SURINAME

COUNTRY READER
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CARL F. NORDEN
Vice Consul
Paramaribo (1940-1944)

Carl F. Norden entered the Foreign Service in 1938. In addition to serving in Chile, Mr. Norden served in Germany, Poland, Suriname, Cuba, Santiago, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Spain, Iran, France, and Venezuela. He was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert in 1991.

Q: *Now it was quite a change to go from Prague to Paramaribo, that was a totally new experience.*

NORDEN: That was an interesting post, I will tell you why. Most people don't think of it that way. Suriname was the source of about 70% of the bauxite that we imported, which meant bauxite for airplanes and that was rather important. There was considerable concern lest the

Germans get their hands on the bauxite. It would have been very easy to have sabotaged the bauxite works. Bauxite has to be dried before it is shipped. Wet bauxite that was shipped to Trinidad was bad news, would have been very bad news. Suriname was defended by twenty-four Dutch marines and two hundred natives with Dutch army officers, so it was a tricky thing.

Q: *Were they sort of a Free Holland movement?*

NORDEN: No. Eventually of course we made a deal with the Queen, saying if and when it looks as though there is going to be war we would take over the defense. I knew that there was this deal. When the G-2 [Army chief of intelligence] went on a tour of the area and he stopped by this two-bit post where I was the sole officer, the consul, I asked him when were we going to send some marines over here. The Dutch were fiercely independent. So I said to the G-2 when the agreement with the Queen was to be put in force. He said that I could be sure that something much bigger was in the works that would start it. So I had a Thanksgiving dinner with all the top Dutch people -- which meant for the most part mulattos, the Dutch did not have a color line at all -- and I noticed that something was going on in one corner with my newly hired houseboy, who was running into some difficulties. I sent for him and asked him, "What is the matter, what is the difficulty?" "Oh Mr. N, he black man and he want white ice cream."

Q: *So they were not as broad minded as one might think.*

NORDEN: As a matter of fact right after that my clerk came over and said, "Mr. Norden I have got to see you, I have a telegram, it starts out, ‘Eyes only for Norden’, so I can't decode the damned thing. I said, "I know what that is, it is when the boys are coming." The telegram said that at eight o'clock the next morning there would be such and such a troopship that would arrive in Paramaribo from Panama. It said "Please inform the governor.” So of course I called the governor and said I assume you have already received a message, which he had. He got his directions from the Queen. So the next morning we had one battalion of U.S. infantry.

Q: *Was there any opposition to this?*

NORDEN: Any Dutchman who knew me well enough to be informal with me would say, "Mr. Norden, it was not necessary, we can defend ourselves, the Dutch can always defend themselves." I said, "I know that, but if the Queen thinks it is necessary don't you think you had better think so too?"

It was an interesting post. Protocol, if you want protocol, take a small Dutch colony, boy, you get protocol! I had to call on the Dutch officials and the first two weeks I was there I called on every official, pay my respects and so forth. And then having done that I had to do a repeat to every official's wife.

Q: *You could not just leave your card?*

NORDEN: Oh no, you could not just leave cards, not at all.

Q: *Well, it gave you something social to do, anyway.*

NORDEN: It took me six weeks before my calls were done. That was one of the little tiny duties that you have in the Foreign Service.

ROBERT M. BEAUDRY
Principal Officer
Paramaribo (1955-1956)

Robert M. Beaudry entered the Foreign Service in 1946 after serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. His career included positions in Ireland, Morocco, Switzerland, and Italy. Mr. Beaudry was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Was it called Suriname in those days too?

BEAUDRY: Yes. It always was called Suriname. Dutch Guiana, I think, was something American map makers used.

Q: I was wondering because I always thought of Dutch Guiana, mainly because there was British and French Guiana.

BEAUDRY: In fact, it was the Suriname River that gave it its name. What's her name, Behn? An English novelist of the 17th century wrote books about Suriname. It was the place that the British swapped the Dutch for New York.

That was also a pretty good assignment, really. The principal officer job there. People get ambassadorial titles for that now.

Q: What was the situation in Suriname? You were there from 1955-56.

BEAUDRY: Yes. Well, the Dutch had just established a new, what they used to call "Dominion" status for Suriname and the Antilles. It was sort of a commonwealth arrangement. They really had local self government. The Dutch had a military presence, maybe a battalion, and were in charge of the police who consisted of local people except at the top. And they had a governor general, who was Dutch. But they subsidized the place quite a bit, although our main interest was Alcoa's bauxite mines, which were much more important then than they became later when they found bauxite lots of other places. So the Alcoa manager was very important. But it wasn't as dominant as some other interests had been in those countries in that part of the world.

We got along pretty well with the Surinamese and we didn't have any serious problems with the Dutch. There was no business of the US being sort of between the Dutch and the locals.

Q: It wasn't the case as so often happens in some of these colonial places where the colonial authorities from the home country are pretty suspicious of the Americans of trying to promote independence, etc.?

BEAUDRY: A number of the Dutch were unhappy about our role in Indonesia, but that was another ball game, although some of them had been there. But basically, we did not have that kind of political question. In fact...I am trying to think what our major problems were. There was one bit of investment that came in. Somebody wanted to fish for the shrimp in the area and there was a little back and forth about that kind of investment, because the Surinamese were used to the Alcoa type investment and they weren't used to smaller operators who were demanding this or that. But we really didn't have any serious problems. My problems were personal, and medical. I ended up being flown out. I lost ninety pounds down there.

Q: Were you married at the time?

BEAUDRY: Oh, yes. In fact a child was born on the way. The medical scene there was not at all promising.

Q: Wasn't there a Dutch hospital there or something?

BEAUDRY: Yes there was a hospital, but let me just say that blood samples were taken Monday to catch the KLM flight to Amsterdam and you hopefully got the results back Thursday, but probably not for another week. Anyway, I wound up being flown back to Bethesda, to the Naval Hospital, where I stayed for a month. That kind of stuff wasn't very well handled in the Department in those days, but I managed to get to Bethesda because I had home leave orders which they could use as a travel authorization. They arranged for one of the guys in Curacao to come over because it was only a two man post, plus a seven man AID mission, or whatever they called it then.

But, that was pleasant as a post. We had four children by then. From there, after a month in the hospital and home leave I went to Switzerland where I was the number two man in a three man economic section in the Embassy in Bern.

NANCY OSTRANDER
Ambassador
Suriname (1978-1980)

> *Born in Indiana in 1925, Ambassador Nancy Ostrander received her BA from Butler University. She was posted in Santiago de Cuba, Havana, The Hague, Antwerp, Mexico City and Kingston and was the Ambassador to Suriname. On May 14, 1986 she was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin.*

Q: And they tell you right then that you're in? It's not like the FSO exam where you have to wait for the results?

OSTRANDER: I did have to wait for the results; they would let me know in a day or two. Then I did get the word that my name had been reported out to the full Senate with a recommendation for approval.

Q: But you had a sense when you were there that you had passed?

OSTRANDER: I certainly didn't think that it was going to be controversial at all, since most of them didn't know where Suriname was. [Laughter] I told them about that, as a matter of fact. I had been briefed by the desk, and I had been reading in, and they did want to know if I knew Dutch. And I had been studying and going over to the FSI eight hours, one-on-one, every day. Dutch.

Q: How long did you keep that up?

OSTRANDER: About four weeks. I don't think I'll ever speak Dutch. In the first place, I find it impossible to speak a foreign language to anybody who knows English, and I've never met a Dutch speaker who didn't. I certainly got so I could read it, I got so I could understand it, and if I ever did come up against somebody who absolutely knew nothing but Dutch, and many of the Hindustanis, the East Indian people, and some of the Javanese don't know English, I could certainly make myself understood. But reluctantly.

Q: You did a lot of preparation. What about this ambassador's course, did they have that yet, over at FSI?

OSTRANDER: We had a conference, an ambassador's conference, that lasted a week. It was a couple of days here, and then we went off to some CIA place and communed together for a couple of days. I remember in that course, Geri Joseph and I got to know each other. Although she didn't go off to the CIA place; she had other things she had to do. But we got to know each other. She was going to the Netherlands, and I was going to Suriname, so we had that in common. There was a fellow who was going to Denmark [Warren Manshel].

Also Spike Dubs [Ambassador Adolph Dubs, taken hostage in Afghanistan and assassinated February 1979] was in that group, going to Afghanistan, and we got to be quite friendly. I remember, he was so thrilled, and the last time I saw him, he was downstairs. He was getting on the FSI bus and had a suitcase, and he was going over to Virginia, and on to his post. I'm pleased that he was so delighted because that's the way I remember him: a big smile on his face, really excited.

Q: What did you think of Geri Joseph?

OSTRANDER: I liked her very much. I sat there next to her admiring her hundreds of dollars' worth of silk suits, and she was so right, looking so ambassadorial. She told me that she sat there looking at me and envying my thirty years or whatever it was [of experience and] knowing what I was doing. And I thought, oh, gosh, too bad that it can't be a combination of both somehow. But if I had as much money as Geri Joseph did and was in the Foreign Service, something would

have had to have been very peculiar about my background if I made that much money out of it [government service]. I liked her very much, and when I was in the midst of that coup, she thought of me and after it was over, she wrote the nicest letter.

Q: We were speaking about security and the problems of terrorism.

OSTRANDER: Suriname had two routes to get to work, so that didn't provide much means of alternating, which is what security recommends--that you don't take the same route home all the time. And they also recommend that you vary your schedule, that you go in at different times, which also is not possible when you have a very, very small embassy and are doing as much of the substantive work as anybody, and you have to be there at the appropriate hours. In Suriname we worked from seven until three, straight through.

Q: Because of the heat?

OSTRANDER: Yes, because of the heat and because of the hours that everybody else worked. The Foreign Office worked only until noon, and then they worked also on Saturday. I was on call on Saturday, but I didn't usually go into the office. In such a small town, the office can come to you, if there's anything necessary.

That doesn't sound like too exhausting a schedule, but I can never remember an evening during the week and usually on Saturdays, too, that there wasn't a function that I had to attend. And you get as much done in those evening groups as you do any time.

Q: The minute you said seven to three, I thought, that's a long day, because then you have to go out at night.

OSTRANDER: Suriname slept at three o'clock in the afternoon until about six or seven. They stayed up very, very late into the night, because it's cool.

Q: Your training in Cuba was good for that, wasn't it?

OSTRANDER: But I can't anymore, that's all there is to it. I would go to the dinner parties. I'd still have to get up at five-thirty to get to work by seven. It was late every night, I must say.

Q: What about when you first arrived at the post. Could you discuss that? Did you stop anywhere on the way, first of all?

OSTRANDER: Yes. I took the Eastern flight to Trinidad and Tobago. You could go to Curaçao and wait for the Antilles Airline plane, which was a subsidiary of KLM, the ALM line. Get that flight if you happened to coincide with it. But that got you into Suriname about two in the morning, and the airport there is sixty miles out of the city and really in the jungle. It's the airport that was built by the U.S. Air Force in the Second World War, because we ferried people and equipment through Suriname on the way to North Africa. It's a beautiful big airport, and it was built by us, and it's still a great one, but it's sixty miles south of Paramaribo, and there's no way

that you can ask the Foreign Office to be out there at two o'clock in the morning to greet an ambassador.

So I went the other route, which was Eastern Airlines to Trinidad and Tobago. Richard Fox, who was ambassador at that time, kindly asked me to stay with him and his wife. I had known them here in Washington.

Trinidad and Tobago was infamous in not showing much courtesy in getting people through the airport, and I can still see both of us sitting out there on the tarmac, waiting: two U.S. ambassadors sitting there cooling their heels while people tried to get my baggage through customs and get me into the country. We waited a long time.

The next afternoon I took the Air France flight, which island-hops Martinique and on down to French Guiana, but makes a stop in Paramaribo. It isn't exactly what you imagine [as to how] of how you're going to arrive. It was packed full. People even in the rest rooms. There just weren't enough not enough seats and not enough flights. There still aren't, I'm sure.

Q: No first class, I suppose?

OSTRANDER: Oh, of course not. I can remember John Burke, who was Ambassador to Guyana at the time said, "Nancy, wouldn't you know that you and I would pick posts, when we finally could take first class, that had no first class." [Laughter] It's true. I did get first class, though, all the way to Trinidad and Tobago on the Eastern flight. That's the only time I've ever had that privilege.

All of the Amazon countries were negotiating a treaty called the Amazon Pact. They had just finished the treaty, and it was being signed in Brasilia, and so all the foreign ministers and most of the Foreign Office had gone to Brasilia at the time I arrived. I was met by somebody from Protocol, and by my entire staff, at the airport. I didn't make them see me off, incidentally, because by that time I understood what it meant to get everybody down there. But I didn't know that at the time, so they were all there, and they met me at the airport. We had a drink and refreshments while they got my things through customs, and it was then night, and we took an interesting drive through the jungle to get back. It was eight or nine at night, but, of course, the sun comes up at six and it goes down at six when you're on the equator, and Suriname is, I think, only four degrees north of the equator.

Through the jungle. To me it was very interesting, because having lived in the Netherlands, all the directional signs, the way the roads were, were set out--everything looks just exactly like the Netherlands, but you're going through the middle of the jungle. So it's really rather strange.

Then I got to the house. Nobody in it but me. Just nobody. In Suriname, you don't have servants at night; they go home. I was given the keys and just sort of turned loose, and that was the *greatest* disappointment of my life, that house.

Every wall, and I'm talking about even those in the same room, was painted a different color. I find this very distressing It bothers me. Let me give you a sample of one bedroom: There was an

avocado rug, one lavender wall, one navy blue wall, one yellow wall, and one orange wall. There were two overstuffed chairs in it that had slipcovers on them, and they were pink. The bedspread was something [else]. I have never seen anything like that. I learned later that Surinamers love this--the more color the better, and it doesn't make any difference to them if it clashes.

But I certainly didn't get any sleep that night. I don't know why. I was so dead tired, to begin with, and realizing that I couldn't--you know, I wish they'd warned me. And I wish they had said something like, "Don't worry, we'll do anything you want, we'll paint it. We're just not doing anything until you get here and have a look at it."

Well, the next day, when I went to the office for the first time, the poor administrative officer said, "Can we do anything for you?"

And I said, "*Paint* the house white!" I painted everything in it white, just because I couldn't stand all that. I'm very sensitive to color. I can't relax. I mean every room in that house--every wall was a different color. So anyway, they did that, and boy, what a difference it made. Then I started moving furniture around.

Q: But what did you do about that avocado rug?

OSTRANDER: Well, I found out later, the hard way, that the ambassador who had been there before me, Owen Zurhellen, had ordered a lot of new furniture. It takes so long to get anything down to Suriname. Not just that many ships go, and nothing goes by plane, apparently, because they can't fit it in the hold. They can't get a plane in that's big enough.

After I'd been there about six months, I got this cable from FBO [Office of Foreign Buildings] which said that they regretted that all that furniture--which I hadn't even known had been ordered--had gone down in the Bermuda triangle in a shipwreck. And that I was really indeed fortunate, because everything on board the ship had been lost. If it's only damaged, you can't replace it. They can't reorder it, because there it is. There are all kinds of government claims, and it's a dead loss, and so you can't reorder until there is a settlement. I didn't realize the government doesn't insure anything anymore. They just don't lose enough, and the insurance is very expensive to be worthwhile.

But I was indeed fortunate that everything had gone down. They reordered the furniture, and I made do with what there was. The color scheme was really rather nice, but I did get rid of that avocado rug. One of the bedrooms had been used as a cold storage room, and I kept that up until some new furniture did arrive. At that time I tried to make arrangements for getting the food out of the bedrooms and into closets, because I don't know about you, but I just can't live like that. I want to open a door and not see that it's storage. I found the house absolutely unlivable, because the way it was built, the architect had put the supporting beams right in the middle of the--for instance, as you walked in the front door, you walked right into a supporting beam, and you had to walk around it. And when you opened closet doors, there they were. In the bedroom. And I'm talking about beams that are sort of y-shaped, so that you smashed your head on things. I found this impossible to arrange the furniture. It was just impossible to live with, although you certainly learned to do so.

Q: What did you do for furniture since that new order of stuff went down?

OSTRANDER: Well, there was already furniture there. It was time to replace it, but you could make do. There was plenty of furniture. As a matter of fact, there was too much furniture and so stuff had been piled up in bedrooms. It was a four-bedroom house, and I would say that at least two of them were just jam-packed full of really bad furniture.

Q: Was this overstuffed furniture?

OSTRANDER: Some of it was. I fixed up a guest room that really, really looked nice, and I fixed up my own room, and then as stuff began to arrive--and toward the end of my tour a few things did arrive--I managed to get the other two bedrooms pretty nice-looking with furniture.

Q: What kind of furniture are you permitted to pick out? Do they give you catalogs and you select?

OSTRANDER: I never had that opportunity. FBO does that, and it was Henredon furniture, and I think a lot of surplus. As a matter of fact, you run into the same thing all over the world.

Q: Yes, you do; very heavy, sturdy furniture.

OSTRANDER: Very heavy. There wasn't much on the walls, and I did manage to get the Arts in the Embassies program. Did I tell you that story?

Q: No.

OSTRANDER: It was through a fluke that I got it. I started immediately to try, when I saw that there were no art institutes or art museums anywhere in Suriname. There was plenty of wall space, and it was all white by this time, and so it was really a great place for just that sort of thing.

After about six months of trying, I came back up to the department, and I went to see Ambassador Thompson's wife. She still runs it [the Arts Program], I think. I wasn't getting anywhere with it. I was really being stalled.

And I can understand why, because to send good art to a country like Suriname, where the humidity is incredible--but my point was this: you send it to Paris and London and Rome and Moscow, where they've got all the art you could possibly want. And yet here is a country that this is going to be the only opportunity for an awful lot of people to see anything in the way of good painting. And I thought it was criminal.

But anyway, I was sitting there, being turned down by Mrs. Thompson, and the phone rang, and she answered it, and I heard her say, "The ambassador isn't here, but his wife is." And then the blood sort of drained out of her face, and she looked at me, and she said, "I do beg your pardon,"

and handed me the phone. And when I hung up from that telephone conversation, she says, "You can have anything you want."

Q: She thought you were being one of those testy wives.

OSTRANDER: Oh, yes. And she sent me--thirteen very large paintings. I don't know how they ever got them into a plane. But got them down there. Then all my artistic friends down there automatically came over to help me hang them, and they all had such good ideas, and it really looked great. The inspectors were there, I remember.

And that night--or very shortly thereafter--I held a grand opening. I gave something which in Suriname, in their tongue, would be called an *opodoro*, which is an open door, or an open house. And invited everybody in the city, and even at that, people gate-crashed, because they wanted to see the paintings.

Q: Now could you remember any of the artists of these paintings that you selected?

OSTRANDER: I had two very large ones by the wife of our Ambassador to Haiti--

Q: Oh, Sheila Isham. Hers are very good.

OSTRANDER: Yes, they looked very nice there. Oh, and I can't remember the others.

Q: But in the modern vein, with a lot of color.

OSTRANDER: Very modern, a lot of color.

Q: No representational work?

OSTRANDER: No. One that was sort of an impression of New York City, of a big city that had postmen on bicycles, and a little bit of Wall Street was really very entertaining to look at.

Anyway, that night even the president of Suriname came, and the TV station showed up to do a live on-the-scene thing, and I must say that those paintings looked better on TV than they actually did just looking at them.

And they're still there, I think. And since they're still there, I would recommend others do this, and that Mrs. Thompson's group down there in Arts in Embassies not worry too much about humidity. There is nothing more humid than Suriname. I did have air-conditioning in the house.

Q: Is this a masonry house? A stucco house?

OSTRANDER: It was wood, and you reminded me of a story. I kept hearing things at night, and then one day I got up, and I looked at the wall in back of my bed, and it looked funny. I went over and touched it, and the only thing that was there was the layer of paint. Can you believe it? I don't know, but something ate it. Something ate that whole wall and left nothing but the layer of

paint. All of Suriname, in those days, built things of wood. Everything looked exactly the way it did three hundred years ago, because they'd replace it one plank at a time, you know.

Q: So did you see a lot of wood from the outside of the house? Is it like Tudor with the wood beams going up and then the stucco in the middle?

OSTRANDER: It was cement block, is what it was, except that is, in the front. The ground floor was cement block, and then the upper part was wood with paint on it. Except for the part that's brick. Most of the center of Suriname looks like Williamsburg. It's exactly the same period. It's Dutch and it's brick; it's beautiful. It's colonial, let's put it that way.

Q: Was yours built in that style?

OSTRANDER: No, not at all. It was modern. It was a pretty good house for Suriname. I would say they're not really well-known for their architects, their modern architects. Which always struck me as rather funny, because look at Brazil, which is right next door. Fantastic architects they have there, and architecture. Using the modern with old-time styles, and bringing the outdoors in, and it's just so attractive. Not so very much in Suriname. It's the old part of town and downtown that is colonial, Dutch colonial I loved it. Oh, it's marvelous. They don't paint it very much. They do paint it, but then the paint goes so quickly.

I remember the Dutch ambassador, when I first arrived said, "They tell me that as soon as you look at these buildings, which look like they need a good coat of paint, and find them beautiful, you've been here too long." Well, it took me about two weeks to find them beautiful. [Laughter] I just loved them. There was something about that weathered wood. Everybody who got off the plane would look at it and say, "Why don't they paint it?" And I would look at it and think, "It's nice when they paint it, because it's beautiful all white, but somehow or other there's just something about that weathered wood that I really like."

The whole place is--if the Rockefellers would see it, they'd rebuild the whole city. Well, most of it's rebuilt, but on all the side streets you would see leftovers from the seventeenth century in places. Old brick lying around like nobody's business.

Q: I suppose that was the jewel in the Dutch crown, wasn't it?

OSTRANDER: One of them. Remember there was Indonesia. But it still is the second largest Dutch embassy in the Western hemisphere. Next to Washington, the largest Dutch Embassy is in Paramaribo. Now they had an architect go down there and build them a new embassy. It was a very modern building, looked very Dutch, and yet they had incorporated into it all the reminiscences of the old Dutch colonial. Oh, great, really.

Q: Well, you were talking about the first night there, and how it was the worst night of your life because you had all these dreadful colors and everything. Did you think, "This is just too much for me? I can't take this?"

OSTRANDER: Well, I cried all night, that's for sure.

Q: Because this was the culmination of your career!

OSTRANDER: Of course! And as I looked at it, I thought, "I can't live in it! And there isn't anybody here, and I don't even know where the john is. I don't even know where the kitchen is."

Q: To be left all alone like that!

OSTRANDER: It wasn't what I had expected at all. The next day, when the admin officer said we'll paint it any color you want, I felt better. But I thought then, why didn't they phone me up? But, of course, this is a very inexperienced staff. People get sent to Suriname--at least at that time they were sending people on their first tours in a new field--what do they call that--an excursion tour. For instance, my administrative officer was, out of cryptography. They had taken people with talent out of the communications field and given them excursion tours to see how they would do as administrative officers. The one I had was terrific and very good and is still in the administrative field. The second one, too, was that.

So they sort of had to learn the hard way, and they were learning on *you*. I think I was expecting too much. I think that if I had had better briefings, I wouldn't have been upset. After I got back, when new ambassadors were going down and they asked me for briefings, I tried to talk to their wives, too, to alert them to this. I didn't find them very receptive, because this was the culmination of a career, and they weren't wanting to hear this. But, at least they weren't going to go down there with any illusions based on my experience.

Q: Did you have a chance to talk to Owen Zurhellen before you went down?

OSTRANDER: No, I didn't talk to him. I talked to the secretary. He wrote me at length.

Q: You weren't able to talk to Helen either?

