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

# AMBASSADOR CHARLES THOMAS

*Interviewed by: Thomas Stern*
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NOTE: The Oral History was not completed

**INTERVIEW**

[Note: This interview was not completed due to the death of Ambassador Thomas]

*Q: This is June 24th and the first interview with Ambassador Charles Thomas. Charlie, thanks very much for joining us today. On behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, I want to thank you for giving us this time. I think-I know-that your contribution will be a valuable addition to the collection and I look forward to our discussion. Charlie, let me start with the usual questions and ask you a little bit about your background, where you were born, what your educational background was and what brought you into the Foreign Service?*

THOMAS: Well, Tom, I was born in Buffalo, New York and I was raised in Massachusetts with four years in New Hampshire as well. I went to Harvard and studied government there.

*Q: You went through all grade school and high school in Buffalo?*

THOMAS: No. I was born in Buffalo and I left almost immediately, within a week after birth and then went to grade school in Massachusetts, then to a private school in New Hampshire and then to Harvard. After Harvard, I took a degree in government.

*Q: When you went to Harvard and took your degree, did you have any idea what your long range plans might be?*

THOMAS: No. Not at all. I really didn't. Possibly something in public service but that's about as precise as it got. At Harvard I was in the regular ROTC which implied a three year obligation for the Navy. I took the Foreign Service exam in my junior year at Harvard and passed it. I took it sort of not as a lark, but just for the hell of taking it to see if I could pass it.

*Q: Challenge?*

THOMAS: Yes. And that sort of laid dormant. I was in the Navy. I spent three years on active duty as a Naval aviator.

*Q: Let me go back again. Did you have many courses in international affairs?*

THOMAS: I had quite a few because I studied government so there were a fair number, yes.

*Q: But not necessarily focusing on international affairs. It was part of your government…*

THOMAS: Right. Yes. It was equally divided between local, national and international.
*Q: And you graduated from Harvard in?*

THOMAS: Graduated in 1956. Went straight into the Navy. Went through flight training. Did two years as a Navy helicopter pilot. Actually I stayed in the reserves for a number of years afterward so I was flying whenever I was back in Washington. During that period I had to make a decision because I had a regular commission in the Navy. I had to make a decision whether I wanted to stay in the Navy as a regular officer or transfer to reserve and get out after three years. I decided to get out and I began to think about the possibility of taking advantage of the fact that I'd passed the Foreign Service exam.

*Q: The oral? The written and the oral?*

THOMAS: The written. Actually I'd passed the oral as well.

*Q: You passed the oral as well. So you took the oral right after you…*

THOMAS: I don't remember exactly. I think I was a junior or possibly a senior.

*Q: But you took them at Harvard?*

THOMAS. Yes. Yes. I remember the oral very well because it was done in the old Custom

House Tower in Boston.

*Q: Tell me a little about that.*

THOMAS: Well it…

*Q: Three examiners?*

THOMAS: I think there were three and I don't remember any of the questions they asked me. It was not the usual or the expected. There were no tricks or anything like that. It was very straightforward.

*Q: Back to the written. That was a one day written?*

THOMAS: Yes, it was. They had made the transition to the one day written.

*Q: At that time.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And you were told right after you had your session that you had passed?*

THOMAS: Well, I think so. I think so. Yes. Yes.

*Q: Okay. So it came up to crunch time and you decided to get out of the Navy and stay in the reserves.*

THOMAS: Yes. You had to stay in the reserves. See, I had a regular commission and with that program you had to decide whether you wanted to stay in the Navy and retain you regular commission or whether you wanted to complete your three years and get out and just finish up your reserve obligation.

*Q: I gather from the comment you were a Navy flyer.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: What did you fly?*

THOMAS: Anti submarine warfare helicopters plus a lot of rescue work as well.

*Q: So you were a helicopter pilot.*

THOMAS: I was a helicopter pilot. And fixed wing but primarily helicopters flying off aircraft carriers. You had to make a decision in your second year on active duty. I made that decision and I began to think about the possibility of going in to the Foreign Service and by

the end of two and a half years I decided I would go in. It happened that there was a long waiting list at that time. It meant that I would come off just at the end of my tour.

*Q: 1959?*

THOMAS: 1959. Yes. So I literally flew off the aircraft carrier because we were deployed at sea at that time and flew straight to Washington and joined the Foreign Service. It just happened to coincide perfectly.

*Q: Did you have any acquaintances in the Foreign Service at that time? Did you know anything about the Foreign Service?*

THOMAS: I had a pretty good idea in general what it was all about because I had read a lot about it. So I think I knew the structure of the organization and what the work was. So I had a pretty good idea.

*Q: And your Navy career, did you have a chance to go overseas, visit overseas places?*

THOMAS: No. We spent all our time at sea. We never went to… Well we went to Canada once. Basically we were hunting submarines in the North Atlantic so we never went overseas.

*Q: Did you have any friends in the Foreign Service or relatives?*

THOMAS: No.

*Q: Nothing. So you plunged right in.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: We're now 1959.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: When did you enter? Do you recall?*

THOMAS: September '59.

*Q: And you went straight to the A-100 course?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: What do you remember about the A-100 course?*

THOMAS: I think I remember almost all the individuals who were in it and what ultimately

happened to them.

*Q: Your fellow students?*

THOMAS: Yes. They were all…Except for one there are no longer any in the service still. I think I was the next to last or third from last to get out.

*Q: Who were some of the people?*

THOMAS: Steve Ledogar. I have to think for a minute just to disconnect them from their subsequent assignments.

*Q: Well that's all right. You can go on to that later. Was the A-100 course useful to you?*

THOMAS: I don't remember very well. I don't think it was very good at that time.

*Q: That was the general consensus.*

THOMAS: It was run by people who were unhappy that they'd been assigned that task.

*Q: Did you get a better feel for how the department worked or was that at all helpful to you?*

THOMAS: No. It wasn't really helpful.

*Q: Okay. All right. Then assignment time came up. Do you recall how that worked out?*

THOMAS: Well at that time they had an assignment process where you took a shot in the dark as to where you wanted to go. In other words you did not have a list of what was available. So you said, "Well, I want to go to Paris," without knowing whether Paris was a possibility or not. And everybody, mostly, people went either into consular work or into security work somewhere in the department at that time. I ended up going to a border post in Mexico.

*Q: That was not by choice? I assume you did not put Mexico, border post on your list?*

THOMAS: No.

*Q: Do you recall what you were interested in?*

THOMAS: I can't remember what I put down.

*Q: Okay. Did you have any language fluency…?*

THOMAS: Well, I had passed the written requirement for Spanish at Harvard, but had never spoken it. So I took the Spanish course. The basic Spanish course.

*Q: Three months?*

THOMAS: Yes, I guess it was three months.

*Q: Three months.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: You got to Juarez in 1960.*

THOMAS: Right.

*Q: Okay. Did you go through a consular course before you went? Do you recall?*

THOMAS: Yes, I think so.

*Q: So you were here in Washington in training for a fairly extended period of time.*

THOMAS: Yes. It was right up until May. May or June.

*Q: So September to May you were essentially at FSI being trained. Okay. And when you got down to Juarez... How big a post was it at the time?*

THOMAS: At that time it had about six officers.

*Q: And how many in the Consular Section?*

THOMAS: The Consular Section had four.

*Q: Four?*

THOMAS: Three or four.

*Q: Three or four?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And were you rotated in that or did you just start in on one…*

THOMAS: You rotated between non immigrant visas and immigrant visas. That's all.

*Q: No American protection. Just the visa side?*

THOMAS: I didn't do any protection work except on the side. We had one officer who did

that full time.

*Q: So you rotated between immigrant and non-immigrant?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And was that a shock to you?*

THOMAS: No. I mean, we'd all heard about that kind of work. We'd been through the consular course. It was a surprise I think because we had a clientele which was fairly from the lower economic echelons. A lot of brides of GIs who were stationed at Fort Bliss, including a number of cases where GIs had married prostitutes and not realized that they were prostitutes and had faced the problem of getting waivers so they could come into the United States. It's a rather delicate question or problem to tell a guy that your wife can't come in because she's a prostitute.

*Q: Was there an organized racket? Did you run into that? Mexican women marrying Americans just to get across the border?*

THOMAS: No I don't recall any racket.

*Q: The workload was quite heavy I assume?*

THOMAS: Very, very. It was relentless. Yes.

*Q: Did you feel…Were you under pressure to get the work out?*

THOMAS: Well, you felt under pressure to clear out the waiting room every day. Especially in the visitor visa section and to make sure you didn't fall behind on immigration visas.

*Q: In the NIV did you follow what happened to the people you issued NIV's to?*

THOMAS: No. You would occasionally hear indirectly that INS had deported somebody but that was very rare.

*Q: And that didn't bother you?*

THOMAS: No.

*Q: There were a lot of consulate officers that got very upset when non-immigrants started to be deported. You were not one of them?*

THOMAS: No. I don't get upset because people who were aspiring immigrants were some of the best.

*Q: Did you get a chance to wander around the city or early province at all?*

THOMAS: Yes. I did political reporting.

*Q: How did you get started on that? Do you recall?*

THOMAS: Well my predecessor in the post had been Larry Pezzullo who had also done political reporting. We overlapped a little and I just sort of picked it up from him. So I did have a fair amount of chance to travel around the state of Chihuahua. We had, for example, a celebration of a battle between the black tenth cavalry and the Mexicans which had always been a big deal for them. We got down to Chihuahua City where the governor resided and off to the Paracas del Cobre where the famous Indian tribe lives, plus the Mormon settlement where George Wolney was born, called the Colonial Wires which is still a large Mormon settlement down there.

