frigate arrived demanding full payment plus interest. When he declined the captain's invitation to lunch, the ship actually bombarded the hills above his

palace before departing with the threat that it would be back. Cakobau then petitioned Queen Victoria for admission to the British Empire. When we returned, the Union Jack was flying in Suva and we were told to take a hike – though London did eventually settle on a small payment to the commercial consul.

Q: So Fiji wasn't so much conquered by the British Empire as applied for admission?

LYON: That's a good way of putting it. I think this is one reason the Fijians have a fairly positive view of their colonial experience. They certainly blame the Brits for a number of things – not least the importation of Indian farm laborers and a policy of dealing with the Indians through trade unions while essentially protecting, and not preparing, the Fijians from modern life and politics, but they also credit the Brits for helping them transform themselves from warlike cannibals to devout Methodists and Catholics. The Royal Family holds a special place in Fiji – even though it has been a Republic for decades, the Queen's portrait is on the wall of every official and graces their currency, and when Prince Charles, who returned King Cakobau's ceremonial war club to Suva when granting Fiji its independence in 1970, visited while we were there, there were enthusiastic ceremonies for him throughout the country.

Q: So you met the Prince of Wales? What was he like?

LYON: You could tell he worked large rooms of officials and VIPs for a living, devoting his full attention to the guests he was speaking with. My wife and I had an interesting five minutes with him as he worked a large and friendly crowd and we liked him. His prickliness with the press was obvious, though, as when his host tried to steer him over to a small group of Fijian journalists, as tame a group as you'll find, he acted as if he was going over to them, then spun slowly on his heel and snubbed them as only a royal can. They were crestfallen, he seemed diminished.

Q: OK, back to Fiji. If I heard you right, you are saying that the British importation of Indian sugar cane laborers was the genesis for the racial problems that have plagued Fiji's recent history? Can you tell us why they did it and how it has played out since.

LYON: Even before Fiji joined the Empire, European and American traders had been trying to figure out ways to take advantage of its rich resources. An effort to grow cotton succeeded during the US Civil War, but then failed when the much more efficient American South resumed exports. After annexation in 1870, British investors and the royal governor hit upon sugar cane given the many similarities between Fiji's soil and climate and those of sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean. Early efforts foundered, though, as while Fijian chiefs were willing to lease land for plantations, their people weren't terribly enthusiastic about the type and amount of labor required. Since the Brits were already familiar with the work and discipline of Indian farm workers, not only in India but also throughout the Empire, it was natural for them to look to bringing them to Fiji as well.

Between the 1880s and early 20th century, some 20,000 low-agricultural caste Indian farmers were brought to Fiji, mostly, but not entirely, male. Some returned to India after their labor contracts expired, but, with plenty of work to do, most stayed on in Fiji. They were quick to unionize, first against the Fiji Sugar Corporation for better wages and working conditions, but eventually against the colonial government, both because it supported the FSC and because it sought to deny the Indians basic political rights. Even though the Indians were badly splintered among themselves – mostly Hindu, some Muslims, coming from all over India, from different castes and speaking different languages – they learned early on the necessity of organizing politically to defend their interests. This meant that when Fiji became independent, the native Fijian chiefs, who had been insulated from many of the realities of the modern world by a paternalistic British empire, were unprepared to deal with an organized and sophisticated labor party and immediately felt threatened by people they had previously ignored.

Another element of the Indo-Fijian population consisted of later migrants, many of them Gujarati businessmen and merchants. Thanks to small amounts of capital, their business acumen and tremendous hard work, they came to dominate Fiji's commerce and light industries. Taking advantage of the Pacific Islander's social and financial obligations to less well-off kinfolk, which can make it next to impossible to accumulate savings or even keep an inventory, Gujaratis also became small shopkeepers and money lenders throughout the country, needed by the local villagers but often resented. Their children were quick to take advantage of educational opportunities and moved into the professions, coming to dominate fields such as medicine and business.

Q: I ran into this during a short stay in the Federated States of Micronesia. Their culture also made it next to impossible to be a shopkeeper as you were obligated to support your extended family .

LYON: There is a Fijian term for it, “kerikeri”, which means that you can go to a family member of close neighbor and literally carry off what he has that you need. There are, of course, social controls on this, you can't rob him or take what his family needs for survival, but if he has excess, you are entitled to it. The best example I remember hearing was of a Fijian who had just set up a small bar and restaurant, received his first shipments of beer, and then watched helplessly as a good part of his brand-new inventory was carried away by a brother-in-law for his wedding. Communal spirit, you bet, conducive to commerce, absolutely not.

So, at independence Fiji was split along economic class lines as well as racially. Indians dominated sugar production, commerce, manufacturing and the more technical and scientific fields, while Fijians controlled the Army and civil service and held their own in other professions such as the law. Indian leaders were chosen by their communities, Fijian leaders were traditional chiefs, many well educated, but not used to the give and take of a democratic system and certainly not used to working with one another.

Making the situation even more combustible was that in the years before independence, the number of Indo-Fijians actually surpassed the ethnic Fijian population, reaching 49%

to 46% in the 1966 census, with the other 5% being Europeans, Asians and people of mixed ancestry.

Q: I had never heard that, at least in the Pacific though I think there are Caribbean countries where Indians make up the majority of the population, or at least are the largest minority.

LYON: It was entirely due to a higher birth rate in the Indo-Fijian community, other than wealthier families sending back to India for brides, there was no additional migration. It turned out to be a temporary phenomena as one result of Fiji's coup culture has been that Indians have been emigrating for several decades now. I believe Indo-Fijians are now down to something like 38% of the total population, still a sizeable number, but less of a demographic threat.

Q: This must have an effect on the economy as in Uganda when Idi Amin got rid of the Indians. They were the shop keepers. They were the engine that made the place run.

LYON: Nothing nearly so dramatic in Fiji as the Indians weren't driven out in mass as in Uganda, but rather left through individual emigration. This is not to say that it hasn't had an effect on the economy and quality of life. The people who are leaving are mostly well-educated and are leaving with badly-needed skills in such areas as medicine, accountancy, architecture and academics with their departures leaving Fiji a poorer place. Many Fijian academic degrees and professional certificates are accepted throughout the Commonwealth making it relatively easy for the more skilled Indians and their families to leave. I'll give you one example. I was told on arriving in Fiji by our regional medical officer in Canberra that embassy personnel needing non-emergency dental work should get this done overseas as he was not happy with the quality or hygiene of local practices. I decided to do this while on a trip to New Zealand and ran across two entire blocks of Indo-Fijian dentists who had met New Zealand's stringent certification requirements. Bringing this closer to home, the percentage of Fijian citizens applying for the US visa lottery was also one of the highest in the world.

Q: OK, but when you were there, the two communities were still of roughly equal size, correct?

LYON: Not only that, but I need to also mention that there was very little social interaction between the two communities. I don't know if you have been up the Amazon in Brazil, but the situation in Fiji reminded me of the joining of the Amazon and Negro rivers near Manaus almost 1000 miles from the Atlantic. The two rivers are different colors, temperatures and densities, are moving at different speeds, and they flow side by side, one half black, the other brown, for miles before they start to meld.

Fiji is like that except that the two communities haven't started to meld. Fijians are deeply communal, Indians are individually ambitious. Fijians play rugby, Indians play cricket. Fijians are deeply Christian, Indians are Hindu and Muslim. When I'd had a few beers I'd add that Indians are mostly vegetarians while Fijians used to be avid cannibals.

They didn't dislike each other as individuals – gangs didn't prey on people of other races found in their areas – they just didn't interact if they didn't have to. The entire time I was there, I met three interracial married couples, one spouse Fijian, the other Indian.

Q: Three, did you say three?

LYON: Three, in a country of almost a million people, with hundreds of thousands of each race, three. I remember them all distinctly. One was a senior academic at the University of the South Pacific, an Indo-Fijian married to a Fijian, two of our closest friends were a minor Fijian chief married to an Indian human rights activist, and, by great coincidence, the niece of my Indo-Fijian cook was married to the cousin of my Fijian driver. Members of both races will marry whites, or Chinese, but not each other, they just don't interact socially.

One contributing factor may be that unlike many of the Indian descendants of migrant workers to the Caribbean, who have become somewhat Caribbean themselves, Indo-Fijians pride themselves for remaining Indian. They speak Hindi among themselves, they continue to wear saris and other traditional Indian dress, they look back to India as something more immediate than just the mother country, all too often they favor hiring Indians over ethnic Fijians, even for menial and support positions. There is a funny story about Prince Phillip at a Commonwealth event for which the Queen had requested delegations dress in their national costumes. The prince went over to a group of Indo-Fijians dressed as if they were from India and feigned great surprise when he learned they were actually from Fiji, pressing them for why they didn't dress as if they were from the South Pacific.

Q: Could you spend a few minutes talking about Fiji's post-colonial history, which I think has been dominated by a coup culture.

LYON: The British were very aware of the fact that they were handing a potential powder keg over to traditional leaders they had failed to prepare for independence and their sympathies were very much with the ethnic Fijians over the combative Indo-Fijian labor movement with which they had battled for decades. The 1970 constitution established race-based electoral rolls – Fijians voting only for Fijian candidates, the same for the Indo-Fijian, European and mixed-race electorates – with equal number of seats in the House of Representatives for the two major races. However, the same constitution designated the Great Council of Chiefs, by definition all ethnic Fijians, as a Senate, modeled not on the US Senate, but on the British House of Lords. It also specified that the Prime Minister and ceremonial President must be indigenous Fijians.

This worked, or rather kept the peace, until the elections of 1987, when the Indian-dominated Fiji Labour Party formed an coalition with several secondary Fijian parties which then won a majority of seats in Parliament. The Prime Minister was Fijian, but a slight majority of his cabinet were Indo-Fijians which was unacceptable to many high chiefs and other Fijian leaders. A young Army officer named Sitiveni "Steve" Rabuka led

two closely-linked coups and established a staunchly Fijian nationalist military dictatorship which formalized Fijian political control in the 1990 constitution.

The Rabuka government was wildly popular among ethnic Fijians, but was condemned internationally. Fiji was suspended from the British Commonwealth while the Labor governments in Australia and New Zealand instituted punishing economic sanction, curtailing tourism and aid and refusing to allow the transshipment of non-essential goods.

I hope I'm not going into too much detail here...

Q: Not at all. This is exactly what I would like you to do as few of our readers will have a solid grasp of Fijian politics and history. It's not as if we are talking Canada here.

LYON: To Rabuka's credit, he not only took steps to end Fiji's isolation, he seemed to understand that what he had done simply wasn't good for the country. Facilitated by one of my predecessors, Ambassador Don Gevirtz, a Clinton political appointee, Rabuka met with the more main-stream of the Indo-Fijian leaders, J. Ram Reddy, and, with the help of a New Zealand academic, worked out the structure for a new constitution with a unique, though in my mind unworkable, power-sharing dynamic. Their intention was for the moderate middle to win elections against the nationalist Fijian parties and the Indo-Fijian union dominated Labour Party. Under the constitution, the leader with the most seats in the lower house of Parliament would be prime minister, but his cabinet selections would go proportionately to any party winning more than 10% of the vote.