OSTRANDER: No, she was probably in London with her daughter again. Owen's letters were marvelous, but they were about what to do and what to get briefed on before I got down there. He talked a lot about what to do about bringing food, and we were given an ample allowance. You know [in] Suriname back in the seventeenth century, you died if the ships didn't get in, because there just wasn't anything to eat there. I don't think it's changed that much, because if the ships get held up somehow or other . . . my meat came from New Zealand.

Q: Do they fly that in in freezer planes?

OSTRANDER: No, they brought it by ship. I assume that they still do, and it was fine. My office was in the tallest building in Suriname--it was on the sixth floor, and you could see the ships coming in so you knew very well whether or not your furniture had arrived, or the meat. "Ah, it's New Zealand; that means that the meat is here."

I had a lot of freezers. Their fishing industry there, which is now also gone, [gave us] marvelous shrimp. I also did a lot of fishing on my own and stocked the freezers.

Owen Zurhellen wrote me very good letters, as I was saying, telling me what to bring, so I went down here to one of these warehouses and got one of those dollies and bought a thousand dollars' worth of food. It was cases of food, and it was a lot of fun.

Q: Of course, you had already entertained so much that that was no problem for you. What sort of entertaining did you like to do on your official--.

OSTRANDER: They had a cook who was superb, Soeki. The servants went home at night. As a matter of fact, they all went home at noon unless I was doing something, and then came back if I needed them. I soon learned that unless I was having a dinner party or a reception, I didn't want them back. It was kind of nice just to mill around the kitchen and fix something for myself.

I started giving dinner parties at first, because it seemed the thing to do, but I soon learned that that wasn't going to do for me. Of course, you have the wives to dinner parties, and the money doesn't go very far when you're doing that. I didn't get much representation money.

But also, after dinner, they followed the custom of withdrawing, and the women were always in one end of the room or withdrawn somewhere, and the men--who were the ones I was supposed to be with--were over somewhere else. And as much as I like to talk to the women--because I'm doing both roles, so I like to know where they buy things, and it's good to find out about schooling, because I've got a staff with children and all that sort of thing. But what I really was sent there for was to find out about the political side of things and that was over there where the men were. Now I could get some good things from the women on that score, but I needed to be talking to the men, and it just wasn't working. I would invite my DCM whose wife wasn't there, and turned him loose over there, but it wasn't the same.

So I decided, what I'm going to do is reserve the dinner parties for just social times, with good friends, and wanting to get together with the women, and I will go the luncheon route otherwise. And that's what I did, and that worked magnificently. Three or four times a week I had luncheons that usually started about one, and then since nobody was going back to the office, they were going home, they would leave about three. I would have only one table of twelve or fourteen people, in a circular table, and I invited only the men, which meant that it could go a long time.

I don't mean to say that, because there were times when I invited women, too, but it depended on what their job was. There were an awful lot of women doing an awful lot of very good work in Suriname.

I had, for instance, a group that would be in the multilateral area: the EEC man, the U.N. man, the World Health Organization man, this sort of thing. Then I would have a group that was labor union, and the minister of labor, and labor affairs. A group that was press and media. It worked marvelously, because they were all delighted to see people they knew very well, and they really opened up and talked about the issues that interested them all, and I learned a great deal. I used this when visitors came, too. I welcomed every visitor from the U.S., whatever they were coming for, because it would give me an opportunity to invite another group.

Soeki the cook was superb. I could call him at eleven o'clock in the morning and say, "I've got to have a luncheon. Can you get something together for fourteen people by one o'clock?" And it was always marvelous.

Q: Now tell me about Soeki.

OSTRANDER: He's Indonesian. Last name was Rachman, which is, of course, a Dutch name.

Q: And he had been the embassy cook for a while?

OSTRANDER: Owen Zurhellen got him because the cook Owen had when he got there quit--I think was hired for a big hotel in Aruba. So Owen, who is not a shy person, went to a luncheon out at one of the hotels and found it delicious, and just walked right back into the kitchen and hauled Soeki out and hired him.

Q: It's a way to get a good one.

OSTRANDER: Well, he was great. He always wanted to check the menus with me, and he would come in a couple of days before. I tried to plan the luncheons at least a week in advance, and I would write them down on the calendar. He fixed my lunch every day, no matter what. He didn't fix my breakfast or my dinner, so he came for lunch. He would come in with his with his pencil and paper, looking very, very serious. He would say, "Now, for the luncheon on whatever, the head of the Supreme Court's going to be here, and the last time he was here we had beef, so what do you think we'll give him this time? What do you want to start with?

I would say, "Oh,--let's start with your delicious pumpkin soup."

"Well," he would say, "I was thinking that perhaps maybe the clear consommé would be better on this occasion."

And I would say, "Of course."

Then he would say, "What, ma'am, do you want for the first course?"

And I would say, "Are there any of those shrimp left over?"

"Well, I was thinking of some of the tukunari fish."

And I would say, "All right."

And then, "What do you think for the third course?"

"Well, let's go with your delicious cordon bleu."

"Well, I was thinking maybe chicken kiev." [Laughter]

And he would always have the menu, and we went through this farce because he insisted.

Q: I gather he kept track of what he had served everybody.

OSTRANDER: If he kept any files, I didn't know it. He must have remembered it.

Q: Did you actually write it out so that you wouldn't repeat what you gave to somebody?

OSTRANDER: No, I relied on him entirely. I kept full records, that is, my secretary did--of who came when, who was invited, who didn't show. A third time they didn't show, they didn't get any more invitations. That's just all there was to it, unless there was some really good reason. But on the third time telling you they're going to come and then don't, or if they turn you down flat three times, then I just decided they really--for some reason or other--weren't interested.

Q: Did that happen very often there? Was it a certain group of people?

OSTRANDER: The labor union people were difficult. I can still remember talking to some labor person and introducing him to somebody else who was in labor, and thinking that they would get along, and he turned and snarled at me, "He's a company man."

I learned something then. Maybe it's a fear of the company man that they don't want you--I don't know. Anyway, they came often enough, but I never knew until the last minute who was going to show up at the front door.

Q: So you had to keep it fluid.

OSTRANDER: Sure did.

Q: With a round table. Was the round table there, in the house?

OSTRANDER: No, they weren't round. I think maybe Owen did that. Somebody had round things built that went on top of the nice mahogany table. I expect it was Owen, too,--it would sound like him--that had marked on there where to put the plates if it was for nine people, ten people, eleven people, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, whatever. So that the staff could just come in and find the number and put the plate there for it. It was great.

Q: Did you use seating plans?

OSTRANDER: Oh, yes. My secretary did those and cleared them with the DCM, who was supposed to be protocol officer. Just as I went out the door about fifteen minutes ahead of the luncheon, she would hand me the seating arrangements and the place cards. She kept files of place cards so that she could use them over and over again, if they came back. And she kept track of who was invited, when, to make sure that I got everybody in, yet didn't overdo one.

Q: To do this systematically as you obviously did, seeing different groups of people and then going to certain parties and all the national events, you must keep a very close set of records, I

should think. You'd get completely bogged down, wouldn't you? You wouldn't know who you'd had where, or who you owed.

OSTRANDER: You're talking about countries that have more than 313,000 people in them, I think. [Laughter] USIA does list people, as I'm sure you know, with their country plan, as to who are the movers and shakers and in what audience they should be reached. I kept copies of those lists and made sure that everybody on that list got invited at least once during the course of the year. Other people too, but everybody on those long lists--they were long lists--and they sure got in a reception or whatever.

Q: It's a lot of work, isn't it?

OSTRANDER: Yes, it is. I only got $5,000 a year, as I recall. And let me tell you that I made that money stretch--fishing for the first course is one way to make the money stretch.

Q: You mean you actually fished yourself?

OSTRANDER: Yes, and was very proud when I looked down at that and realized that I'd put that on the table.

Q: What would you have, three or four courses at lunch?

OSTRANDER: A soup course, a fish course, the main course, and a dessert.

Q: No salad?

OSTRANDER: Yes, there was always a salad.

Q: Well, then that's five, isn't it? I presume you did the salad separately.

OSTRANDER: Yes, I did. They eat the big meal at noon. I had a good thing going with fresh vegetables, because at that time we had the Air Force refueling in Suriname.

They flew down from Wright Patterson Air Force Base, oh, maybe once every three months or so, and refueled in Suriname, and they very kindly would get in touch with me and say, "What can we bring you?" So we had this agreement that, so long as it was for representational purposes, they would provide from Wright Patterson. So I got *lettuce* and *apples* and all these fresh things that were just absolutely impossible to get otherwise--and it was such a treat. Every three months, and Soeki could make that stuff last a long time. I don't know how he did it.

I always also made up a small basket--I tried to make them very attractive--not such a small one, of cauliflower and one sample of everything, and sent it over to the president.

Q: Why how nice. Did you do this each time?

OSTRANDER: Each time. Oh, they loved it. His wife told me that he always insisted, whenever that basket came, that he would make the salad himself. So you can make it do a lot.

Q: Was that your idea to do that?

OSTRANDER: Yes.

Q: What a clever thing. See how far-reaching that is.

OSTRANDER: Oh, you bet it is.

Q: You sent him a cabbage, and he had good will towards America. [Hearty laughter]

OSTRANDER: And he sent me a parrot, which I loved dearly. He thought I was lonely, and I sure was in that big house. There's nobody to talk to. If you have problems with your staff, or worries about your staff, there's nobody to share that with, absolutely nobody. Or concerns about them. Or wondering how to use them to better advantage. And you just live with it.

Q: How much talking can you do with your DCM? I mean, you had selected your own DCM, but probably from a list.

OSTRANDER: Yes, I had a list, and interviewed everybody, and selected Dave Cox. The bureau had pushed him and wanted him to go. And I must say, he had had experience in just about all the things that I hadn't had experience in. He knew economics, he knew political, he had done visits, he was familiar with U.N. He really had a really wide scope.

Q: That complemented yours.

OSTRANDER: Yes, that complemented mine. And so the bureau had pushed him, and I had no trouble going along with that.

Q: But he was nobody you knew?

OSTRANDER: No, I didn't know him. Unfortunately, he got sick after he'd been there about six months or so. Let me see, he got there in August or so, and I think he left in April. And then the Department left me six months with nobody. They didn't have a candidate; they didn't have anybody to offer. And the government was on the brink of falling. Alcoa was on strike. They'd shut the smelters down, so the economics of the country was falling apart.

I called the labor officer, who was regional, and living in Barbados when that happened, and he said, "I'm sure you can handle it yourself." The Department said, "You can handle all the political reporting yourself, all the economic reporting."

So I ended up doing just about everything there was. The USIA officer left ahead of schedule with no replacement. The consular officer was transferred, I remember, to Spain, and they were very sorry, but they couldn't get anybody down for another few months.

That's when I got the flavor of what it's like in a post that most Foreign Service officers don't particularly relish serving in, in a time when you can't really send anybody to a post unless they select it. And I think that's probably too bad; the needs of the service ought to come first. I think everybody's preference ought to be in there somewhere, but it ought to be part of the equation, not all of it.

Q: Well, I don't understand this. With the whole thing falling apart that way, why didn't your regional labor man come out?

OSTRANDER: Oh, it's his job, but he was assigned to Barbados, and he had the whole Caribbean, and besides which he said he liked my labor cables. [Laughter]

I, of course, talked to John Burke, who was in Guyana next door, going through hell over the Jonestown thing. He was such a stabilizing force for me. I'm sure he doesn't realize it. He sent over his number two man from USIA to help me out, and just, in general, offered me all kinds of support.

I can remember he called me up one day, and he said, "Nancy, I just want to tell you that the fewer people there are in Suriname, the better the reporting gets." [Laughter]

I really needed a pat on the back by that time, and he gave it to me. I had my secretary, my code clerk, the administrative officer, who was an excursion tour code clerk person. At that time, my code clerk was leaving, too, and so I got a new code clerk. I had the old code clerk, before he left, doing consular work, and he enjoyed it. I mean he was delighted with the opportunity to do that sort of thing. It was a time when we were so short-handed that I was asking everybody to do everything. The consular officer, before he left, was doing some economic reporting and some political reporting.

It worked, but oh, you know, you shouldn't be left that short. If they're going to open an embassy, they should staff it and support it. If they're not going to do that, they should have left Suriname without an embassy and covered it from Georgetown, Guyana, as many other countries did and do. It's the way I felt about it.

I'm sure they couldn't have cared less if they didn't hear from us. No, that's probably not true; there were important things happening there. Surely the economics office and the labor office were interested in what was happening with ALCOA. They were having a crisis at the time.

The political situation was such that it was building up to the *coup* that finally happened. I couldn't report everything that occurred, but I tried to get up a sort of wrap-up cable every week as to what had happened. I think under those circumstances what you've got to do is something similar to that. You've got to remember that you cannot afford to report on anything that isn't on your goals and objectives list, because nobody in Washington has time to read it anyway, and you've also got to keep in mind that you must report to a group of people that do not have the luxury of keeping up with everything that's going on in the country. But that means that every week, then, you're going to have to summarize what's happened before, and I didn't have that

kind of time. So I was doing what reporting I could, and it sure could have been improved on, but anyway, it was a pretty adverse situation.

I finally got a new DCM, and I got a new USIA officer, and a new consular officer, so the staff finally did come together. Unfortunately, at that time I lost my absolutely superb secretary, Emily Grizzard. An absolutely remarkable woman, I would tell her what my troubles were, and she would come in with the most practical solution to the problem I've ever heard. She's just that sort of person that walks into the office, and everything just automatically seems to fall into place. She protects you, a problem doesn't get to you unless it absolutely has to.

Q: That's wonderful. Had you selected her?

OSTRANDER: No, she had volunteered to go to Suriname just as Owen Zurhellen's tour was coming to an end. I wished I could have kept her, but Emily has two daughters, and they needed her back in the States, so she went. She said that's the only thing that would come ahead of her job.

Q: You're showing me a pretty agitated first six months, probably more than that.

OSTRANDER: The whole tour was that way! No, I would say that it was not agitated--everything went swimmingly--up until possibly the 19th of November, 1978, which is six months after I got there. What happened on that day was Jonestown.

Q: Oh! Jonestown. You people had to help cover that, did you?

OSTRANDER: We were certainly affected by it, in many ways. Of course, at the beginning, we thought people were out wandering around in the jungle, and so the concern was with our citizens. We thought also that a lot of them might be headed for Suriname, to get away from the place.

Q: You didn't know they were all dead at that point?

OSTRANDER: No, that information kept feeding through to us, little by little. Suriname and Guyana were in a shooting war at the time, but still Guyana needed planes to try to get out there in the jungle and see what was going on, and hoped that Suriname could help them out. So we were being asked a lot of things like that.

Probably the biggest impact was that I hesitated to bother the desk in Washington for anything, because the desk officer, Dick McCoy had previously been the consular officer in Guyana, so he was very much in demand on this. Any time he had was spent with Guyana. Not only did everybody want to talk to him; he was also the person responsible for supporting Guyana. He was desk officer for Georgetown, too.

That went on for about a year, you know. Just not really willing or able to call on my desk back here because they were so completely and utterly occupied with that horror. And I don't mean to criticize; I was completely and utterly sympathetic.

Q: Of course. You couldn't call on the Department.

OSTRANDER: Well, I did only when I just absolutely had to.

Q: Yes, but you were having a coup down there, weren't you?

OSTRANDER: That didn't come until February 25th, 1980. But the political and economic situation had been really touch and go for six months before that. Elections had been called, so we were in the middle of an election campaign, trying to report that.

In January of that year, the sergeants in the military had gone on strike, because they wanted to have their own labor union, as they had back in the Netherlands when they were in the Dutch military. The Suriname government had not really given them an ear, and so they had gone on strike, but that had been settled. I think it was settled because the police sided with the government, rather than with the military.

In February, however, a bunch of these sergeants actually went into the barracks and found the arms stores wide open and the clips in the machine guns, so they just took over the barracks, and then went down and took over the rest of the government, shot up everything.

Q: Killed many people?

OSTRANDER: I don't think they killed more than six or eight, but still, I can remember that morning, three o'clock in the morning, hearing all the gunfire. The military barracks was in back of me. And waking at three o'clock in the morning and saying to myself, "It's Chinese New Year, and I wish they wouldn't shoot off so many firecrackers." Something in the back of my mind told me that the Chinese New Year had been a couple of weeks before.

Q: You were half-awake, of course.

OSTRANDER: I was wide awake, [but] it couldn't happen in Suriname, in peaceful Suriname where nothing like this had ever happened before. And the guard out front was asleep, as usual, and so I thought well, "Everything is calm and serene." He told me later, "I knew if there was anything wrong you would have awakened me." Can you imagine? [Laughter]

Anyway, they did take over the base and then went down to the river and got on the one gunboat and started shooting shells off all over the city, trying to get the police. Some of their sergeants were supposedly in the police headquarters, in the jail, and they were firing on the jail to try to make them release their sergeants. They did not have good aim, and we could watch the shells go by. It was as simple as that. It was really a bad time. The firing on the city and the bombs lasted for about three days.

The Air Force was there at the time, refueling. It took all the ingenuity any of us in that place could pull together to get those extraordinarily expensive military aircraft out of Suriname that night. There were three of them, worth millions, and the airport was of course immediately

closed. I still don't know how we did it. I remember a lot of work on our radios which we weren't supposed to have.

Q: Between you and the base you mean?

OSTRANDER: No, because that was too far away. I had a good friend of mine in between who would relay messages. I sent the DCM, and the administrative officer, with my USIA clerk, who sort of knew how to get things done, down to try to negotiate how to get the planes out of there, and the Air Force officers who were in hotels [had to be taken] back to the planes. I finally got them into my car, and flew all the flags, and managed to get them down to the airport. We're talking about sixty miles, and the road's closed and blocked, and the shells [are] going all over everywhere.

Q: Did you go with them?

OSTRANDER: No, I did not. I couldn't. Somebody had to be back up at the office. They got through. By that time I had gone back to my house and I got the word there. One plane got off, and then another plane got off, and then the last plane finally left, and that plane flew over my house and dipped its wings. I have never been so glad to see anything go in my life.

Q: Well, how many officers are there per plane? A couple?

OSTRANDER: Oh, no! I had about sixty-five people.

Q: How did you get them out there?

OSTRANDER: Hired busses, as I recall.

Q: All your work in consular affairs and American welfare--

OSTRANDER: That helped.

Q: Must have leapt to the fore. You thought, "My job is to get these Americans out," I suppose. "Protect my people."

OSTRANDER: It was the *planes* I wanted out. The first call I had had that morning was that the Hindu radio that morning were reporting that the CIA had started the coup. Because they had seen the planes arrive that night. The planes had arrived just two, three hours before the coup. So it was very important; [the Air Force] wanted out of there and they wanted their planes out of there.

Q: It was just pure coincidence they were there.

OSTRANDER: Yes, of course. They'd stopped to refuel. It was American property and those aircraft were very sophisticated. We wanted them out of there, and the colonel in command was beside himself wanting to get out of there. And we got them out.

Q: Did the military give you any recognition about it afterwards?

OSTRANDER: No, not that I recall. I always kind of had a feeling that they thought I should have known it was coming. Of course, nobody knew it was coming; not even the sergeants knew it was coming.

Q: In many of these countries, nobody knows, except the very small group that's doing it.

OSTRANDER: But they didn't even know it.

Q: They just happened to stumble on the guns?

OSTRANDER: They had decided that they were going to go over to the base and see if they couldn't get something going. I've heard they were hopped up on marijuana--I've heard all kinds of stories. But they certainly weren't expecting this, and they really didn't want the government. They wanted something entirely different. Once they got the government, there's no way they could give it back. They didn't know what to do with it when they had it.

The next months until I left in July were really touchy and really a challenge.

Q: Did you feel that much could be done, or anything could be done, at this time of great ferment, with, say, USIA?

OSTRANDER: Throughout all the time I was there, USIA, I thought, was the one tool I had to work with. Suriname was pulling away from the Netherlands. Had broken with the Netherlands and wanted to break with the old country. Somebody once asked me where Suriname was, and I said, "I think it's about forty-five miles off the coast of the Netherlands and beginning to drift southward." They didn't know whether they wanted to be South American or whether they wanted to be Caribbean, and this was all a big dialogue that they had going within the government. They wanted to be very much closer to the U.S.

I had that feeling that they were going to be substituting their allegiance to Holland with allegiance to the U.S., and I thought this was a marvelous opportunity, and that what we should be doing was using the USIA to give scholarships and the like. Although this wasn't going to be a transition overnight, if we did have people getting their university degrees in the United States, eventually this was going to help. That meant that USIA could be very helpful.

I'll give you an example of that. You got a much better salary in Suriname if you had a degree from a Dutch university. You didn't get any benefit if you had a degree from a U.S. university. So working through USIA, we did manage to get that changed, through the Ministry of Education, that they would give these bonus points that you get for degrees, even if you got your degree from a U.S. university rather than a Dutch one.

Suriname was going to have to turn somewhere, because it had tied its guilder to the U.S. dollar, and with the cost of living going sky-high in the Netherlands, they were soon simply not going to

be able to afford to go back there to school. So that's why I tried to get USIA to focus on and to build that tie, which I hoped would pay off much later. But I didn't have much of a staff at USIA either, so that was kind of hard to do. [Laughter] I think we probably did the best we possibly could on that score. pick and choose who would get them.

Q: You couldn't do as much of that as you wanted to?

OSTRANDER: Just simply didn't have the budget. I wanted so much to bring U.S. groups to Suriname, to expose them to the culture, and to get to know something about us. Because they know a great deal about Holland, but not about us. But the way USIA worked at that time, you had a budget, and then when any of these entertainment groups, or cultural speakers, or whatever, came near you, you could pick them off, if you could pay for them. But nobody comes *near* Suriname. They just don't go to the northwest coast of South America. Everybody goes to Brazil, but that is not close, or they go on the other shore [Pacific]. But that's terribly expensive, and if you don't have much budget to start with . . .I can remember a harp trio that had to quit. We had them set up to play in a place called *Ons Erf*, which means our earth, our yard. Very nice auditorium, but it's outdoors, and the noise of the frogs was so loud that the harpists could not hear each other. They really had a terrible time and had to give up halfway through, because all they could hear was the frogs.

I can also remember a young man who came who played piano, and he played very well, but it was also outdoors. I had him to lunch the next day and asked him how it had gone, and he told me that he had panicked because when he looked down at his hands just as he was ready to begin his concert, they were covered with mosquitos. [Laughter] It was this sort of thing.

Anyway, Suriname didn't get much in the way of entertainment. We did have lecturers who would go to the university, but somehow or other sometimes that would cause more trouble than it was worth. Depended on what they were saying. You have to know a little about Suriname, I think, before you come down there and give a lecture. You're too apt to be thinking Brazil or a country that has completely different circumstances.

I was grateful for whatever we could get through USIA, but oh, heavens. We had the Navy band once, and they loved it. Gosh, what I could have done with a good choral group. They loved choral singing.

Q: So all of these ideas that you had that couldn't work out--it was lack of money that kept it from happening?

OSTRANDER: Lack of money and lack of opportunity to get anybody there. I thought the USIA program was excellent. It just doesn't work in the remote areas of the world. For instance, if you had a choral group that was going to Venezuela and then on down to Rio, think of what it would cost to bring them over to Suriname, for a day, and then send them on down. Besides, there's maybe one plane a week, so they could drop off to do a concert and have to wait a week. If they are going to have USIA cultural tours--which I think they need in places that are remote-- they're going to have to have some extra help from USIA in order for the post to be able to afford anything. Otherwise what you're going to get is something on a tape, and that's about it. Or one

human being. You can afford that usually. One pianist, or harp trio. I thought we were lucky enough to get the harp trio, but I learned a lesson on that: don't have it in the mating season for frogs!

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Continuation of interview: August 12, 1986

Q: So you really were off the beaten track.

OSTRANDER: Absolutely, no doubt about it. Nobody was ever in the area.

Q: So most USIS money was spent on what?