*Q: Now this was a time when there was still considerable unrest in the area.*

THOMAS: Well, actually, there wasn't.

*Q: There wasn't?*

THOMAS: No.

*Q: But the poor area of Mexico.*

THOMAS: Yes. I mean, relatively speaking, it wasn't so poor. Juarez was a, comparatively speaking, middle class-not middle class- but it was a relatively prosperous city. It did have a ring of slums. They did pretty well in cross border traffic, and activities related to tourism and things like that.

*Q: What did the political reporting consist of?*

THOMAS: It was what was happening to the local administration in Juarez and what was happening to the governor of the state because the governors were rather important in the overall constellation of the Mexican political process. At that time, of course, they were all members of the ruling PRI party.

*Q: Did you learn something about the reporting craft?*

THOMAS: Yes. But not a great deal because there was nobody there who was… There weren't any other political officers there.

*Q: And the CG or Consul General…?*

THOMAS: I think it was a consulate at that time, not a CG.

*Q: He wasn't very helpful in improving your skills?*

THOMAS: No. It was a retirement post basically.

*Q: And he was a consular officer primarily I presume?*

THOMAS: No. He was a political appointee.

*Q: Oh, okay. Do you have any recollections about the views of the local population towards the United States?*

THOMAS: I think obviously I had some views but they weren't supported by any polling or facts.

*Q: I understand.*

THOMAS: The people we dealt with were I don't want to say pro-American, but friendly. A lot of them had kids in school in the States, particularly the upper echelon. A lot of them sent their kids to university in the States. Along the border a great number of people spoke English. There was a lot of back and forth. At that point you had the Bracero Program so lots of Mexicans were going to the States under that program. You had a special arrangement on the border where you could get a green card and still live in Mexico, go across every day and work in the States. Thinking back on that, I don't know how that happened but that was the case. So it was a tremendous amount. Of course, El Paso across the border had a hell of a lot of Mexicans and the mayor was of Mexican descent.

*Q: Did you come away with any views about the whole entrance process of the United States in a situation like Ciudad Juarez?*

THOMAS: Well, you worry a little bit that some fairly undesirable people are getting in. On the other hand you had a lot of people who were the best of the crop because they were the ones with the ambitions to go to the States. So sort of a natural selection process was taking place. You worry a little bit when an American GI inadvertently or unknowingly marries a prostitute. That does not bode well for the marriage. If you had been worried about immigration the way people are right now, you probably would have said, or could still say this, okay, let's reconstitute the Bracero Program, which actually worked very well. It gave regulated conditions for the workers in the United States and the workers were needed to do work that Americans wouldn't do, yet these people would go back to Mexico. They brought back a lot of money. They were able to build a house and so on. A lot could be said for the program. It got shot down on the grounds that it was sort of inhumane in some way when in fact I don't think it was. Because there was a fair amount of … I'm not saying there wasn't problems but there was a fair amount of supervision. The Bracero living conditions and so on.

*Q: The accusation was that it was exploitative?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Just one last question on this score. Did you feel that you had some impact on regulating immigration into the United States?*

THOMAS: No. I mean it was small. I mean the Consular officer has great latitude in who he lets in so on a really mini micro scale, yes, but as far as any significant numbers, no.

*Q: Okay.*

THOMAS: You basically had maybe two or three minutes to talk to an applicant for a visitor visa, a high percentage of which never intended to come back to Mexico. There are certain pro forma presentation documents like a bank account, so forth, which meant really nothing.

*Q: The reason I pursued this is because your next assignment was still in the Consular field as I understand it.*

THOMAS: That's right. Partly. Yes.

*Q: Partly. How did that come about and did you kick and scream? Did you go to La Paz kicking and screaming?*

THOMAS: No. We were happy to go to La Paz.

*Q: As a Consular officer*.

THOMAS: Yes. I had talked to the DCM who was also going there. I talked to him in Washington.

*Q: This was before your assignment was made?*

THOMAS: This was after it had actually been made.

*Q: After it actually had been made.*

THOMAS: I had a chance to talk to him. It was clear that there would be a real chance to rotate into the political section as well as well as serving as head of the Consular section. As it turned out, I did at least half of my time there in the political section.

*Q: Yes. I want to get to that. When you went…Let me ask you first of all what were the sizes of the Consular section that you headed up when you went?*

THOMAS: There was one American, in addition to myself. He was a vice Consul. There

were four locals.

*Q: Four locals.*

THOMAS: Something like that.

*Q: So the Consular workload was relatively manageable?*

THOMAS: It was definitely manageable because there weren't that many… There were relatively few IV and NIV applicants and protection was quite rare.

*Q: I want to talk a little bit about who else was there. You started off with Ambassador Stephansky.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: What do you remember about him?*

THOMAS: Well, Ben Stephansky had been in the labor field for many years. He was well known. Well known as a democrat. He was a political appointment of course. He was quite nervous in this assignment. I'm not sure quite why. Very concerned about what was happening, how it would be seen in Washington. I think he had a very hard time. It was a very fragile political situation.

*Q: I want to talk a little about that, but let me ask you he must have arrived a few months before you did?*

THOMAS: He came in with the Kennedys so I think he'd been there the whole time. So this was, I got there in '62. Kennedy came in in '61. He'd been there I think two years.

*Q: Okay, I see. But he was still a little nervous about something.*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes.

*Q: But he was followed while you were there by Doug Henderson?*

THOMAS: Right. Right.

*Q: Doug Henderson was a professional Foreign Service officer?*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes.

*Q: Can you compare their styles a little bit?*

THOMAS: Well, Henderson was more confident. He had served in Latin America before. In

fact he served in Bolivia before. So he knew the scene and he was pretty confident about it and he didn't have this nervousness vis a vis Washington that Ben Stephansky had. I never was quite sure why he was that way but he was. Stephansky I think hoped to go on to other things after the assignment to Bolivia so he wanted to make sure he was doing a good job there.

*Q: Of course he could have picked an easier post for starting out. And the DCM was?*

THOMAS: The DCM was John Stutesman. He was DCM the entire time I was there. He arrived shortly before I did.

*Q: Now John was also an old hand? And obviously a steadying influence.*

THOMAS: Well he was sent there to steady Stephansky basically. Unfortunately, Stephansky was aware of the fact that he had been sent there to steady him and resented it. It was a very tense relationship between Stutesman and Stephansky.

*Q: Did that affect your work?*

THOMAS: No. Not really. Not really.

*Q: But it was well understood and known around the embassy?*

THOMAS: I'm not sure how well known it was. I was aware of it. I'm not sure how much. I mean neither party talked about it at all. It was …

*Q: Just visible.*

THOMAS: …just an issue. Around you saw it. Not that people were around the front office that much so it wasn't that obvious. I would go to all the country team meetings in the first year so I saw more than most.

*Q: This was when you were the Consul? Tell me, did the U.S. or the embassy's position change on various issues after Stephansky left and when Henderson came in?*

THOMAS: I really don't know for sure. I don't remember that well. It was primarily operational issues. We were supporting the government. Nobody was happy with the opposition. So there really weren't substantive questions. It was a matter of how you ran the place and the link to Washington. That sort of thing.

*Q: I want to pursue this a little bit, both as you saw it from your consular hat and in the political section. Before I do that, what was the job in the political section you finally went to?*

THOMAS: It was just being a political officer covering the local scene.

*Q: Internal politics.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Tell me a little bit about U.S. Bolivia relations in this two year period as you saw them.*

THOMAS: Well, the government at that time was friendly to the United States but was still a party with relatively leftist inclinations. We were supporting it because it had been democratically elected and it was very rare for a Bolivian president to be democratically elected and stay in office for a full term.

*Q: Were we accused in being involved in domestic politics because of our support of Pas?*

THOMAS: Oh, yes. There were always accusations of U.S. or CIA involvement.

*Q: Were people serious about this or par for the course on the part of Bolivians?*

THOMAS: Well the average Bolivian probably had no interest in politics whatsoever. It was a very thin veneer on top in the cities that were involved in politics in any significant way. A very high degree of illiteracy in the country.

*Q: So you had a small strata of leadership and a mass population that worried about day to day living and not much about anything else. So your contacts were primarily with that small strata of leadership.*

THOMAS: Yes. Absolutely.

*Q: And they did berate the United States*?

THOMAS: Yes. I mean some of them did. There was a full range from the far right to the communists. The prevailing tone was sort of mildly leftist at that time.

*Q: Mildly leftist. Describe that a little bit, Charlie.*

THOMAS: Well, I mean the Pasesentoro party would describe itself as a leftist party.

*Q: They were for government ownership of enterprises?*

THOMAS: Well they were prepared to leave in government hands enterprises like the National Mining Company which was tremendous in the economy. They took no measures to reform that.

*Q: The railroads were government run? The transportation system was all government run?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: How well were they run?*

THOMAS: Pretty badly. COMIBOL, which was the national mining company, was a disaster.

*Q: Now this was tin mining primarily?*

THOMAS: Almost entirely. Yes. There was an oil company too. YPFB, which was government run and which had a very hard time finding oil even though there was a hell of a lot of oil in Bolivia. It was during this period that they began to talk to foreign companies and they actually did let some foreign countries in for prospecting.

*Q: Did you push that? Foreign investment?*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes.

*Q: Essentially as an economic issue?*

THOMAS: Well both as an economic issue and as a stabilizing element in the country.

*Q: Talk a little bit about the tin miners and their hold on the political process*.

THOMAS: Well the tin miners-and tin was the major export at that time-the mines were in the control of leftist unions which at one time had been associated with Pas's party. But there was a growing split between Pas and the miners as he tried to do something about its drain on the economy. Not only were…

*Q: The mines were money losers?*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes. It was valuable for an exchange but it lost money.