It might have worked with two party leaders dedicated to making it work, but in the 1999 elections, both Rabuka and Reddy were thoroughly repudiated and their parties almost swept out of Parliament. Mahendra Chaudhry, a talented but highly polarizing union leader, won a majority in Parliament with his Fiji Labour Party. Chaudhry made an effort to appease ethnic Fijian sentiment, the majority of his Cabinet was Fijian and he followed the constitution in appointing opposition party ministers, but his government was deeply unpopular in Fijian nationalist circles.

Chaudhry is generally given credit for having been an effective prime minister, particularly with regard to the economy, but in May 1999 a shadowy group of former special forces soldiers led by a mixed-race businessman by the name of George Speight seized Parliament and held Chaudhry, his cabinet and a number of parliamentarians hostage for nearly two months, demanding a Fijian nationalist government. The military commander, Navy Commodore Frank Bainimarama, brokered a settlement and then arrested Speight and his followers when they were found with automatic weapons in violation of the truce agreement. Bainimarama instituted a military government in July of 1999 while setting into motion plans for a follow-on election, I think two years into the future.

Q: I don't believe you had arrived at post yet so who was our ambassador at this time?

LYON: Wouldn't you have it, but our ambassador to a racially polarized country with a strong Indian population was none other than our first ever Muslim-American ambassador, Osman Siddique, a Bangladeshi-American. He had been appointed by President Clinton after Prime Minister Rabuka had declined agrément for Clinton's first nominee, James Hormel, who would have been our first openly gay chief of mission. Fiji's 19th century Methodists, Hindus and Muslims were unified in opposing a homosexual ambassador, but I don't think Rabuka felt he could go against Clinton in denying two nominees in a row.

I had met Ambassador Siddique in Washington and again at PACOM in Honolulu and liked him. He had considerable international business experience and was smart and capable. He was into the final months of his first year when Parliament was seized. He showed considerable courage when he learned that one of the embassy's junior officers, a young woman who had just arrived at post, was caught at her home in a cross-fire between rebels and government troops. He loaded up his lightly armored sedan, called the Yank Tank, with every American flag he had, and then, despite resembling the people the coup was being staged against, drove through both Army and rebel lines to rescue her.

Because of the unsettled nature of the situation in Fiji, Osman's resignation was not accepted immediately by the new Bush administration, but when things normalized somewhat he left post in the spring of 2001. However, as his original replacement had not made it through the Senate confirmation process, and I would not make it to post until January 2003, the embassy was led by two charge d'affaires for over 18 months.

Q: That, the coup, not the embassy leadership, sounds awfully traumatic. How long did the military government stay in office?

LYON: Bainimarama followed through on his promise of elections, actually moving up the date on orders from Fiji's High Court, and the polls were held in September 2001, at which time I was in Washington twiddling my thumbs waiting for John Kerry to hold a confirmation hearing.

The elections were won by a Fijian nationalist party led by the interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, a banker, which, lacking an absolute majority, then formed a coalition government with the hardline Fijian nationalist party led by none other than the coup leader, the imprisoned George Speight. Chaudhry and the Fiji Labour Party won far and away the second largest number of seats, and sought to join the cabinet as called for by the constitution. As could be expected, the constitution's power-sharing provisions proved unworkable when confronted by two antagonistic parties with nearly equal representation. Chaudhry demanded 40% of cabinet posts for the FLP, including several major ones. Qarase rejected this out of hand, offered a few token positions, like the Minister of Libraries, and formed his government without any Labour Party ministers. The power sharing requirement went into the courts, where it moved slowly through the system until being upheld by the Supreme Court in 2004. I'm jumping ahead of myself here to stay on topic, but when Qarase moved to comply with the court ruling, he

steadfastly refused to offer Chaudhry a portfolio, leading the FLP to announce it would not join the government, but would move formally into active opposition.

Q: What kind of role did the international community have in responding to the coup and its aftermath?

LYON: While I am sure we weighed in frequently, not having an ambassador at post after Osman left and not having very much in terms of aid to withhold – Peace Corps was not reestablished until I got there and our only assistance program was a regional disaster preparedness course with our funding provided through the Asia Foundation – our influence was limited. As in 1987, it was the Commonwealth, Canberra and Wellington who stepped to the plate threatening to isolate Fiji and reduce development assistance. Once Bainimarama’s interim government was established, there was less talk of this though I am sure he knew that any failure to move back to democracy would lead to negative consequences.

Q: What about India, was there much evident concern with supporting the Indian Diaspora?

LYON: It might be different now given India’s increased assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, but when I was there India kept a very low profile in Fiji. It had a small high commission and a low-key high commissioner and seemed to do very little, overtly at least, to support the Indo-Fijian community. My sense is that Indo-Fijians saw themselves as more Indian while the Indians saw them as Indo-Fijian.

Q: So what did you find when you finally arrived at post, I think you said in early 2003?

LYON: I arrived in January 2003 and presented my credentials immediately, I think the government saw my delay as being due to American displeasure rather than to the Senate not doing its job. With the power-sharing provision under judicial review, superficially Fiji appeared totally normal. I had excellent access to the Prime Minister and anyone in the government I was interested in meeting. I found Qarase to be highly introverted, a good decent man, a Fijian nationalist, but one who was generally more focused on giving his fellow ethnic Fijians a helping hand up than in knocking the Indo-Fijian community down. I never succeeded in forging a close personal relationship with him, but found he would see me anytime I asked and would talk frankly with me about key issues. I had a closer relationship with Foreign Minister Kaliopate Tavola who I found well versed in international affairs and a warm friendly individual. As for the opposition, I made a point of calling on Mahendra Chaudhry and the FLP leadership almost immediately and of letting them know how distasteful I had found the 2000 coup that had removed them from office. They responded by inviting me to key party leadership meetings and sharing their hopes and aspirations for a multi-racial Fiji.

The domestic issue that dominated my time in Suva was the testy relationship between Prime Minister Qarase and the Army Commander, Navy Commodore Frank Bainimarama. The latter had a strong forceful personality as shown by the fact that

despite coming from Fiji's small and decidedly subservient Navy, he had risen to command the Army, the country's strongest and most respected institution, well and deservedly recognized internationally for taking part in UN and Sinai peacekeeping missions.

Bainimarama had earned my earlier respect for having ended the 2000 crisis, restoring stability, ending violence against Indo-Fijians, and then complying with the High Court order to move up the date for elections earlier than he had intended. He had returned to his barracks and as best I could tell when I first met him, seemed content to leave politics to civilians, focusing, with me at least, on rebuilding the US-Fijian military relationship, especially the training and equipment needed for peacekeeping deployments.

The problem was with Qarase's dependence on Speight's ultra-nationalist party in Parliament. It began lobbying almost immediately for the Prime Minister to start pardoning or otherwise releasing coup plotters and participants from prison. As a rule, he wasn't keen on doing this, but the pressure was unrelenting, with the constant threat of losing their support in a no-confidence motion, and he began to give ground. Several lesser figures were pardoned without incident, but when Speight's vice president was released on grounds of poor health, and then seen and photographed at an all-night celebration, Bainimarama began applying pressure of his own, boycotting certain government events or having jeeps of armed soldiers patrolling residential neighborhoods near the homes of senior ministers.

Q: Let me stop you for a second. Wasn't Bainimarama not only an ethnic Fijian, but also a chief? Why would he take on a nationalist Fijian government that was presumably putting indigenous Fijians first?

LYON: Three reasons I think. The first was that the coup plotters had tried to kill him not once but twice, the first time as he raced back to Suva after the coup, a road ambush, and the second time when a small group of active duty soldiers with rebel sympathies tried to kill him in his office – two years later he still hadn't repaired the line of bullet holes in the wall behind his desk. The second was that he honestly seems committed to a multi-racial Fiji. He filled key cabinet posts with Indo-Fijians when he was acting Prime Minister after the 2000 coup and, jumping ahead, later when he seized power and then was subsequently freely elected to office. The third was that he had no sympathy for Fiji's highest, or paramount chiefs, clearly seeing them as holding back the country's development, in large part due to their opposition to Indo-Fijians.

But it was the second that truly fueled Bainimarama's anger, even rage. When the topic of the coup plotters came up in my meetings with him, either one-on-one or in larger gatherings, you could literally see his stomach muscles clench, while his face, formidable and daunting on a good day, would darken into a scowl and he complained about the pardons and other efforts to free coup participants.

Qarase was extremely clumsy in his efforts to remove the threat posed by Bainimarama, no doubt hoping to replace him with a more nationalistic, and less assertive, military

commander. He promoted him to rear admiral in an effort to get him chosen for a UN peacekeeping job, then broke him back to commodore when the job went to someone else. He tried to block him from the virtually automatic second five-year term, only to back down when soldiers appeared outside his house and office and followed him as he moved around town. I used to liken Qarase to a bar room brawler who goads and goads an opponent, then runs chin first into his fist. As long as the military stayed loyal to its commander, Bainimarama was pretty much untouchable.

Q: Did Bainimarama ever speculate openly about overthrowing the government or was everything more implied?

LYON: One thing about Frank was that he almost always favored directness over subtlety. The first time I am aware of his having openly speculated about a coup was when he hosted a small traditional kava ceremony for the visiting UK defense attaché from Canberra, the only other guests were the three resident DATTs, including our own. Kava, a peppery soporific, can lend itself to wandering conversations and in this case Frank began sharing his presumably inner thoughts on carrying out a coup in the name of democracy and good governance, blaming the Qarase government for pardoning coup plotters and discriminating actively against Indo-Fijians.

Our attaché hotfooted back to the Embassy and reported the meeting to me and my DCM, Hugh Neighbor. We decided to invite the British, Australian and New Zealand high commissioners over the residence to discuss what, if anything, we should do. After considerable back and forth, we decided not to approach Bainimarama directly, he might then claim we had done so to give him our blessings, but to approach him through a former military commander, who was both highly respected and one of the few Fijians of Polynesian ancestry, who had been one of Frank's mentors as a mid-level officer.

Q: David, if I can interrupt, did this sound imminent or was it more simply something the Army commander was just thinking about? What did the Department think of your plan.

LYON: More the latter, though we were all struck by the casualness with which Frank mentioned it to the representatives of four countries who could be expected to oppose any form of military coup. We felt this reflected both his anger and frustration and the amount of thought he was giving the question. We also decided it was better to act right away, staying behind the scenes since we were hardly accusing him of a coup plot, than to wake up one morning and see troops on the street and the government ousted.

As for the Department, I will confess that I never even considered waiting to get its permission to act. I was motivated partly by the need I felt to move quickly, but mostly by the fact that I worked for Colin Powell, who was on record, including when he met with my group of departing ambassadors, as saying that if we thought we were right, it was better to risk having to ask for forgiveness than to delay waiting to get permission.