OSTRANDER: Books, that sort of thing. We did have a few lecturers, [but] it just seemed to me they were saying the wrong things.

Q: They were thinking in terms of big countries, I suppose.

OSTRANDER: Perhaps that's what I meant there. They would give lectures that the next day made headlines in the newspapers, and it seemed to me that they turned around what they were trying to accomplish, because any human being who comes to Suriname from outside becomes extraordinarily important, and everything he says is going to make headlines. Whereas in many universities, many lecture tours, what you said might be in one tiny little paragraph of some newspaper, in Suriname it becomes very, very important indeed. It sometimes stirred up a lot more than we had hoped for. I kind of dreaded it whenever there was a lecturer coming, as a matter of fact. We didn't have that many of them.

We did spend most of the money on books. Oh, we didn't have much money, let's face it. Books easily took care of that. We had the wireless file, and that was very helpful, and I sent copies to the right people in government and elsewhere.

Q: Well, shall we go into that coup?

OSTRANDER: I hate to talk about it. I find it very distressing always. It brings it all back, to talk about it. After about three days [the sergeants] had the entire government. They took the ministers prisoner and did not harm them.

I was extraordinarily worried about that because at the same time Sergeant Doe was doing his thing in Monrovia, and at night on TV we had pictures of the murder of the cabinet members in Monrovia. I didn't think these sergeants were going to resist temptation, but they did. The gunfire and the shooting and the burning lasted about three days. We had some hairy times.

Q: Were you yourself in personal danger?

OSTRANDER: No, although I didn't know it at the time. This [coup] was certainly not anything against the United States government. However, when the shells are going by the window, they don't know this. And you never know under circumstances like that if there's somebody who's going to--it was during the time that we had all the hostages in Iran. It could very easily have occurred: "Let's take some hostages and hold them and get what we want."

My own judgment was that if they were going to take anybody hostage, it's going to be the Dutch, because this is one of the places in the world where, when there was a demonstration in the street and they were marching against somebody, it wasn't against the U.S. They were marching against the Dutch. I used to stand and watch them go by, and not wish my Dutch colleagues any harm, but it was kind of refreshing. But still, you can never tell.

I remember vividly that a very young Dutch engineer who lived cater-corner to me in Paramaribo with his family, came over and remained in front of my residence for three days. Just stood guard there, because he was worried about me. He was worried, and he never let me know he was there, but of course I could see him. He never tried to take credit or anything, and I saw him later when I was about to leave the post, and I thanked him for that, and he said, "You have no idea how worried I was," and I said, "I think I do."

A Dutchman, from whom we rented a warehouse space, had a very nice apartment at the top of the building, and he called me up and offered me that apartment if I needed to leave the residence. The Dutchman had two of the meanest Doberman Pinschers I have ever known, and he thought that they would be good protection, and I suspect that they would. As a matter of fact, they would have scared me to death.

Q: Was there much trouble on the base which you were right in front of?

OSTRANDER: Well, they shot the place up and killed the guards there. This had been my plan: if anything ever did happen, I would go to that base. The prime minister lived very close by, and if worst came to worst, I could take refuge in his house. Of course, he at the time was running and taking refuge in the police station, which was later blown up and burned in order to try to get him. So the two safe-haven areas I had staked out were gone. I had British friends who lived in the bush. You could only get to their place by river, and they were not too far from the coast. And although the U.S. government had no idea of my plans, I felt that, if worst came to worst, I could go down and talk one of the Javanese boatmen into taking me up river and they could have gotten me up to the very forlorn coast, and somebody could have picked me up from there. All of that would have been pretty easy. There were some 400 citizens, however, that I was responsible for.

[The following was originally off-the-record but was added by Ambassador Ostrander in 1992. It is not on tape.]

We were in danger, of course, but not because we were Americans. The Suriname army was at war with the police force, and under those circumstances, everyone is in danger. There was no way out, however; the airport was closed and there was no way to walk or even go by canoe south through the jungle to Brazil and its jungle. The only possibility was to drive east to French

Guiana or west to Guyana, but there is only one road and it is dissected by many very wide rivers. There were no bridges, and the ferry boats were not allowed to operate. (The word guyana, by the way, is Amerindian. It means "land of rivers.") When you see those mighty rivers you *really* begin to appreciate *Papillon*. [Book written by a one-time inmate of the French penal camp on Devil's Island in French Guiana.] They say the book wasn't really true. Well, his description of the rivers certainly was!

A sort of fatalism takes over when you are trapped like that, and you take events one problem, one hour, one day at a time. The worst lasted only about three weeks. By "the worst," I think I mean total uncertainty as to what was happening or would happen. My DCM was a tremendous help at that time. He had a military background and knew how to deal with the sergeants and roadblocks and curfews and special passes to be out of the house or to drive--that sort of thing.

I remember that first day of the *coup*. The airport was not yet closed and the early morning commercial flight arrived from Georgetown, Guyana, loaded with Cubans. They had a large Embassy in Guyana. When I learned of it, I called the President of Suriname (he still seemed to be in authority), and said I thought this could turn into an ugly problem since they were obviously trying to take advantage of a chaotic political situation. (Those were their usual tactics.) He agreed and saw to it that their visas were revoked and that they returned to Georgetown. The same Cubans returned to Paramaribo the next morning with new visas, and by that time, the sergeants had enough control so that there was nothing either I or the President could do.

The sergeants at first hoped to keep President Ferrier in office as a sort of figurehead. The 16 NCO's (by now the 16 *colonels*), however, were really totally in charge. They formed the "Road"--a council or a junta. After that it was a matter of watching who would knock off whom (in one form or another) and remain in charge. It took a lot of months. A man named Bouterse prevailed, and he does to this day.

The world press also got to Suriname on that first day after the *coup*. They descended on the Embassy--on the pitiful few of us there who had so many other things to do. I found them a really lazy lot. I was happy to talk to them and to brief them on what little news there was. They seemed to want it all handed to them--to have their copy totally prepared for them. They seemed to have no intention of researching anything by themselves. We did our best, but we were sinking fast into a sea of work, and no help seemed to be en route. The U.S. cavalry was not galloping to the rescue with Errol Flynn heading the charge!

Just when I felt we really couldn't handle this without help, the news broke that Diego Asencio, our Ambassador to Columbia, had been taken hostage. The news people vanished into thin air--well, into the only plane still running. They went to Columbia and left me to deal with Suriname. What a relief! I was very worried about Diego, but if it had to happen, his timing was right for me and my small staff.

At the Embassy, we were trying to get back to some semblance of order. Morale was really high (after the shells stopped coming at us) in spite of the total frustration of trying to keep up with a government (I use the term loosely) that was in a constant state of flux.

The first July 4 (four months after the *coup*) was memorable. The top government officials--friends, dear friends--were imprisoned. I thought I would still like to have the usual noontime glass of champagne ceremony since I was about to leave Suriname. I did not know how this would be received. The curfew was still on at night so there had been very little entertaining. I invited the usual high-level business community and new government officials. I did not know what to do about the 16 colonels. They were still carrying their Uzi automatic weapons everywhere they went. I finally decided to invite them, but alerted them that I would not welcome any Uzis. They would have to leave them at the door, like in the old West. They did not come. My guests and I were more relaxed without them.

The short speech I made that day was a pretty good one. I had a book on my library shelf that contained written eye-witness accounts of events in U.S. history. One was an account of a feast held in the backwoods of Ohio in 1788, Marietta's first Fourth of July. They had a lot of food! The table was 60 feet long! Just as they were to eat, there was a cloudburst (in Surinamese a *Sibi Boesi*--literally "it sweeps out the forest") and a lot of the food was ruined. This happened twice more. No sooner was the food ready than there was another *Sibi Boesi*. Finally there was almost nothing left to celebrate with except grog. And they drank toasts for the rest of the day. I put all those wonderful toasts into one. Among other groups, we drank to the Constitution, the Congress, General George Washington (not yet President), to "the memory of heroes," to patriots." There were 13 toasts in all. I added a fourteenth--to "absent friends." The message got through, I am sure. But then they knew all these underpinnings of democracy were going. They simply were helpless to stop it.

On looking back on those days, I remember the sadness of seeing a new democracy that held so much promise suffering this terrible setback. I remember the loneliness of my own position there and the feeling of helplessness to do much of anything to make matters better. Washington was not interested, or so it seemed. This was Dutch turf. But it would have been really difficult for Surinamers to ask for help from the old colonial power. The regional desk seemed almost angry at me for reporting bad news--for presenting them with yet another problem. Jonestown was still an issue; hostages both in Iran and Colombia were very much taking up the attention. No one had time or much interest in worrying about this small nation on the North Coast of South America. I sometimes wondered if the powers that were even knew where Suriname was.

When I first reported the *coup* by telephone, the regional director told me to "take refuge in the embassy compound and to call in the Marine guards." My heart sank--he was not even aware there was neither compound nor Marine guards. Such advice was far from reassuring.

The sergeants were not very sophisticated or politically wise about how to govern, at least in the beginning. The *coup* had succeeded, but without any planning for how to proceed before, during or after. It was a spontaneous thing--a surprise to everyone--most of all to the sergeants (now colonels). A few days into the new regime, a group of soldiers entered the embassy ready to search the place. They had heard the prime minister was hiding there. I tried knot to create a scene or to make them feel foolish by downplaying the incident. I had the admin officer explain that this was U.S. territory and under international law, they couldn't search the place. They said

they didn't know that and then left quietly! The prime minister, I later learned, was with the Catholic archbishop.

During that first morning, when the shells were bursting around us, my staff asked for permission to take down the flag as a safety measure. I did not give it. The insurgents were anti-Suriname government and anti-Dutch, but not anti-US (yet), so I felt the flag could be what saved us from a shelling. *[End of insert]*

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OSTRANDER: There was something that ran through my mind: "If you're not going to get out of this, you at least don't want it written up in the history books that you ran off and left 400 people and took the flag down! [Laughter] It's just not done. It's not cricket. Especially when you're not sure what's going to happen. Maybe if you really thought, "They're after me." I don't know, maybe you would do something. My good friend, Thea, who is British and traps animals under contract with European zoos, I must say, she came to mind, too. I thought, "Thea could get me through the woods and to French Guiana." So I did have in mind ways that I could get out, but then suddenly realized: "You can't. There's no way the other people could get out. You can't do that." It would be like only one person could leave the *Titanic*, and you elected yourself.

Q: And you don't do it.

OSTRANDER: Of course you don't do it. Now if somebody said, "We elect *you*, because you are the American government: you are going," that's another thing, but you don't elect yourself.

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Continuation of interview: September 9, 1986

OSTRANDER: There has to be some political advantage, to be selected over all the other qualified people there are in the Foreign Service, especially since there are so very few jobs. And it really is pretty remarkable if you come along with the right qualifications for the right post at a time when it is politic to appoint a career person, when it's politic to appoint a woman, when it's politic to appoint somebody, in my case, in a consular cone--it just all came together at the right moment. When also, at the same time, I think there was no great hue and cry for any particular male going to Suriname that all the bureaus that get involved in this and the hierarchy were particularly interested in. As a matter of fact, I think probably the one thing I was pretty good at was knowing when that moment arrived and when that post arrived, and inserting myself into it.

Q: Exactly. I think the way you saw that that was your chance, and it would be your only chance, probably. That you matched the job and the job matched you, and so forth.

Before we leave Suriname, I just would like to ask you, going back to the first day of the coup--I'm not interested in the politics. You've explained that very well. What I'm interested in, is your reaction to this. You said you woke up. . .

OSTRANDER: Three-fifteen, around then, in the morning. You could hear the firing, which sounds like firecrackers. I always tell myself, remember that rifles and automatic weapons sound like firecrackers. Firecrackers sound like automatic weapons, so if you really think it's firecrackers, you'd better watch out! Well, the guard didn't seem upset, and the firing didn't last very long, the weapons fire. And I kind of paced the floor and wondered about this for about, I think, forty-five minutes, but then everything got quiet again. And the guard was calm, and probably asleep.

So I went back to bed, but was awakened at about five-thirty in the morning by the telephone ringing, and this was a young man who worked for us in USIA, whose political antennae were excellent. His background was Hindustani, which is what they call the ones who came from India. He called to say that the early morning Hindustani news broadcast from Suriname had said that there had been an attempt against the government that was CIA-backed, and that since things hadn't been decided yet, the shooting would continue. By that time, I was beginning to hear the shooting, which was down by the river bank, which is where the embassy was.

Q: But in the middle of the night the firing was at the camp, which is right behind you?

OSTRANDER: Which is right in back of us. What had happened was that the sixteen sergeants, when they had taken over the military camp, and had found all of the weapons in there with gun clips in place, had suddenly realized that they had the military base, and what were they going to do with it? They hadn't really thought beyond that. So they got their weapons and went down to the waterfront with the idea of rescuing the sergeants who were in jail, their buddies who were in jail. The Prime Minister took refuge in the police station, which is where the other sergeants were held, assuming that they would not fire on the police headquarters because they would be firing on their buddies. Somebody, however, had not bothered to tell the other sergeants that their buddies were in the police station.

The Suriname military had one coast guard cutter, a small boat really, which patrolled the Suriname River, and which was armed. So they went down, and got into that, and started shooting shells toward the police station. Not knowing much about how to aim guns, however, they were hitting all over the city. These shells were falling all over the city.

Since the American embassy was in the tallest building, on the sixth floor of a six-floor building, the only one in town, it was very tempting. We could look down on this boat and see somebody trying to aim this gun, and not being able to. It was really fascinating to watch it and see the shells go by the building. We were about three blocks from the police station. They did finally manage to get the police station on fire.

They finally got the sergeants out, and the prime minister, who had taken refuge there, took refuge elsewhere. We later, three or more months later, found out he was with the Catholic archbishop.

Q: Well, did they actually fire at the embassy?

OSTRANDER: No, they were not firing at the embassy.

Q: Did they hit anywhere near?

OSTRANDER: Very near. Very near indeed. I was not frightened by that.

Q: So you went to work at your usual time?

OSTRANDER: Went to work. My driver came by and we went to work. When he started to pull down the main street, which headed to the embassy, you could see the results of shells coming in--it was pretty obvious that they were shelling it. So he went around a back way and pulled in, and I went up to the embassy to get a telephone call off to Washington, because most communications from Suriname are by telex, and all the telexes go through the Foreign Office, so they just pull the plug. And through the telephone company, too, they can just pull the plug. So I thought, before they start cutting off communications, I think I'd better telephone. We did that, and I got through and told them what was happening. We actually, since we had our own communications, stayed in communication throughout the whole thing.

Q: You said that this period of turmoil lasted at least three weeks.

OSTRANDER: At least three weeks. We didn't know from one day to the next what was going to happen.

Q: Was there a curfew?

OSTRANDER: There was a curfew from five to five, I think it was, and that lasted for months and months and months. We had to have special passes.

Q: But you kept on. You kept the embassy open and you kept working the entire time.

OSTRANDER: Oh, yes. We never closed.

Q: On looking back, what are your strongest memories, and what do you think you learned from all this?

OSTRANDER: Suriname? I loved the Suriname people. I really did, and regret that it's so isolated to begin with, so you lose track. In the second place, so many of my friends are now in the Netherlands, and I've lost track of them. The traffic pattern is Netherlands-Suriname, and not U.S.-Suriname, and it's so hard to get there, and so hard to communicate.

But I really regret having circumstances cutting me off from those wonderful, wonderful people. There was a country with so much promise. I really had great expectations for what would happen to them, and this whole coup has brought the hope that they offered, the promise that they offered, to a complete standstill. It will come back again, but it's going to be a hiatus, you know. Just really tragic.

Q: Well, you also made a very good point, which I have taken due note of, that the United States missed a good chance at that time.

OSTRANDER: Oh, yes. Most definitely. And yet I could understand why we missed a very good chance, in that the people of the United States would never have backed any such action by our government. They didn't know where Suriname was, in the first place, and why are we going to spend money in this place? Let the Dutch move in. And that's very good thinking, except if you stop to compare, as I did last time, with what if it had been us in our revolutionary days, and everybody had said, "Let the British help them," we wouldn't have taken anything from the British, and that's all there was to it.

Q: Did you feel, when you got there--I mean, you had realized when you were working back at the Department, that this was your chance. You were perfectly suited, ready for this job, in other words, and events proved to your own satisfaction that indeed this was the right place for you?

OSTRANDER: Oh, yes. I think so indeed. I think I did a good job for the U.S. government there. I don't know how much I did for the people of Suriname, but then again, that's not my job. That's not my job at all. It's not a popularity contest, by any means, by any way of thinking. Although I was very popular.

Q: You provided a good example for women. That comes through pretty clearly.

OSTRANDER: I think so. I think so, except I'm not sure the Suriname women needed any example. I think they're really strong; they're really remarkable.

Q: Well, maybe they needed to be pointed in the right direction, though.

OSTRANDER: I don't even know about that. I think you'll find in most developing countries the women are a very strong resource. Now I'm not sure the men realize what a wonderful resource it is, and I often said to them there, "Remember that as a developing country you need all the resources you can get, and don't forget what a wonderful resource your very strong women are." They're not only young and strong, but very creative, and they seem to know how to solve problems.

Q: Common sense.

OSTRANDER: Absolutely. Common sense. Tell them what the problem is, and they'll solve it. Now they may not go through the right bureaucratic channels, and they may do [it in ways] that you would consider politically naive, but they'll get the problem solved. You won't even know how they're doing it; just wake up one morning and it's done. I think all developing countries could use that resource probably more than they do. Or maybe they all use it; maybe the women just aren't getting credit.

Oh, it was a learning experience. Most definitely. Most definitely a learning experience. There were the old frustrations, though, that I'm sure that everybody who's ever served in a developing country feels, and that is, the wonderful plans. Let me say that they seem to be able to draw up

the best plans for how to move their governments ahead, how to solve their economic and their development problems. It looks so good on paper, and then here comes the monetary backing, but something happens in the implementation. It just doesn't move. It's like "'lasses in January," as the old saying goes. It just doesn't seem to get going--to get off the paper.

And I don't know why. The middle management isn't there--something isn't there. If you make a landmark and go back and [say] "Every year I'm going to go look at it, and see how much further they've gotten," it isn't going anywhere. And you can't figure out why, because the planning is done, and *they've* done it, so it isn't that somebody else is doing it for them.

Q: And you've become so empathetic to these people that you're sort of egging them on, I suppose.

OSTRANDER: Of course, you want to see it move. You want to see it happen. You want to see it get ahead.

Q: How did you feel about yourself after all this? This was a very difficult assignment in many different ways, not the least of which was being where it was. Were you surprised at your own strength afterwards? Did you come out of this feeling pretty proud of Nancy Ostrander?

OSTRANDER: I came out feeling that I was more astute--that I knew more about political and economic affairs than I had ever dreamed I did. I had been told throughout my entire career that consular officers don't understand these things, for so long, that I had believed it. I mean about one-crop economies, or shall I say one-mineral economies, because we're talking bauxite here. I knew about the importance of labor relations. I was able to judge political reactions and what they meant to U.S. bilateral relations, and I had been told I wouldn't know any of this. And I did know it.

Q: Why do you think this is? Because you had just absorbed it in all your posts abroad?

OSTRANDER: I think you absorb it. Well, I think you observe, and I think you observe the mistakes as well as what's done right by other people, as you grow within the Foreign Service. But if you're that sort of person, if you're going to hide and not get involved in that, I expect you can get through without observing.

I have talked before about serving in large posts, and its importance, because you are in a position to see how things are handled. Also to see mistakes. I can remember looking back and thinking, "Well, I remember Mexico City, that Tony Freeman did such and such under such circumstances," and maybe that doesn't quite apply here, but it opens the mind to thinking about how things are.

Having a good DCM whose career has been the opposite of yours is also marvelous, and I did have that for my early months in Suriname, and I was able to learn from watching him and how he worked a group at a party, how he never relaxed at a party. Did not tell people how to do things, but asked how they thought of things. He never took their ideas for his own, but just got

all of this information into the old mind, you know, and then computed it from the basis of U.S. interests.

I learned a lot from that, but I learned that at other posts, too. Small ones, and large ones, and middle-sized ones. If you want to look at it, and if your boss will give you the opportunity to read what's going out and what's coming in, if they'll let you sit in on staff meetings and hear what's talked about, so that you know what's important and what to follow, that makes all the difference.

Q: Do you think that your being a woman at this post was helpful to you in any way?

OSTRANDER: That's interesting. You know the Dutch are so used to women as rulers, because of the long dynasty of their women queens, so that [the Surinamese] certainly accepted me in a position of leadership without any difficulties at all, even though they're no longer Dutch, of course. But that was their heritage, so in that way that may very well have--although being Ambassador of the United States of America would have put you in a position of authority there, no matter what. But they certainly didn't bat an eye to have a woman coming down. They were rather pleased by it all.

Q: It didn't hurt you at all?

OSTRANDER: It didn't hurt me at all, that's for sure. Did it stand me in good stead? I doubt it. Because it was just a little too unique, I think, for most of the male ambassadors from the other countries to totally accept. With most of them--not with all of them--but with most of them, I felt that perhaps they were condescending, at least at first.

Q: Specifically, what I was wondering was if you found that because you were a woman [you] were able to be blunter and to speak your mind with less worry about tact than a man might have.

OSTRANDER: Oh, I think probably true. I think probably true. Another thing, I could play dumb at odd times, whereas a man could never. I could say, "Gee whiz, I don't understand this at all. Would you please explain it to me?" And no man could ever say that. His pride would never let him, although it would be true. And it was true, in my case. I said "play dumb," but I wasn't really "playing dumb." "This is something you're going to have to start me from scratch on, because this is something that I've never run across. What in the world are you talking about?" And most men would not--

Q: So in a way, you used their condescension for your own benefit, didn't you?

OSTRANDER: Oh, you bet. But don't women always? I think we find any opening. We don't seem to have to worry about this "face" that men have to--how they come across with the other male.

Q: You don't have to be macho.

OSTRANDER: You don't. And if you're going to get what you want because some man thinks that you're a stupid woman--so what! [Laughter] You know, as long as I got what I wanted. . .I can remember this personnel officer once named Jean Farr. I've forgotten what the circumstances were, but it was when I was working in Personnel. I can hear her still, saying, "Well, I can always cry," when things were really desperate, to get what was absolutely necessary for whatever cause she was working for in the Foreign Service. This was not for herself, but for the cause. She would say, "Well, I can always cry." And men can't. Or they can, but they would never stoop to that. I'm sure they wouldn't.

Q: On the other hand, were you ever, say, kept out of a circle that you'd like to be in, because it was all male, such as a sporting club, where the men gathered to discuss matters?

OSTRANDER: Not as ambassador. It certainly did happen at the lower levels, though. I think I told you about that thing in Jamaica, if I'm not mistaken, when the ambassador was leaving. Perhaps I didn't. I think Walter Tobriner was leaving Jamaica. And they were going to have a country team goodbye party for him. The economic counselor picked a club for this goodbye party from the country team, of which I was a member, picked an all-male club, and announced to the DCM, who questioned this, "Don't worry about Nancy, I'll send her a bouquet of flowers." [Laughter] This is true.

Q: That's a shocker. So it was a fait accompli.

OSTRANDER: It was a *fait accompli*, at which point the DCM said, "Cancel *all* of those plans. We will have the goodbye party at my residence."

Q: Good for him. I presume it was a man [the Economic Counselor].

OSTRANDER: It was a man who said that.

Q: That's typical male thinking, isn't it?

OSTRANDER: Yes, throw me a fish or whatever; send me a bouquet of flowers, rather than to be included as the consular counselor. That's what happened. Ambassador Trobiner would have been the last person in the world to permit that sort of thing.

But that was 1968, and I think just about any time up to 1971 or '72, you would have run across things like that, and I'm sure that there were many other such incidents that I've just forgotten. American businessmen's clubs, all of these organizations that to be a Foreign Service Officer you need to belong to, were just not open to us.