*Q: Right. And they were heavily subsidized by the government.*

THOMAS: In effect yes. The dangerous situation about the mines was that they-the miner's unions-were armed. For example when the AID mission there bought a building to give to the National Geological Survey as their headquarters, it turned out that they had bought a building which was filled with the mistresses of government officials. These ladies when they were told that they were going to be evicted produced machine guns and wouldn't let anybody in the building. They finally got the miners' militia from the Ministry of Mines to attack the building but they were driven off, too. Not with a lot of shooting but it was a show of force.

*Q: By the women?*

THOMAS: Yes. Finally they got one apartment open. They put in a rock crusher. They turned off the water and electricity by the way which didn't make any difference. It was off most of the time anyway or a good part of the time. Finally the ministry installed a rock crusher in the one apartment that had become available. They ran it 24 hours a day and that drove out the remaining women. That illustrated there was a certain anarchic air to this place and a lot of guns around.

*Q: Something like the Wild West?*

THOMAS: Well, yes. In Santa Cruz just before I arrived a lynch mob chased a perpetrator into a church where he tried to take refuge. They just went into the church, hauled him out and hung him.

*Q: When you were there, they also attacked the USIS office in Santa Cruz did they not? Do you recall that?*

THOMAS: I don't remember that. Don't remember that.

*Q: But this whole atmosphere. Were you at all nervous about your security?*

THOMAS: Well you certainly were not nervous about anti-Americanism per se, because the average guy was, if anything, for America. I think what was significant was when Kennedy was killed. There was a great spontaneous outpouring of sympathy. Within minutes of the word coming over the radio, buildings had put their flags out. Everybody was required by law to display a flag on certain national holidays. Literally within minutes of the announcement of Kennedy's death, they all, with no request from the government, put out their flags. I'll always remember that.

*Q: Because?*

THOMAS: Because of great sympathy of Kennedy.

*Q: There was a great sympathy for Kennedy even though it was anti-Americanism. They distinguished somehow between Kennedy and the Americans.*

THOMAS: Well no. I'd say there was anti-America feeling, but there was very little animus against Americans per se.

*Q: Per se.*

THOMAS: Yes. I mean we got shot at a couple times but that was not because we were Americans. That was just because we happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

*Q: Oh, that was not an attempt on you per se?*

THOMAS: No. No.

*Q: You just happened to be as you said in the wrong…*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: I see.*

THOMAS: I never thought…We traveled a lot in the countryside and we camped out a lot in the countryside. We never felt insecure.

*Q: Weren't some American officials held hostage by tin miners?*

THOMAS: There was a hostage incident where about 21 foreigners, including a number of Americans, were held hostage in retaliation for the arrest of some mining leaders. Once again, that was not anti-American, that was used as a pressure device to get these guys released.

*Q: Did you play a role in their release?*

THOMAS: We had a little hostage rescue mission, which I led.

*Q: Tell us a little about that.*

THOMAS: This thing dragged on for a number of days. After the arrest of the mining leaders down there on the highway, there were foreigners up in Siguabente or in the area of Siguabente, who were picked up by the miners. I think there were around 21 or something like that, and taken to Siguabente and kept in the mining headquarters.

*Q: These were foreigners who lived in Siguabente?*

THOMAS: No there were a variety of people. There was two USIS officers who happened to be on the highway who got picked up. There was a Dutchman and there were some engineers. A variety of people. I've forgotten what their professions were. They just happened to be around at the time. They got snagged and they got put up there. We sort of… Various people were trying to get them out without success and finally we decided we would send somebody up. I was actually I think in the political section but I was also the Consul.

*Q: Various government people?*

THOMAS: All the other governments were interested and we were interested. It was the first real crisis of the Johnson administration. I had actually looked into the background of these things. There was a previous case in the late 40s of a hostage taken. I read up on what had happened. I talked to a guy actually who had been there at the time. So I knew a little about

the background and it was decided I would go up. Partly because as consul you had a special role to play which was well known to everybody. The American Consul was the American Consul and you had a different category and one of his tasks was to protect American citizens and so forth.

So I went up and I took with me a Bishop to help the negotiation. He came up with us and I met in Siguabente Juan Lachine who was the Head of the Miner's Union.

*Q: Excuse me. Was this the bishop who had jurisdiction over this particular area?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Oh he did. I see.*

THOMAS: I can't remember. Maybe I didn't take him up but he came up. He was up there at some point. He was around although he didn't participate in negotiations to speak of. So I talked to Juan Lachine.

*Q: Who was?*

THOMAS: He was the head of the Miner's Union and he was actually vice president of Bolivia. That talk got nowhere essentially. So I spent the night at Siguabente. The hostages were all held in the mining headquarters building. The threat was that they would blow them up. Bolivia was a country that had dynamite everywhere. You could go down to any flea market and buy a ton of dynamite. It had been stolen from mines. So everybody had it. The miners wives were sort of in charge. They were sitting on all this dynamite down on the first floor of the building. Some of them were armed with knives and so forth. So I discovered after a while that the real problem was not so much the political issue. It was the fact that the miner's wives were very concerned about the safety of their husbands in La Paz. They were afraid that they would…

*Q: These were the miners who…*

THOMAS: Yes. The two mining leaders who had been picked up. Their wives were very concerned. I finally got a chance to talk to them. They were very concerned that their husbands would be killed in jail or murdered in jail or suffer an accident in jail. So after negotiating for a bit with them, I said, "Listen. I can tell you that the United States will take an official interest in their safety and well being and I will be prepared to take you back with me to La Paz," or some words to that intent. That's what it took to get them out.

*Q: Now were you in contact with the embassy in this 24, 48 hour period or were you…?*

THOMAS: I had one or two conversations with the embassy, I think. I really don't remember. Telephone contact was very difficult. So I don't remember.

*Q: So you were pretty much on your own?*

THOMAS: Definitely was on your own. Yes.

*Q: And your marching instructions were to get the foreigners out? Somehow.*

THOMAS: To get the Americans out.

*Q: To get the Americans out.*

THOMAS: Yes. So anyway. They said, "Okay."

*Q: Now wait a second. Did any of the other embassies send representatives up there?*

THOMAS: No. There weren't any others I don't think.

*Q: You were the only Western or foreign representative up there?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: What was your reaction about the mine leadership. You have now mentioned women on two separate occasions, in two separate stories, were women prominent in the political affairs in Bolivia?*

THOMAS: No. No they weren't at all. There were very few women involved. These were really peasant women. Trolas was the technical name. These are women that wore the Trola outfit. It has a bola hat and the multi layered skirt and was what the average Bolivian peasant woman wore. Despite the fact that their husbands were leaders, they were in the traditional Indian dress, Imov dress.

*Q: But in this particular…*

THOMAS: As far as I know, they have no political role to play. They were essentially concerned with the safety of their husbands.

*Q: And were supported by the miners…*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: …in their concern.*

THOMAS: That's right.

*Q: So they had a leadership role in some way.*

THOMAS: Well, I don't know if you'd call it leadership but they certainly had some sort of link into the decision makers that made it possible for them to persuade the leadership to let these guys go.

*Q: After you had extended your services.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: So they were able to manage to convince the leadership that they had gotten everything out of them that they wanted to get out?*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes.

*Q: And go ahead. So you brought them back.*

THOMAS: Well we loaded everybody. I had with me a carryall and a Bolivian driver. We loaded…

*Q: You did all the negotiations in Spanish? You didn't have an interpreter with you at all?*

THOMAS: No. It was all in Spanish.

*Q: All in Spanish. So your Spanish was good enough at that time.*

THOMAS: Yes. And the women, they didn't speak anything. They barely spoke Spanish. They basically were native Indian speakers. We spoke in Spanish not with a translator.

Anyway they said, "Okay. They can go."

There was a series of checkpoints going down the hill from the mine. It was about 30 miles down to the first city.

*Q: Government check points?*

THOMAS: No. These were miners' check points.

*Q: Miners' check points.*

THOMAS: Yes. We got everybody into a carryall and a couple of other vehicles and we went down in a convoy. We got through the first checkpoint okay. Then at the last check point, the guy said he had no instructions to let us through.

I got out and I said, "Listen, we're going to have to go through." I took away his rifle. I told him to get out of there and then I opened the gate and out we went. That was it.

*Q: Was this just the valor of youth? Would you have done that had you been a little bit older and wiser?*

THOMAS: You mean pushing our way through?

*Q: Taking the rifle?*

THOMAS: I probably would have done it because a show of force like that is sometimes the only way. I mean we could have fussed around for hours and God knows what might have happened. This was a very fragile arrangement.

*Q: But you obviously put your personal life at stake here?*

THOMAS: I didn't feel at the time it was particularly dangerous. We were pretty intimidating. We had three or four vehicles. He was a Bolivian peasant with a couple guys around him. (End of Side 1 Tape 1)

I had the two Bolivian ladies with me in the carry all.

*Q: These were the wives of the mining leaders?*

THOMAS: Yes. We dumped everybody else in Aural and I continued on to La Paz in the carry all with the two ladies. We took them down to the city and made arrangements for them to see their husbands and so forth.

*Q: And?*

THOMAS: And that was it.

*Q: Did you talk to the government officials about their concerns?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And did you get any assurances from the government that they…*

THOMAS: We got assurances from the government. I don't think the government ever had any intentions to kill them. I don't know why they had that particular concern. They eventually got out.

*Q: Let me go back to the anti-America feeling. It did not play very well in the United States if you recall. As a matter of fact I think it became a political issue with Goldwater insisting that aid be stopped to Bolivia. Did you have any feelings about our capability to influence events in Bolivia.*

THOMAS: We had a fairly substantial capability because we had a large aid program for one

thing.