This perspective was shared by my British colleague, but the Australian and New Zealander, no doubt reflecting the greater importance that Canberra and Wellington

placed on Fiji, demurred saying they needed to call their foreign ministries for guidance. Thanks to the fact that their capitals were on contiguous time zones, they got the go ahead very quickly and we invited Frank's mentor over to the residence and discussed first our concerns and then our governments likely negative reactions.

The former commander heard us out, agreed with us, and called on Frank the next morning. He later reported back to us that Frank had listened intently, had not volunteered any information, but had told his mentor that we had nothing to worry about.

Q: Was that it? I know he eventually took over, but not on your watch, right?

LYON: We had to repeated the entire process about six to eight months later, though this time we broadened our group to include the Japanese, South Korean and Indian ambassadors. Again we sent a collective message to him through a back channel, and again he didn't take any action.

I went one on one with Frank during my last few months at post after an article I had written for one of the local newspapers in which I extolled the importance of maintaining a democratically elected government in Fiji. He almost seemed surprised by this so I spelled it out to him, we were one-on-one, of the consequences for the US-Fiji relationship should there be a coup. I reminded him that Fiji's High Court and Supreme Court had not yet ruled on the issue that had infuriated him and that since the majority of justices on the High Court, and all but one of the justices on the Supreme Court, were from Commonwealth countries, the government's proposed course of action was likely to be struck down. I also made it clear to him that the finally growing US-Fiji military relationship would be terminated and that he would be persona non-grata as far as the US and American military were concerned.

Fiji enjoyed a democratic government, under Prime Minister Qarase, my entire tour. I don't know if my approaches to Bainimarama kept him from taking any action against Qarase while I was there, I suspect that when he decided to finally act, as he did about fifteen months after my departure, he just went ahead and did it.

Q: The government must have been aware of your position, were they appreciative?

LYON: I was walking an often fine line between criticizing the Qarase government for its pardoning of coup plotters and for its often non-democratic pro-Fijian nationalist policies while simultaneously defending its right to exist as a freely elected government that said it would obey judicial decisions that went against its policies. An example of where I criticized the government was when they floated a law which would have allowed an indigenous Fijian to commit violence against someone who was seen as taking a political action against the Fijian people. In other words, a Fijian knocking an Indo-Fijian down to steal his wallet was a crime, the same action against an Indo-Fijian holding a protest sign would not be.

I was far and away the most outspoken of the diplomatic corps when it came to questions of democracy, political rights and governance. There was one time, though, where I thought I might have gone too far. One of the two major newspapers wanted to interview me about my views on the Qarase government's treatment of Indo-Fijians and the constitution. Following local practice, they sent over the questions, we modified them, we wrote out carefully crafted answers, and it was printed. In a total departure from local practice, though, one of the paper's most serious journalists than ran a front page article on what he thought I was actually saying about the government, taking the veiled messages we were sending the Prime Minister from between the lines and broadcasting them in clear language and large font.

It came out on a Sunday, when my wife and I usually played a round of golf at Suva's only course. I remember being very uncomfortable about the non-diplomatic criticism correctly applied to the spirit of my interview answers and had a terrible front nine. We then walked through the club house where a large group of golfers were waiting to go out to the course – all races, all backgrounds – and they stood and applauded us. I had a very good back nine.

The Prime Minister sent word to me that he was not happy with the article and was wondering why I had not said anything about the threat to democracy posed by a military coup. I thought this was fair and arranged for a follow-up interview on this subject, which he appreciated, and which led to my meeting with Bainimarama and our discussion of the USG response to a coup that I mentioned a few minutes ago.

Q: Before I go on to some other questions, anything more about the US-Fiji political relationship you would like to mention?

LYON: Just one thing. Do you remember Rabuka having denied agreement to James Hormel, Clinton's first choice to come to Fiji in the late 1990s?

Q: I do, he was openly homosexual and ended up going to Luxembourg.

LYON: Correct. Well in late 2004, Qarase decided to remove a potential political rival by appointing Rabuka as ambassador to the US. Unfortunately, despite our having advised him not to announce the choice publicly until we had the chance to vet Rabuka and give him agreement, Qarase jumped the gun and announced the appointment. The result was a firestorm of protest from the Indo-Fijian community, much of it aimed at me, which rightly blamed Rabuka for starting the downward cycle of a coup culture. Two allegations surfaced which we had not heard before, namely that he had been one of the figures behind the 2000 coup, but had melted away when the Army stayed loyal and that he had also at the very least been aware of and primed to take over the interim military government had the second assassination attempt on Bainimarama succeeded. We looked into this thoroughly and decided that the allegations were correct. I had previously felt that his efforts to return democracy to Fiji after his first coups, and his accepting losing the election of 1999, had rehabilitated him and that we should grant agrément, but with

this new information, and with the importance that we had placed on democracy in Fiji, I decided to do everything I could to get the Department to deny agrément.

Q: Wow, my experience is that that isn't easy to do, that the bar for our accepting foreign ambassadors is pretty low.

LYON: We only found two examples of it in recent history, though I am sure there were others where the choices were withdrawn rather than denied. But I felt that Rabuka's actions were totally reprehensible in 2000, had done immense damage to Fiji, and our granting agrément would undercut our efforts to further democracy in Fiji and throughout the Pacific.

I had not expected, though, to run into resistance within the Department starting with the office director for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. He had other things to do and just didn't want to take something on of so little importance to his main portfolios. I went over his head, one of the prerogatives of being a Chief of Mission, and eventually got the support of the EAP front office. Weeks of bureaucratic labor later and we had the agrément denial on Deputy Secretary of State Armitage's desk his last day in office. He had already agreed to it in principle, but then got called away on short notice to the White House and failed to sign it before leaving office.

Q: Oh Lord, so was all of your work wasted?

LYON: It could have been, but fortunately I had told the Prime Minister earlier that week that Armitage had agreed with my recommendation and that had been enough for him to withdraw Rabuka's name. He then turned around and appointed a well-respected Fijian businessman to Washington.

Q: OK, then, before we gone on to my last topic of China, tell me a little bit about the US-Fiji commercial relationship. Were many American companies in Fiji and what was our trading relationship like?

LYON: American investment was pretty much as you would expect for a small tourism-focused Pacific island country. A number of big hotel chains were there, led by Sheraton which had a world class resort in Nadi, to the west of Suva, and two of the world's finest small luxury hotels, Turtle Island and Wakaya were owned by Americans. The only other major American investment was Fiji Water which by the time I was there was Fiji's second largest export earner. Taking advantage of a retired Foreign Commercial Officer who I arranged to come to Suva as a WAE employee, we assisted in the setting up of a small American Chamber of Commerce which consisted of local American businessmen and Fijians either franchising for American companies, hoping to do so, and/or buying from or selling to them.

Fiji Water actually won the Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence in 2004, joining Motorola of Brazil in being recognized for its contributions to its host country, its work force, and to local communities. I was invited to take part in a live video

teleconference with Secretary Powell, other Washington dignitaries and of course my counterparts in Brazil. This had me worried as Fiji was, shall we say, a bit behind the telecommunications curve. I assigned an officer, the same one who set up the American Chamber of Commerce, Don Cleveland, to go down to the local telecommunications every day for a week and make them turn on and hook up the necessary equipment. I was very happy that everything worked perfectly from our end, and have to admit more than a bit of guilty pleasure when Motorola Brazil winked out halfway through and was never able to reestablish a connection.

We were a significant trading partner for Fiji, importing water, fish, and sugar primarily, and exporting a much smaller amount of mostly finished goods and some food products. We had some modest export successes, Ace Hardware and Costco came to Fiji, and we were able to break some of the Australian food monopolies, but for the most part the small quantities involved kept the big, competitive American exporters disinterested.

My most significant export promotion effort was almost immediately upon my arrival when we learned that Air Pacific, now Air Fiji, was planning on ending a decades-long relationship with Boeing and turning to Airbus. I met with the CEO of Air Pacific, an Australian, Qantas was a 40% stakeholder, who said that Boeing had simply taken them totally for granted, had made no serious sales pitch, but had basically told them, “we know what you want, here is when you will get it and here is what it will cost you”. Airbus, on the other hand, had wooed him and his board, asking what they wanted, in what configurations, when they needed the planes, and under what payment schedules.

I sent off a first-person telegram to the Department and the Department of Commerce on Boeing’s failures and within weeks we had a high-powered sales team in Fiji meeting with Air Pacific and trying to get them to reopen the bidding. I knew that the CEO favored Boeing, but wasn’t sure this would be enough, even after my French colleague antagonized him by threatening the Ministry of Finance with the possible loss of EU aid if the sale did not go through. Shortly thereafter, Airbus announced that they were having serious production problems and the CEO announced they were postponing their final decision until they had more information. This opened the door for Boeing and their 787 Dreamliner. A young sales executive moved almost full-time to Fiji, rented space in the Air Pacific HQs, and was eventually successful in getting an order for four 787s, with options for two more, though this two ended up getting held up, first by the 787’s own production problems, then by the 2006 coup in Fiji which was followed by a dramatic reduction in inbound tourism.

Q: OK, then, let’s talk about China a bit before turning to your other countries. How active was China in Fiji when you were there and were there any signs then of what has since become somewhat of a great power rivalry?

LYON: Fiji has had a long-standing relationship with Beijing so there was none of the diplomatic drama that we’ll talk about later with the other four countries in our district. China had a large footprint in Fiji when I was there, everything from fishing boats to shopkeepers, to tourists and businessmen. There was a general sense that bribes were

being paid for fishing licenses and visas, but to my memory there weren't any major scandals. As elsewhere, China's development assistance programs were focused on infrastructure projects with mixed results. China had successfully rebuilt and expanded Fiji's national stadium, I got to drive by daily a large billboard with crossed Chinese and Fijian flags with a thank you to the Chinese people from the Fijian people. Less successful was the completion of the road circling the main island with the Chinese contractor coming under criticism first for using only Chinese labor and second for failing to finish the project on time or on budget.

What I remember most about the Chinese embassy and presence was that for the first time in my experience, going back to the 1970s in Africa, the Chinese ambassador was the equal inter-personally to the most effective of his western counterparts. He was fluent in English, could tell colloquial jokes as he slapped people on the back, he always had a big smile for everyone. He was very effective in working with the Fijian government and representing China's interests. He was never able to break into the front rank of myself, the Brit and the Aussie, but he was right behind us.

The only time I remember getting even slightly crossways with the Chinese was when we learned they were going to provide the office of the President with both computers and internet connections. We brought in an expert from the embassy in Canberra who explained why this probably wasn't a good idea. The Fijian response – "If you'll give us the computers and pay for their internet connections, we'll give the Chinese ones back", a not ridiculous request that embassies just can't meet.

After the coup in 2006, it's my understanding that as Fiji's traditional western donors backed away, the Chinese became much more active, but I don't have anything specific for you except that this probably also reflected China's growing wealth and regional ambitions after decades of rapid economic growth.

Q: Alrighty then, let's call it quits for the day and turn to your regional duties on our next call.