Q: One suspects it's still true in the Middle East.

OSTRANDER: I expect so. I expect so. I don't know about the Middle East, but it's still true in the Middle West. The Rotarians and this sort of thing. However, when I was diplomat-in-residence, I joined the women's Rotary club in Indianapolis, and my only feeling from that is it's the men Rotary members who are missing something. The women were doing perfectly all right

without their male counterparts. Gee whiz, what a vibrant bunch of women out there, and how much the men could be learning from them! So it's still true in some areas of our own society.

Q: Well, so you left having, on balance, been very pleased.

OSTRANDER: It was a very positive experience. I think I've told you that I'm not seeking it again. I don't think I want it again.

Q: No, no. It takes too much out of one, I suppose?

OSTRANDER: You fight all the way. It's just eternal.

Q: And the responsibility never lets up.

OSTRANDER: Oh, never. Especially since you're going to get the posts that are not going to be fully staffed, ever. Let's face it. The very small posts, if men are there, stand a better chance of being fully staffed than if there are women ambassadors. I'm sorry, but that's just the way it is. "Oh, let Nancy sweat a while longer. There's nobody dying to go there." Whereas if you had a real nasty male, it gets staffed. And since that's the type of post that I would probably get if they ever asked me again, no thanks. I'm tired of that.

Q: When you came back to the United States, after I'm sure a round of tremendous parties and farewells and so forth. . .

OSTRANDER: Not really. Because of the *coup*, you see, they were still having the--

Q: So that went on till you left, did it?

OSTRANDER: Oh, yes, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, they asked the president to leave, just about, oh, maybe two or three weeks after I left there. But there was still a state of flux, and we still had a curfew.

[The following was added by Ambassador Ostrander in 1992. It is not on tape.]

I knew that President Ferrier and his family would leave Suriname soon as a result of the *coup*. They had been very kind to me and I considered them good friends. I wanted to do something special for them. I had been thinking about what my goodbye gift would be since shortly after my arrival two years earlier. I wanted to do something unique and I thought of the perfect thing when I first saw the great seal of Suriname. It was very attractive and I wanted to do it in needlepoint. I thought, "That really would be unique. I think probably no other ambassador anywhere has ever made a gift of his/her own needlework."

I learned of a place in Florida which for a price (not cheap) would work up the design and send yarn and instructions. I worked on the project for months and months, then found a custom framers in Indianapolis who blocked it and put it under glass in an octagonal frame. It was gorgeous!

President and Mrs. Ferrier were very appreciative and actually took it with them when they had to leave the country. A picture of it made the newspaper and I got many favorable letters about the gift. One woman told me she was ashamed she had never thought of the idea herself--that it had taken a foreigner to see the beauty of Suriname's great seal.
[End of insert]

PAUL GOOD
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Paramaribo (1979-1981)

Paul Good was born in Kentucky in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree at Cascade College he received his master's degree from Ball State. His career in USIA included positions in Thailand, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Australia, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Morocco, and Senegal. Mr. Good was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 2000.

Q: Today's the 22nd of September 2000. It's the Autumnal Equinox today at one o'clock. Paul, let's start. You are in Surinam from 1979 to '81. What was your job? Then let's talk about the situation in Surinam at this time.

GOOD: Okay. I was a public affairs officer, the only USIS officer at post. We had a separate building in which we had a library, a reading room really and a press operation. We had media contacts. We worked with the university. The embassy was down the street and it's the first time in my, I guess the only time in my career, in which we pulled the embassy to our building ultimately. At the time I left, we had signed a lease to move the embassy to our building. They were going to put the consulate on the ground floor. We were on the second floor already because the landlord had over strengthened his building, far more than the regulations called for, so that it meant the top floor was easily strong enough to take the heavy communications equipment.

Surinam had a very strange situation. It was sort of a dead zone for communications. It had difficulty in transmitting radio messages. When the coup came, as I'll talk about in a minute, Washington couldn't communicate with us. They were quite upset, not that they were usually interested in communicating with us. But since there was a coup, they thought perhaps they should, and perhaps they were right, but I must say that not having them communicating was made a lot easier during the coup, (chucking) since they couldn't interfere.

We had a small embassy, which increased while I was there because of the coup and the resulting questionable relationships with Cuba through Grenada. Nancy Ostrander was the ambassador when I got there. She was supported by a DCM, a communications officer, an ADM officer, and three young officers on first tours, basically. They had some training, but they were on their first tour, so they had a consul and a couple, one of the early tandem Assignments.

Q: The DCM must have been basically jack-of-all-trades?

GOOD: Yes, political and economic officer and DCM. He was under some stress, partly, I suspect, because he had some difficulty working with Nancy. I don't know whether there was a gender problem there or not. He was finishing up or had finished up a divorce. His wife was an heiress, and the kids had been settled with huge trust accounts, and none of those were there at post with him, so he wasn't always lucid. But when he was in a good mood, you couldn't ask for a politer, gentleman.

Q: Who was it?

GOOD: Nuel Pazdral. I think he'd spent more of his time in Eastern Europe. Poland was one of his strong interests.

Q: Pazdral?

GOOD: Pazdral.

Q: Yes. I knew a Pazdral. Yes, I know Nuel.

GOOD: Yes, last I heard he was in Bucharest, I think.

Q: Yes.

GOOD: I'm not sure what happened to him after that; it's been some time. He was a real gentleman when he wasn't upset.

Q: Yes.

GOOD: But we had some problems, because he wanted, partly because he wasn't as you say jack-of-all-trades there, he wanted to vet everything that I did. Obviously, when it came to media reporting, our job is to get the stuff back to Washington as quickly as possible. We don't have time to wait around for vettings. The ambassador didn't want to get into the middle of it. She said, "Settle it yourself." So I did, I ignored him, took my messages directly to CPU. But there was a political situation, which I think was beyond Nancy's comprehension. Now partly it's because she didn't have a great deal of experience in South America, but partly it was because she felt that she wanted to deal, and therefore, we should trust the information that she was getting from the highest sources. One of her main sources was Henk Arron, who the head of the legislature. Unfortunately there had been a problem with the operation, and they were at a stalemate, had been in stalemate for some months before I arrived.

Q: You might have talked about the general situation in Surinam at that time - its composition, its economy...

GOOD: Surinam had been Dutch Guiana, of course, and received its independence in 1975. It had been traditionally a very poor colony for Holland. It had been useful historically because it

did have a safe port; the Paramaribo River had easy sailing for some distance up the channel, and so the city itself was some miles from the sea.

Basically between the sea and the city were mangrove swamps, so it wasn't as if you were in highlands and so forth. The mosquito problem, malaria had been pretty well wiped out by Rockefeller when he came in in the '30s to do a good deed. By 1979 malaria was because they haven't been able to maintain the spraying.

Before World War II, they had discovered aluminum ore. It had become strategically important during World War II, not only for aluminum, but because it was one of the landing fields needed to ferry planes from the United States to Africa and the Middle East. The planes couldn't take long hops, and it was too dangerous to go across the North Atlantic. They had the longest airfield in South America put into Paramaribo to allow them to take off with heavy loads of gas. They went from the U.S. to Jamaica to Paramaribo to Recife across to Dakar, Sierra Leone, Kano, Cairo.

Q: Sierra Leone.

GOOD: Yes, hopping across. It was important for the war effort to keep the channel open to be able to get the ore out. There were no railroads, and it was not a difficult channel to block if they could get their ships in, and they tried. The Germans had a ship in there that they scuttled trying to block it. It's still there, but they didn't succeed in completely blocking the channel.

But come independence, they hadn't really left much of that wealth locally. They were well educated. They had probably on a per capita basis, the highest level of education of any country around, not that there were that many people of course, but with independence about 150,000 of their half million people or so, left.

When I got there, they were down to about 350,000 and quite dependent upon Holland for the "golden handshake," which was still being paid out. With the coup which came, the handshake was put in escrow, and they're talking about meeting the final payments now, but the situation, and this is 2000, is still a bit too uncertain for them to be sure how to do it. But they'd like to get it over with so they can clean their books. But at that time the problem was internal with the Indians, the Hindustani as they called them, and the Creoles, which were a mix of mostly Creoles, but some Bush Negroes, those who were descendants of the slaves who had immediately escaped into the bush. I must tell you that the bush began 15 kilometers outside of town, so it didn't take long to get to the bush.

Now the composite of the country is not like Guyana. It isn't about 50-50 Hindustani-Creole. It's about 30 percent Creoles, 7 or 8 percent Bush Negro, about 33 or 34 percent Hindustani, about one percent Asian, mostly Chinese, the leftovers from the early 1800s when they were brought in as indentured servants. There were Javanese, about 17 percent who came in between World War I and 1939. And the whites, mostly Dutch, who had come as early as the 1830s and stayed, small farmers, not well educated, but industrious. With the exception of the Javanese and the Chinese, there hadn't been much mixing between the races as far as marriage was concerned. There were also some American Indians. There were Jews, both Sephardic and Ashkenazim. They had come

in originally via the circular route, if you will, from Spain in 1492 to Holland, to Brazil, which at that time was under the control of the Dutch because the Portuguese had turned their attention to Spain when the royal houses joined, 1580 to 1640 I think it was, and had then, after being kicked out when the Portuguese, came back, moved up the coast. Some stayed, some went on to Rhode Island and Barbados and Curacao and even Cartegena.

The Ashkenazim came over fleeing the Nazi regime in Germany. They had, and still do have, or at least did when I was there, two active synagogues, not so active that they could fill both of them every Saturday, Friday night, but enough so that they would shift from one Sabbath in one to the next Sabbath in the other. They stayed out of politics though. They were very much involved in business.

The chief businessman there, whose daughter just got married this last weekend in the Hamptons, Lee Iacocca, was there at the ceremony, had the Coca-Cola franchise. He also had the Pepsi franchise so that nobody could get compete with his Coke. He had the bakery. He had the reconstituted milk. He had some car agencies, a lot of export import in general. His father had been the chauffeur for the general in charge of the airport and the troops that we had there during World War II. I guess the payoff was that he met and he worked in the deal where he got the franchise for the country.

But to get back to what the situation was when I arrived, after several months of stalemate, that is that nobody had the majority in the legislature, the fight was whether or not anything that had been decided on was valid. Nothing was happening as a result. Henk Arron was the speaker, a friend of Nancy's, or so she thought, and perhaps he was, I don't know. There was a president as well, but he was not involved in the day-to-day affairs. He sort of floated above it all, a very nice fellow, and one time told me that the reason they had to have these political shenanigans was that there wasn't anything else happening in Surinam. They didn't get hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes. What else could they get? So they had to make their own. He was forced out later. When I tried to report this as the scenario in my country plan back to Washington, Nancy wouldn't let it go. She said, "This is going to work itself out; it's not going to be a problem."

Q: What caused you to think there was a problem?

GOOD: My sources were telling me that the situation was unstable, that you couldn't have this stalemate for much longer. It had already been going on for months. I know my predecessor felt the same way, but she and the ambassador had not been speaking, which is one of the reasons they hurried me down there. They literally weren't talking.

Q: Is this another ambassador and another?

GOOD: No, it was Nancy.

Q: Nancy?

GOOD: With my predecessor, the PAO. She was very well connected, but of course she wasn't getting her message across. I was unable to get it out, except orally to anyone who might come by from the agency.

Q: Speaking of the agency, what about the CIA? Did they have a presence there, and if they did, what were they getting?

GOOD: They didn't have anyone at post. They had TDYers on occasion, coming up from Brazil.

Q: So this wasn't very high on anybody's priority list?

GOOD: Not yet. It wasn't until the coup and the subsequent flirtations with the Cubans and then the Libyans that they began to get some attention. I suspect that that's what did in Nancy's successor, John J. Crowley, Jr., who'd come down from being DCM in Venezuela, very good guy, very savvy, but he wasn't felt to be strong enough in denouncing and working to undermine or break the building relations that the new government in Surinam after the coup was developing. There were some Middle Easterners in Surinam, not many, but there was a mosque, at that time. I remember seeing at the airport on occasion when the various flights would come in, a coterie of a few dressed in the Middle Eastern outfit. It became larger later on, but I don't have direct knowledge of that.

Q: At the time, when this situation was building up, did we, were you in any way, or anyone seeing the hand of the Cubans or Libyans there, or did this develop later after the coup?

GOOD: In my opinion it developed later, but there was a propensity for it on the part of Desi Bouterse, who became the leader of the junta after the coup, because he had to look for someplace, as is the want of people who have been turned off by the major players in politics in the world. He had to go someplace, and he was a ripe candidate for being solicited by the Cubans and the Libyans in this way. There wasn't then any active organization looking to overthrow the government.

The problem was that the government was fragile. A little push for whatever reason turned out to be enough to knock it down. The little push came from a strange side. At the time of independence, the army, according to the Surinamese soldiers, had been promised a labor union by the Dutch. This was 1979, '80 by the time the coup came, five years after independence they didn't have their union. So a rough group of the Surinamese, basically because the Dutch had not had any officers, like with Idi Amin in Uganda, they had to get somebody up. They took their most senior NCO, although no one suggested that he was capable of being an officer. They had to make him one. He's now, well at the time of the coup he made himself a colonel I guess, Desi Bouterse, Desi and his men didn't see eye to eye, got together in the lunch room at the base, and in effect, went on sort of a hunger strike, or at least a sit-down in demand for their union. They wanted to be able to negotiate probably a little more money, whatever, and nothing happened because the government was not in a strong enough position to do anything. They didn't have anybody really in charge to be able to do that. They wanted to, but that didn't make any difference to the soldiers. They wanted some action. So about seven days after they sat down in their dining room, (chuckling) they decided to make a move. At night a group of them went out

and blew up some ammunition at the armory and went down and took over the fort. It was a fort, and not a badly built fort, but it's not something that you couldn't have pretty well demolished if you'd had any other forces around. Of course the government didn't have any other forces. Henk Arron just lost his cool and fled. I don't know where he fled, I don't think he left the country at that point, but he disappeared. So there was nobody in charge, and by default, this military group found themselves in charge of the country. So they had to quickly figure out how to reorganize themselves and to this new responsibility.

From the embassy point of view, it was sort of embarrassing. We had been using Paramaribo as a refueling point for the long distance flights that would go out to the Azores to pick up the drops from the satellites. They would refuel in Suriname, fly out to pick up the stuff, refuel in the Azores, and then come back.

Q: We're talking about?

GOOD: U.S. Air Force.

Q: Pictures of, I mean packets of?

GOOD: Packets of film.

Q: Packets of film that came out of our photographic satellites?

GOOD: Right.

Q: Yes.

GOOD: We didn't have it bouncing down like we do now; it came down physically. They were overnighting the night of the coup. So, of course, the easy assumption that was made by some is that we had organized this. Well, all we were really trying to do at that point was to get those guys out. There were 30 some of them in the group, and we had to get authorization from the military, since they were in charge, to give us freedom to take them out. Some of them were out at the field already, but the officers were in town at the hotel, and we needed to get authority to take them by car out to the airport and get them out, which we did.

Nancy had to be kept safe, and for some reason at the time of the coup, she was at the residence, and I was assigned. There seems to be some rule that says that the ambassador has to be chaperoned by some officer from the embassy, and I was designated to be that person. So we did some telephoning from there, and some car traffic came back and forth. Nancy's inaccurate account of this day is what prompted my getting in touch with your office.

My wife was a little upset that she was frozen out of communication over at the house. I didn't get through to her. It turns out that, of course, these guys downtown were shooting into the air. 50 caliber machine gun bullets have to come down once they've gone up, and one of them came down into our house roof, which was tin, and it came through the roof, and bounced on the bathroom floor where my wife was brushing her teeth, and hit her in the leg. Fortunately by the

time it got to that point it wasn't strong enough in force to break the skin, but it was a hairy experience.

Q: Yes.

GOOD: But we survived. Because of course the army guys knew that we were not involved, they weren't after our hides. We got our people out. They never came back by the way. They were diverted over to Cayenne. When they found that the girls at the hotel were topless, they never bothered to come back to Paramaribo or try to get authorization to come back. So I never saw them again.

Of course the coup leaders and everybody else in any leadership role in the community was focused on getting things back in order. The ultimate result was that the Dutch pulled back their aid. The Dutch colonel in charge of their military effort was a liaison who was living next door to me. We put a gate in our common side fence so that we could go back and forth, socialize during the coup, which was on for quite a bit of time. I spent a lot of time under coup conditions in South America, both Chile and in Surinam. We didn't have it in Colombia, but sometimes it seemed like we did. But in any event, they had pretty well cut back their support, and it was under military conditions.

They had a series of coups for one reason or another as they jockeyed for permanent position, a total of five. The end result was that they end up with no legislature, and no president, just a junta made up of a group of sergeants who had gotten together and then moved themselves up. The sergeants were a mixed breed. One of the most active ones actually was of Hindustani extraction, not pure, but pretty close, and the Desi tended to be more Creole. The language that they used, they were most comfortable with, was Taki-Taki, which is a patois with a Dutch-English base. Desi was a pretty good stump speaker. He would harangue the crowds.

Q: In Taki-Takis?

GOOD: Yes, Boutarse was not well educated. He preferred the Surinamese spoken by the masses.

Q: Yes, his first name is?

GOOD: Desi.

Q: Desi Bouterse, yes.

GOOD: Desi Bouterse was the spokesman. He's still around. He's under trial, I believe, in absentia in Holland for something right now. Suriname got involved with drugs, probably still is, as a transit point, Desi still has significant political power, because he's got this voting block.

Of course, the way they handled and have handled their legislature there is on the basis of, which is not uncommon around the world, proportional representation. Each block sets set up a list of people who are running on their ticket. Depending upon how well they do in the election, they

will get some or more of that group into legislature. It's done by popularity, and the list is set up one, two, three, four, five, six, so that if they win enough votes for one, the first on the list certainly gets in. If they get more than that, it's two and three, and it's dependent on how far down the list you get before they cut it. It isn't a one-man, one-vote kind of a situation. So with the coup which went on, I don't know how, it seemed to me they cut it back, but it seems to me that it stuck around for the rest of my time there, which was another year and a half.

Q: When the coup first happened, were there overtures that you were aware of to the American embassy for help to do something from either side?

GOOD: No, no. What could we do?

Q: Well, no, but I mean sometimes you get this even though maybe, you know, we're saying, "Gee we can't do anything." But you have people who, you know, we're a super, big, major power, and there you are, and I would think that somebody would come running to you and say, "Do something," or "Help me," or "Do this or that."

GOOD: Well, let me set a little bit more of a scene. Surinam is isolated, very isolated. It wasn't receiving television signals from anyplace else. You could get some radio, but it was at sort of a dead zone. You don't get a lot of that either. By the nature of the Caribbean communications, the information that they get by short wave is from their home mother country, whatever it may be, is only about the mother country and whatever little news might be coming out of that colony. The only cross information was coming from a 10-minute news broadcast to the Caribbean from Voice of America, which would include in those 10-minutes bits of news from across the spectrum of former colonies in the Caribbean and northern South America. These people had been educated in Holland, to the extent that they were educated. Outside the country they didn't know. Some of the younger ones, children, were beginning to go to the States for college when I got there. They had no idea what our system was, so our degree wasn't recognized. They didn't know where to fit us into the salary scale, the newly returned graduates. They were focused on Holland, and that was it as far as outside relations. Yes, they knew about Brazil, but Brazil didn't really care.

Q: Well, of course you're USIA, and I mean information service. Let's say prior, when you arrived there, what had USIA been doing?

GOOD: We fed the wireless file to selected people, opinion makers. We got it to the television station, the radio stations, and so forth so that the people who were making decisions knew we existed, and they had some general idea what was going on in the world. But their visceral instincts were still their relationships between the Netherlands and themselves and trying to negotiate some kind of balance within the country. When you have no majority and the partiality is not dominant, you've got a lot of internal negotiating to do.

I remember meeting some Surinamese on a train in Holland one time. Once they got out of the country, they realized that they had far more in common with their opponent, let's say in Surinam, when they were outside the country, than they did with anybody else. They realized they really were Surinamese. They might disagree with the Hindustani, if they were Creole and

so forth, but they understood each other far more than anybody else understood them. Across the board they were hungry for anything we could tell them about what was going on in Suriname.

Q: What about the Dutch during this, as this thing developed? Was there a Dutch...

GOOD: There was an ambassador.

Q: An ambassador? I would have thought...

GOOD: But there was no public information person, and this really showed.

Q: Why?

GOOD: Well, there was no tradition for it. I think that we were the only embassy that had anyone involved with information. So the ambassador attempted to serve as spokesman. He did a bum job of it because he had no experience. He was being forced into public positions where his experience had only been in in-house or behind-the-scenes negotiation. He would say things that he really didn't mean or could be taken the wrong way. It didn't work out. They needed to have someone there who could be a buffer.

Q: They weren't having somebody, in other words, the Dutch ambassador was not saying, "We are for democracy, and if you have this, your aid will be cut off," and that sort of thing?

GOOD: He might have made some threats about the aid, but he was perceived and probably he still had a habit of thinking of himself as being the big guy coming back to sort of "look at this former child of ours, Surinam." There wasn't really the feeling that, certainly not, that the military sergeants were his equal. Now the president was a sophisticated guy, and Henk Arron wasn't bad, but these other guys were just not classy guys.

Q: How did the thing develop? What were you doing? The soldiers came and took over the fort, and then what happened?

GOOD: It turned out then that there wasn't anybody else who was in charge. Henk Arron had disappeared, the legislature sort of dissolved of its own, and the president, by the nature of the presidency and the nature of the personality of the president, was not in a position to step in and take charge. If he had been a strong leader, he could have stepped in and resolved the situation on that morning because these guys, all they wanted was their union. They had not done this to be saddled with running the country. They didn't know how to run the country. They weren't economists. They knew that they weren't considered the equals of the Dutch in the negotiating situation. It was a downer for them, and of course, it turned out to be a downer.

The country has just not survived well at all. It's obviously still there, and they still are shipping out the aluminum ore, but projects such as the one that we were involved with over on the west side of the country died. The border river between Guyana and Surinam had been used as an opening to get to some other ore. We had the contract, built the railroad to get from the river to the mine, and had been involved in building up a new village, but nobody wanted to live there.

They had done a bad job of building support locally. They didn't have a psychologist on the committee who was setting this thing up. So when it came down to the time to get people to permanently settle over there, they gave them houses, they gave them all kinds of benefits, but there wasn't any party life. So the whole project sort of died, because the coup came along, and certainly there wasn't anybody in the new government who understood what the situation was and being interested in pushing it. The last I heard, the village was deserted, and there wasn't anything coming out of the mine.

The railroad's still there, the best railroad in the country. There were only two. The other one ran slowly from Paramaribo up to the dam. I put one of my sons on there one day to give him something to do while he was visiting, and he said it was awful. He said it was just terrible. There was a drunk on the train, it didn't go anywhere, it stopped, and there was nothing to do when you finally did achieve the dam. Going through the jungle was ugh.

There weren't many roads. There was one road across the country. It went from Nieuw Nickerie, which is on the border with Guyana on the river, which is the border with Guyana. And there was another one across from Saint-Laurent, which is the first city on the French Guiana side.

You had to take a ferry for a couple of the crossings, and there were a couple of bridges, because Surinam is one series of rivers that run from the interior to the ocean. Because there were no roads that penetrated the interior, the one crossroad meant it had to either have a ferry or it had to have a bridge. You couldn't get to French Guiana or Guyana without using ferry. While the one to French Guiana was an okay car ferry, the one to Guyana was for foot traffic. One small could be put on the roof. The Nieuw Nickerie, Surinam location was not directly across the river from the Guyana border post. So you first went out towards sea, not all the way, and then back inland on another river quite a ways. I think it was about a four-hour trip to get across. I did it one time. The consul and I decided to take a long weekend. We got over there; we got a taxi and made our way into Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, and loved it. Now it didn't take too much to bring variety.