*Q: And that was useful for political purposes?*

THOMAS: Sure. And there were a number of issues. This was a time when we were going after Castro and Bay of Pigs had failed and so forth. There were a lot of issues in that area and we were putting pressure on all Latin American nations to join up and attempt to isolate Castro.

*Q: Were we successful with the Bolivians?*

THOMAS: Yes. I think we were pretty successful. I mean they had certainly leftist inclinations and their foreign minister towards the end Felman Velarde certainly… He definitely had a leftist tendency. But the fact was on the whole, we had Bolivian support. We had a lot of leverage on the Bolivians.

*Q: Part of this was at least the historical antipathy that the Latin Americans had for North Americans?*

THOMAS: Well, once again there was antipathy towards American policy but there was a lot of goodwill towards Americans. I mean it was a day when an American could go into the bank in Cachibou and cash a check. No questions asked.

*Q: Any American?*

THOMAS: Yes. Even tourists. So there was very positive… The Bolivians had a good experience with America in many ways. For example the Point Four Program inaugurated by Truman was greatly admired by the Bolivians. It did a lot.

*Q: It did?*

THOMAS: In fact the AID mission-I can't remember what AID was called at that day. I think it was ICA or something like that-but they still had the official plates that the government provided to the AID mission, at Punto Cot Quattro. So that's a measure of interest.

*Q: You feel in a way that…*

THOMAS: We-I-we had three kids there with us and we traveled all over Bolivia and did a lot of camping out in the boondocks with no protection at all.

*Q: And no concern?*

THOMAS: Very little concern.

*Q: Very little concern.*

THOMAS: Yes. The further you got out in the boondocks, the safer you felt. I would never have say camped out in the middle of a city. But out in the boondocks we felt very safe.

*Q: And the Bolivians were friendly to you out in the boondocks?*

THOMAS: Oh yes.

*Q: Let me go back to the Point Four AID Alliance for Progress and so on. You felt this was an effective tool of American policy?*

THOMAS: Well, it was and it wasn't. I mean it gave you the illusion of maybe having more influence over events that you actually did. Although it certainly did have some impact on the macro issues that we were interested in.

*Q: Macro economic issues or macro political issues?*

THOMAS: Macro political issues. Yes. It didn't have a hell of a lot of impact on the willingness of the Bolivians to take the political heat that would have been required if they had really reformed their economy and tried to transform it into a market-a real market-economy. Particularly privatize government entities and those things. So it didn't have much leverage there.

*Q: This was a political issue for the Bolivian government? It did not feel that it had enough muscle to go to a free enterprise system?*

THOMAS: Well, it did…

*Q: Or was it a theological question?*

THOMAS: It was basically a free enterprise system except for the large government entity.

*Q: Right.*

THOMAS: Like the airline, the petroleum company, the mining company. And it certainly didn't feel it had the clout to take on those issues. But it wasn't just that. There was a residual belief that a state run economy was viable. It was a really different atmosphere in those days than there is today.

*Q: There was a belief …*

THOMAS: Socialism wasn't discredited the way it is now.

*Q: There was a belief that a state run economy could be successful. .*

THOMAS: Sure.

*Q: It was quite clear that the government was broke.*

THOMAS: Well, it was and it wasn't. They were getting revenues from their exports.

*Q: And they were running huge deficits?*

THOMAS: Yes. They were running deficits but it was not really broke in the sense of a super crisis. Plus they were getting a substantial amount of foreign aid from others including the U.S.

*Q: While you were there, there was a change in government. Paz got thrown out I believe.*

THOMAS: That was after I left.

*Q: Oh. Was that after you left?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: You left just a few months before that.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Was there any indication Charlie, while you were still there, that such an event might take place?*

THOMAS: Well yes. Bolivia has a history of not having peaceful transitions or constitutional transitions.

*Q: And what occurred in the embassy. Was the military restless?*

THOMAS: I don't really remember what the embassy was saying. There were always rumors about the military being restless and there was always rumors about some man on horseback by the entrance coming in to take over. I don't recall when I left, which was probably June I guess or something like that, that there was any immediate prospect for a coup.

*Q: While you were there in the political section, do you know whether any efforts were made to restrain the military or teach them about democratic practices by the embassy?*

THOMAS: We had a very substantial military liaison and that was part of, at least ostensibly, was part of their job. Whether they actually carried it out, I don't know.

*Q: You did not witness them carrying it out?*

THOMAS: Well, I think that the officers involved genuinely felt that they could have some influence over the question of the military operating within a constitutional system but our motivations were quite different that theirs. They wanted to have a military relationship with the United States. They wanted access to equipment and funding. They really didn't want to pay any price for that.

*Q: Were they interested in coming to the United States for training? I'm not sure whether that's always been a positive but…Church state. You mentioned the bishop was up there watching you negotiate. In general, what was the relationship between church and state? Do you recall?*

THOMAS: I don't recall if there was an official relationship or not. I really don't remember.

*Q:* How about between the embassy and the church?

THOMAS: The church didn't play a big role.

*Q: It did not.*

THOMAS: No. Mainly because it's a country primarily populated by Indians who I think were sort of nominal Catholics but with a completely different cultural tradition. I'd have to say I couldn't really answer that question very well because I just don't remember.

*Q: Let me ask you one last question about your tour. Did you come away being positive or optimistic about Bolivia's future? Or were you pessimistic?*

THOMAS: Moderately optimistic.

*Q: Moderately optimistic.*

THOMAS: At this point they were beginning to have some real prospects for finding oil. Mining had good prospects. So if they had had an open economy it could easily sustain itself. But at the same time you had a largely illiterate population, a lousy education system, terrible transportation. It was a real third world country.

*Q: In these terrible sectors, were these just pure inefficiencies or was it done with malice aforethought?*

THOMAS: I can't answer that question because why is a country like Argentina who was up to the level of Canada in the 30s gone downhill, until maybe recently? There's a million reasons people sometimes come up with.

*Q: Is there anything else about this tour that should be known 50 years from now?*

THOMAS: No. I mean I was looking at it from very low levels so I don't have a good sense…

*Q: Oh. One thing. Did you have as part of your responsibilities, develop some good contacts among the politicians.*

THOMAS: Yes. The Bolivians were quite accessible.

*Q: That was no problem? They would talk to you freely.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: So you thought we had a pretty good handle on the internal politics?*

THOMAS: I'd say sort of because you know the Bolivians were…While we were there a number of people were plotting to overthrow the government. They did not confide their plans to us. At least I was not aware of it. They might have talked to somebody else.

*Q: Let me ask one other question in that relation. I assume we had a station there?*

THOMAS: We did. A big one.

*Q: Was that a problem for you?*

THOMAS: I think it was a problem in the sense that it was a fairly large station. It was well funded and it was always questioned whether somebody would see the station as a more important interlocutor than the embassy.

*Q: Rivalry?*

THOMAS: I don't think there was a great deal. I think there was a fairly cooperative relationship. The front office and the station.

*Q: You and your reporting were fairly consistent with what they were reporting as far as you knew?*

THOMAS: I think so. Yes.

*Q: But they were not particularly helpful to you in doing your reporting?*

THOMAS: I don't think they were unhelpful. They were often…

*Q: …Often in a different sphere.*

THOMAS: …somewhat on a different tangent. I mean they were pretty open with us. I didn't

sense any great problem except the inherent problem that existed in those days was a very well funded and active overseas operation. They'd been involved in all kinds of…

*Q: …covert actions?*

THOMAS: Covert actions. Sort of a heyday at that point. God knows what they were doing in there.

*Q: Okay. That gets us to 1964 and tell me about how the next assignment came about.*

THOMAS: Well, I just went through the normal process. I didn't try to manipulate it or anything, even if I could have, I'm not sure and ended up as desk officer ARA.

*Q: What desk was that?*

THOMAS: It was the Caribbean desk.

*Q: Caribbean desk.*

THOMAS: Yes. Eastern Caribbean for both AID and State.

*Q: And how long were you on the desk?*

THOMAS: Maybe six months and then I went to the front office.

*Q: And how did the front office job come about?*

THOMAS: Just got recruited.

*Q: One day you got called and said, "Be up here,"?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Had you had a chance to get to know Mahan while you were on the desk?*

THOMAS: Well actually at that point it was Jack Vaughn.

*Q: Oh. Jack Vaughn. I see.*

THOMAS: Yes. I had known him before. Jack had had Bolivian experience. He had served there before. So he knew that probably. Maybe it was that. I don't know.

*Q: So you moved up to be Vaughn's special assistant?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: I see. Let me go back to the Caribbean experience. This is your first tour in Washington. What do you remember about frustrations or delights?*

THOMAS: That area was not an area of great interest to the seventh floor.

*Q: Or sixth floor either?*

THOMAS: Well, sixth floor. It was to them I'm sure.

*Q: Was it?*

THOMAS: You had general Alliance for Progress activities.

*Q: Guyana was under your jurisdiction?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: So the Caribbean went beyond the islands.*

THOMAS: Yes

*Q: How far?*

THOMAS: It went to the former colonies-the former European colonies.

*Q: I see. Were there a lot of activity on the Guyana while you were there?*

THOMAS: There was quite a bit. Yes.

*Q: Is that what you spent most of your time on do you think?*

THOMAS: No because that was being handled at a fairly high level. We really weren't major players at this level.

*Q: You said you were a desk officer?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Reporting to?*

THOMAS: We had a-I forgot what you call it-a country director.

*Q: For the Caribbean?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And he reported to one of the deputies?*

THOMAS: There weren't many deputies in those days.

*Q: Oh this was the heyday of the country director?*

THOMAS: Yes. I think there was just one deputy. Bob Sayre was it.

*Q: I see. Okay.*

THOMAS: Harry Shlaudeman was the office director.