LYON: Good morning.

Q: Good morning David. All Ready?

LYON: I am. The timing was absolutely perfect.

Q: OK, today is 30 June 2011 with David Lyon. We are going to talk about the other island countries you were responsible for.

LYON: Sounds good. One of the many things that made my job in Fiji so interesting was that we were a regional embassy, based in Suva but initially responsible as well for the Kingdom of Tonga and the micro-states of Nauru and Tuvalu. About a year and a half after I got to post, we added Kiribati to our portfolio, taking it over from our even smaller embassy in the Marshall Islands. As I mentioned earlier, we also had de facto

responsibility for the three South Pacific French overseas departments. All told we had something like 12 million square miles of mostly empty ocean with diplomatic responsibility for five countries, consular and defense duties in the French islands, and an awful lot of fish.

Q: Speaking of ocean, empty space and fish, during my short time with the Federated States of Micronesia, there was concern there about the Japanese, the Russians, other countries coming in and essentially poaching in their territory. Fishing the place out. Was this a problem in your area?

LYON: Outside countries poaching South Pacific fishing stocks was a huge problem. Boats were supposed to use transponders and fish only in authorized territorial waters and paying agreed upon royalties for fish caught. Because of their widely dispersed island groups most countries had huge EEZs, but there were few monitoring or enforcement mechanisms. Some countries' boats just came in and fished illegally, almost always escaping detection. Many developed countries would play the Pacific Island governments off against one another in terms of the amount they would pay per pound of tuna or other fish caught. They would go to Tonga and say, "Look, you let us fish for this amount or we will go someplace else and fish instead." So the countries were essentially bidding against each other for these fishing fleets. Some of these boats would then fish while in transit to the country they were ostensibly destined for, poaching fish from Tuvalu while en route to Tonga, for example, but paying Tonga's lower royalty per pound.

Fishing was one area where we occupied the high moral ground though our presence was shrinking fast from the 1990s on. When I went to our Ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, he said one of the things he was proudest of during his career was leading negotiations with the Pacific islands on fishing when he was Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Environment and Science that basically set one regimen for all American boats fishing in the Pacific and uniform prices for fish caught. All of our boats were rigorously required to use transponders which were monitored by the Coast Guard.

Q: With fishing stocks so important what were the island states doing to protect and benefit from this resource and wharf we were doing to help them?

LYON: The individual countries were frankly not doing very much. Fiji and Tonga had small navies which did some patrolling, but Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu had virtually no maritime resources and what they did have were usually tied up in port or being used for linking capitals to often far-flung island groups. It was always surprising to me that the descendants of some of the greatest seafaring people in the world really didn't seem to like going to sea very much.

The Islanders did make some efforts multilaterally, mostly through the Pacific Island Forum a regional convention on highly migratory fishing stocks, but they were inhibited by their lack of diplomatic throw-weight and the fact that while there was a recognition of the dangers of depleting perhaps their major resource, many still saw themselves as competing with one another in the short-term for badly needed revenue.

The Australians and new Zealanders were the main countries providing bilateral assistance, we did very little in this area beyond monitoring our boats and occasionally using transiting surveillance aircraft to track the presence of larger fishing boats. Canberra was providing small ocean-going patrol boats, training, and funding for maintenance and operations funds, while Australia and New Zealand would use their patrol aircraft to look for boats fishing illegally and try to direct what few patrol craft there were to go out and check and make sure they were licensed and were fishing legally. Both countries personnel, though, were generally frustrated by the Islanders seeming lack of interest in actually setting to sea to apprehend boats found to be fishing illegally.

Q: What about other developed countries, were they helping or hurting?

LYON: A mixed bag. Japan, China, South Korea and European nations like Spain had major fleets in the region and from my perspective were almost exclusively interested in catching as much fish as they could with as many boats as they could cram into the region. There were constant rumors of bribes being paid to local officials to turn a blind eye to over-fishing, though I can't give you any specifics. At least when I was there, Japan was one of the few countries to refuse to take part in the Convention on Highly Migratory fish. The EU did take an active role and it seemed to me that Spain and other European countries with fishing fleets in the area were beginning to take a more positive role.

Q: Did Was there anything as ambassador you could do about this?

LYON: I wish we could have done more, but we simply had other priorities and were happy to have the Aussies and Kiwis take the lead which they were doing as effectively as the local governments could handle or would allow. We certainly provided diplomatic support, I was our representative to the Pacific Island Forum and spoke about the need for better conservation and enforcement, and we had a very positive role in both formulating the Convention on Highly Migratory Fish and encouraging other fishing nations to take part. And as I said earlier, US fishing boats were scrupulous in abiding by agreements, quotas and fees.

Q: How were you staffed for working on issues such as international fishing rights or other environmental issues? You had an economic officer, right?

LYON: We had a single reporting officer, a mid-level Political, Economic, Commercial, and Public Diplomacy officer, assisted by a part-time junior consular officer, and a single professional LES employee, a very well-connected and competent Indo-Fijian named Nirmal Singh. Understating it, we were pretty thin, especially when you considered the fact that we were responsible for five human rights reports, five human trafficking reports and the myriad of other required annual reporting usually times five.

Wanting to do more to help conserve fishing stocks was one of our major justifications for requesting the Department to establish a regional OES position in Suva which finally happened the year after I left. This was a long, hard slog given the pressing needs around the world the confronting the Department after the start of the Second Gulf War. My second year, I pushed it all the way through the Department HR bureaucracy only to have Deputy Secretary Armitage shoot it down after saying he had been in Fiji during the Vietnam War and there weren't any flights going anywhere so what were we doing asking for a regional position? I resubmitted everything the next year along with comprehensive flight schedules showing Fiji was the aviation hub of the South and Central Pacific and he approved the position.

So now we have a full time dedicated OES position in Suva responsible for all the Pacific island countries, not only for fishing, but also for HIV/AIDS, a small but growing threat, climate change and the like. I consider getting this position established to be one of my major accomplishments in Suva, though I would have loved to have been there when the first officer arrived to take on and expand this crucial portfolio.

Q: OK, today is 30 June 2011 with David Lyon. Let's start talking about the other states in your district starting with Tonga. One always thinks of Tonga where its king appears at various British coronations or wedding.

LYON: They were very proud members of the British Empire – they adopted the Empire more than being colonized by it -- and still feel very close to the British royal family. The most famous picture along the lines you mentioned was of the reigning Queen of Tonga, Queen Salote, at Queen Elizabeth's coronation. She became famous because she refused to put up the roof of her carriage despite heavy rain out of respect for the British Royal family. There is actually a very funny joke that goes along with the photo as she was a very large woman in an enormous Victorian era gown sharing her carriage with a Malay prince, a very small man. The joke asks who is with Queen Salote and the punch line was, "her lunch".

Tonga was one of the Pacific's established Polynesian monarchies when Europeans began arriving in force in the late 18th century. Captain James Cook named them the Friendly Island not realizing that the Tongan's apparently hospitality at a feast held in his honor was masking serious discussions about whether to kill him and his crew. Tonga was fertile grounds for European missionaries and Tonga's ruling family began to model themselves on the British royals, naming their kings Siaosi (or George) and their queens Salote (or Elizabeth). When they joined the British Empire, they did not give up their sovereignty and Tonga's royal family traces its direct lineage back to the first half of the 19th century.

With the help of missionaries, Tonga declared itself to be a European-style constitutional monarchy in 1875, but in reality the sovereign king or queen has had nearly total power, certainly through the time I was ambassador. I understand there have been some political reforms more recently, but as late as 2005, when I finished my assignment, the King was probably the world's last remaining absolute monarch. Tonga had a parliament, but with

one-third of its members appointed by the King, one-third by the country's 33 nobles, and only one-third elected by its 100,000 commoners, it was hardly representative or independent from the Palace.

Q: Let's back yep bit and talk about Tonga, its history, and its people as I doubt many of our readers will be familiar with the country.

LYON: It's a fascinating country, spread out over some 36 inhabited islands, but with half of its 200,000+ people living overseas and two-thirds of the remainder on the island of Tongatapu which includes the capital of Nuku'alofa. It is one of the most homogeneous countries in the world, something like 98-99% of its people are Polynesians who probably arrived on the islands something like 2,000 years ago. Tongans were fierce warriors and expert sailors and were actually in the process of conquering large parts of Fiji when those islands joined the British empire.

Q: David, let me stop you for a second. Did you say half of the world's Tongans live abroad? Where are they and why is that the case?

LYON: About half of overseas Tongans live in Australia with the others primarily divided between New Zealand and the U.S. The first two are a result of proximity and shared membership in the British Empire and Commonwealth, we are a destination mostly because of the Mormon Church. As I mentioned earlier, Tonga was receptive to early European and American missionaries and nearly 100% of Tongans today are extremely devout Christians – the country virtually comes to a stop on Sundays, commerce and unnecessary travel isn't allowed and many Tongans attend multiple church services. Historically, most were Free Wesleyans, or Methodists, with a reasonably small minority of Catholics. The Mormons, however, have made the Pacific islands a major priority and Tongans have been attracted to the faith's tenets, as well as to an extensive school system in Tonga and the chance to go to Mormon colleges and universities in the US. The Latter Day Saints, or LDS, have also been highly adept politically, renting land for their schools and administration buildings from the royal family and cultivating close ties with the Palace. Official figures are much lower, but one LDS official said he believed as many as 40% of the world's Tongans were either Mormon or leaning towards them and that some in the Church thought/hoped Tonga might become, eventually, the first Mormon-majority state.

As for why the outward migration, there simply aren't a lot of economic opportunities in Tonga. Part of this is due to limited resources and farm land, but much of it has to do with population pressures and Tongan culture. An example of the latter is that every male upon achieving his majority receives a small parcel of land from the King. Originally, this might have been enough for subsistence agriculture, but not with today's population. I don't know if this land can be sold, but there are strong social pressures against giving it up, even for people living overseas. The land can be leased, and there are some larger plantations growing food and export crops, but in general the system has inhibited economic growth and the creation of decent-paying agricultural jobs. In turn, both the

government and families have encouraged young people to go abroad, find employment, and send money home.

As a result one is struck by seeing very large, very well fed people, well dressed, driving nice cars on good roads, with decent housing, but without any sense of any underlying economic activity.

Q: Was Tonga caught up in WWII, there must have been fighting all around it?

LYON: They were full members of the British Empire. They were never occupied or attacked by the Japanese, but they provided troops to Britain. The King was very disappointed that even though he had a reserve commission in the Army, the British would not allow him to serve because of the risk of having the crown prince of a ruling family in the British Empire captured by the Japanese. He ended up going to law school in Sydney during the war.

Much of Tonga's goodwill to the US goes back to WWII. During my initial call on him, the King proudly showed me the American Cemetery immediately adjacent to his palace, telling me that it had first been used for American sailors fatally wounded during the Battle of the Coral Sea. Not very far down from the cemetery is what still called the American pier, used for cargo vessels calling on Tongatapu. The King repeatedly told me that just as we had been there for the Empire's hour of need in the Pacific, so would Tonga stand with us in the War on Terrorism. As I imagine we'll discuss later, he held to this promise.