Q: Did it seem like the big city there?

GOOD: Absolutely. Now the city itself is below sea level, the downtown area. They've got a dike up there. But they had squash courts, which to me is a sign of civilization. It was well laid out. The streets were broader. It had some lovely architecture, not being too well maintained, but a lot of wooden architecture, which drove our security people crazy because, of course, there wasn't anyplace that they could get a really fireproof building. Their legislature was quite good looking. They had a national park. They had manitees in the gardens, in their ponds.

They had problems economically there. It was difficult to get food. Canned food was illegal. If you had a can with food, you had to open it in your house with the shades down and a flashlight. You couldn't throw the can away; you had to bury it so they wouldn't find you had it. I got this story from the Guyana's ambassador to Surinam who took some cans back with him. He said it was a real secret process to be able to enjoy it. We went into the grocery stores, and maybe there would be a scrawny chicken or two, but there wasn't much else available. They thought that

Paramaribo was heaven on earth. It wasn't too long after that before they both thought that the only place to go was Cayenne, over in French Guiana.

Q: Was there any, was the geography such that Brazil didn't play any part in it, because it does have a border with Brazil?

GOOD: But there was no land communication. There is a road, which is navigable most of the year by four-wheel drive, in Guyana that runs south to Brazil. But in Surinam there was nothing. They worried about Brazil a little bit. They weren't uncomfortable with them personally, because Brazilians that they'd met were mixed, and they were dealing on a business basis, and their political association was with the Netherlands. They had no real association politically on a decent basis in South America.

They were having border fights with the French over the border with French Guiana. That led later almost to an armed conflict. The French had a French Foreign Legion post in San Laurent just across the river from Surinam, which was sort of senile. I went over to take a look at it one day (chuckling). Nice guys, but it was the pits. A couple of them had retired in town. One had married, he had opened a little restaurant, and on the side he sold mounted butterflies in plastic. I still have a beautiful blue one hanging on my wall at the house. He was very pleasant, had a little daughter, I don't know whether he had a wife around still or not. There was also an old prison falling down. You could still go in and see the shackles.

From San Laurent an hour or so, you got you blast off site for the Ariane rockets, very modern. In fact, the way that they moved the missile from its setup point to the launch pad went right across the highway. When they were having it shot, they closed the highway, and you couldn't go on to Cayenne. The police were also firm about using seat belts...

Q: So the soldiers started taking over the government? Anybody coming? I mean what were we doing, just sitting there watching this, or were we?

GOOD: Yes, yes we had no axe to grind on this one.

Q: I mean what was our fee? Normally, you know, we're pushing democracy and that sort of thing.

GOOD: We weren't pushing democracy as actively then, as we were later. We were pushing human rights. This was Carter. Remember the disastrous Carter years where you didn't want to wake up in the morning because you didn't know what policy change had been made while you were asleep.

Q: Now often when you get a coup of this nature, in the first place, I assume because these were essentially sergeants in the army, you know, that we probably didn't have much in the way or anytime knowing these people before hand or not?

GOOD: Well, I did have an indirect information source. My chief local employee was a classmate of Bouterse, a grade school schoolmate. Now he wasn't a close relationship because

there had been some kind of a fight over a woman some period before that, and so Ronny was sort of worried about his long term (laughing), physical well being. He left the country not too long after I did and moved to Curacao, last I heard.

It was a very small place. These guys had been drinking buddies; they grew up together, rode bicycles together, which of course was the main means of transportation up until independence. People didn't have money. They were poor. This assistant of mine had gotten himself a high school education, I guess, and had gone into journalism, which is where we picked him up. Bouterse didn't even have that much education. There was one good high school in town, but with independence, the source of teachers disappeared. They'd been mostly Dutch. The grade schools weren't well staffed by the time I got there, so that the graduates weren't qualified to really go on to a reasonably tough high school that they had. The traditional, not quite gymnasium, but of that nature, heavily academic, definitely teacher dominated school. The student didn't learn to ask questions, but by the time they'd finished their one high school, they could be well prepared. One of them I remember went up to Dade County and went to the Dade County College and just was embarrassed at how backward it was. He was far more advanced than the community college curriculum was prepared to provide him. But of course, that was like going from a prep school back to a community college here. You just had more of a start than your competitors.

We did have, or I had, some information. You could pick up some indirectly from the Dutch, and as I said, the colonel in charge of their relations with the military was next door. His opinion of Bouterse was very low. His opinion of all of the Surinamese soldiers was, as a colonel would have toward the non-officer class of any developing country, I suspect. The British feeling toward Idi Amin is another illustration of that. So I could get information about what was going on in the military this route, but from the Dutch side you had it filtered a bit because it was anti all the way. From Ronny's side it was more gossip because he also wasn't involved in the policy level to the extent there was a policy level.

Q: From your perspective, how did the takeover work?

GOOD: We're talking about almost a small town. There was no opposition. These guys, well they had the guns. The Dutch weren't going to come in. All they were prepared to do was to cut off the aid. The businessmen in town, like my friend Jack, were interested in making sure that the communication lines continued so they could get their stuff out and get their stuff in. So they were looking to maintain relationships on a commercial basis. Of course, the soldiers had no objections to that and the businessmen had basically gone to school with these guys too. It wasn't as if you had to go through several layers to get to the people who were making the decisions. The problem was that you had a number of people in the junta, and they quarreled within their own group. You had to get a number of people putting pressure on the number of people in the junta to get them to see that this is the correct way to go on this decision. "It's not going to hurt you, in fact it's going to help you, and it's certainly a help for us because if it helps us, it'll help the country." Shortly after I left, and I left in... When did I leave?

Q: Well, you left in '81?

GOOD: I left in '81, just trying to think what month. I guess I left in June, and I was going, wait a minute. Where was I going from there? I was going to Chinese language training, in August. Yes, I left in late June, for Colombia.

Sometime in the fall of '81, they had a purge and killed a number of leaders including the union lawyer who was living behind me. That put a shuddering halt to a lot of the civility between groups. Others, such as the vice chancellor of the university, who'd been one of our grantees, a very qualified lady, left with her husband. Her husband was also well educated, but he had a closer relationship with the guys in the junta. He came back before she did. She went up to Gainesville, Florida, and then she ultimately went back too. After I had left, and she had left, I had some correspondence with her, but it cut off when I suggested that there was perhaps a bit of a problem with the democratic process in Surinam. She got huffy about that. It was the last I've heard from her, because obviously there was a problem. I guess I wasn't very tactful in suggesting that democracy had failed. She probably took it a little bit personally in thinking that I thought that the educated group had failed to sustain its responsibility in keeping control of the process so that it didn't go off the track as it obviously had and is obviously still off 20 years later.

Q: While you were there, the coup was when?

GOOD: The coup was in January of '80, the first coup.

Q: So you had about a year and a half with this?

GOOD: Yes.

Q: What were our concerns? How did they develop?

GOOD: The immediate concerns were to get communications up with Washington, very small potatoes stuff, but that was important. They wanted to know from our point of view what was going on. Then, because it was the Dutch area of influence and because they really had no dealings with the rest of South America, the Monroe Doctrine wasn't a real problem. So we backed off and let it go its own merry way for a while. We didn't get interested again until Desi began to play footsy with Cuba. Apparently they had had some contact with Grenada, Gre-nay-da as they pronounce it in the Caribbean, and they had some mutual visits back and forth. At that point, Washington began to get a little more interested. That's about the time that Nancy was pulled out. I think she'd done her two years. Jack came in. He, then, was thought, as I understood later, to be less than forceful in his denunciation of these contacts and about what alternatives they had and what would happen if they didn't make use of these alternatives. Then that got complicated when the Libyan influence began to arrive. It may have been more than just Libyan, but the idea that there were the Middle Easterners interested Washington. There are lots of Middle Easterners in that area. Venezuela has about 100,000 Syrians for example and there is a mosque, and there is a mosque in San Andres, the Colombian island that I enjoy visiting.

To get down to a little bit farther ahead, something the Moroccans, for example, find very difficult to believe, is that a non-Muslim can go into a mosque. I was very happy to remind them,

or tell them, because they didn't believe it at first, that I had gone into mosques all over the world. The fact that I couldn't go into the mosque in Morocco was not because of the Muslim religious tenants. It was because of the French policy decision when they took over the protectorate. They wanted to leave one place at least where the Moroccans could be Moroccans without fear of foreign influence.

Q: Yes, that makes good sense, yes.

GOOD: But there were mosques, and there are lots of Middle Easterners or networking.

Q: How did we see, were there manifestations of Cuban or Libyan influence at the time?

GOOD: No, not noticeably in the country. They didn't have people coming in and being stationed there that I could see, but it was at that point that we began to get some TDYs. DIA sent one in. CIA sent one in to begin to try to get a little bit more information.

Q: Now I remember, I can't remember who it was, the ambassador that I interviewed who said that at one point they sent in a military team. A lieutenant colonel or something came, looked around, and said, "Well, we could probably take the place over with a battalion."

GOOD: Oh, easily.

Q: "But then what the hell do you do with it." (Laughing) And that kind of ended that. I mean it was of-

GOOD: Our concern ultimately was that this should not be a mess of problems for us. We had no interest in taking it over. We didn't feel that it was our place to go in there and teach them how to suck eggs. The Dutch were there to do that, and we were happy to let the Dutch deal with this problem. We wanted to know what was going on, and that's why we had some intelligence people coming in, but it was not a high priority.

Q: Did you find that the Dutch were rising to the occasion?

GOOD: No, because from their point of view, this was a problem they didn't need. After all, the independence was only five years before it. Their perception of the Surinamese was like their perception of the Indonesians. "This was an underclass. We had ruled them for hundreds of years, so they're acting out of place. We will discipline them and we will bring them back to some level of sanity if we can." Our U.S. position seemed to be, "Fine. Good luck, we will help if we can." To give you an idea of how small the country is, I remember my wife and I were out on a drive on a Sunday off to see the Jodensavanne, which was an old Jewish settlement. We stopped at the river waiting for the ferry to come over, the two-car ferry, and a car, drove up behind, parked, also going to go across. The guy comes out, I come out, and we start chatting. He knew my name, he knew my address, (chuckling) and he knew what I did. I had no idea who he was. We were very visible.

Q: How about your USIA activities?

GOOD: Conditional, we continued, we had some grants, we brought some people in. One of my projects was to attempt to educate the ministry of education on what our university degrees meant. I brought an educational expert down to have a series of workshop with the officials at the ministry to explain to them where our degrees fit in with the Dutch degrees, which was all they knew. They don't fit very well, because the doctorandus, which is the Dutch degree, is a degree of four to six years study in the specialized field that they're interested in. It starts immediately upon entering the university.

Q: Oh.

GOOD: They don't have those two years of general education that are our norm. So when they took the graduate record exam, they went up to the ceiling on competence in their field, biology let's say, but they were way down on general knowledge. The foreign student advisors in the States were having to be educated on educating the people in the departments that, "All right, this guy didn't show up well on general knowledge, but he's super in the field that you're going to teach him." Then they had to get the word out to professors that these people might have gaps in their knowledge of art and general history, but don't think they're going to be faulted on the subject that you're teaching them for their Master's program. Technically they were really, with the doctorandus, up to the thesis level of a doctorate. They just didn't have the broadness. You could call it a Master's, but it's more than a Master's, and yet it in many ways it puts them a little bit off keel with the people who have Master's degrees here. They're not quite as broadly based. So that was one of our projects.

We provided tapes for them; we had clearances to the TV station for broadcast. I got caught one time. I loaned the guy a tape for his personal viewing, which we didn't have the broadcast rights for. Washington heard about it from Curacao, because he put it on the Dutch network of the ABC network that's Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao. I didn't get disciplined for it, but I was told to watch it. I went back to him and said, "Listen, I don't have rights for that. Don't do that." He said, "Okay."

We had an occasional speaker in. One fellow I remember came from Fairfield College in Connecticut, apparently our best expert on Suriname at the university systems up here, not that there's a great competition for that title.

Q: (Chuckling)

GOOD: He came down with a viewpoint on Chile, which was, of course, the liberal radical viewpoint that it'd been our fault and that we had pushed the coup. It wasn't, of course, accurate, and I blasted him for it. He calmed down, and I said, "Look, don't talk about it. You're not here to talk about it. You're to talk about the United States; that's your topic."

So he behaved himself for the rest of the time. But I got some repercussions because I reported it back to Washington. I didn't want anyone confused about where this guy was coming from as a speaker because I walked into the room after his speech, and people would say, "Ah, CIA, CIA, CIA," because those were the days when we were called ICA (International Communication

Agency). I figured it was just an anagrammatical confusion. Reading these stories last week on Chile from Jack, the Teflon man as they call him, I agree with him.

Q: You were referring to a set of articles about a former CIA representative in Chile. Was it during the coup or after the coup?

GOOD: It was before and after.

Q: In The Washington Post?

GOOD: Yes, and Jack was a riot. I remember one night we went out for a pizza, a bunch of us, and he impersonated the U.S. ambassador. We got great service because he's, what is he? Six-foot-five, something like that?

Q: Yes.

GOOD: A big fellow, and very exuberant. In those days he had an afro cut, but what he was saying in the series, I would sign on to because we had been actively helping the opposition as they had. Our interest was in keeping the opposition viable, as I had said earlier. They had known about the coup, but not too much before. I remember a week before the camp we'd been up at the snow lodge with some of them. They'd gotten a call and had to go back down, so that they knew about it the week before, at least some of it.

Q: Did the, going back, beginning of coup, coups confused (chuckling), what about

GOOD: Coups are fun, actually.

Q: Well, of course, the Foreign Service was. You always want a coup, you know, I mean. (Laughing)

GOOD: In the coup in Chile things had been tight. That is, you really didn't want to try to run around at night if you had sense. In Surinam with a pass, it was just less traffic.

Q: Yes?

GOOD: Since our courier would come in late, the plane was late arriving every night. The schedule was late. We'd have to go out to the plane, and we had our pass, and we'd go out and get the courier and bring him in. We never felt that there was any danger.

Q: Did you, you mentioned it, and I recall too, that there was a point where, I don't know whether it was a shootout at a cabinet meeting, or anyway, several of the members of the regional junta...

GOOD: This was after I had left.

Q: Yes, after you left, got killed by other members of the junta. But during the time you were there, was the military rule coming down heavily on the people; I mean you know, a human right problem or something like that?

GOOD: No, no, no. They still acted as if they wanted and needed and expected to get popular support. Desi Bouterse would have town meetings, if you will, down in the city square near the fort and harangue the crowd, and they'd respond. They'd be talking in Taki-Taki rather than Dutch and "the greatness of our guy." So yes, they were looking for popular support and expected to have it, because they thought that it was better to be run by the masses, than by the elitists. They thought that this would be what the people would like. It was only after it was obvious that they, this popular support, expected certain other things that were inconvenient to them that squabbling began to start. It eventually triggered the breakup of the junta. The reorganization of the junta was after I had gone.

Q: By the time you left, the junta was, I mean you weren't seeing a return to democracy on the horizon?

GOOD: No, there was no obvious interest in setting any deadlines for elections or that sort of thing. They didn't have people in a level of policy making who understood what it was all about anyway. One of the fellows that we had planned to send to the States under the Humphrey Fellowship had had to back away because they needed him to run the foreign ministry. He had a doctorandus. He was a sophisticated guy, but he was at their beck and call. He was not making policy. If they didn't have preconceived ideas, they'd listen to what he said needed to be done for the good of the country to maintain relationships and so forth, but that was only to keep things going. Democracy was not something that they felt had a high priority.

Q: When you were there, were there visits from Cuba, for example?

GOOD: There weren't any state visits; there may have been visits. As I remember it, the Surinamese went out to visit more than people came in to visit. There may have been some people in my last months who came in, but it wasn't something that was in the papers, no.

Q: This is just a concern for us, not a...

GOOD: The fact that there were contacts caused concern, because they didn't want the Cuban influence to be able to expand any more than it already had.

Q: I guess we've mentioned Granada was the New Jewel movement. It had gone rather sour, and there were problems in Grenada. The Cubans were beginning to move in there, as the next year was to see us putting troops in there. So I guess we were more sensitive to Cuban influence?

GOOD: Well, Cuba's has always been a bugger with the Caribbean relations and not South American relations.

Q: Yes.

GOOD: This was, you know, only a couple of years after the problems in Chile, and we didn't want there to be another place where their influence goes after we had managed or at least found other people who managed to get this settled down in Chile.

Q: Now did the airfield you mentioned, it was a rather large airfield, play any role? Was that something we were concerned about falling into the wrong hands?

GOOD: No, not that I know of. I understand that they've got a McDonald's on the road to the airport now.

Q: (Laughing)

GOOD: Jack Fernandez told me that he got the franchise for that. Actually he said though, that the place hasn't changed much. They put in a couple of fast foods. They've got a Kentucky Fried, two McDonald's. Actually the road to the airport is still in about the same condition it was and not much expansion.

Q: Yes.

GOOD: A few people came back. I was talking to Jack's sister at the Hampton's wedding, and she said that, let's see, they would be about 60 now, some of her classmates who had gotten graduate degrees and had left the convent eventually. Shortly thereafter they had tried to go back to see if they could be contributors to the growth of Surinam and so forth. They didn't stay. Most of them just disappeared back to Holland, welcomed back to Holland, because they're productive people. But they found that things weren't there for progress. Again, you've still got it run by basically uneducated people without a world view, not much sophistication. Bouterse had done training in Holland. He had been out of the country, and he was certainly more sophisticated than his counterparts, than the junta. But he wasn't educated, so he was very, very limited.

NEUL L. PAZDRAL
Deputy Chief of Mission
Paramaribo (1979-1981)

Neul L. Pazdral was born in Missouri in 1934. He graduated from Stanford University and served in the U.S. Army. Mr. Pazdral joined the Foreign Service in 1961 and served in Denmark, Germany, Poland, Suriname, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

PAZDRAL: But I was offered the job in Suriname as the DCM and that was a very attractive prospect from a career point of view. Well, when I got there...actually it was a DCM job but before that it had been a political/economic reporting officer job and they had just upgraded it because the Ambassador, Nancy Ostrander, felt she really needed the dignity of having a DCM down there. It was the smallest Embassy in South America at that time. So I was really the economic/political reporting officer.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, there was a revolution there while I was there. I got there in 1977 and I think the revolution occurred in early 1978. It was really a non-revolution. As a result of that the Embassy grew spectacularly even in my time. By the time I left we had a defense attaché's office, a couple of political reporting officers. We didn't have a CIA station yet but they kept somebody there continually on TDY and later on opened up a station. Communications was augmented and we even moved into a new Embassy building. That is all simply an indicator of how much emphasis was focused on that country.

The situation was that when I got there the military, like everything Dutch, had a very strong union. When the country became independent the civilian government had offered the military certain pay and other concessions which had never been implemented. I remember one of the chief grievances of the military was that one of the things that the new Surinamese government had offered them was to extend health care benefits to their families. This hadn't been the case before. This was very natural and was done as a matter of course in Holland and in almost all countries. But although it had been promised to the Surinamese military the government had never implemented it; so if your wife got sick, you paid. And of course it made them very unhappy.

So just about the time I got there the military had threatened to go out on strike, which was illegal. I remember somebody describing to me the first attempt of the military to strike and according to this description the military had formed up outside their barracks and said that they were now on strike. They had been surrounded by a police cordon.

The police chief, whom I knew well enough to call him up and ask him to do something for me, had put his police all around these...the Surinamese military were only a couple of thousand strong and less then half of those were in the city of Paramaribo, so you are not talking about large numbers ...but the police had surrounded these striking soldiers who weren't doing anything but standing in formation at that point.

The police chief was trying to coerce them into giving up their strike and they refused to do it. He ordered them to disperse and they wouldn't do that. The soldiers were armed, they had their weapons with them but I don't know if they were loaded. Failing to disperse the soldiers and becoming more frantic about it, this police chief allegedly began dancing and shouting at his troops to get rid of these soldiers, to shoot them if they have to. Then actually saying to one of his policeman, "Shoot them, why don't you shoot?"

So that was kind of the situation when I got there. One of the first things that I remember was that several of the leaders of the soldiers union were put on trial because striking was illegal and unfortunately the government had the very bad sense to try them on a very serious crime. If I recall correctly they were saying in effect that the soldiers by violating their no strike contract had committed treason, the punishment for which could be death. I remember that there was some possibility that these people could actually be executed if found guilty. Well they were found guilty. Again I remember going down to watch this happening. The military were formed up outside the court house in Paramaribo, just standing there. They stood there all day while their leaders were being sentenced.

I think there had been three or four men who had been on trial. The rest of the army...I don't think they defied their officers I think the officers were just smart enough to not get in the way...they just marched down and stood in orderly ranks outside the court house all morning while these people were being sentenced. I have forgotten what the sentences were. They weren't nearly as hard as they could have been, but the military was unhappy that they had been found guilty at all. It amounted to a political trial. So the soldiers decided to take over their barracks. If I remember there was a cantonment in the center or near the center of Paramaribo. The soldiers union leadership decided that they would take over, in effect have a sit-down strike within that compound. They originally had planned to do it before the verdict itself had been delivered by the trial court, but typically, they had tried to get into the compound and the soldiers on guard, who were also members of the union, had refused them entry. You know, "You have no business coming into the compound this late at night. We can't let you in." So the potential sit-down strikers had just turned around and gone home. That was the way things worked in Suriname those days.

But then they decided to try it again several days later after the sentences were actually passed. I don't recall clearly although I know we were able to discovered what had actually happened. This time instead of trying to get through the gate they climbed over the fence. They were seen doing this by the guards, as I recall, but they at this point were in on it and let them do it. They got into the compound...there must have been 300-400 of these guys and they in effect went on a sit-down strike. Somebody said, "Well, if we are really going to do this we should have arms and ammunition just in case the police try something on us again." They said, "Okay, let us go and take over the ammunition bunker," which was a few blocks away over by the small airfield down town.

So they went to the ammunition bunker and the guard on duty there, who was an old sergeant who had served in the Dutch armed forces, refused to let them in. So they shot him. That was a big mistake. Certainly they had no intention of doing that, I know that for a fact. It was just that one of the soldiers, a kid got trigger happy and happened to have a loaded shotgun. He shot the sergeant and killed him. Right there is were everything started to unravel because at that point they had committed a capital crime and it was no longer a matter of a peaceful strike or something like that.

They took over the ammunition magazine and distributed the ammunition and later weapons, which they hadn't done, to the troops that were on the sit-down strike. You now have an armed group within this camp which knows it has done something bad and is very sensitive to whatever may happen to it.

The next thing that happened was that they decided they had better take over the navy, which consisted at that point of two 55 foot gunboats. There was some scandal attached to them...they didn't perform as they should. Somebody made a lot of money on them. Anyway they had small caliber guns on them, nothing substantial but enough to cause a lot of damage. I remember my first inkling of the fact that revolution was going on was to see one of these gunboats out on the river. The Embassy was on the eighth floor of the tallest building in town and had all glass walls so you couldn't help but see what was going on around you. I noticed one of the gunboats out

there making figure eights in the river, and occasionally I would see a puff of smoke. I didn't pay any attention to it for a moment or two but then I heard explosions in the town.

What was happening was that the gunboat was shelling the police station. That was the beginning of the revolution for us. And the rounds were going into the telephone exchange so telephone communications within the city and with the outside world were very quickly disrupted.

The next thing, and this really frightened me because I had been in the army and knew what heavy weapons were like...one of the things that the Surinamese army had was track vehicles with four 50 caliber machine guns mounted on them, quad-50s as they are called. They were anti-aircraft weapons. But they were very impressive. One round from a 50 caliber machine gun, if it hit you in the stomach would blow you apart, or would punch holes in the side of a destroyer big enough to stick your head through. They are very impressive weapons. Well, they were having some looting going on so the soldiers decided that since they had now effectively taken charge of things they had better stop these looters. So they rolled out one of these quad-50s and fired it down the main street.