*Q: Was there already a combined State/Aid bureau at the time you got there?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: I see. So you were responsible for both. Well were there any AID programs for the Caribbean at the time?*

THOMAS: Yes. They had some programs.

*Q: Some programs. So you were both an AID officer and a State officer.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: How did you think that worked?*

THOMAS: It actually worked fairly well. I mean if you assume that the Alliance for Progress worked very well, which it really didn't, in sort of the big picture. My own view on that is that it probably retarded development in Latin America.

*Q: The Alliance?*

THOMAS: Yes. It may have been useful politically but as far as inducing people to really look at the hard situation it did postpone that day.

*Q: Because?*

THOMAS: Because it provided a hope that you could continue with current policy and not pay the political and economic price for real reform.

*Q: I guess you make the same comment about Bolivia?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And that was for the Caribbean as well?*

THOMAS: That's true everywhere. Yes.

*Q: You generalize to all Latin American on that?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Was Mascoso, Lee…?*

THOMAS: He had left by then.

*Q: He had left already?*

THOMAS: Who had taken over for him? Bill. He was a Washington lawyer. Bill. Bill. Bill.

*Q: Oh. Rogers.*

THOMAS: Bill Rogers.

*Q: So you didn't have a chance to work with Mascoso?*

THOMAS: No. No.

*Q: We had some military establishments in the Caribbean. Were they any concern or problem for you?*

THOMAS: Well, we were sort of disestablishing ourselves. For example in Trinidad, there still was a Naval station there. They were just phasing out residual activities.

*Q: But the decision already had been made?*

THOMAS: The last thing to go was the officer's club.

*Q: But you didn't have to get involved?*

THOMAS: No. The decision had been made. That was not a problem. And there were other facilities. Again Antigua had something. Basically they countries weren't anxious to kick them out. They wanted them to stay. At that point we really didn't need it.

*Q: Back again to the cultural shock of working in Washington. Did you fall into that bureaucratic pattern fairly easily? Was it a problem at all?*

THOMAS: It was very easy because we didn't have any really tough issues at that point, other than Guyana. And the toughest things on Guyana had already passed. It was sort of residual things. So they weren't issues that required a lot of White House or seventh floor input.

*Q: Or debate with other bureaucracies?*

THOMAS: Yes. A very minor debate with EUR because EUR still had some chunks of Caribbean. I think they still had the Bahamas or something like that.

*Q: Okay. Let me then move on to when you moved up with Vaughn. When did you move up to the front office?*

THOMAS: I can't remember. I'd have to check my records.

*Q: And what was the job?*

THOMAS: Sort of a staff assistant kind of a job. It was keeping track of things, making sure actions got taken, followed and it involved travel on occasion too.

*Q: Were you the only staff assistant?*

THOMAS: Actually we had three. We had one other who was sort of at my level Harry Bergold who was a step up.

*Q: How long were you with Vaughn?*

THOMAS: Well. I'm not sure. Vaughn got selected as Head of the Peace Corps and I stayed with him until that point.

*Q: And then Mann came in? No.*

THOMAS: Mann had preceded Vaughn I believe. Because Mann at that point was the Under Secretary.

*Q: Under Secretary. So you were there with Vaughn throughout his period. Did you last beyond that, too?*

THOMAS: No. When Vaughn left I left and went with the Peace Corps.

*Q: Let's talk a little bit about the role of a staff assistant. Did you find it satisfying? Did you find it interesting?*

THOMAS: Yes. It was a lot of fun. You saw everything that was going on. You got a chance to travel with the Assistant Secretary. That was it.

*Q: Tell us a little about your recollections of Vaughn.*

THOMAS: Well Vaughn was an unusual guy. He had a very varied background. He went from being a Marine in World War II in the Pacific, to having been a boxer lived overseas in Latin America, worked for AID in Africa and Latin America, so he had a very distinctive background. He had a lot of sort of hands on experience in Latin America and spoke very good Spanish.

*Q: Was he very material?*

THOMAS: I didn't find him particularly material. No. I think he had some difficulty in adjusting to State Department and working at that level of a bureaucracy on a lot of political issues.

*Q: Does that include a problem of working for an undersecretary who had been his predecessor?*

THOMAS: I don't know. He never mentioned, at least in my hearing, a problem there so I'm not….

*Q: That's not an issue as far as you were concerned.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: How about relationships with other parts of the State Department? Did he have pretty good relationships there?*

THOMAS: I don't know. I mean as far as I could tell they were.

*Q: And other government agencies?*

THOMAS: Yes. I think they were pretty good.

*Q: Did he handle both AID and State Department matters?*

THOMAS: Yes. Well, you had an AID administrator in Bill Rogers and I don't recall exactly the structural relationship.

*Q: So Vaughn reported to him and the secretary?*

THOMAS: No. I think Vaughn was the superior in the Bureau even though they were at an equal level in the bureaucratic system. Assistant administrators roughly. The way it was set up with the merged AID/State Bill basically was reporting to Vaughn. But nevertheless I don't think there was any statutory arrangement. It was done on an informal basis.

*Q: I want to get back to that question. And you still have one deputy during this period?*

THOMAS: I think so. I can't remember anybody but Bob Sayre. Maybe there was somebody else but I sure don't remember who it was. I mean in effect… Well as you said this was supposed to be the heyday of the country director and indeed they had a lot of clout and you had some very senior guys there.

*Q: Now ARA was a tech base for a lot of innovations-management innovations-the combination of AID and State-one of them, I can't even think. Did you also get involved in things like PCPS and other programming exercises?*

THOMAS: Well, yes. I vaguely remember something about that but I don't remember it having any real impact on anything.

*Q: Nor any views about its effectiveness?*

THOMAS: DVDS?

*Q: DVS?*

THOMAS: Well, yes. It had no effect really except maybe having people order their thinking a little bit more systematically. It's not a system I think that was easy to fit into an organization like the State Department.

*Q: Even when the AID program was part of the organization?*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes. Because you could never really measure what kind of impact AID had. You couldn't really say that AID or the Alliance of Progress was a purely political program or purely an AID program therefore you had this mixture and it was hard to assess what you were accomplishing with it.

*Q: That's a very interesting comment and let me pursue that a little bit. One of the reasons for combining the political and economic efforts was to have political goals guide the economic efforts. Was that in fact what happened?*

THOMAS: That I'm not sure. Because I don't know how it was functioning before whether there was a greater gap than there was later. I think the integration sort of worked and there was definitely on a personal basis much more contact than you would find in your traditional relationship.

*Q: Now you're talking about when you were the desk officer?*

THOMAS: Yes. I've never seen it in any other mode than that mode.

*Q: And the special system. Did that combination make any difference to you? The combination of State and AID? Or was it so second nature to you by that time?*

THOMAS: That was the environment that was already set up by the time I got there so it was functioning and I'd never see the more traditional arrangement.

*Q: You said you traveled around with the secretary. Did you come away with any impressions about Latin America? General conclusions about its condition and its future?*

THOMAS: Probably not. I don't think I was thinking any deep thoughts along those lines at that point.

*Q: Your job was essentially operational?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: One other question. Was there much interest in ARA in other parts of the Department?*

THOMAS: No. As everybody knows, I think, it is a very inbred bureau.

*Q: Right.*

THOMAS: I served in Uruguay. I served with an ambassador who had literally never set foot outside the Western Hemisphere for any reason. Tours in the military, Foreign Service, never.

*Q: The reverse of that coin is that at times ARA becomes very important to the White House for example as it did right after Reagan was elected. That was not true in the '64-'66 period as far as you recall?*

THOMAS: Yes it was because you had the Dominican Republic during that period. And you had residual Castro concerns, you had Guyana concerns. I mean it was of concern probably because for the wrong reasons. It was sort of a negative kind of a way. Nobody wanted anything to go wrong. Plus, Kennedy with the Alliance of Progress you had what appeared to be bright prospects for an innovative program to deal with the third world. There was I think more interest then in Latin America than there is today.

*Q: But Kennedy was gone by the time you moved up to the front office?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And Johnson didn't have that great of interest in Latin America?*

THOMAS: Well, Johnson was very interested in not getting bitten by some nasty event in Latin America. That's why he moved rather decisively on the Dominican Republic. He didn't

want another Cuba or Cuber as he put it. He sure as hell was prepared to take what measures were required to avoid that.

*Q: What do you remember about that crisis?*

THOMAS: He also was concerned about Haiti by the way.

*Q: Oh really?*

THOMAS: We had a lot of contingency plans for dealing with Haiti.

*Q: Let me get back to Haiti. Let's talk about DR first of all. What do you remember about the DR situation in that period you were there?*

THOMAS: Well, it got out of hand. In the way that was quite unexpected. There was a lot of very high level interest in the White House.

*Q: It got out of hand in the DR?*

THOMAS: In the DR. Yes. At that point the ambassador wasn't there. He was off someplace, Tap Bennett. The thing developed rather fast. The White House was extremely interested. Mac Bundy went down there personally with an Air Force jet. It was handled at the White House level within the first day I think. Because I think Johnson really didn't want to have another Cuba situation on his hands.

*Q: Are you suggesting that Vaughn was left out of the loop?*

THOMAS: No. Vaughn was in the loop. He was part of the process but the decision making was not delegated. So he was one of the participants but he wasn't making the final decisions. The president was or Mac Bundy.

*Q: As you recall did it work out to your satisfaction? Do you think he did a good job?*

THOMAS: I think it did and given the limitations of the time they acted decisively. They sent in an overwhelming force which was the smart thing to do. You didn't piddle around with a battalion or anything like that; they sent in division level forces. I liked the outcome but it was certainly a stable kind of outcome.