Q: Did you go there often.

LYON: Though considerably smaller than Fiji, Tonga had an international presence, a functioning economy and a professional military so I went there several times a year. They were also providing us political, and even some military, support after the attacks on 9/11 while also presenting us with problems in the area of democracy and political rights. In addition, we had a small but effective Peace Corps program based in Tongatapu, but spread out over much of the country. It was easy to get to, only a two hour flight, and a pleasant place to visit so my wife would often travel with me, quickly developing a small circle of Tongan friends of her own. In fact several babies who were born there during our posting were named after her, I think one baby had the name of Maureen Lyon Taumoepeau.

Q: Wow, how do you pronounce that?

LYON: After Maureen Lyon, I haven't a clue and would be afraid to try.

Q: What would you talk about when you were there – did we have any major bilateral issues with the Tongans?

LYON: We had three major security issues I would raise with the King and his son, who was both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The first was that Tonga had been actively selling passports for over a decade, primarily focusing on Hong Kong Chinese, but without any serious controls that we were aware of. The War on Terrorism turned this from a travel/visa nuisance to a major security issue. A second was that Tonga had moved into the international ship registration business, basically looking to undercut in price and lack of regulations countries like Panama and Liberia. This came to the floor the day of my swearing in by Secretary Powell in the Department when a Tongan flagged ship was apprehended in the eastern Mediterranean with something like 27 tons of illegal munitions destined for the PLO. The third was our looking for political support worldwide for the War on Terrorism and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The White House and Department were basically looking to add as many names as they could to the Coalition of the Willing and as many national flags as possible outside of the multinational military HQs.

Q: How did Tonga do in response? It sounds like we were asking for things that we relatively cost free, like joining the Coalition of the Willing, and others that had a real financial cost to them.

LYON: They stepped up beautifully in all counts. As I mentioned earlier, the King had made it clear that he was with us in the Middle East and the entire government responded accordingly. The sale of passports stopped, controls were tightened on ship registrations, Tonga was an early member of the Coalition, it offered and sent troops, a platoon at a time out of its military of something like 450 soldiers, sailors and Royal Marines. The first contingent left in June of 2004 and there have been several others since then.

Q: What was it like dealing with an absolute monarch, you must be one of the few FSOs of your generation to have this experience?

LYON: It was very, very interesting, beginning with my presentation of credentials, all decked out in a morning coat with tails, top hat and white gloves, to our negotiations over political support in the Middle East, to discussions on democracy and basic political rights. Probably my most intense relationship of the five I had with countries in my district.

The King, His Majesty Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV, was in his mid-eighties when I arrived and had been ruling Tonga since 1965. He was enormously hard of hearing – he used these over-sized headphones connected to a large Bose receiver that he would point at whomever he wished to address a question – but with an active mind and a great deal of interest in foreign affairs. He had drawn international fame during the middle part of his reign when he was dubbed the world’s heaviest monarch at something like 465 pounds. He then seized upon the issue of obesity, Tongans are among the heaviest people in the world, and led a crusade against it, losing nearly 200 pounds as an example to his people. When I met him, he was perhaps 250, but one thing I remember is that when we shook hands, mine disappeared completely in his, despite the fact that I am 6’4 and over 200 pounds myself.

The King was respected and obeyed in Tonga, but perhaps not loved. I think he had always had the interests of his people at heart, but he had proven to be a poor steward of the royal treasury. In the early 1990s, he had been swindled by his Court Jester – I kid you not, he had one – who happened to be an American and who had convinced the King to let him invest tens of millions of dollars in the international markets. The investments failed, or were never made, the jester disappeared, and Tonga and its King were widely ridiculed. More recently, the King had decided that Tonga needed its own international airline, had purchased two Boeing 767s, and had ordered that they be heavily subsidized by the Treasury. The airline failed at a great cost to Tonga and the King was further embarrassed by his eldest son, the Crown Prince, not the Prime Minister, swooping in and picking up a monopoly on domestic routes.

The most disturbing thing about Tonga to me was that the Royal family, mostly in the person of the then Crown Prince and his sister, seemed to act as if they truly owned the country. The princess had forced the King to break a long-standing and beneficial relationship with Taiwan and recognize Beijing when, a year or so before my arrival, she jetted off to China and essentially sold Tonga's satellite space to the Chinese, keeping the proceeds for herself. The Palace then forced the Chinese as part of their arrangement to move into the very ostentatious Taiwanese Embassy, at several times the earlier rent, which happened to be owned by the King. My last example was when the Crown Prince, who already had a self-granted monopoly on Tonga overseas telecommunications and Internet services, arranged a \$27 million personal loan from the Chinese and bought the country's power grid, jacking up the cost of energy after doing so. Later, when he was having trouble making the payments, he had the gall to come to me and suggest that Tonga would cool its growing relationship with China if the US would pay off this loan.

BUT, when it came to our security relationship, dealing with a friendly and forward-leaning absolute monarchy was much easier than dealing with a democratic government as in Fiji. I would raise our security concerns with the sale of passports and lax ship flagging regulations, and the King would order the necessary steps taken. I would ask for Tonga to join the Coalition of the Willing and it would happen immediately. My DCM went to Tonga concerning an Article 98 agreement and had a royal decree within days. The King himself made the decision to send Tongan troops to Iraq, inviting me to Tongatapu for a Royal Tattoo that would have put Edinburgh's to shame for its pomp and circumstance, as well as warriors chanting and stomping the sipu tau, the Tongan version of the Hakka, in grass skirts and with war clubs.

Q: I gather from your earlier comments about democracy and human rights though that not was all good in Tonga, at least in your estimation.

LYON: From the beginning of my tour to the end, I was caught between our deep appreciation of Tonga's contributions to the War on Terrorism and our long-standing objective of furthering democracy, political rights, an independent judiciary and a free press everywhere in the world. The White House and Department were clear that they

emphasized the former, I couldn't see any reason why we couldn't thank Tonga for its contributions while also pressing them on the areas of democracy and good governance.

I'd like to make one clarification to your question. The issue in Tonga wasn't human rights – people had those in good measure – I was focused on political rights. For me, these included the people's ability to choose or at least shape their own government; an independent judiciary that could act as a check on the royal family, especially, but not limited to, their treating the country as their own piggy bank; and an unfettered press. I made the point repeatedly, and was not always popular in Tonga, that with a homogeneous and well-ordered population deeply supportive of the Monarchy, democracy was hardly a threat to the country's stability.

Whether I was out of line or not, I often felt undercut by the Department. One time, I had made a condition of the Prime Minister to support one of his proposals only to have him fly off to Washington and meet with Deputy Secretary Armitage, without the Department informing me, who rewarded him by approving the program.

The Department and I had a major battle over including Tonga as a Millennium Challenge country. As I am sure you know, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was a brainchild of President Bush who wanted an organization outside of USAID that would support countries that were doing things right in terms of an open economy, receptiveness to investment and trade, education, health, and, very important, a free press, independent judiciary and democracy.

Tonga obviously failed to come anywhere close to these last requirements, but the Administration was looking to reward countries for their political support in the Middle East and seized upon the MCC as an easy way to steer funds Tonga's way. Now I had no objection to an aid program, economic and/or security assistance, but I strongly disagreed with perverting the goals of the Millennium Challenge by establishing a program in an absolute monarchy that was actually moving backwards where the press and judiciary were concerned, firing their Australian chief justice for ruling against a royal decree and closing one of the two newspapers for critical editorials.

I had a very interesting and eventually heated discussion on this with one of the MCC's earnest and highly political young staffers. We were talking democracy and he was trying to argue that because Tonga had a parliament, it must be a democracy. I kept on refuting this by pointing out that the people only elected 1/3rd of the MPs, but he kept on insisting that free elections for any percentage meant that Tonga was a democracy. I struck out with his boss as well, and eventually was only able to block the program by sending first-person cables to three assistant secretaries in the Department laying out just how ridiculous an MCC grant to Tonga would look, before the issue went away.

Q: Just as with what went on in Fiji, this couldn't have made you very popular with the government.

LYON: No, it didn't, but while some of superficial aspects of our relationship changed, Tonga's support for the War on Terrorism never wavered, and I found that the Prime Minister treated me with more deference and respect after I blocked the MCC grant than he had after going over my head with Deputy Secretary Armitage. He also appreciated that I continued to support his requests for security assistance, including a maritime patrol aircraft and equipment for Tongan troops deploying to Iraq.

Q: What other countries were active in Tonga? I'm sure the Brits were still there, but what about the Chinese?

LYON: The resident embassies were the British, Australian, and New Zealand high commissions and the Chinese embassy. The Brits were disengaging from the Pacific, though their High Commissioner was very knowledgeable and a great help to me, but the Aussies and Kiwis were stepping up their involvement in the Kingdom, expanding both development assistance and security-related programs.

For reasons we debated internally and with our western colleagues, without any satisfactory conclusions though, the Chinese had decided to make Tonga the main thrust of their diplomatic move into the South Pacific. Timed in with the switch in recognition I mentioned earlier, I think it was 1998, they had financed the construction of a major tourist hotel in Nuku'alofa in preparation for the Millennium celebrations as Tonga had actually changed its official time to become the first country in the world to welcome in the third millennium. Beijing paid millions for Tonga's satellite space, had financed the Crown Prince's purchase of the national power grid, and was building a number schools and other infrastructure projects around the country. The Chinese ambassador, a very good one, had pushed his way to the front of the four resident chiefs of mission, though I'll admit to a great deal of professional satisfaction that when I came to town, I was given precedence over him, something that clearly didn't make him happy.

Since China wasn't using its new influence to establish a military presence in Tonga, a very strategic center of the Pacific, we decided they were playing the long game and had determined that it would be more effective to deal with a powerful monarchy than with neighboring fickle democracies where pro-Chinese leaders were as likely to be voted out of office as retained and where opportunistic governments saw profit in playing Beijing and Taipei against each other. Our thinking about their thinking went along the lines of the fact that a royal bought was a royal owned and that their investments in the Crown Prince and his sister would give them leverage well into the future. I don't know if this worked for them, as I left Suva several years before the Crown Prince became king, plus he only reigned a few years before dying relatively young and passing the throne to his younger brother, the Prime Minister, who is now King 'Aho'eitu Tupou VI. I suspect that while Chinese influence remains strong, they don't have the constancy and relative permanence they had hoped for.

Before we finish with Tonga, let me mention the large and growing Chinese expat community there. With the establishment of diplomatic relations, it became easier for Chinese to gain entry to Tonga and by 2001 there were several thousand there, a lot in a

population of only 100,000. Most were shop keepers, restaurateurs, and small businessmen, though a few larger companies had moved in mostly looking at agricultural exports of food and imports of Chinese made products. They were highly unpopular with their Tongan competitors, both established stores and local markets, but were generally well received by consumers who appreciated their lower prices and longer store hours. This was shown vividly when pro-democracy demonstrations turned into general riots and looting. A number of Chinese shops were singled out by looters and some were burned, while in other places locals rallied to protect “their” Chinese. I wish I knew how this dynamic is playing out fifteen years later.