If you have ever heard one of these things firing it scares the daylights out of you and I could see the rounds. They had the standard load and one out of every five rounds is a tracer. First of all I was afraid they were going to start a terrible fire because the whole town was made out of wood. The Ambassador was in the building...my first thought was for safety...I was kind of interested sitting up there and watching it all happen, but coincidentally we had two Air Force planes which were on the ground in Suriname.

In those days every time NASA launched a satellite they would send down two Air Force EC-135s, basically a 707 packed with electronic gear, because there was a place over the south Atlantic where there was a hole in their radio coverage. They couldn't track the satellites unless they had at least one airplane out over the south Atlantic. So every time they were about to launch a satellite they would send two of these airplanes down there just in case one broke down. This plane would fly out over the Atlantic. I think they had to fly out for something like six hours and then orbit for several hours while the satellite was going up and then fly back to land in Suriname.

The reason they came down to us was that the US military had built a ten thousand foot runway near the city of Paramaribo during the Second World War and that was now the international airport.

Q: One of the major ferrying points over to Dakar and off that way.

PAZDRAL: Exactly. The runway was still in good shape. These planes had fairly large crews. I think there was something like 13 men on each airplane. These men normally would land their airplanes, come into town 25 miles to spend the night. Since we were all good friends and everybody knew what they were about they would be wearing their military uniforms.

Now we had some 26 Americans in battle dress in downtown Suriname and two extremely expensive airplanes out at the airport. They were supposed to be taking off that morning to go fly this mission. Our communications were still open and we were getting messages from somewhere telling us to get the airplanes off. They didn't know about the revolution because we hadn't been able to do any reporting yet. But they wanted to know where the hell were the airplanes. They hadn't gotten any reports that they were off the ground yet.

I remember one of our chief preoccupations was to get those guys back out to the airport. We got one car load of people out there but the Surinamese military had also taken over the airport and threatened to shoot up the airplanes if we tried to move them. We managed to get the rest of the crew onto a bus and we were going to send them out to the airport and the bus got hung up. We were trying to use radios and they didn't work and all that sort of thing. Then I finally managed to get through by telephone to somebody who I knew at the military headquarters and explained the problem. I said, "Who could I talk to? We have to get these airplanes off the ground if we possibly can." Finally they said, "All right. If you will go to point X we will have somebody meet you there who will escort you."

So I drove to this point, which was four or five blocks from there and a little Surinamese of Javanese extraction, he was all of about 4 feet high and wearing a huge steel helmet and crossed bandoleer on his chest with fragment grenades hanging off it, popped out of the bushes when he saw my car stop and ran over and jumped into my car. He divested himself of his bandoleer and dropped it on the floor...I remember that because I had all these fragment grenades rolling around on the floor of the car.

We drove very carefully up to the barricades with me holding an American flag out the window. We got in and I ended up talking to the guy who is now still the military ruler of Suriname, Desi Bouterse. He was an extremely intelligent guy and he had been union leader. But when they started all this striking for their rights, he had backed out. He said, "I agree with what your purposes are, but this is not the way to do it, I resign from the union leadership." So he was sort of out of the loop and was not one of those who was arrested. But when all this trouble started occurring they very quickly identified him as one of the few people who had his head screwed on right and could maybe bring it off for them. So they grabbed Bouterse and told him that he had to be their commander. So that is what he did. He personally, then, gave me his assurances that we would be able to move the crews out to the airport and get them on the planes. And the planes would be able to leave.

As it happened, if I recall correctly, by the time we got all that done, it was too late. They had to postpone the satellite launch and they just flew the planes out of there.

The point was that that was my reason for going down there right in the middle of this revolution. The gunboats were still out in the river shooting the police station, and the police chief had fled and was in hiding. I remember they were interrogating people there and as I walked passed one of the barracks, I remember a door opened...and there were several people lying on the grass spread eagle, obviously under guard and being told to lie face down with their arms and legs out stretched and not move. They were all either naked or wearing shorts. Some of them showed evidence of being pretty heavily beaten. As I walked passed this barracks this door

opened and another body came flying out, horizontal, face down, as if he was on a stretcher, which he wasn't. Somebody had just picked him up and thrown him out the door. He flew in front of me, hit the grass and bounced a couple of times and quickly stretched out his arms and lay there very rigidly, obviously having been worked over pretty well.

The military at the time of the revolution were a fairly civilized sort. After I left there, the bad element apparently gained ascendancy because later on the union leaders and others...there were something like 17 civic leaders who were just brutally slaughtered. That was after I had gone.

While I was there, and I was there until 1981, so the revolution occurred in 1980. Let's see. I got there in 1979, the revolution occurred, as I recall, in February 1980 and I was there for about a year after that.

One of my contacts was a man who was on the so-called military council. I knew him quite well because my hobby is teaching flying and I had become one of the flight instructors for the Aero Club Suriname. I had actually gotten a Dutch instructor's license from them. He was one of my flying students. I would go over to his house and he would tell me what was going on and sort of hold his head in his hands about the way the revolution was going. This was several months later.

But the point of all this was that they really hadn't intended at all to take over the country. This was not a conscious revolution. They were simply a bunch of soldiers who wanted what had been promised to them. The political establishment was so ham-handed as to force them further and further into a corner. This unfortunate accident occurred from which then evolved the fact that they had a revolution. Once they had killed a few people, if they had simply laid down their arms as the President of the country asked them to do, they would have been treated as criminals, and they knew that. They went to him...he was a very highly respected figure. His family was old Suriname and he had good connections in Holland as well. The military went to him on the second day and said in effect, "We really didn't mean to do this and we would like to give the country back." He said, "Well, legally the only way you can do that is if you give yourselves up and I will try to see that you are treated humanely, but I cannot promise you anything." They said that that was not good enough.

The situation that then developed was that they governed the country but kept turning to him for advise. It was he that was a moderating influence. His threat was to resign. They wanted him there because they knew that he was their link with respectability and they did respect him. He was a very effective politician. He was elderly, and as I recall, he had always planned to retire anyway in a few years. He had a health problem, I think. But in any case, he finally resigned just before I left. He finally told them, "Look, boys, you can't do that or I will resign." At that point they had been getting some advice from some very radical politicians and they in effect said to go ahead, he wasn't needed any more. A big mistake on their part.

Suriname was fraught with radical politics. In fact, one of the more interesting things before the revolution was to figure out who was the most extreme left wing. I think any person who goes to a Dutch university, in those days at least, became a flaming communist. They brought that back to Suriname with them. Whereas the flaming communists of Holland graduated from university

and moved on into the establishment and moderated their views, in that fervent tropic environment down in Suriname that didn't happen and you had some people who were ready to call forth the revolution today. You almost had some shining path types down there, really.

So some of these people had access to these military fellows who were trying to set up a government that could run the country and gave some very bad advice as to which way to go...collectivizing, expropriating and nationalizing all property, and things like that. These things didn't actually happen, as far as I know, but the military were told they were the things to do. And they didn't know any better.

The Dutch military attaché got himself into a lot of trouble because he had maintained his contacts with the military throughout. He had, of course, very good contacts with the Surinamese military and the boys, as he called them, would come to him for advice. After the revolution they would come to his back gate and knock. He would come out and let them in and they would sit on his back porch and drink beer. They would ask him what to do and he would give his personal advice about how to run the country. As I understand it, some Dutch politician found out about these continuing contacts and made it into something very bad. As if this Dutch military attaché had somehow helped to bring about the revolution or fomented it and was then encouraging these radical military types. None of this was true. He was trying to ameliorate the problems that the country was facing and to help guide them in ways that would bring the country back to stability. But he got fired as a result of the bad publicity he got in the Netherlands.

I left there before things really got bad. But, as I say, after that a friend of mine who was an American and a pilot down there was killed. He was a helicopter pilot and the military council used him frequently. He was flying for a mining company but they would just sort of take over his helicopter and have him fly them around various places they wanted to go. The story was that his helicopter went down in a rain storm, but I never believed that because he wasn't the sort who would have gotten himself into a situation like that. I am reasonably certain that he was done in because they got one of the senior members of the military council in the same airplane accident. He was one of the more moderate ones.

Bouterse, Desi, this Dutch soldier who took over the leadership of the military group had at first, for example, said that he did not want any rank or title or anything like that. And for quite some time he refused to be addressed as anything other than Sgt. Bouterse, which had been his rank in the Suriname army. He later became a Colonel, but he first, I think, became a Lieutenant. I guess people convinced him that he couldn't run a government and an army if he didn't have some rank, so he let himself be called Lieutenant and finally Colonel. He was a man of extreme intelligence. He had served with the Dutch forces and had been in...he did two years in the Netherlands and was involved with NATO troops by virtue of his service in the Dutch army. In that very brief contact he learned to speak very good German, for example. I could talk to him in German better than I could talk to him in Dutch, because my Dutch wasn't that good. He was a very practical guy, but also a guy who had come from very primitive background. One of the things that would immediately occur to him as a solution was, "Well, let's kill our enemies." A fairly primitive, brutal approach to life.

Q: What were our concerns as an Embassy and American policy there?

PAZDRAL: Well, I would say our main concern was that the revolution not be radicalized, as happened, in fact. We had Guyana to the north of us with some very radical politicians. The Cubans in those days were extremely active and trying to gain footholds wherever they could on the continent, and in fact did. Before I left we had some pretty good evidence that the Cubans were actively supplying arms by secret flights coming into the big airport at Zanderij, because they had shut the airport down and I, as a pilot had some ins in the civil aviation establishment and knew there was something funny going on there. There were flights coming in that flight controllers were telling me about but they didn't know what they were and the military were meeting them. I am reasonably sure that that was Cuban arms coming into the country. That connection then became overt and much stronger. That fell apart of its own weight as it had done in other countries, notably, again, in Guyana.

But that was one of our fears, that they would become another base for a revolution in that part of the world. Northern Brazil, I guess, was ripe country for that sort of thing and having a base in Suriname would have been very convenient.

And we were also concerned about the economic development of the country because the Surinamese civilian government, as well as the military types when they took over, couldn't really be convinced that their former basis for prosperity, namely the bauxite industry, wasn't as strong as it had always been. As you perhaps know, Suriname was the principal, if not the only for a while, source for bauxite during the Second World War. It was so important that we had two squadrons of P-40 fighter planes down in Suriname protecting the bauxite mines. How you protect a mine with a Curtiss P-40, I don't know, but that was what we were doing. And of course during and after the war it provided a significant flow of foreign exchange to Suriname so the country was relatively prosperous. Then the Dutch, as everyone said, had left the country with a golden handshake. I have forgotten the numbers now but I think the amount of Dutch aid promised over a five year period immediately after independence was such that it amount to $50 a head for each Surinamer, which was a great deal of money.

The Dutch were surprisingly forthcoming with their foreign aid as I found out then and later on when I was working in Romania. The Dutch were well-known for their philanthropy.

But any case, corrupt politicians had quickly done a number on the economy, such that the country was really foundering. The civil service was grossly bloated. With the exception of the bauxite industry, which is basically an American run operation...it was just being bleed to death. They made some very unwise choices. For example, they took a lot of Dutch aid and built a railroad over in north Suriname which was supposed to tap into another big source of bauxite. Well, the point was that first of all the world market was dropping rapidly because there were many other sources of bauxite by then and secondly, this place they built the railroad to at a cost of dozens of millions of dollars really only had low grade ore and not much of it. It wasn't like discovering a new Golconda at all. In effect, I think it is fair to say that the money spent on that railroad was wasted. I don't know if they ever started mining anything after they finished the railroad.

The contractor was an American firm, Morrison-Knudsen and one of the things that the military did when it took over was to try to investigate corruption in the government. There had been an awful lot of corruption in the MK project, not with the Americans at all. They were as clean as a hounds tooth. They could see this coming and took great pains to see that everything they did was well documented and that they accounted for every penny they got and that they got no more than they were supposed to.

But, for example, a couple of months after the revolution, the Surinamese military insisted on having some senior officials from Morrison-Knudsen come down to Suriname to discuss the project with them. What they did was in effect arrest them and interrogate them. They had gone through the records of the Surinamese organization that had implemented this project and had simply put a blanket on the floor and taken all the files of this organization and dumped them into the blanket and picked up the whole thing and taken it off to military headquarters to sort out. Well, obviously there wasn't any evidence in the file anyway. Nobody would have been dumb enough to leave it there and even if they had these military guys couldn't have found it after they had stirred up and totally disorganized the files.

But I remember we were fortunate enough to be able to bring in a Surinamese attorney who was very well known and very well respected to sit in with the three guys from Morrison-Knudsen and myself at the meeting. He was later made to leave the meeting.

The Surinamese military, who, I say, were fairly straightforward, primitive, brutal types, if you will, were threatening to take these guys out and string them up by their thumbs until they told the truth. I was sitting there saying, "You can't do that. These are American citizens." Reason prevailed because the Morrison-Knudsen fellows suspected what they were getting into and had come very well prepared to demonstrate on all of the charges against them that it just wasn't so. They obviously knew that so and so had been taking money out of the project and had very well documented their contacts with so and so, and what they had been paid and what they had paid him, etc. They were able to convince these military fellows and get off the hook. Whatever happened to that project, I don't know. I doubt very much that it had any success.

I had probably better stop.

JOHN J. CROWLEY, JR.
Ambassador
Suriname (1980-1981)

Ambassador John J. Crowley, Jr. was born in New Mexico on February 10, 1928. Mr. Crowley received his BA from the University of West Virginia in 1949 and his MA from Columbia University in 1950. He served in the U.S. Army from 1946 to 1948. As a member of the Foreign Service, he served in countries including Venezuela, Peru, Belgium, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Suriname. Ambassador Crowley was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 27, 1989.

Q: *Well, then a place where I don't imagine any president ever has been or ever will go, your appointment as ambassador to Suriname. How did you get the appointment?*

CROWLEY: Well, I believe--I never saw it in writing--but I believe I was under consideration before--you know how the system is in the Department. They make lists of people. I think I was on lists before. But one time Lowell Kilday, who was then in personnel, called me and he said, "If you want to, your name could be on a list for Suriname."

And I said, "Lowell, you know, I spent my whole career practically in Latin America. I'm much more comfortable in a place where they speak Spanish, but . . ."

And he said, "Well, but you served in Belgium and, you know, they speak Flemish there and so forth." [Laughter]

Q: *The language in Suriname being Dutch.*

CROWLEY: The official language being Dutch. So I said, "Okay." And so, lo and behold, it went through. They were having a bit of a crisis because the democratic government had been thrown out in February of '80 by the then-Sergeant Bouterse, who later became a colonel and the dictator for all intents and purposes. And so I was sent there rather hurriedly with no training in Dutch, and I hadn't really learned any in Belgium, either, because I was concentrating on French over there. [Laughter]

I arrived and presented my credentials to the last elected official, who was the president. He was the only one--he still had enough prestige that the military hadn't thrown him out. But a month after I presented credentials to him, he was out, and from that time on I dealt with either Colonel Bouterse, or his hand-picked government, which consisted of a civilian cabinet, but they all answered to him.

Q: *In the first place, what were American interests in the area, if any?*

CROWLEY: ALCOA had bauxite mines, an alumina plant and a smelter, plus its own hydroelectric dam. That was a major American investment. It was still the eighth largest aluminum producer in the world. Next to the government, ALCOA was the largest employer in Suriname, so we had this big, sort of elephantine, you know, kind of investor there, and nobody else. Well, Castle and Cook were there canning a few shrimp, packing a few shrimp, but as far as investment, it was this giant that had supplied the aluminum during World War II when other sources were not available. And they had their own shipping line, and also we had that to look out for, besides our own political interests in not wanting to see areas of communist influence expand.

Q: *How did you deal with ALCOA? I mean, did they have sort of their own foreign ministry and take care things? I'm speaking with some experience. I was in Dhahran with ARAMCO, where they generally went along with us, but actually they had a far larger staff and all. I mean, was this a similar case?*

CROWLEY: Very much. We were, to a great extent, overshadowed. Visitors used to look at the ALCOA manager's house and say, "Well, he's got a much grander house than the ambassador." I used to say what you say, "He's got a bigger staff, too, you know. A bigger investment."

We got along very well. Our personalities were compatible and he came to call on me, you know, and he was deferential to a certain extent, and we became good pals. So we had no conflict with them. Their policies were basically not in conflict with anything we wanted to do. The only bad thing that happened when we were there was the world price of aluminum declined, and they had to lay off some people and that caused some friction with the government. But we had no basic problems.

Q: *We had, by this time, a new administration. It was the Reagan Administration?*

CROWLEY: Yes.

Q: *Had you felt any of the repercussions of the change of administrations? Because the Latin American field, I was told, there was sort of blood in the corridors. And on the Latin American side, where actually in Africa and the Middle East and other places, you know, it was done in a workmanlike way, but there were some zealots who came in--I mean, this is the impression I have--from the far right who were allowed free rein in Latin America. Did you feel any of this?*

CROWLEY: Well, I think a lot of that was concentrated in Central America. Suriname is pretty far out at the end of the line there, although it was in a certain amount of light because of the fear, you know, that the communist influence would grow.

No, I didn't feel any particular change in policy. I think the frustration I had all the time I was there was that we had always counted on the Dutch to be the leaders there. They had an enormous assistance program. They had the highest per capita aid program in the world, sort of like conscience money. You know, the Dutch were saying, "Oh, we treated these people so badly we have to make amends," and, consequently, they had a very high standard of living and they had very high sanitary standards and almost everybody was literate, and all this Dutch money kept coming into the country. So the thought in Washington was, "Well, why should we give them anything? You know, the Dutch are in NATO, and let them take the responsibility. We'll set up a little embassy and we'll have 20 people in it."

When I got there, like any other ambassador, I said, "What are my tools?" I found that we could send five or six people to the States under USIS grants, and we finally got a little IMET program started, but aside from that, we had no leverage.

Q: *IMET is?*

CROWLEY: IMET is International Military Education and Training. But that was around $50,000 annually, and the Dutch had these millions available. We had a trade fair and we did things to try to stimulate interest in US products. I was working on a proposal to start a limited AID program and possibly a Peace Corps program. But what happened? Bouterse kept getting

rougher and rougher against the democratic institutions. The Dutch then began to say, "Whoa," and then we had to hold back on the aid. The people here in Washington said, "Well, gee, if the Dutch are going to cut back, maybe we should do that, too." And whenever I would talk to Bouterse, he would more or less say to me, "Well, what have you done for me lately and what are you prepared to do?"

It was a rather discouraging climate, and my messages to Washington on this subject, I thought, elicited less than reasonable responses. They always kind of put things off, saying, "Well, we'll have to see." Finally, AID did send down John Bolton, who was the general counsel and who is now, I think, the deputy attorney general (in 1990 he became Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations), and he came back and gave a personal report to the head of AID, and then they agreed that they would start the small mission.

But what happened was that in the fall of--let's see if I have my dates right--'83. I forget when the massacre was, but I think it was in the fall of '83--that Bouterse had about 20 people rounded up whom he didn't like, including the head of the Free Trade Union movement, and ex-minister whom he thought was traitorous, some media people and so on. He had them all beaten and shot to death, and then later the explanation was that they had to be shot because they were trying to escape, you know, ley de Fuga.

In any case, then at that point, the Dutch cut off every penny of aid. Nothing. And we said, "Well, we aren't going to give any, either." I wasn't there at this point, but I could feel for whoever was there, because he or she was left with nothing. Our strategy then became, since these people are sitting up there on the shoulder of Brazil, let's get the Brazilians to do something. The Brazilians don't want Castro, you know, screwing around up there in the country next to them.

So they did have some success. The Brazilians were very lethargic because they said, you know, there are many hundreds of miles of jungle between us and then some. But, finally, they went up and they offered Bouterse some simple stuff--boots and uniforms and some M-1 carbines and some trucks and a few, I think, joint business ventures. But the deal was: no more encouragement of Castro down here. So he's been playing pretty much by that rule and has permitted elections.

Now they have an elected government, but he's still sitting in the background with the Army. Plus they have an insurgency going on in the part of the country near French Guiana, so it's not terribly stable. But I must say that it was a frustrating time, and I was caught up the rigidities of policy and there wasn't any time to change it.

Q: *What was your impression of Bouterse?*

CROWLEY: Well, he was a very clever man. He had probably a high school education, but he had been in the Dutch Army. He had been stationed in Germany and he spoke German. He spoke fairly good English. His mother was Carib Indian and his father was Creole, the name they give blacks there. He had certain superstitions. He told me several times about things that he had to

do, you know. Like he had to go a certain time of the year and make a pilgrimage to certain shrines--they were not Christian ideas.

He was also a physical culture type. When the revolution took place, he was head of physical education for the Army and a sergeant, and he was a natural leader. He took over. They raided the arsenal, he and the other NCOs, they got their guns out, they arrested all the Dutch officers, they put them on a plane, sent them out, and they were in charge of the country. The only people they had to worry about were the police, and so they went over to see what the police were up to. The police took a look at them (all the police had were sidearms) and they said, "We're with you."

I think he was probably surprised that he took over the whole country in 24 hours. But then once he got a taste of it, it was pretty nice. He became a colonel and he indulged in quite a few luxuries around there, although he always looked like an austere person. He always wore a camouflage uniform.

My impression of him was that he was a person of no ideology, that for a while he was swayed by these leftists, particularly when the Dutch cut off the aid and he wanted to retaliate against them and against us. But after his friend Maurice Bishop of Grenada was killed, and when the Brazilians came up and told him about the facts of life, he retreated from that Marxist position, and what he wants to do is just be in charge.

Q: *Did you find yourself having to go up and say, "You really shouldn't do this. You should be more conscious of human rights and all," and getting a rather fishy-eyed stare? Did you find yourself having to do things that you realized weren't going to get anywhere but were instructions?*

CROWLEY: Well, during my time, you see, it hadn't come to the point of actually committing these atrocities, and there were always doubts. If you went to him and said, "Well, there ought to be more freedom of speech," he'd say, "There's freedom of speech. They can print anything they want to, the newspaper here." You couldn't really pin it down. Of course, once the murders were committed, then he was over the hill.

What I used to do with him was talk mainly--I talked some about local conditions--but it was mainly geopolitical, saying, you know, it was bad for his country to get off in this orbit with Grenada. And, as it turned out, Bishop was murdered and so on, and this was not a good thing. But he always assured me, he said, "Mr. Ambassador, your country has nothing to worry about from me from a security standpoint. I know that we're in the US sphere of influence and all that." But his bottom line was really, "What do I think is good for me? How far can I go?"

Q: *Did your find our invasion--or whatever you want to call it--of Grenada, did that have a solitary effect in that part of the world? I mean, the feeling that if they went too far, who knew what Reagan and company might do?*

CROWLEY: I wasn't down there then, but I know that earlier in the Reagan Administration somebody leaked a plan that CIA had been working on to destabilize Bouterse, and the fact that

it was leaked then killed it. But I understood from people down there that this had quite an effect on him. He thought actually the CIA was actually moving. [Laughter] He moderated his stand on a few things.

What I heard about Grenada was that it scared the hell out of the Sandinistas, and some people said this is the very moment to go over there and negotiate. But we didn't, you know, because the White House hard line was "no negotiation." At the time that we hit Grenada, they would have been ripe to talk to because they were really concerned; they were frightened. But we let it pass. I don't know if that's accurate, but I heard that.