*Q: What about Haiti? What was the situation in Haiti?*

THOMAS: I've forgotten what the domestic situation was but there was I think there was worry that Haiti would blow at some point and would be susceptible to Cuban influence. We were prepared to avoid that. Now when I say prepared I did not see the contingency plans on Haiti but we had a contingency plan. We even had prepositioned supplies.

*Q: Things were that tense?*

THOMAS: I'm not sure they were that tense but there was always concern about Haiti. Going back 40 years and the potential that Haiti had for turning into an unstable situation which could be exploited by Castro and the communists.

*Q: Beyond the communist threat, why else did you…What else did you see as our policy? What other concerns did we have in Latin America?*

THOMAS: Well to a great degree our policy was driven by the specter of what happened to Cuba and the Alliance to Progress was sort of an idealistic response to that. It was getting ahead of the game, preventing something similar happening.

*Q: What you are suggesting is that our policies were generally defensive?*

THOMAS: It was both. I mean the motivation was, on some people's part, the program was defensive -- preventing Cuba.

*Q: You're talking about the Alliance now?*

THOMAS: Yes. And our general engagement-political and economic engagement-with Latin America. But you could also say, and for many people, it was an idealistic development program. So you had it both ways.

*Q: How about for Charles Thomas?*

THOMAS: To me it was a mixture. At that point I didn't have any well formed ideas on the fricassee of development programs. I thought it might, you know, it had a chance to work.

*Q: Did you have any thoughts about whether we should have been more active in promoting democracy as a political tool, aside from the economic?*

THOMAS: Well.

*Q: Had you formed any view on that?*

THOMAS: No. No. No.

*Q: Let me ask you this. You traveled with the assistant secretary. Did you run into any anti-American demonstrations during this time? Was there any eggs thrown at you or Vaughn that you recall?*

THOMAS: I'm trying to think. We went through Columbia. We were in Venezuela. We were in Miami when the people were leaving Cuba in rowboats. There was a great deal of caution. Particularly say in Venezuela where there had been some terrorist incidents. There was

actually an armored personnel carrier parked out in front of the embassy permanently. But no. I don't recall any demonstrations. No. No incidents of hostility.

*Q: One last question. Anything else you've learned about how the Department works?*

THOMAS: Well, I think in that kind of you job you sort of internalize certain procedures and you understand the necessity of trying to figure out who's doing what on the seventh floor. You learn that the State Department doesn't function according to organization charts. It's purely a question of who can do what and who's got the clout to do it, who knows who and who trusts who. Also that there is a dysfunctional personnel system in the State Department.

*Q: We'll get to that in a second. Did you develop an inner circle of contacts on the seventh floor and in other bureaus?*

THOMAS: Yes, well we didn't interact a great deal with other bureaus except for EWA and some residual interests in the Caribbean.

*Q: Caribbean. And the seventh floor?*

THOMAS: Seventh floor. Yes. I knew all the staff assistants up there.

*Q: Tell me about this functional personnel system.*

THOMAS: Dysfunctional.

*Q: Dysfunctional.*

THOMAS: Yes. Well, I mean it was clear that once you left the junior officer level the system didn't function as an objective arbitrator of who should go where and there were a lot of…Because it was such a tiny system, who you knew and who wanted what and what your timing was were pretty important. It wasn't as if a systematic process existed to make sure the right guy went to the right place. Basically I think because it couldn't exist because there were just too few people for that kind of system.

*Q: Did you spend any time on personnel work as a special assistant?*

THOMAS: Yes we did. We spent a lot of time on who was going to be assigned to what jobs.

*Q: Right. You yourself, personally?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Ambassador, DCM, below that as well?*

THOMAS: No. Yes. Well certainly below that. Not really ambassadors or DCM's because that was done by Vaughn to the extent that an assistant secretary has any impact at all which, in my experience, is virtually nil. Other than that I don't remember. Certainly in the 1980s, the assistant secretaries had very small impact on assignments.

*Q: But you did work on personnel assignments as a special assistant?*

THOMAS: Yes. A peripheral kind of thing.

*Q: Let me move on then. Vaughn went to the Peace Corps and you followed.*

THOMAS: I did.

*Q: At his request?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Did you have the slightest idea what you were getting in to?*

THOMAS: I had a generally good idea of what it was all about.

*Q: You detailed to the Peace Corps. Correct? You never left the Foreign Service.*

THOMAS: No. No.

*Q:* W*hy the Peace Corps?*

THOMAS: Well the Peace Corps at that point was relatively new. It was doing some interesting things. It was a chance to run something of a dimension that you couldn't expect to experience in the Foreign Service for a long time in your career, if ever in fact.

*Q: So it was the management side that was attractive?*

THOMAS: Management and the idealistic.

*Q: Idealistic.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And you went directly from Washington to Honduras?*

THOMAS: I did.

*Q: You didn't work at the Peace Corps Headquarters at all?*

THOMAS: Never did.

*Q: Did you get any indoctrination at headquarters? A little bit of training period at all?*

THOMAS: No.

*Q: You didn't stop at Go, you just went right to…*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And what did you find when you got to Honduras?*

THOMAS: Well we had a large program there. It was about 130 to 150 people and it was a very varied program. It had architects. We had…

*Q: Architects?*

THOMAS: Yes. We had a small group of architects. We had nurses. We had community developers and we had agricultural people. So it was a lot of variety. It was an interesting program.

*Q: And were there any surprises? Had you read up at all on the program before you left?*

THOMAS: I knew because we'd traveled around a lot in Latin American and we'd seen the Peace Corps in action. So I pretty much knew what we saw.

*Q: But the Honduras program specifically now.*

THOMAS: I knew what they were doing because I knew what the numbers were. There was no real surprises there.

*Q: Tell me a little bit about how effective you thought the programs were.*

THOMAS: Well it depends what you mean by effective. If you are talking about effective as a way to foster international understanding and educate a lot of Americans in a certain area of relationships with other countries or if you are talking about development. There are a lot of different goals for the Peace Corps. I think in terms of development it may have been a pretty small impact. In terms of its impact on Americans, it was a big impact.

*Q: Why was that?*

THOMAS: This was sort of mostly at the micro level. Obviously it couldn't do that much. I didn't see…

*Q:* …that much in a given period of time.

THOMAS: Yes. And it's really hard to measure. You can do certain things, that the results that don't appear particularly in Peace Corps programs for 20 or 30 years. One is the personal relationships that are developed. One are the examples that the volunteers set for people, especially in the education area, and certain kinds of health programs, agricultural programs. You may be teaching say raising pigs as we did in Honduras. The impact of that could take the time between a kid learns it until he's an adult. So it's not… I wouldn't expect to see concrete measurable results…(End of Side 2 Tape 1)

*Q: What about some of the volunteers who were there while you were there? Did you ever run across them again?*

THOMAS: Um hum.

*Q: And whatever happened to them after that?*

THOMAS: Well, for example one volunteer who was there working on construction programs, he'd been an engineer. He is working for Boeing Aircraft Company right now. Another has gotten into politics. We had a lot of nurses who just continued on in their profession. We had some older ladies who were in their 60s and 70s and they are all dead now. So…

*Q: So you really had a mixed representation of age groups.*

THOMAS: Yes. Very wide. We had some people under 20 up to 70.

*Q: Really? I didn't realize that. And as the general composition you came to view this as a positive experience?*

THOMAS: I think it was a positive experience for the volunteers. It very clearly was. It was a positive experience for the host nation as well.

*Q: How about for the United States?*

THOMAS: I think it was. For a small amount of money we got a lot out of it.

*Q: These volunteers had an impact on their localities where they were working?*

THOMAS: Yes. I think so.

*Q: Even on a personal basis?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: What was the job essentially as director? What did he oversee primarily?*

THOMAS: Sort of general supervision to make sure people were doing what they were supposed to be doing.

*Q: So you traveled around the country a lot?*

THOMAS: Continually yes. And dealing with problems. Health problems or personal problems, discipline problems. And then you had program development working with the host nation figuring out what they would like us to do and talking to the local community and seeing what they wanted to do and seeing if we could negotiate something with Washington to produce those volunteers.

*Q: Weren't there that many volunteers who were in the program?*

THOMAS: It ranged depending upon the cycle. I think we averaged around 130.

*Q: What percentage were personnel problems?*

THOMAS: Very low.

*Q: Very low percentage.*

THOMAS: They did a lot of rather draconian weeding out in the initial selection process. During the course of training they weeded out a lot of people too.

*Q: Was Vietnam an issue at all among the volunteers in Honduras?*

THOMAS: Yes it was.

*Q: How did that play out?*

THOMAS: It was an issue. I can only remember one concrete instance. That was we had a program for many flags in which all countries were to contribute in some way to helping out in Vietnam. We were twisting the arms of Central American countries to make donations. We would provide an aircraft to fly the stuff over. Volunteers saw that this was to say the least artificial and they reacted against it. They were a little unhappy about it but there were no demonstrations.

*Q: Did you have to talk to them about policy?*

THOMAS: We talked a lot about it. But this was before the real peace movement began.

*Q: Still a bit early.*

THOMAS: Yes. The volunteers were becoming disenchanted with what we were doing and

seeing it as artificial.

*Q: What we were doing for Vietnam?*

THOMAS: Not so much in Vietnam but its impact say in Central America where you were trying to line up allies through arm twisting and they were aware of that.

*Q: Were the volunteers at all helpful in providing information to the embassy about political or cultural events in Honduras?*

THOMAS: There was a prohibition against doing that which we enforced and there was to be no intelligence gathering. That would be disastrous for the Peace Corps if we became an adjunct to the CIA. There was a great temptation to do that. Not that it could have provided a lot. In those days the CIA was scarfing everything it could and there was some possible assistance the Peace Corps could provide but it would have been disastrous for the Peace Corps to do it.