Q: All right then I think that does it for Tonga. Which country would you like to discuss next?

LYON: Let’s move on to Nauru, a very different country than Tonga, but with some of the same issues, especially on the counter-terrorism side.

Q: Well then Nauru. Is it Nauroo or NaRoo? Tell me about it.

LYON: Either way depending on where you are, I usually say Nauroo. Where Tonga was the most important of our non-resident countries, in many ways Nauru was the most interesting and for its size the most challenging. It is an isolated country of some 8,000 people several hundred miles away from any other islands, further isolated by unfavorable winds and ocean currents. Very little is known about Nauru’s early history, though people have been on the island long enough for their language to have diverged quite a bit from other Micronesian populations. Before my first visit to Nauru, I asked its high commissioner in Fiji about its history. He said, “Well in the early 19th century we were discovered by a German merchant ship. That is the beginning of our history.” Follow-on question, “Well do you know where you came from?” Answer: “No.” Question: “Do you know about your ethnic background?” Answer: “No.” I found this fascinating.

Unlike most other Pacific islands, which are atolls or reefs, Nauru is a volcanic plug, the remains of an extinct volcano whose sides had been eroded away, leaving a low-lying rock island only eight square miles in area. Nauru is one of the four great phosphate islands in the Pacific with tens of thousands of years of migrating birds’ droppings filling every crack and seam in the rock with what became incredibly rich guano, highly sought after for fertilizer. The island’s phosphate riches were discovered by Germany in the late 19th century at which time Nauru became a German colony. What became nearly a century of intensive guano mining began in 1907.

As a result of the mining, almost the entire interior of Nauru is totally uninhabitable with enormous yet fragile pinnacles interspaced with deep canyons, almost a moonscape. All the people live in villages around the fringes of the island – the airport runway is actually a straight section of the road circling the island. The sides of the volcanic plug fall off very quickly so the country lacks a true deep water port, though long piers were built to allow phosphate freighters to dock and load their cargoes.

Q: Am I remembering correctly that Nauru was once one of the wealthiest countries in the world?

Once Nauru was able to pry away control of their phosphate mining from overseas companies in the early 1970s, it became the second wealthiest country, per capita, in Asia after Japan. Unfortunately, despite several well-intentioned efforts to invest their largesse, Nauru blew through their wealth incredibly quickly and had very little to fall back upon when the phosphate reserves began to run out in the late 1990s. I went to a worksite which had at least a dozen large parked earthmovers – I asked about them and was told they all had minor mechanical issues, one had two flat tires, and it had been easier to import new ones than have to deal with mechanics and the need to order parts. I had already discovered that for historical reasons Nauru's informal capital was Melbourne, several thousand miles to the south. The presidency had a large apartment in a luxury building while Nauruans routinely went to Melbourne for medical treatment, such as dialysis, with highly subsidized travel on Air Nauru and free lodging in several large apartment buildings owned by Nauru's sovereign wealth fund. Shortly after I received the word that I would be nominated as the next ambassador to Nauru, but was forbidden to deal with Nauru officially to avoid offending Senate prerogatives, I was invited to the Nauruan national day, hosted by their consulate general in Melbourne -- I believe along with their UN Mission and embassy in Fiji, their only remaining diplomatic posts in the world. Much to my surprise, I ran into Nauru's president, chief justice, four or five cabinet ministers and several assembly members, all in town for the national day and a major Australian Rules football match.

Q: So what happened to all of that wealth? Given the wealth you've described, it must have been enough to support a small population for decades.

LYON: One would have thought so. Unfortunately, for colonial and post-colonial reasons Nauru itself only benefited from perhaps two decades of phosphate mining. But even this should have been enough. But the government was simply unable to restrain its spending, partly on infrastructure and mining equipment, but mostly on supporting an unsustainable and very unhealthy lifestyle. Imported food replaced fish and local products and Nauruans have become the most obese people on earth with the world's highest rate of diabetes. But why build a dialysis clinic in Nauru when Melbourne was only a six-hour plane ride away? With one or two exceptions, I wasn't aware of a great deal of corruption, of stealing state assets, but officials certainly took every opportunity to travel internationally usually staying at first class hotels.

The sovereign wealth fund had been a great idea, but was badly mismanaged. It invested in projects ranging from Nauru House, an office building in Honolulu, to Broadway plays, and just about anything and everything in between. The income from good investments often disappeared to support bad ones and what profits there were were rarely reinvested effectively. One potentially excellent idea had been to invest into what could have been the Pacific's regional air carrier providing passenger and cargo service for small island countries throughout the region. At one point, Air Nauru had seven

aircraft, or one for every thousand of the country's population. But again, poor management, including aircraft leaving scheduled passengers in terminals or on the tarmac while they were commandeered by government officials for trips to places like Melbourne, led to incredibly erratic and unreliable service, forcing other countries to develop their own airlines. By the time I got to Nauru, they were down to one Boeing 737 which was shortly thereafter seized by the US Import-Export Bank for non-payment of the loan Nauru had secured to pay for the aircraft.

Q: With all that, what was its government like?

LYON: The best way to illustrate Nauru's government in the early 2000s was that it took me well over a year to present my credentials, mostly, with one exception, because they kept on changing governments and heads of state faster than I could get credentials from the White House. Nauru's government is modeled after an Australian city government with members of parliament elected from neighborhood constituencies. The MPs then chose a president from among their number and he in turn chooses a cabinet from his colleagues who voted for him. It sounds great on paper, but is actually very unstable as there aren't enough plum jobs to go around for more than a half dozen cabinet members, leading to narrow majorities and the chronic defection of back benchers who are promised better jobs if they support another person for president. All very democratic and all totally chaotic, especially if times are tough and belts being tightened. In the fourteen years between 1989 and 2003, there were no fewer than 17 different presidents, though to be accurate a number of politicians had the job multiple times.

I arrived in Suva with credentials from President Bush for Nauruan President Rene Harris, one of the old guard and widely seen as a major contributor to Nauru's economic crisis. He was voted out the week before I was to go to Nauru and a reformer was chosen in his stead. New credentials arrived only to have the reformer replaced by one of his allies. New credentials arrived, only to have Rene Harris return to office.

Q: My God...

LYON: But wait, we're barely halfway through an odyssey that had the protocol office in the White House complaining to their counterparts at State about that "Bozo Ambassador", their words not mine, in Suva. But by then I had heard enough about Harris to know that he was an unreliable president and an unreliable partner for us on some key issues – such as shell-banking and the sale of passports. I put the word out that I would not be presenting my credentials to President Harris unless he began cooperating on these key anti-crime and anti-terrorist issues. I was surprised and impressed when he then signed several key, long-promised agreements with us while in the US for a UN meeting which led me to begin arranging travel to Nauru. Harris then died in a Washington hospital, he was a terminal diabetic, and the Department coordinated with the Nauruan ambassador to the UN for me to go to Nauru as a presidential envoy to his funeral and while there present my credentials to the acting President. Unfortunately, the Nauruan UN mission failed to tell the Foreign Minister or acting President of this and he refused to accept them. I went back to Suva, waited for a new president to be chosen,

happily another reformer, sent another request off to Washington for what must have been my sixth set of credentials, and finally succeeded in presenting my credentials, literally picking them up at the airport from Fiji's FedEx manager.

Q: With all that, what were our issues with Nauru, I think you mentioned money laundering and passports. Much else?

LYON: We certainly wanted to encourage and support good governance and effective economic stewardship, but our core issues were almost entirely focused on anti-crime, and anti-terrorism objectives.

Nauru was a significant money laundering center, hosting hundreds of shell banks, mostly just post office boxes and many known to be owned by the Russian mafia. Having the Russian mafia involved was bad enough, but increasingly we were concerned that Middle Eastern terrorist groups would take advantage of the same network to move and conceal funds. Working with the Department and the multilateral Financial Action Task Force, we brought considerable pressure to bear on Nauru, basically threatening to cut them off completely from the international banking system and foreign assistance. President Harris died in Washington within days of complying with our demands.

A second issue involved the sale of Nauruan passports to non-citizens, perhaps a remnant of when Nauruans were world travelers and seen as generally good risks by visa and immigration officers. Most purchasers had been Hong Kong Chinese in the run-up to the colony's return to China, but our concern was that criminals or terrorists would purchase a Nauruan passport in a false identity. Again, Nauru gave in to our pressure and even presented us with a list of all passports issued in the previous five years.

Q: What about the reformers who came into office as you were finally presenting your credentials?

LYON: They were more than willing to cooperate with us on security issues, but their main focus was economic, trying to staunch the bleeding. I had a lot of respect for them – they imposed a government salary structure, for example, which basically paid the same wage to everyone from an office cleaner to the President – but there was almost nothing we could do, or were prepared to do, for them directly, preferring to leave this to the Australians and New Zealanders who were doing quite a bit. The Australians had established a major refugee camp in the island, which while controversial under international law, was perhaps the only thing keeping Nauru afloat as a source of jobs and foreign currency.

What I hated was that the two times the reformers came to me asking for help I wasn't able to deliver even though the other parties were an American company, GE Capital, and the US Ex-Im Bank. Not that the two weren't completely justified, it just hurt to see well-intentioned reformers being undercut by Americans. GE Capital had rewritten and consolidated all of Nauru's debts into one package secured by Nauru's last remaining viable overseas assets. The Nauruans had been diligent in paying the loan's interest, but

had somehow failed to realize that they needed to be paying down the principle as well. With good reason, GE Capital decided not to underwrite another loan and requested the principle be repaid. The Nauruans begged me for help and I called GE Capital's Sydney headquarters only to be connected to the same executive who had unsuccessfully tried to evict me from the Consulate General's building in Melbourne after 9/11. I was no more successful with him than he had been with me as I really couldn't argue too forcefully against his position that Nauru just wasn't a good risk for a sizeable loan.

A few months later I received another panicked call from Nauru, this one relating to Air Nauru's last remaining aircraft, a relatively new Boeing 737. This time, the earlier régime hadn't even been paying the interest on their loan and the plane had been repossessed during a stopover in Melbourne by the Ex-Im Bank. I made some calls, but all I could do was tell the Nauruans that their only recourse was to repay the loan in full, something they couldn't afford to do, given the long series of missed payments and earlier warnings, all of the latter had been swept under the rug by earlier governments.

Despite these setbacks, I was generally impressed by the reformers' focus on preserving what little was left of the Nauruan economy. Despite continued government shake-ups, they remained in power for the rest of my term and for at least a few years thereafter. In addition to the salary cap I mentioned earlier, they froze non-government travel subsidies, greatly cut back on official travel, brought in consultants to explore how to resume at least limited phosphate mining, provided training and seeds for people to start home gardens and small subsidies for fishermen, and generally tried to live within their means. One of their more innovative initiatives was to bring in a Japanese company to collect, pay for, and export millions of dollars of scrap metal, mostly cars and trucks, which also had the effect of cleaning up the island of tons and tons of broken down vehicles and waste metal. They also initiated discussions with the Australians and New Zealanders about providing seasonal labor only to be rebuffed, essentially by the attitude of "you aren't exactly known for working hard in Nauru, what makes you think we think you would work hard for us."