JONATHAN B. RICKERT
Desk Officer for Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname
Washington, DC (1980-1982)

Jonathan Rickert was born and raised in Washington, DC and educated at Princeton and Yale Universities. After service in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1963, serving tours in both Washington and abroad. His foreign posts include London, Moscow, Port au Spain, Sofia and Bucharest, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. In his Washington assignments Mr. Rickert dealt primarily with Eastern and Central European Affairs. Mr. Rickert was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

RICKERT: One last footnote which isn't about Trinidad. Before I left, I did a TDY in Surinam because when I was coming back to Washington I was going to be in the Office of Caribbean Affairs, ARACAR, with responsibility for Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. Suriname was an even smaller embassy. Nancy Ostrander was the ambassador there. The DCM had to leave or his political officer, the DCM, had to leave on short notice for personal reasons not permanently but for a period of time. They just had a military coup there. So ARA agreed to my going down and filling in as a TDY political officer. So I had a good introduction to Suriname before taking over the Suriname desk. It was a lot of fun, it was a much more open society in terms of willingness to be able to talk to people. In Trinidad you can meet with anybody but they wouldn't say much. In Suriname, they would not only meet with you but they were very open. In the three weeks I was there I met the President, the Prime Minister, about half the cabinet, the trade union leaders, Alcoa had a big operation there and the union worker Frank Darby was later murdered ... and also Desire Bouterse or the corporal who had staged the coup and a number of his thugs and others.

Nancy and I went one time to meet with the Prime Minister, Chin A. Sen. He was of Chinese origin and he was very despondent about the way things were going. Nancy and I convinced him not to resign which I thought was because he was viewed in Washington and by the embassy as a stabilizing force. You don't think as a mid-level officer that you were going to be involved in trying to convince prime ministers not to resign. The scale of these countries, there is only, roughly, 350,000 people in Suriname. There are more Surinamese in Holland than there are in Suriname.

In any case, then when I left, I came back to Washington, took over as desk officer and had responsibility for those three countries to start with.

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Steve Bosworth was our DAS. The main concerns in the Caribbean were the Reagan Administration's Caribbean Base Initiative which was an effort to increase trade and investment and help raise the standard of living in the region and then to prevent further spread of Communism. There was a lot of concern about Suriname. Steve Bosworth was very much involved on Suriname because no one knew where this Corporal Desire Bouterse was going to take the country. There was concern that he might have Marxist links or leanings. The U.S. had been caught by surprise in the Western Hemisphere before and the Reagan Administration, I think quite rightly, didn't want to see that again even in a very small place.

Q: As I understand the situation in Suriname there was presumably a debate between those who thought that we'd try to work with him, work around him, have contact with him, as I guess, Ambassador Ostrander did and you mentioned the visit you had made with her ... and those who thought maybe the best thing was to maybe try to oppose him, isolate him, boycott him. I did an interview in this program with Ambassador Denis Hayes who was there much later than the time we're talking about but as I understood from him, he decided not to have any contact with Bouterse.

RICKERT: Bouterse there and the military.

Q: ... feeling that anything he did would be misinterpreted, it was better to shun him and then I'm not sure I pushed him hard enough on the success of that approach which I kind of wondered about. I wish I had debated it a little bit more. But anyway, is that the kind of thing that you had to deal with at the time?

RICKERT: My recollection is that we didn't want to do anything that would raise him in the estimation of the population. But we needed a key contact with him in order to know what he was up to. I don't recall any efforts to isolate him during this time. I don't recall the exact date of the military coup but it was early in 1980, February, something like that. So Bouterse was unknown to the outside word. People were still trying to figure out who he was, what he wanted, why he had done this, where he was headed, all these other things ... I remember I sent, I don't remember his name but the Army found a fellow, a Major if I recall, who was sent as defense attaché. We haven't had a defense attaché before, but he was an American of Indonesian origin and therefore spoke Dutch. Bouterse did not speak English as I recall, or spoke very poor English. The hope was that through this defense attaché we could get a closer contact with Bouterse, not to glorify him or to get him attaché but know what he was up to and why.

When Nancy Ostrander left, a very good career officer, Jack Crowley, who had been DCM in a number of places and sort of a career ARA hand, took over. He was there for a while. I think, from what I could tell, did a very solid job. He was replaced after a couple of years at the request of Tom Enders actually.

Q: I'm very interested in hearing what you're about to say given that build up.

RICKERT: Well, Enders called Rob Warren and me and our deputy director, Dick Howard up to his office one day and said, "How are things going in Suriname?" We said, "going well." Well, "How's Jack Crowley doing there?" We said, "Fine professionally, he's doing a good job so forth." "How does he get on with Bouterse?"

Rob Warren actually carried the conversation and said that he talked to him from time to time but there is a cultural difference and generational difference between the two. Enders, I'm sorry I have to quote this but he said: "Well, I think we should have somebody down there who can really get in with Bouterse and his people." "Somebody who'd go drinking and whoring with him" – was the term he used. Enders didn't think Crowley was the man so Crowley was recalled. The person who was supposed to have replaced him ran into problems. He had been in Afghanistan just prior or was it after, I don't know if I've got the chronology exactly right but Spike Dubbs had been assassinated there. Then we had a series of chargés maintaining relations on a very reduced level. This officer had been there as chargé. He had, according to what everybody said, I can't say this from personal knowledge, but apparently a girlfriend, an Australian girl who came and stayed with him there for extended periods. Others didn't have local girlfriends or spouses and some complaints were made. This got to the undersecretary for management. When the undersecretary heard about this, he blocked the appointment. I can't vouch for anything except the quote from Tom Enders for which I was personally present, but I heard the rest of this from enough sources so that I think in outlines at least it is an accurate picture of what happened.

Q: Somebody went to Suriname?

RICKERT: Frankly ... I don't know.

Q: That was perhaps after your time?

RICKERT: It may have been after my time because I honestly don't remember who ended up going. As time went on, Rob moved on. Enders was told he was going to get a DAS he didn't want, a political gentleman named John Upston. He refused to accept Upston. To make a long story short, Upston agreed to take a political appointment. He was made the coordinator for Caribbean affairs and he took over Rob Warren's office and he had his own secretary but because he had a, shall we say, less than sterling reputation, Rob and Dick Howard and all of us went to see Enders and asked that we not be put under his direct direction. Enders, to his credit, created a special position that supervised no one but went around, made speeches and visited the region. Upston was a perfectly amiable fellow. He wasn't nasty. He accepted this arrangement. He didn't make anyone feel that they had stabbed him in the back or anything like that. The tradeoff was that we didn't get a director because the slot was taken. So Dick Howard, who was really a career ARA person and a very good and decent fellow and very good officer, became the acting director. And I, as the senior most desk officer, became the acting Deputy Director. So I gave up Guyana to Marsha Barnes who was delighted to get it back and did the deputy stuff in the office.

Q: And continued to do Suriname and Trinidad.

RICKERT: Right.

A couple of interesting things that happened. What happened during the Reagan administration? I remember they were very concerned, as I mentioned, about Communism possibly in Surinam. The Surinamese foreign minister was due to come to have a meeting with Secretary Haig. I was told to write very tough talking points which I did, which were cleared up through the chain and went to Haig. I was the note taker at this meeting. The Surinamese foreign minister came in. Haig put his arm around him and didn't use one of the talking points. He achieved the same end through different means. I'm not saying he just rolled over but he figured that in this case, I'm assuming, that talking tough to a person representing 350,000 people was less likely to get the desired end than showing some concern and interest and friendliness ... So that was one little lesson there.

One bizarre Trinidad thing happened while I was there. After I left Trinidad, the second DCM, I mentioned the first was Mike Yohn, the second was Joe O'Mahony who had spent time in India and Latin America: a fine person who had been very badly shot up in WWII and was in a lot of pain a lot of the time. Joe was a decent person and a good DCM. He was chargé after I left because the next ambassador who was a politico had not yet come. There was a delay in his getting there. I came back from lunch one day and I was told by my secretary, "you have a flash message from Trinidad." That's almost a contradiction in terms. I had never seen a flash any time in a place except during my time in the OP center. The flash dealt with the following: Prime Minister Williams had died suddenly. Well, you don't need a flash message for that, but the decision had been made to cremate him in Trinidad. They needed a crematorium, because the only cremating that was done in Trinidad was done on the banks of the streams, Indian style. That was not considered sufficiently respectful for a person who came from an African and Christian background. So I had about three or four days to get a crematorium ... a portable crematorium to Trinidad so that Eric Williams could be cremated. Where do you start?

At first I called DoD [Department of Defense]. They were extremely pleasant but they said they had no such thing. They didn't know of such a thing and they couldn't give any help. I scratched my head and I finally though, well, let me call Gawler's Funeral Home out on Wisconsin Avenue. They had handled the arrangements for Abraham Lincoln's funeral. I figured they had long experience when they handled the arrangements for my father's funeral in 1950. I got ahold of the cremations guy there and explained the dilemma and he said to me, he was very polite and understanding and helpful and said: "You know, I hope you don't mind my asking but, most of the time, it's found more efficient to take the body to the crematorium than the crematorium to the body." I hadn't told him who this was for, I said I couldn't, because it was all very hush-hush. I said, "I understand, but in this case it doesn't work." I said it was for someone outside the country. So he said, there's a company in Orlando that makes crematoria. He gave me the name and the phone number and everything else and he said, "Why don't you call them and see what you can find out." So I got hold of someone there and they said that they had a crematorium that had just come off the assembly line and was test fired and was ready to go for use in Michigan but that it could be diverted. We got the dimensions and found that it would fit in a 747 cargo

plane, big enough to take it. They of course wanted to see the color of the money, which I don't blame them. The payer for this operation was TRINTOC (Trinidad and Tobago Oil Company Limited) which was the Trinidad oil company which had an office in New York. I put them in touch with TRINTOC and TRINTOC took care of the money. The crematorium was trucked down to Miami. We had to hold the plane a bit but it got on the plane and got there by the deadline.

It was one of the more bizarre things that I did in foreign service.

Q: So the Trinidad government came to the embassy for help and it was told that this would be a nice gesture?

RICKERT: I guess. I could only surmise. As I recall, the cable was a request. They certainly didn't cook it up themselves. It may be that the Deputy Prime Minister or someone mentioned it to the chargé and he said, well, we'll see what we can do. Whether it was request or demand or just something that they heard about, I no longer recall. The chargé took it on and was "charged" to get hold of this crematorium. It was a gas-fired crematorium. They had plenty of gas in Trinidad so that's what happened.

Q: And it worked?

RICKERT: Well, that, I've heard mixed stories about that. There were problems with it but I think it eventually worked. There's a little footnote in this. I'm jumping ahead in this story and I won't go in to all the gory details but some years later in the late '80s I was in Bulgaria and we had a CODEL [Congressional Delegation] a large CODEL there. I ended up chatting with the military aide that normally accompany these CODELs. He asked where I served and so forth, I mentioned Trinidad and he said, "Oh, Trinidad. I worked for BWIA, the British West-India Airways, for many years." To make a long story short, he said, he knew that it must have been me there who made the arrangements, but he picked it up from the point where there was a crematorium and all the rest and he got it taken care of. So here was an American diplomat and an American military officer; He was a Reserve officer; He did this in his free time, so to speak, standing in the garden of a Bulgarian government villa in Sofia talking about the cremation of the Trinidad prime minister. It was really kind of macabre. It was very enjoyable to both of us to meet the other half of this process.

G. CLAY NETTLES
Deputy Chief of Mission
Paramibo (1982)

G. Clay Nettles attended the University of Alabama and served in the U.S. Army from 1954-1956. In 1957 he entered the Foreign Service, having taken the exam during his final year of Law School. Mr. Nettles's postings included Japan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Lebanon, Pakistan, Zaire, Italy, Turkey, and Switzerland. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1997.

NETTLES: Before that, Ray, I was to Suriname for six months as the DCM on a TDY basis. When I left Turkey, I had hoped to be the U.S. Director for the African Development Bank. I was the State Department candidate. Unfortunately, after several months, it went to a political appointee. Unfortunately, from my point of view because I would have enjoyed that.

Q: That would have been in Abidjan?

NETTLES: Correct where the Bank is based. However, that didn't work out. I had turned down several significant assignments hoping to get that. Then a friend of mine told me that the next morning I would be called in by Personnel and told I was going to be sent as DCM to Suriname. Forewarned is forearmed. I was in no position to say "No" to the assignment, but said, "Alright, we're willing to waive the requirements to speak Dutch." I said, "It really wouldn't be fair to me or to the position, but I will be happy to go up to a year while you find someone or even train someone in Dutch." Much to my surprise, they agreed to my condition and asked if I could leave the next morning. Three days later, I was off in Suriname. It was an interesting time to be there. The reason they wanted someone down there right away was that the military dictator, Bouterse, had rounded up all the leading opponents one night and had them shot. Only 17, but these were some of the most prominent people in the country - the head of the supreme court, the dean of the university. We criticized him, of course, so he discovered a "plot" in which the DCM was involved. He couldn't very well say the ambassador was, as he had just arrived a few weeks before. He had the DCM PNGed and the U.S. government wanted to send a replacement immediately to show that we took this very seriously. That's why I was sent there. I was there for seven months and it was a fascinating time to be there, but again, like Saudi Arabia and Zaire, I was glad to go and glad to leave.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

NETTLES: Bob Duemling.

Q: The head of government, I recall coming to Ghana when I was there a little later. I was there from '89-'92. I'm not sure exactly when he came, but I think Jerry Rawlings, who was head of state in Ghana, saw certain similarities with the story in Surinam. Does that sound right to you?

NETTLES: Only to the extent that they both had a military background before coming to power. From what I've heard of Rawlings, but you know better since you were ambassador there, I always thought of him as a rather benign figure who did a lot of good work in Ghana, whereas, Bouterse was a psychopathic murderer. I think there is a big difference.

Q: Rawlings tended to be friends with not too many people on the international scene and the ones he chose had certain characteristics like that. And, I don't think he was entirely benign. He did some good things no question about it.

NETTLES: I will defer to your judgement of Ghana.

Q: Anyway, you were there for seven months and they found someone else who could speak Dutch to replace you presumably?

NETTLES: Patrick Killough. He trained in Dutch and, as I say, had I spoken the language, I think I would have enjoyed a regular assignment there.

Q: Was Dutch pretty important?

NETTLES: Yes, it was because Dutch was the language of the news every night on TV and the papers were published in Dutch. They spoke what was called Papiamentu, which was a mixture of Dutch and Spanish and perhaps a little African and English thrown in. As DCM, I couldn't supervise properly the reporting if I couldn't read the papers or listen to the radio and know what was going on. Yes, to have done the job properly, I really needed to speak Dutch or at least be able to read it.

Q: So after this temporary assignment, you came back to Washington to the Bureau of Economic Affairs? What was your job there?

NETTLES: I was the head of the Office of Marine and Polar Minerals within the Economic Bureau. The United States government and other interested countries were trying to develop a minerals regime for Antarctica. The idea being that we should do this before any significant minerals or petroleum should be discovered. IO had the lead in this within the State Department, but EB was very much involved in it, too. That was the major thing that we were doing.

Q: I suppose the Bureau of Mines and the Interior Department, but also some of the American mining companies.

NETTLES: Correct. There were other things, but that was the major thing.

Q: The Law of the Sea Treaty negotiations had already occurred.

NETTLES: That's right

ROBERT W. DUEMLING
Ambassador
Suriname (1982-1984)

Ambassador Robert W. Duemling was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1929. He received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Yale University. Prior to becoming a Foreign Service officer, Ambassador Duemling served in U.S. Navy intelligence and was stationed in Japan. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Rome, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Ottawa, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Suriname. Ambassador Duemling was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: Your next assignment was as Ambassador to Suriname from 1982 to 1984. How did that come about?

DUEMLING: By this time, my old friend and colleague from Ottawa, Tom Enders, had become Assistant Secretary for Latin America. As my time for re-assignment came up--the Multi-national Force assignment was just a short-term one for 8-9 months-- Tom decided that I would be a very good person to put into this rather peculiar job in Suriname. I say "peculiar" because this country is under the Latin American Bureau, is in South America, but is Dutch speaking. It is therefore not part and parcel of the Latin American package. It is sui generis. He asked me if I would go and I agreed. It gave me an opportunity to have an Embassy of my own. While the appointment procedure was in progress, I took intensive Dutch because I didn't know any. I learned enough Dutch and I continued to study the language with a tutor during my assignment. I got to the stage where I had passable conversation skills and I could read documents. All of the local newspapers are in Dutch, government documents are in Dutch and the television and radio are in Dutch. So it was important that one should speak the language. There is bit of irony in this because by derivation, I am half Dutch. My mother's family were pure Dutch although they had been in the US for over 100 years in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Q: Holland, Michigan, is very close by. What was the situation in Suriname when you got there in 1982?

DUEMLING: It was a very tense situation because there had been a peculiar military coup that had taken place in 1980. The Dutch gave Suriname its independence in 1975. The Dutch left it in perfect shape. It had everything going for it. For a small Third World country it had paved roads, it had an excellent and extensive electrical network which did not break down--no shortages or outages--, it had a superb water and sewer system--better water than in Washington, DC--, they had a trained labor force, an excellent school system, no endemic diseases. The country had everything going for it.

There was some dissatisfaction among the military and the enlisted men decided they wanted a trade union. That may sound funny to us, but the Dutch army has a trade union. So the Surinamese army decided it had to have one. They petitioned for one and the government turned them down. Then about thirteen sergeants decided to go on a sit down strike. These sergeants sat down in front of the President's Palace. At a certain moment, they were invited in to talk to the President who told them that if they thought they could a better job, they were welcome to it and he walked out, leaving them in charge of the country. There were a few shots fired--very few. The government tried to use the police to get the sergeants back to the barracks, but they refused. There were two people killed. It finally turned out into a military coup. The sergeants were self-proclaimed Marxists of a sort--of the kind that is very vague about Marxism, certainly not intellectual Marxism. It was mostly dissatisfaction with the general situation. So the military took over the government.

Initially, it was a friendly operation. There were a lot of people in the traditional establishment who were trying to be more or less supportive of the new government. But things deteriorated rather quickly because the military, in trying to run the government, didn't have the skills or the

education to do it. Government services began to fall apart and the economy began to fall apart. People began to mumble about having lived in a democracy with a Parliament and began to demand the return of democracy and representative government. There was increasing agitation on the part of the civilian population, including demonstrations, demanding the resignation of the military government and the return of a democratic form of government. It became clear that the military was in increasing danger of losing control of the country. About this time, the dictator by the name of Bouterse--the lead sergeant, now Lieutenant Colonel--invited Maurice Bishop, the head of the government of Grenada, whom he considered to be his mentor and model, to come for a State visit.

Bishop came even though the visit was very unpopular because most Surinamers didn't like Bishop and didn't like what he was doing in Grenada. He was not given a warm welcome by the people; on the contrary, on the last day of the visit, the government tried unwisely to organize a public meeting, which was met by a demonstration which out-drew the government's meeting by about ten to one. Among the people who was deeply involved in the demonstration was the leader of the Trade Unions as well as others. We subsequently learned through documents that Maurice Bishop had a long conversation with Bouterse and told him that if he didn't get tough with the opposition, he would lose control of the situation. He had to smash the opposition. Bouterse thought about that for about one month and then in early December 1982 took his palace guard out in an evening and picked up about 18 people, some of whom had been the ring-leaders of the opposition. Fifteen people were tortured and then murdered. These included some of the most prominent citizens of Suriname. That occurred about four months after my arrival. That put a wholly different complexion on what was going on in Suriname. It absolutely chilled the population. Initially there was a twenty-four hour curfew. That was eased finally to a twelve hour curfew which continued for about six months. Needless to say, the US reaction was extremely negative. I was sent in to tell the Prime Minister, who was a figure head, and occasionally the dictator, our views. Part of the problem was that we had had a modest assistance program--the Dutch had a very large one--and when the Dutch suspended theirs, we did the same. That put the country in a very serious bind. The Surinamese always wanted to talk to me about the possibility of resuming the program.

Q: Under the circumstances, why did the US appoint an Ambassador?

DUEMLING: I was appointed before the slaughter. I went out at a time when our relationship with Suriname was low-key, not terribly friendly because we could not be supportive of a military government, particularly a left-wing one. We wanted to continue the relationship because we were concerned about the strategic location of Suriname. If it had a hostile government, it could interdict the supply routes to and from the Panama Canal. Any traffic heading for the Canal from the South Atlantic goes right past Suriname. The problem of a hostile government became even more difficult after the slaughter because the government then moved radically to the left. A new Cuban Ambassador arrived and the government took on a very Cuban tinge. The Cubans were essentially calling the shots.

I had been assigned before this had happened to this degree. Then the question was whether I should stay.

Q: What policy were you recommending?

DUEMLING: In the first place, I reported in as much detail as I could what had happened. It was extremely difficult to get any information concerning what precisely was going on. I had a CIA office there and we just contacted those we knew somewhat surreptitiously because of the curfew. We were doing the best we could just to tell Washington what had occurred which was not immediately apparent. It took a better part of a week to figure out really what had gone on.

The reaction from Washington was that I should remain. They wanted to have someone in place to report on events. They thought it would be better to have someone do that than to close the mission. This was a small Embassy and if the Ambassador were pulled, it would not have worked very well. We had a DCM who had been charge' for a long time before I arrived. He knew the country very well--in some ways, too well. In this turbulent period that followed the December massacre, the dictator called me in during January to declare the DCM and the head of USIS personae-non-grata. They accused both of them of meddling in internal politics. I denied it of course because from an objective point of view, neither officer had been "meddling". They had certainly been hustling around asking people what was going on trying to keep track of events. Unfortunately, both had done a couple of silly things that I did not know about until somewhat later. One thing for example that the dictator told me was that the government had tapped telephones and had recorded efforts by the DCM to call, before the slaughter, the labor leader I mentioned earlier to ask him what he intended to do about supporting the demonstrations. The government had all of that on tape and they decided that this was provocation on our part. They declared these two officers, who knew a good deal of what was going on, personae-non-grata thereby reducing the staff considerably. Washington decided that it made sense to keep me in Suriname, since these other senior officers were no longer available as fall back.

Q: Did you agree with that assessment?

DUEMLING: I saw no reason for me to return because in the first place my assessment was that the local actions were not directed against us, but rather were an internal situation. We might have had a reaction, but it was not directed against us. In the second place, I didn't feel in any great personal danger nor did I think my staff was. I didn't have a Marine contingent to guard the Embassy. Before I went to Suriname, I was asked by Enders whether I wanted a detachment. I said "No, it is a small post and I don't see a need for them." Often in a setting like that, the Marines can often be more trouble than they are worth.

Q: This is often true. Young men who get drunk, chase the local girls and in time of trouble, can't really shoot. They really don't help that much.

DUEMLING: I didn't see it as a necessity. Once we got through the slaughter and the problems, it would have been difficult to get the Marines in because at that point the government also was watching us very carefully. I thought that the answer to the situation was to sit tight and continue a dialogue with the government. We had a quiet dialogue and tried to find ways to establish some rapport with the government to find out what they were doing. We did make some small gestures, very small--I got CINCSOUTH and the CIA to come up with some money to buy a

couple of electronic score boards to install in a big gymnasium that they had. The Surinamers were going to host an international basketball tournament and needed the boards.

There is an international association of military sports. Our military forces belong to it as well as twenty other countries. This association gets together and has a basketball tournament. For some reason, Suriname was hosting and the US military were coming to play in that tournament. I supported that effort as being fairly innocuous. We wanted to maintain friendly relations with the people of Suriname who were very pro-American. We didn't want to desert them. We were working towards an evolution which would result in the return of a democratic government, which is what is happening now--slowly. The point was not to "lose our cool" but to hang, in taking some modest steps, but always telling them that they would not receive any further assistance until they had cleaned up their act and returned to some form of democratic government. As a policy matter, I didn't think therefore that any purpose would be served by pulling up stakes.

Q: Was there any opposition to this policy in Washington?