*Q: Were you ever accused of being a CIA tool?*

THOMAS: I don't remember that although I know in some countries they were.

*Q: But not in Honduras.*

THOMAS: I don't recall anybody saying that in Honduras. No.

*Q: Were the Honduras officials quite open with you? They wanted the Peace Corps and they were…*

THOMAS: Well I mean they were relatively open. The extent to which they wanted the Peace Corps is hard to say because their views were diluted by their desire to maintain friendly relations with the U.S. and to continue military and economic assistance programs. For some of them, okay, those crazy Americans want to send in volunteers, okay, let them. If it makes them happy that's fine. There was also among others the hope that it would actually contribute to development and others. They would have additional people to assist them with different programs.

*Q: But there were skeptics?*

THOMAS: Yes. Sure.

*Q: Reflecting what?*

THOMAS: Reflecting people who were against American policy and resented the American presence, chronic leftists who saw this as an aspect of imperialism. But they weren't particularly vocal. On the other hand at that point Honduras was being run by a right wing,

basically a junta.

*Q: So there wasn't much debate about the program at all? And the officials were responsive to you and your needs?*

THOMAS: Yes. Pretty responsive.

*Q: Essentially. Were there areas which they wanted to get into where you couldn't provide assistance?*

THOMAS: I can't remember. I'm sure there were but I just don't remember a concrete case.

*Q: I want to go back to the question of independence from the rest of the U.S. government. How did that play out with the embassy?*

THOMAS: It was no problem with the embassy.

*Q: The embassy obviously respected the need for the Peace Corps.*

THOMAS: The Ambassador was supportive and positive.

*Q: About the program?*

THOMAS: And didn't try to interfere in any way basically. He was helpful, was very friendly to the volunteers, would have receptions for them occasionally. But didn't interfere at all. Nobody did. The political counselor was the same way. The DCM was the same way. At that time you have to remember it's the early days of the Peace Corps. It had a lot of support in the United States and there wouldn't have been a great deal of tolerance I think, for an embassy that really tried to detract from the independence of the Peace Corps.

*Q: Although in other places there were efforts to do so? Tell me in your travels through Honduras, were people welcoming of the Peace Corps?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: It was accepted by the population?*

THOMAS: It was accepted. I think the population probably had higher expectations than were justified by what the Peace Corps could do. There was always the possibility that maybe the Peace Corps would bring with it money and aid and stuff like that. So there were mixed feelings. The people in Honduras were basically pro American. Most of them would have immigrated to the United States if they'd had the chance.

*Q: And the volunteers made a good impression I assume?*

THOMAS: Yes

*Q: With the local population.*

THOMAS: Some stayed.

*Q: Some stayed? Tell me do you recall did you learn any lessons about management of an operation?*

THOMAS: You learn the basic lessons about delegation. The thing I learned about the Peace Corps is that there was a real maternalistic tendency on the part of the Peace Corps staff.

*Q: Washington staff?*

THOMAS: And overseas staff to sort of micromanage things. These volunteers were almost by definition responsible, intelligent adults who were really quite capable of essentially running the program themselves. They really needed less staff direction than the Peace Corps was accustomed to. They really wanted to run everything. For example, the staff set the allowances for the Peace Corps. The volunteers were given a living allowance. By the time I got to Honduras I said, "Why don't we just let the volunteers set their own allowance?"

That worked very well. The underlying assumption was if you let them set their own allowance, they're going to overpay themselves. Well actually they did just the opposite. We had a volunteer in Uruguay. He sort of got forgotten by the system and we had raised allowances to accord with inflation at one point, or the volunteers had actually. But he sort of dropped out. It turned out that he didn't complain. We finally found out this guy was getting $27.00 a month at that point and never said a word.

*Q: Really?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Let me understand this. Did you set your own allowances? Did each country set its own allowances or was it set by Washington?*

THOMAS: No each country did.

*Q: Each country set its own allowances.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: I see. Are you suggesting you were overstaffed at headquarters in Honduras, in particular Tegucigalpa?*

THOMAS: We weren't particularly overstaffed. We didn't have that many people.

*Q: What I'm saying is you would have centralized the operation there?*

THOMAS: A lot of things-decisions-could have been made by the volunteers themselves and it would have been better to do it that way. A lot of it was programming and the administrative stuff and things like allowances.

*Q: Volunteers being fully self-sufficient.*

THOMAS: They were extremely self-sufficient. We had volunteers in communities that could only be reached by aircraft. They were on their own. We had one volunteer who happened to live in the president of Honduras' home town which was accessible… You could walk to it but you had to take a plane to get there. She was a very good looking woman, this volunteer, and the president liked to dance with her when they had a local dance. He was a bit of a lecher.

*Q: As presidents will.*

THOMAS: And every time she'd dance with him she'd hit him up for some money for one of the projects they had. That's as far as he ever got.

From the management side, that's the lesson I learned that you could delegate a lot. There was a tendency to treat volunteers as college kids and most of them were beyond that. Christ, we had volunteers who were grandmothers.

*Q: I didn't realize that at that time they had to open doors.*

THOMAS: These are regular nurses. Some of them had advanced degrees. In fact most of them had BS's in nursing and they could operate on their own very easily.

*Q: It's obvious that you enjoyed the experience enough to continue for another couple of years.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And in '67 you went to Uruguay as director.*

THOMAS: Right.

*Q: Out of the clear blue sky?*

THOMAS: Yes. Pretty much.

*Q: Had you indicated that you wanted to continue in the Peace Corps?*

THOMAS: I made it clear that I wanted to become a director someplace.

*Q: I see.*

THOMAS: Just to run my own program.

*Q: And did you have any trouble with State Department on staying on?*

THOMAS: No. No. Not a bit. State was sort of encouraging this sort of thing at that point. There were a fair number of FSOs who did this including Dick Holbrooke.

*Q: He became Peace Corp director?*

THOMAS: In Morocco, yes.

*Q: Oh, really?*

THOMAS: Yes. That's right.

*Q: I didn't realize that. How was the program in Uruguay? Was it much different than…*

THOMAS: Uruguay was completely different because essentially…Uruguay at that point was an under developing country.

*Q: Under developing country?*

THOMAS: Yes. It was about the same level as Argentina.

*Q: Working its way down.*

THOMAS: Which meant that they had been at the level of Canada in the 1930s. They were just working their way down. It had a high literacy rate, a lot of people questioned why the Peace Corps was there at all because of…

*Q: A lot of Americans?*

THOMAS: Americans and even some Uruguayans. Not a lot because they didn't know that much about the program. Because there's always resistance in Washington to having a program in a country like Uruguay.

*Q: Because?*

THOMAS: Because it was so developed.

*Q: Oh. I see.*

THOMAS: The mindset was that the peace corps is for underdeveloped countries and it's not for developed countries or even under developing countries.

*Q: Now how big of a program was it?*

THOMAS: The program ranged from about 15 to 23 depending on the cycle.

*Q: And the emphasis?*

THOMAS: The initial emphasis was a 4H program.

*Q: 4H program?*

THOMAS: Yes. They had an equivalent organization of 4H.

*Q: Why 4H?*

THOMAS: Well because of the farming country and 4H could do a lot of things in that area. Although it was farming it was not terribly rich soil. It was not very efficient farming country so there was an area there for technical assistance and training younger kids.

*Q: And do we have an AID program?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: We have AID by then.*

THOMAS: A small AID program.

*Q: A small AID program. Was there any duplication or overlap?*

THOMAS: There was a willingness to cooperate on the part of AID. There was a very strong willingness. There were a number of places where they helped fund little projects. But there weren't any obvious places or big cooperation.

*Q: Did you try to change the nature of the program at all?*

THOMAS: Well we changed it a little bit. We also had an inherited program called leisure time activities which was sort of a strange program. I think the initial program that we put it in there just to get it into the country. It was basically to develop programs that would be working with kids when they're out of school and that sort of thing. Those are the two initial programs and there was a third which was a basketball program. Uruguay traditionally had been a basketball power in South America. They had sent down a group of basketball volunteers to work out in rural areas and the cities too, to develop better programs.

Unfortunately for some reason they never had the basketball players, I think our Peace Corps volunteers, playing together very much. That was sort of a disastrous start. They formed a team and they got beaten by everybody.

*Q: They being?*

THOMAS: The Americans.

*Q: Volunteers?*

THOMAS: Volunteers. Yes.

*Q: And they got beaten by everybody?*

THOMAS: Which damaged their credibility as instructors. They would have been better off if they had really developed their teams with everybody else.

*Q: Well, there is no common theme between 4H and basketball coaching.*

THOMAS: Well there is in a way. You're dealing with youth.

*Q: That was the emphasis?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: In the hopes of?*

THOMAS: In the hopes of having some impact upon development sort of indirectly through personal contact and new ideas. And also just helping out with a country where the money available for youth programs is pretty much drying up. The economy was in a real crisis at that point. We were right on the edge of the beginning of the Tupamaro terrorist activities.

*Q: I want to get to that in a second. The suggestion was that we sold a peaceful program to the Uruguayan government.*

THOMAS: I'm not sure that's true because I wasn't there at the beginning and I don't know how much arm twisting…. You remember Sergeant Shriver went around the world getting everybody to take the Peace Corps. Ours to some degree was sold because here's a guy, the brother-in-law to the president, the major power in the world wants to do something and there are very few countries that are willing to say no to that. They said, "What the hell. Let them come in."

*Q: By the time you got there it had been running for four or five years?*

THOMAS: Well it had been running for two years.

*Q: Two years only?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Oh. It started after Kennedy's assassination.*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes.