Nauru also joined in the Beijing-Taiwan shuffle. I think it was only a coincidence, but the Foreign Minister, David Adeang, ended up as my seat mate on the return leg to Fiji of my last visit to Nauru as he headed off to Taipei to establish relations with Taipei. It was not my proudest diplomatic moment, my excuse was it was my last month at post before retiring, but I only learned about the real purpose of his trip in the papers the next day after stories were carried about Chinese Embassy officials camped out outside his hotel room in Fiji trying to convince and/or prevent him from continuing his trip.

Q: Well, on that note let's move on to, and I hope I am saying it right, Kiribati?

LYON: It is spelled Kiribati but it is pronounced Kiri-bas due to early missionaries who tried to apply islander speech patterns to English as they translated the bible into local languages. Kiribati was fascinating for me and I enjoyed my three trips to Tarawa, its capital and the site of the major WWII battle, even though it was hard to get to and not very comfortable while I was there. It is the Micronesian part of what had been the

British colony of the Gilbert & Ellice Islands. London chose to administer the Gilberts, now Kiribati, together with the much smaller Ellice Islands which were populated by Polynesians and is now known as Tuvalu. The two split amicably, though with some friction over who owned what state assets, before Britain granted them independence in the late 1970s.

Kiribati is actually an immediate neighbor of the United States as the eastern-most of its three island chains is south of Hawaii and abuts several U.S. island possession in the South Pacific. Its extended island chains, made up almost exclusively of atolls totaling just over 300 square miles of land, run north to south and give the country and its roughly 110,000 people an EEZ of over 1.3 million square miles. Almost all the people live in the western-most island chain and almost half its people live in East or South Tarawa. The country is poor with one of the lowest GDP per capita levels in the world and a UN development index in the high 130s.

Q: Given those factors, what made you enjoy Kiribati so much?

LYON: Unlike a lot of countries I've been to, they seemed to really try to live within their means, means being defined as their own limited economic output, mostly the sale of fishing rights, and international assistance from its leading donors Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and international development agencies. Government salaries are low, corruption seemed under control, and Kiribati restricted its overseas presence significantly, only joining the UN in the early 2000s, a year or two after I left Fiji. You'd drive around Tarawa in the evening and you'd see young people gathering around boom boxes talking and dancing. It just had a pleasant vibe to it. When I was there for Kiribati's 25th anniversary, the celebrations were kept low-key with sporting events, a fascinating Miss Kiribati contest, and local parties throughout the country.

Another thing that gave Kiribati a lot of respect in my eyes was that its president, Anote Tong, was half-Chinese, his father having been a stateless Chinese cast adrift in the Pacific during WWII – even more amazing in the race/tribal conscious Pacific was the fact that he had defeated his older brother in the last presidential election. I found him educated, I believe with a degree from the London School of Economics, sophisticated, friendly and utterly devoted to improving the lots of his fellow Gilbertese. Unfortunately, he was one of his government's few well-educated and worldly officials so working below the Office of the President could be difficult, time-consuming and frustrating.

Q: What kind of interaction did we, the USG, have with Kiribati?

LYON: Not a great deal, as I said earlier they weren't even a member of the UN when I was there. We had the occasional border issue, we have a large marine sanctuary immediately adjoining the Kiribati's eastern Line Islands and Americans cruise boats would pull into Christmas Island, but nothing significant. We did have a very effective Peace Corps program in Kiribati, focused on education and youth training.

My main focus on Kiribati ended up trying to get them included in the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which you'll remember came up earlier under the Tonga discussion. But where I had objected to the MCC and its lofty goals and standards where democracy, human rights and press freedom being applied to the absolute monarchy in Tonga, I felt that Kiribati was trying to do everything right. Despite repeated efforts, though, the MCC refused to even consider Kiribati due to its small size and isolation.

The great WWII battle of Tarawa, which I believe was the Marines' first major contested beach landing on an island occupied and fortified by the Japanese, gives us an historical bond with the Gilbertese people. I timed the presentation of my credentials to President Tong with the 60th anniversary of the battle and brought in an Aegis-class destroyer and a color guard from the Second Marines, the division that had carried out the landing. There were parades as well as visits to the landing site, various battle remnants such as the hulk of a Sherman tank resting right at the low tide line, as well as many of the large Japanese gun emplacements. We took the President and First Lady, as well as the Cabinet, out onto the destroyer, which absolutely entranced them.

I also attended the first five hours of an all-day festival at an covered but open air pavilion built with funds donated by American veterans of the battle. It was a combination of a state visit event and a local July 4th, with speeches, a huge buffet lunch, and groups of hula dancers made up by elderly woman who were on Tarawa during the battle, a national dance troop of young women, and then teenage girls. What I remember most about the dancers was that their skirts were made of spliced video tape and their crowns from drinking straws. The same emphasis of imports over scarce local products was shown when the other members of the VIP box got real flower leis but the President and I were given plastic ones. I had planned to stay only four hours, and to leave when the President left, but enjoyed so much I stayed for five.

Kiribati did almost land me in hot water with both Beijing and Washington when they elected to take advantage of my presence, the Navy destroyer and US Marines to announce they were breaking their long-standing relationship with Beijing and opening diplomatic ties with Taiwan. There wasn't anything I could do about this, but when I learned from the honorary British High Commissioner that that the Foreign Office was planning a joint reception for me and the new Taiwanese Ambassador,

Q: Oooo.

LYON: I went right back to the Office of the President, I never found much use for the Foreign Ministry, and told him that if the Taiwanese representative was there in any form of official capacity, I would not be able to attend. They very quickly switched it back to be only in my honor, though the Taiwanese did attend as a guest, which was perfectly OK.

The reception was a good example of just how unsophisticated the Kiribati government was. The British High Commissioner had warned me not to give them an advance copy of my speech as he had been stunned to hear the President using his exact words, though

with UK and Kiribati switched, in his welcoming remarks to the High Commissioner. So when they asked me for my text, I told them it was just notes and illegible. My Australian colleague then later told me that the Foreign Ministry had simply given President Tong his earlier speech with the words US and Americans replacing the UK and British. Making the whole event more surreal, the island's power went out right as I was starting to give my remarks and I did so with a much shorter presidential aide standing on a stool and shining a flashlight over my shoulder so I could read my text.

Q: Why did they switch recognition? Was it money or what?

LYON: Well, to start with, this was back during a period of very active diplomatic competition between Beijing and Taipei. The Pacific was one of three areas where most of the countries recognizing Taipei were clustered – the others were in Africa and Central America & the Caribbean – with China and Taiwan actively courting governments with mostly economic inducements. Among my five countries, Tonga had switched to Beijing, motivated by a Chinese state enterprise buying Tonga's satellite space from the King's daughter, and Nauru would go the other way about a year after Kiribati.

In Kiribati's case, as best I could tell there were two reasons underlying the switch in recognition. The first was that Beijing was widely believed to have secretly backed President Tong's brother for the presidency. The second was that the Gilbertese seemed to feel they were being taken for granted by Beijing and that Taiwan offered them a better development model with a focus on agriculture and small-scale rural development such as fish ponds which President Tong preferred over splashier projects like the new sports stadium being built by Chinese workers in Tarawa.

With my time in Beijing and my adherence to the One China policy, the whole incident made me highly uncomfortable, the more so since the Taiwanese Ambassador, an experienced, personable diplomat who had been educated in the US and who I think had lived in the US for more years than I had, seemed to coincidentally bump into me every stop I made during the rest of my visit. It was clear he had obtained a copy of my schedule and that was looking for photo ops of the two of us together at every opportunity.

There was one very funny story to come out of the switch in recognition. The Navy & Marine Corps Memorial was right next to where a hundred or so Chinese workers were building the sports stadium. After a short parade, I'm at the memorial with President Tong, Gilbertese officials, Navy and Marine officers and a total crowd of about 100 people. Several dozen now-idle Chinese workers came up and were standing just across and above us on the partially constructed stadium. All of a sudden, the Marines raised their rifles for a salute to the fallen and by coincidence they appeared to be aiming right at the guys on top of the stadium who started yelling and diving for cover, presumably thinking we were out to get rid of them. It was hard not to react during a solemn moment, but most of us did at least a decent job of suppressing our laughter.

Q: Well was there any hangover from the Japanese occupation?

LYON: Not appreciably. The Japanese were administering the Gilberts under a UN mandate going back to WWI and had an ongoing colonial relationship with the Gilbertese. I doubt they were sweet and loving, but they weren't as brutal as they were elsewhere in islands they had conquered – in Nauru, for example, they had removed almost the entire adult male population as slave laborers for elsewhere in the Pacific. In preparation for the Marine invasion, the Japanese had actually removed South Tarawa's population and I think only two Gilbertese were killed during the battle. Since the war, the Japanese had built a number of development projects throughout the country and their ambassador to Fiji was also accredited to Tarawa and as far as I can remember he was well received there, for example during the 25th Anniversary celebrations.

Q: Let's move on to Tuvalu. What little I know about the place is that it is one of the lowest lying atoll countries and in great danger of rising sea levels. What can you tell us about Tuvalu and working with its people and government?

LYON: As I mentioned earlier, Tuvalu used to be a British colony, originally administered jointly with the Gilbert Islands, now Kiribati, as the Gilbert & Ellice Islands. The two were separated while still colonies and Tuvalu became independent in 1978. It consists of nine island groups spread over just under 350,000 square miles of ocean, but its 10 square miles of dry land supports a population of roughly 11,000 people, it's something like the fourth smallest country in the world. Its predominantly Polynesian people support themselves by fishing, subsistence agriculture, remittances from Tuvaluan sailors working overseas, foreign aid, and fees received from foreign fishing fleets and from selling its very fortunate internet domain name ".tv" to television stations around the world.

Q: I had wondered how some stations, I think TNT at once point had .tv. With those sources of income, was Tuvalu fairly prosperous? With sun, surf, and sea was there any tourism industry as in similar atoll countries like the Maldives?

LYON: No, not really, and when I was there the UN considered it to be a least developed country, though one towards the top of the scale. It's expensive administering eight far-flung island groups, only one of which, Funafuti, the capital, had more than a few hundred people, plus all of Tuvalu's fuel, finished goods and much of its food had to be imported. I don't think anyone was hungry, apart from the aftermath of cyclones that interrupted the periodic delivery of food, there was a decent education system, and governance, as best I can remember, was both decentralized and pretty accountable to the people.

Before my initial visit to Tuvalu, I had been warned that food in its two restaurants ranged from OK to none existent. So as I did before my trips to Nauru and Kiribati, I packed a military ration, or MRE, several large bags of peanut M&Ms, and a six-pack of bottled water. Fortunately, I didn't need to break into the MRE, though the M&Ms came in handy several times after fairly Spartan meals.