*Q: I see. So it was still very early in the game.*

THOMAS: Yes. I mean Kennedy might have been…

*Q: You got there in '67?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Were there areas that the Uruguayans were interested in having you move into that you couldn't satisfy?*

THOMAS: Well, they wanted to move into educational TV for children. There are a lot of vague ideas about how you might do this. This was before the days of …

*Q: This was early in the game.*

THOMAS: This was before the days of Sesame Street, which was sort of the idea I had-something similar to Sesame Street. We tried to find some volunteers who could capture that idea and help to monitor and develop the programs.

*Q: These were the TV production types?*

THOMAS: Yes. Yes. And we got a group of volunteers like that. We got about 25. They were going to work with the education ministry to develop these programs. There was a lot of turmoil in the ministry and mixed commitment for this effort. The volunteers, I think they never really quite figured out how you put together this kind of program. Plus it turned out there was a big equipment shortage as well. This really did not work out at all.

*Q: At what general conclusions did you arrive from this experience-or your experiences in the Peace Corps-about what makes a Peace Corps program effective?*

THOMAS: Well, first of all…

*Q: I'm talking In terms of economic development, not in terms of the American experience.*

THOMAS: Well first you have to have a local agency, organization, whatever, individual to

handle the country end of it, that is the local nationals. Without that it doesn't work very well. Now that can be either on a national government level or it can be on a local level. For example Peace Corps in Hungary had a lot of support at the local level where housing was provided and this was done not through the national government. That is a primary requirement to make the thing get off the ground, is commitment and the capability to support Peace Corps activities.

Secondly you need a program that the country perceives as useful in some fashion. And you need well qualified volunteers. Now you have to remember back in those days there were a lot of what they call "bags" –BA graduates with no real experience.

*Q: Bags?*

THOMAS: They were given some training by the Peace Corps but they weren't generally technically qualified. We did have some qualified volunteers in the TV area. Many volunteers…

*Q: But what you are trying to say is enthusiasm is not always enough?*

THOMAS: Well that's the conclusion I had. But it's also the conclusion of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps today is very much staffed by older, more experienced, technically more savvy volunteers.

*Q: Well it's a different Peace Corps than it was it '62.*

THOMAS: Yes. So the younger graduate with a BA degree usually receives two or three months of training in agriculture, or something like that, it's just not as useful as the real thing. Finally, would be that you need to give as much responsibility to the volunteers themselves in running the program.

*Q: Tell me a little about that. You finally made some changes in the management of the Uruguayan program.*

THOMAS: Yes. We tried to get the volunteers to take as much responsibility as possible. We certainly did in the administrative area. The critical issue was…The question of living allowances was always a contentious issue in the Peace Corps because the volunteers typically would say, "It wasn't enough."

So we just said, "Okay. Henceforth, it will be for the volunteers to set their own allowances," and it worked very well.

*Q: And you found that they did not take advantage of you..*

THOMAS: If anything it was the reverse. If anything they set them too low.

*Q: And what other decentralizations?*

THOMAS: We tried to… The problem in Uruguay where it got really interesting was we didn't have enough volunteers to really have a critical mass where we could have them help develop programs. We did some program development. The volunteers helped work on a program to combat something called Hydatid cysts, which is a disease that affects humans. It's transmitted through sheep and dogs. It's a major problem…

*Q: Like ticks?*

THOMAS: No. It's a cyst or I'm not exactly sure. I forgot exactly…

*Q: Spreads by contact?*

THOMAS: …what the agent is but it's transmitted from dogs to sheep to humans. It creates a big cyst in your stomach and you eventually die from it. A big problem in Uruguay and it can readily be solved through educational programs. We had the volunteers develop a program like that. I left before it was actually…

*Q: This was a health program.*

THOMAS: Yes. That was something the Uruguayans wanted and which was very important for them.

*Q: You're suggesting that you would have liked to have a great number of volunteers?*

THOMAS: It would have been helpful to have more volunteers to implement that kind of… We could deal with what we had but you have to consider the fact that volunteers are scattered over a very large country comparatively speaking. You didn't have that many chances to get them together to sort of kick around ideas and come up with new programs and things. The density of volunteers was so low.

*Q: But you did see all of them? I mean you went and visited all of them?*

THOMAS: Yes. You saw them a lot.

*Q: How about your relations with the embassy. Who were the ambassadors at that time?*

THOMAS: The first ambassador was…I forgot his name but he died playing baseball at a picnic in Uruguay. He is the one who had never set foot out of Latin America, a very nice guy. And then he was followed by Bob Sayre.

*Q: And both were very supportive of the Peace Corps?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And didn't really interfere with your operations?*

THOMAS: No problem.

*Q: Did you see them frequently?*

THOMAS: Yes. I used to go to country team meetings.

*Q: Did you?*

THOMAS: Yes. With Bob Sayre.

*Q: Now the reverse of the coin. Did you get involved in domestic politics at all? Uruguayan politics?*

THOMAS: No, No.

*Q: Did they try…*

THOMAS: The left occasionally would attack the Peace Corps.

*Q: And you would respond or silence?*

THOMAS: No. No. It was…I can't remember more than maybe once or twice that that happened. It would be in a leftist newspaper but it would have been counterproductive to even respond to it.

*Q: And the government did not try to drag you into any of their political problems?*

THOMAS: No. No.

*Q: So both sides, both the embassy and the government, left you pretty much alone?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: How about the AID program? Did they try to…*

THOMAS: AID was just very supportive and tried to be helpful and would have been happy to engage in joint programs whenever they could.

*Q: But? You couldn't get the volunteers?*

THOMAS: We just couldn't get the volunteers.

*Q: Now there was some unrest while you were there in Uruguay.*

THOMAS: Well Not really. What there was was the Nascent terrorist group that was beginning to develop. When we were there it hadn't really developed. The only thing it had it had made were we had a few incidents where they did some things that were more on the humorous side than the dangerous side. For example they left a bunch of very embarrassing government documents on the doorstep of the judge.

*Q: They being?*

THOMAS: The Tupamaros. And notified the media that they were doing this. That caused the government considerable embarrassment. They had not engaged in their kidnapping campaign and terrorist campaign at that stage.

*Q: But there were some…There was a general strike while you there. There was a student rise. Do you recall that at all?*

THOMAS: No. Nothing. It may have been but it was nothing that was you know really out of the ordinary. I mean labor was very strong there and there was strikes all the time but nothing that was surprising…

*Q:* O*ut of the ordinary?*

THOMAS: Out of the Uruguayan context.

*Q: Let me go back to the management side, the personnel side, of the volunteers. Vietnam any more problem than it was in Honduras?*

THOMAS: Well at that point Vietnam was heating up more and more but there was not, there was no effort- at that point to involve Uruguay in a way that the volunteers would have observed it.

*Q: So it was not an issue for you? They never raised the issue with you?*

THOMAS: In Uruguay they didn't. No.

*Q: I want to go back to Honduras. I forgot to ask you. How did you handle the anti Vietnam feelings of the volunteers?*

THOMAS: We just let them talk about it. The only issue was, what are you supposed to say when somebody criticizes U.S. policy on Vietnam? The response to that was you are not an official representative of the U.S. government so you can say anything you want.

*Q: Oh. I see. I see. The issue was not I'm working for a government that's renegade.*

THOMAS: No.

*Q: That was not the issue. They just wanted to know how to handle the criticism.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And there was less of that in Uruguay?*

THOMAS: Well there was plenty of criticism but for some reason it didn't seem to touch the volunteers that much. It did not become an issue with the volunteers.

*Q: What were the other major management issues? Now this was a small program. Roughly the same proportion of personnel problems as you had in the…?*

THOMAS: I'd say there were fewer because…

*Q: Fewer?*

THOMAS: Just because I only recall one real problem where a volunteer was caught in flagrante by the husband so we just sent him home right away. Not because he was screwing around but because he might be attacked by the husband at some point. That was the only real incident.

*Q: Did you come away from Uruguay with the feeling that the Peace Corps program was a useful program for the United States to conduct?*

THOMAS: I did.

*Q: And the volunteers all presumably came away with positive… Most of them came away with positive…*

THOMAS: Well I think the volunteers in Honduras definitely did. The volunteers in Uruguay themselves had some doubts working because the presentation that had been made to them about the Peace Corps was that it was to assist in development. A lot of them were wondering what are we doing in an under developing country like this? So they had some doubts.

*Q: They had some doubts about why they were there?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And the answer?*

THOMAS: The answer that I gave was the Peace Corps transcends simply development issues. It's also a people to people program. Quite possibly that will be its most important

long run contribution.

*Q: You really felt that.*

THOMAS: Yes. Sure.

*Q: You are still a proponent of the Peace Corps even today?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Primarily as a people to people program?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: And a way of expanding American people's view of the world.*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: I want to go back once more to the relationship between economic development. You seem to have some doubts about the Peace Corps ability to really influence economic development. True?*

THOMAS: I have doubts about any foreign aid program having a significant impact on economic development.

*Q: Now. Significant positive impact?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Because I think you said the Alliance had a negative impact*.

THOMAS: Possibly.

*Q: Possibly. So this is a general view you have of aid programs. We'll get back to that issue at a later stage I'm sure. How about the impact of the Peace Corps on bilateral relations?*

THOMAS: That varies country by country obviously. It had I think quite a positive impact in Honduras. In Uruguay it was probably too small to be that perceptible.

*Q: But Honduras you felt that it had a positive impact?*

THOMAS: Well, it had reached the critical mass. It was well over 100 and they were all over the country. Almost everyone was aware of, or had some contact personally, with a Peace Corps volunteer.

*Q: Okay, I think we might stop right here if you don't mind.*

THOMAS: Sure.

*End of interview*