As for tourism, I'll just recount for you an excerpt I had read in the Lonely Planet Guide which described Funafuti's beautiful atoll and the fantastic snorkeling in the national park only a few miles away from the city, before going on to say how the only hotel is staffed by friendly, smiling people who didn't give a rat's ass, I'm pretty sure that was the term they used, about their guests' comfort or convenience. Add that that distance and isolation and you don't exactly have a recipe for successful tourism. I was able to get out to the national park for some snorkeling, but it took a lot of effort to find a boat owner willing to take me out there, even for a good fee. Once there, it was probably the best snorkeling I have ever done with an amazing variety of coral, fish and turtles.

Q: I'd like to know more about the islands, specifically about how vulnerable they actually are to climate change and rising sea waters.

LYON: They are very vulnerable. Six of their island groups are atolls, and I believe the highest place in the country is only 15 feet above sea level. During my initial visit to Tuvalu, flight schedules dictated that I arrive on a national holiday so after a very unusual motorcade – going first the roughly 300 yards from the plane to the government office building to meet a single minister called in for the occasion, and then another 100 yards to Funafuti's only hotel, I had the day to myself. The vice consul who had advanced my trip had leased two motorbikes for a tour of the island. As we were riding along the lagoon side, perhaps a few feet above the water, on Funafuti's only real road, we could hear the waves breaking on the ocean side. We found a side road, drove about a minute, and there was the Pacific ocean pounding away. At the highest point of that ride, in Tuvalu's main populated area, the highest point may have been 6-8 feet above sea level.

Tuvalu's atoll islands are already subject to overtopping during large cyclones, and I remember reading that a rise of only 8-16 inches would make most of the islands uninhabitable. There has been a lot of controversy about whether the islands are sinking as well, as the volcano tips they lie on sink, but since modern equipment was installed in the early 1990s, sea levels are rising at approximately two-tenths of an inch per year. Doing the math, this puts most people in real danger in only a few decades and the country's survival in perhaps 50-60 years.

Q: Goodness, I hadn't realized it was that bad. What are they and the international community doing about it?

LYON: The government was very seized on this issue, making it their number one diplomatic priority. It had been negotiating the purchase of land and settlement rights in Fiji, though I don't know if this is continuing. New Zealand, I believe, is allowing limited resettlement of Tuvaluans as environmental refugees and both Australia and New Zealand are liberal in granting work permits to them. Multilaterally, Tuvalu has been a leader in the Alliance of Small Island States, a coalition of small, low-lying island and coastal countries that has been quite active within the UN and other international organizations, and in leading an effort to increase international awareness of the dangers to their survival posed by climate change and rising sea levels.

Q: What about bilateral issues? Were there any? How did you interact with what I imagine was a poorly resourced island government so far away from Suva?

LYON: I only got to Funafuti once, for my initial calls for what was probably a week-long visit, but this was mostly because Tuvalu's Prime Minister, Saufatu Sopoaga, was in Fiji several times a year and we would see each other during his visits.

The most pressing bilateral issue the Tuvaluans, besides always pressing for more aid, related to a legacy of WWII, what are called "borrow pits" for sand and coral dug out by the US Army in constructing what was, and still is, the country's only real airstrip. These deep pits have never been refilled, there isn't any above the ground material to fill them with, and have become trash-filled and disease-riddled cesspools, their water rising and dropping with the tides.

Q: They are still there 65 years after WWII ended? Why didn't we fill them back up after the war?

LYON: Under an agreement reached towards the end of the war, the Allied powers agreed that each colonial power would be responsible for reconstruction projects in their colonies, but while London occasionally talked about filling the pits, and to my knowledge never said they wouldn't, nothing was ever done. While I was there I arranged for an Army Corps of Engineers team to update an earlier COE study on filling the borrow pits. The team agreed with the earlier study's negative recommendations, pointing out that the only readily available fill material would have to come from the foundations of the airport runway or by a major dredging project in the atoll's lagoon. The leader of the team flat out told me that if we were to fund the project, it would be enormously expensive, largely due to all of the environmental restrictions on USG-executed work in particularly sensitive environments.

I did some more research on this and sat down with Prime Minister Sopoaga during one of his visits to Suva. I told him that we could not take the lead in any borrow-pit related projects, but might be able to provide some funding should another well-regarded development agency take the lead after completing acceptable environmental impact studies. He did not follow through on this during my tour, but I have heard since that New Zealand may be taking the lead in dredging lagoon sand to fill the pits.

Q: Did we have any development assistance projects at all? Peace Corps?

LYON: Unfortunately not. Peace Corps had closed its very small program in Tuvalu, I think they had four volunteers on the main island group, when they closed the Fiji office, which supported Tuvalu, in the early 1990s. After Peace Corps Fiji reopened, I pressed Peace Corps HQs to reopen the Tuvalu program, but they refused, citing the high costs of supporting volunteers there. I then turned to the Millennium Challenge Corporation as Tuvalu scored very high on their criteria with its vibrant, small-town style democracy, equal education access for all, including girls, and a relatively open micro-economy. As

with Peace Corps, though, the senior MCC staffers I talked to just flat out said Tuvalu was too small and too far off the beaten track for them to even consider a program there.

Tuvalu was extremely aggressive in pressing for international assistance, rarely letting an opportunity go by without seeking aid. One time, Sopoaga, however, went too far even for the coalition that had voted him into office. Within a month of his government opening a brand new office building financed and constructed by Taiwan, he announced he was switching recognition to Beijing, presumably on their theory that he had gotten what he could out of Taipei. A vote of no confidence followed immediately, Taiwan had a good deal of influence in Tuvalu, and he was temporarily removed from office before agreeing to disavow Beijing.

When Sopoaga pressed me too hard on assistance, I would pull out my UN Voting Guide, the very one I had fought against so hard and so unsuccessfully while working for Chet Crocker in the Africa Bureau in the 1980s, and point out how rarely Tuvalu voted with us in the General Assembly

Q: Why would they vote against us?

LYON: A little of this had to do with their being part of the non-aligned movement, plus they would also vote where the money was, for example by supporting Japan when came to whaling, But mostly, they either abstained or just didn't vote. The problem for the Prime Minister in responding to me was that their UN Ambassador was none other than his younger brother. How could I argue in Washington for aid programs, I would ask him, when Tuvalu was not supportive of us in virtually the only interaction we had with them?

Q: I'd like to explore your relationship with the French territories as well as with Embassy Paris. How did all of this work and were there any problems?

LYON: Paris was perfectly happy to have us take care of the routine work in Tahiti, New Caledonia and Wallis & Futuna, from consular services to supporting ship visits and low-level DOD coordination, to assisting the occasional CODEL. Several of my officers were accredited to Paris so they had the authority to provide services in the departments. Paris' main sensitivity was protocol, we should always make it absolutely clear that we were doing this work under the authority of our Ambassador to France. Pro-independence parties in Tahiti and New Caledonia, however, were constantly inviting me to visit in order to buttress their claims to either independence or more autonomous status. Much as I would have liked to have gone, I agreed with the fact that "Their" ambassador was in Paris, plus I could only imagine the French reaction, no doubt amplified by my counterpart in Paris, a well-connected political appointee, had I done so.

Q: Well let's say Tahiti. I would think you would run across Americans think of Tahiti as being the island paradise and head there and get in trouble.

LYON: There was some of that. Again it is very expensive getting to Tahiti and very expensive staying in Tahiti so we are talking yachters, well-heeled tourists and usually well-seasoned world travelers. And again, we are talking an overseas Department of France so you have first world amenities, well-ordered police and court systems and we could do quite a bit by phone, fax and e-mail. In Tahiti and New Caledonia we were dealing with the French government in areas where international tourism was very important so every effort was made by everyone to minimize problems with overseas visitors. Our consular chief would visit perhaps annually to meet with local officials and ensure that our very good consular in Papeete was up on the latest regulations and procedures and answer any questions he might have.

Q: OK, will it was not a sleepy time in Suva - you were pretty busy weren't you?

LYON: It was an absolutely great ambassadorship for me. I greatly enjoyed Fiji, but I think if that had been my only country I might have gotten the diplomatic equivalent of island fever. My wife felt that a bit, though that was partially due to the fact that she was not interested in traveling to Nauru, Tuvalu or Kiribati – my predecessor's wife had told her that the only time she had cried during her marriage was when her and her husband's flight out of Tuvalu was cancelled for the second time. Maureen loved Tonga, though and would visit at least once a year, but for me the chance to go to Tonga two or three times a year with annual visits to the other countries, made my job and life just that much more interesting.

Q: Well David, then you left Suva when?

LYON: In late 2005. I was greatly disappointed to discover that my three year term as ambassador started when I was nominated, so the six months I had spent twiddling my thumbs in Washington essentially counted as part of my three years. I was retiring and my initial plan was to go back to Washington and work for several more years, possibly at Homeland Security where one of my former bosses was setting up its international operations division. Just before we left post, though, we received the bad news that my father-in-law had terminal lung cancer. So we went back to Washington, where I checked out, met my successor, Larry Dinger, briefly, and took most of the retirement seminar, before coming out to California to be with him and support the rest of Maureen's family through a difficult time.

Q: So very quickly what have you been up to since retiring?

LYON: Mostly consulting and mostly for the military. Other than some speaking for Consular Affairs on the new Western Hemisphere passport requirement, I wasn't able to do very much my first year and a half back as I was mostly a family chauffeur. I did take part on a volunteer basis at various seminars and workshops at Monterey's Naval Postgraduate School and Defense Language Institute with those jobs helping me get picked up by Booz Allen which led to short-term contracting jobs with the Army, US Forces Korea and the Marines. Eventually, I became a part-time Army employee, with the grandiose title of "Highly Qualified Expert", working primarily with the Future

Warfare Division of the Training and Doctrine Command, or TRADOC, while continuing to work on a contract basis for Marine Corps University in Quantico.

The TRADOC job has been absolutely fascinating work, looking 20-40 years into the future in order to help shape the Army's doctrine, force planning and acquisition efforts. Any given year, I might be the subject matter expert or major wargame player on scenarios involving the Middle East, West Africa, the Horn of Africa, Korea, the South China Sea, Central America, I've just loved it. All told, I'm on the road perhaps 80 nights a year, it was 160 last year when I was in Korea for two different month-long wargames, which has been just about right for me, scratching my itch to stay involved substantively while leaving lots of time for travel, golf and the like.

Q: OK, David I think this is, now what is going to happen is we will get this typed up and send it to you and then I hope you will both do the normal editing but also add things, you know, I forgot to mention this or you didn't ask me about that, because verbosity is not a problem in oral history. We are not trying to because we don't know who will be using this and they will be searching it with key words and everything.

LYON: That makes perfect sense, and I will be happy to do that.

Q: Thank you David, I hope we can see each other face to face some time.

LYON: Thank you Stu, take care.

End of interview