DUEMLING: Quite the opposite. The opposition to the policy, of which I learned shortly thereafter, came from those who were considering the invasion of Suriname. The Grenada invasion was on October 25, 1983. Earlier, in late January, 1983 - only six weeks after the slaughter - my wife had traveled back to the U.S. - she did that about one week per month because she is a very busy person with lots of commitments - and had to be hospitalized for an emergency operation. She was in the hospital for a week. I called Enders to tell him that I had to come to Washington to be with my wife to help her through her convalescence period for at least a week. He told me that he thought he could not get permission for me to leave Suriname at that point in time. I told him that it was critical and had to be done. He said he would check and see what he could do. He called twenty-four hours later and said that although it had been very sticky, he had gotten the Secretary's approval for a week's return to Washington. It was not until I returned that I realized what was going on. At the highest level of the U.S. government people were talking about invading Suriname. This was about eight months before we actually invaded Grenada.

Q: You might say that the gun was loaded and ready to be fired.

DUEMLING: That's right. It was part of "Let's roll back Communism or let's not allow further inroads" By this time, after the slaughter, with Bishop riding high in Grenada and the Cubans increasing their influence in Suriname, the situation in that part of the world was looking very unpleasant to the Reagan administration. That is why there was a good deal of thought being given to moving in and turning it around. But nothing much happened. I used to come to Washington about once every three months and I would call on Judge Clark, who was then the National Security Advisor, to tell him how things were going in Suriname. This was very unusual that an Ambassador from a tiny country like that would see the NSC advisor. He wanted to see me and every three months I would report to him. He would push across the desk copies of telegrams and messages that had R.R. written in the upper corner. Ronald Reagan was following on a daily basis what was happening in Suriname.

Q: What were you and the CIA reporting on the situation? What was your level of concern?

DUEMLING: We were telling it exactly the way it was - that is to say, reporting exactly what these people were doing, the clear left-ward drift of the government, the increasing Cuban influence on the government. There were certain contingency plans were being made. Washington was wondering whether it would be necessary to evacuate the Embassy. We were developing evacuation plans. I think in the Summer of 1983, during one of my visits to Washington, I was told in advance that the Joint Chiefs wanted to talk to me. I was invited to address the Joint Chiefs and went to their secure area in the Pentagon. Every member of the joint Chiefs, with the exception of one who was represented by his Deputy, sat around the big open square table with a number of subordinates around the wall - there were sixty people in the room. I was in the middle of one side of the table. The Joint Chiefs sat opposite me across the open hollow square. The Chairman thanked me for coming and asked me to open the discussion on whether the U.S. should invade Suriname. We discussed that for an hour and fifteen minutes. They asked me to describe the situation. I sketched for them my understanding and assessment of what was happening, what the country was all about, what its relative importance in the scheme of things was, what degree of threat it posed for a wide variety of American interests. I concluded by saying that the defenses of the country were extremely modest, that although not a military man, my own assessment was that a strike force of approximately 200 paratroopers should be sufficient to take complete control of the capital city and the two military compounds. I did not see it as a major military problem to take over the country if that were the decision. However, I added, that I thought it would be very misguided to take over the country, easy and tempting as that might be. In large part, I did not feel the threat was sufficient to justify the expenditures, the military risks, to say nothing of the down-side political situation in terms of the OAS and our image elsewhere in Central and South America. Those were judgments to be made in Washington on an inter-agency basis. It was not a judgment for the U.S. Ambassador in Suriname. The final and probably most telling point I made was that I had been aware of the contingency plans for sometime - we had had Delta Teams (the special high grade strike forces of the U.S. military that comprise surface, air and water components) surreptitiously introduced into the country to make assessments and take pictures and gather intelligence. I knew about this because I had them in the Embassy, ostensibly to assist us with some contingency plans. I therefore was aware of all the military contingency plans that had been made, but I noted that no discussion had taken place about what would be done after the country had been occupied. On the assumption that on D-Day plus three, we had fully occupied Suriname. The population would be 85-90% entirely friendly and all opposition would be supine at that stage. But who will run the country? They have not been able to run it for themselves for some time. My assessment was that it would have been a very difficult task to run the country. It was very fractured culturally, ethnically and economically. It was a nightmare of a little country from the government's point of view as its recent political history demonstrated. All that would happen would be that Uncle Sam would pick up the can of worms. I didn't think we wanted to pick up that can. They listened to that very attentively and thanked me for confirming certain judgments that they had already made. That was the last that was ever heard of invading Suriname.

Having excluded invasions, there were still theoretically ways by which we could work internally against what was taking place. For example, Bouterse had decided that he wanted to come to the U.S. to attend and address the General Assembly. He would have done that in

October of 1983. As a routine matter, the Surinamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs got in touch with the Embassy requesting visas for the dictator and his entourage. They sent the passports under cover of a diplomatic note. We made checks on all of these applicants - some we knew, others we had just heard of. We found that among the principal bodyguards, according to the CIA files, was a Cuban with military and security training who had been detailed by the Cuban government to run the personal security detail of the dictator. He was posing as a Surinamer, which is not hard to do because Suriname is an ethnic mixture. There are a number of Hispanics. The bodyguard had a fictitious passport. The photograph was of the right guy, but the name, birth date and place of birth were fictitious. We were able to zero in on this fraud and to identify who he was. We dutifully visaed the passports and I signed off on the returning diplomatic note. I hand carried the package to the Foreign Minister with whom I had established a good personal relationship. I had always made an effort to maintain correct and in some cases, cordial, relations with the members of the government on a personal basis. I did that even with the dictator because I used to meet with him periodically usually at my request. We always treated each other with great courtesy and politeness. That worked out very well. I think it is the right way to do these kinds of things.

So I had a very good personal relationship with the Foreign Minister. When I called on him, we chatted I and handed over the passports. I asked him how much he knew about the chief bodyguard. I noted that this particular gentleman was operating under a false identification; we knew it was false and we knew who he really was. I told him that normally we would not have put a visa on a fraudulent document, but as a courtesy to the dictator, I was taking personal responsibility for doing so. The Foreign Minister was much taken aback and thanked me. I told him that this episode had me wondering a little bit about how delicate the situation was getting with all this Cuban influence. There was some question in my mind on who the Cubans were supporting - there were already some divisions taking place among the military dictatorship. There were certain people that the Cubans favored and there were lots of rumors to the effect that the Cubans would have liked to push out Bouterse and replace him with someone more congenial to the Cuban point of view. I told the Foreign Minister that I sensed certain problems within the government on the subject of Cuban influence and support. I was little puzzled why the dictator wanted to have a Cuban in charge of his security in light of these rumors. The Foreign Minister looked at me wide-eyed - these are fairly naive people - and said that this was an interesting thought that he had not considered. That conversation proved ultimately - we found that out through intelligence sources later - to have been a very important seed to plant. The conversation was duly reported to the dictator, who was paranoid in any case, and he began to worry. He did not take the Cuban to New York and may in fact not have gone himself, I don't remember. As October wore on, the problem of Cuban influence became increasingly difficult and I was constantly playing on this with anybody I could get to. It was clear that the Cuban Ambassador was overplaying his hand. The dictator was getting more and more nervous. He was losing control to the Cuban Ambassador and those supported by the Cubans.

In an extraordinary confluence of events, on a Friday in late October we got wind of the fact that Bouterse was going to throw out the Cuban Ambassador and those who had come with him. He was going to close the Cuban Embassy for meddling in internal affairs. He was supposed to make this speech on Saturday night, but he was still working out some problems in the speech. We didn't know what they were, but he didn't make the speech or the announcement until

Tuesday morning. It just happened that on the previous day, the U.S. had invaded Grenada. The dictator nevertheless went ahead with his speech. Of course, everyone in Suriname thought that the two events were related. Bouterse, not surprisingly, was mad as hell because he had no inkling of the U.S. action in Grenada and neither did I. We totally took the play away from him by sheer coincidence. A lot of people thought that it had been a quid-pro-quo with one of the spin-offs of our invasion of Grenada being the expulsion of the Cubans from Suriname. That was not of course the case since Bouterse had already made the decision before the invasion. He of course might have been prompted to do so if he had not already made the decision, but the sequence of events clearly indicates that his decision preceded the invasion of Grenada. The sequence of events made him look like he had cut and run which made him very mad, but in any case, he went through with it, he did toss out the Cubans and thereafter he decided that the country had to be returned to some degree of democratic government. From that point on, the Cuban influence was eliminated and he began talking again with various elements in the Suriname body politic about ways of creating an advisory council initially, and ultimately an assembly. That's the path they have followed and today there is more popular influence - not yet democratic, but they have had elections, and have a consultative assembly with some powers. It is a more democratic state than before. It is moving in the right direction, but too slowly. The Dutch have resumed their assistance. I left Suriname in about August, 1984 and by that time, the situation had stabilized.

I invited Bouterse to come to our July 4 celebration which in Suriname is very small - the diplomatic corps and members of the government. The American community has its separate party. He came and brought his senior military and government people. People were quite surprised because he never represented the government at national day receptions. Our reception was held at mid-day. People would have the usual toast to the government and the two national anthems - your own and the Suriname ones, usually by recorded music I got two girls, an American and a Canadian, who had beautiful voices, who sang both national anthems - ours and the Surinamese sung in Sranan which is the lesser official language. This reduced Bouterse to tears. He was very impressed that anyone would have taken the trouble to do this and particularly that it was sung in Sranan. He was a very strong nationalist and the very fact that we did it in Sranan live, doubly impressed him. He shook my hand very warmly. It was this kind of thing that I tried to do to maintain a relationship even when our policy differences were very clear and when we discussed them openly. That does not preclude some human touches to try to keep a relationship going somehow. I think it is important particularly when the great majority of Surinamese are very friendly to us and we want to keep it that way. We don't want to alienate the people of Suriname; we don't want them to think that we don't care about them because we do. When I left the country a month later, to my astonishment, at a little formal reception and dinner that was given to me by the President, he proceeded to give me the highest decoration the government of Suriname can give to a foreigner. This medal was of a grade never before given to a diplomat. The President explained to me privately that he and his government well understood that the relationship between the countries had had very tense moments in the last few years and there had been some difficult problems. But he felt that I, as an Ambassador, had managed those problems as well as anyone could have and that therefore the government wanted to acknowledge that fact.

Q: You mentioned earlier the "strategic importance of Suriname." In looking back over your career, was Suriname really of such strategic importance? Had not the importance of its geographic location been overtaken by modern technologies?

DUEMLING: The fact of the matter is that the Pentagon, in my view, is always excessively concerned by the security dimension of real estate. That is a primary concern for them and I don't fault them for that. The question is one of degree. If you choose a little country like Suriname on the North-east shoulder of South America, you have to ask yourself the level of importance of such a piece of real estate, even granting that there is some. It was of considerable interest in World War II because the U.S. Army built a large airfield in Suriname which is still there and functions as the international airport of Paramaribo. During World War II, it was one of the stepping stones for the route across the mid-Atlantic over to Dakar. It was of great importance then.

Today, it is of much less importance. Given the range of aircraft and this being the age of missiles, it does not have the same importance. It has some limited interest with respect to the sea-lane approaches to the Panama Canal from the South-east, but that is about it. I would conclude that it has no great strategic importance today.

Q: With reference to the Suriname case specifically, would you please discuss your relationship with the CIA?

DUEMLING: During the course of my career in the State Department I always felt that I had excellent relationships with my colleagues in the Central Intelligence Agency. I found them for the most part highly knowledgeable professionals, interesting and dependable. I always felt that as a Foreign Service Officer, working for the entire U.S. government, it was imperative that we work as closely with the Agency as we did with other Federal agencies.

There was an interesting episode while I was the Ambassador to Suriname which had to do with the attitude of my own station chief - the raking CIA officer on my staff - in terms of his attitude towards the State Department. This episode arose during a tense moment of internal Suriname politics. I mentioned earlier that while I was in Suriname, the country was under the control of a military dictator, Bouterse. He had been a sergeant and he together with other sergeants, led a coup in 1980 and had taken over the country. Only two people were killed in an episode that lasted about two or three days before they had secured power. Not surprisingly there had been a certain amount of rivalry among the military who were running the country. There was a certain amount of social and political turbulence in the country generated by the fact that Suriname had been a democracy and there were a number of people agitating for a return to that state. It was a politically unstable situation.

Bouterse had as a principal deputy a man by the name of Roy Horb. Horb became increasingly disaffected from Bouterse and the strong arm tactics that he employed, particularly when the dictator, under the influence of Bishop, the head of Grenada, decided to arrest about sixteen of the most prominent citizens of the country, who were his political opponents or agitators in support of democracy. He had them arrested in the middle of the night of December 8, 1982. He tortured them for twenty-four hours and killed them. That very brutal episode apparently

alienated Horb, who felt that this kind of violent suppression of criticism of the government was uncalled for and was wrong. Within the ruling military circle, Horb was arguing against such tactics and behavior and for greater accommodation with the political opposition. Horb had been approached by the CIA and much that we knew about the situation we knew from the CIA. He was a contact, a resource, of the CIA - a rather valued one given the fact that he was in the inner circles. In January, 1983 a letter was slipped through the Embassy's mail slot one morning, addressed to me. It was brought to me about 9-9:30 in the morning. It purported to be from Horb who claimed that he was being held prisoner against his will by Bouterse at a military base not too far from Paramaribo. The letter made a great number of accusations against Bouterse and said that Horb was entirely opposed to this. He opposed the Bouterse dictatorship and feared for his own life - he did not think he would survive, but he wanted it known that he was in opposition.

I immediately summoned the country team, including the station chief to discuss the letter. We spent an hour and a half analyzing this letter. We came to the conclusion from other evidence that we had that this letter was a provocation - that it was not a legitimate document. For one thing, it was Xerox copy, pasted together with Horb's name apparently forged unto the document. I prepared a very long analysis of the document, based on the country team discussions. I was about to dispatch this analysis with the text to Washington in about mid-afternoon when I got a phone call from the Department, followed by a "Flash" telegram, asking me what was going on with a document from Horb. Washington wanted to know what was going on as soon as possible. I was surprised that Washington already knew, because I thought it was understood within the country team that we were preparing a collective analysis. What in fact had occurred was that the station chief unbeknownst to me and unauthorized, had simply sent the text of the letter to his own Agency through his communications channel without informing me. That immediately aroused State and Defense Departments and the NSC. Everybody got very excited and wondering what was happening. I thought that the station chief’s action was disloyal because we were trying to analyze the document and put it into some perspective. I dispatched this long analysis which was the proper way of handling this sort of event since there was no great urgency about it. The point was to provide Washington with the text of the letter and some points of reference for analytical purposes and a recommended course of action. This should have been submitted as a package. You don't send the document and say that the matter is under consideration and that analysis follows. Sending the document alone only gets people excited unnecessarily. Washington was very interested in our analysis and agreed with it and our recommendations - namely that it was a provocation and that we would stay alert to see what would develop next.

Within a couple of days, I received a telephone call one morning about 9 o'clock from the Foreign Ministry saying that Bouterse wanted to see me right away. I was told that I would be received in the old office of the Prime Minister at about 10 o'clock. I arrived promptly and was ushered into the old Cabinet room. Waiting for me were three people: Bouterse, Horb and the Foreign Minister, a strong leftist with ties to Cuba and no particular friend of the United States. I was asked to sit down and if I wanted to have coffee. I accepted that. Bouterse then took a document and reached across putting it in front of me, asking me whether I had ever seen it before. It was a copy of the letter that had come through the mail slot. I admitted that I had seen it before. Major Horb was looking extremely agitated and very nervous. Bouterse and the

Foreign Minister appeared quite calm. The dictator then asked me what I thought about it. I expressed my view that it was a forgery and a provocation and I gave them some of the more obvious reasons for my conclusions - I did not give them all of our rationale. Horb was vastly relieved and turned to Bouterse and told him that he agreed that it was a forgery and that he had had nothing to do with it. I told the dictator that I thought the letter was a clear provocation and I assumed that it had been concocted by people who were against good relationships between the U.S. and Suriname and were trying to upset that relationship. I told Bouterse that I dismissed the whole incident. He thanked me and said that he would like to call a meeting of the diplomatic corps, which he wanted me to attend, for noon. By this time, it was 10:30 or 10:45 in the morning. I returned immediately to the Embassy and went to the station chief's office. I told him exactly what had happened and expressed my puzzlement by these events. I asked him whether he had any idea how Bouterse had gotten a hold of the letter. He said that he didn't have any idea. We speculated a little bit on how events may have transpired and how the letter may have fallen into Bouterse's or Horb's hands. The station chief expressed total ignorance and total bewilderment and gave me no advice on the meeting of the diplomatic corps.

At 12:00 o'clock, I returned for the meeting of the assembled diplomatic corps. Bouterse, Horb and the Foreign Minister were all there. Bouterse proceeded to hand out copies of the document to everyone present; then went on to say that he had called the meeting because everyone knew that the political situation in the country was very fragile and that there was a lot of rumor mongering and provocations going on. He said he wanted to commend the Ambassador of the United States, who had received such a provocation, for coming forward and giving this letter to the government. He noted that had been precisely the right thing to do and hoped than anyone else who might be given such a document would be equally forthcoming. I said nothing. As the meeting ended and we were walking out, I turned to my French colleague and told him confidentially that we had never given the letter to the Suriname government. I added that I had no idea where the document came from, but that I would not be surprised if it had originated with the government.

I went back to the Embassy and the station chief's office. I reported what had occurred and I proceeded to send a telegram - a fuller one than the brief one I sent after the morning meeting - to Washington. About 2:30 in the afternoon, the station chief came in to see me and said that he had given that letter to Horb days previously. That was obviously the way Horb knew about it and could have been, although not necessarily, how Bouterse found out about it. I noted that during our morning meeting, he had denied knowing anything about events. He said that he had told me that under instructions from his Washington headquarters which had told the station chief that I was not to be told about the letter having been given to Horb or that he had been in touch with Horb. I was to be kept in the dark. I told him that I had just been walking through a mine-field without knowledge of the facts. I had, on the spur of the moment, to decide what to say to Bouterse when he confronted me with the document. I told the station chief that I thought the whole situation was entirely unacceptable. I had been totally blind-sided. I further added that fortunately, I had enough wit to handle this thing properly, no thanks to him, the station chief or the Agency. I told him that I would contact Washington immediately.

So I sent a telegram to the Assistant Secretary, Tom Enders, explaining what had occurred, that I had not been properly informed and that the decision not to tell me had been approved by the

Department of State. That last piece of information came from the station chief. I requested that Enders tell me, by return telegram, if the Department had agreed with the Agency that I was not to be informed. I further added that if the information were correct, he would have my immediate resignation. I got a return telegram within a couple of hours, saying that the information I had was totally incorrect, that the Department had never been told anything about the letter, it had never approved the idea of keeping the Ambassador in the dark. I gave the station chief Enders' reply. He said he didn't know what to say. In the meantime, another message was received from the Agency, saying that it had never approved the idea of keeping me in the dark. The station chief then alleged that it had been an oral arrangement, done over secure phone and that he had been told that I was to be kept in the dark. Obviously, someone was lying. Was it the station chief or his superior in Washington? Or was it the State Department? Not clear. It was perfectly obvious that this episode gave me grounds for firing the station chief and I could have sent him packing within a week's time because he had clearly violated the most fundamental relationship of loyalty and honesty that must prevail between an Ambassador and his staff. I did not fire the station chief because he was, on balance, an able officer. I had a very small staff. I relied on the station chief as much as I relied on anybody within the entire Embassy in terms of support and pursuit of U.S. policy in the country. Quite frankly, I would have divested myself of a very important asset if I had sent him packing, which I could have done.

I cite this episode because it underscores a number of problems. First of all, of course, is the importance of loyalty and confidence. Secondly, it points to the reality of situations when you are abroad in a small Embassy, in a difficult political setting, trying to conduct a relationship in pursuit of U.S. interests. It sometimes becomes a luxury to stand on principle as I could have. I was in a similar, although less serious, bind with respect to my Defense Attaché, who wasn't very smart and did some silly things - not dangerous like what the station chief had done, but silly. I complained about this to the Commanding General of the Defense Attaché Corps when I called on him in Washington. He asked me what I thought of the Defense Attaché; so I told him that I didn't think he was very good and gave some examples of how I reached that conclusion. He said that he would pull him right out. I asked how long it would take to replace him. The General said "Eighteen months." That ended that conversation. We had a number of ticklish things going on in Suriname and I had to depend on that Defense Attaché to take care of the SWAT team types who were coming in, reconnoitering the country. I had to have the Attaché in place to backstop these special teams. I could not afford the luxury of getting rid of a guy and taking a vacancy. These are the realities of what an Ambassador in a small post is faced with. It is not like being in Bonn where you can fire somebody because there are fifteen people standing behind the guy with the senior ready to take over.

Q: You mentioned two matters on which I would like your comments. You used the phrase "Country Team." I'd like your views on that concept. The other issue concerns the timing and phrasing of telegrams to Washington.

DUEMLING: On the first point concerning the "Country Team," I believe in the concept of a circle of senior advisors, each with his or her area of responsibility - the Deputy Chief of mission, the Political Counselor, the Economic Counselor, the CIA station chief, the Defense Attache, the chief of the Consular Section, the Public Affairs Officer and others. For an episode of the sort I described, I thought it was immediately imperative to involve the senior Embassy

officers and solicit their perspective on the situation to have them come with some ideas of what was taking place and what we might do about it. That is the whole point of having the country team. I felt that involving them was important not only to get the benefit of their advice but also to inform them about what was clearly a major development in our situation in the country. As I described earlier, the station chief went off on his own and without informing me, sent that initial telegram with the text of the letter.

That had precisely the wrong effect, which brings us to the second point that you raised. You should never send Washington a raw message about a developing situation, without providing some degree of commentary about it. It may be extremely brief and if it is complicated, you may just want to say “Our initial reactions are... and a more detailed analysis will follow within the next twelve to twenty-four hours.” Clearly this episode demonstrated the undesirability of a raw, shoot-from-the hip message because it gets everybody needlessly excited. They start jumping to conclusions which are usually ill founded. In this case, Washington was wondering whether there was some kind of provocation that could be quite serious, involving some move against the American Embassy or against its staff. Ail of that was possible. But as I pointed out to Bouterse, the forgery was rather ham-handed and it wasn't that difficult to detect the signs of it being a forgery. There are other forged documents that are much more sophisticated and therefore much more difficult to detect.

Q: One other point about the telegram to Washington that should be mentioned is that some times a wrong message leaks almost immediately into the news media with horrendous effects.

DUEMLING: That is correct. As an epilogue to the story, I mention that shortly after the “letter episode,” Bouterse imprisoned Horb in a small jail in downtown Paramaribo, next to the Fort which was the military headquarters. Within one month, Horb was dead allegedly a suicide - hanging by the string of his athletic shorts. Nobody accepted that explanation. It seemed pretty clear that he had been strangled to death - not suicide, but murder just like the other fifteen that Bouterse had ordered sometime earlier. I might add that CIA had handled that particular asset very poorly and his demise was in large measure because the Agency had been stupid and had done something with and for Horb that even Bouterse was smart enough to see had to had come from someone on the U.S. side. Horb had been given a special trip to the United States, he had been presented a couple of small ponies - he loved animals - which arrived by commercial charter. Horb didn't have that kind of money; someone with an awful lot of money was being very kind to Mr. Horb. If you live in a small country like Suriname, you can figure out quickly who has the money for things like that. That was stupid.

ROBERT E. BARBOUR
Ambassador
Suriname (1984-1987)

Robert Barbour was born in Ohio in 1927. He graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1948 and attended The George Washington University. Since joining the Foreign Service in 1949, his career has included positions in Iraq,

Japan, Vietnam, France, Italy, England, Spain and Surinam. Mr. Barbour was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Today is July 24th, 1995. Bob, we're at the point where I mentioned before. We've got Suriname, then Diplomat in Residence, and you were in Suriname from '84 to '87, then you were Diplomat in Residence, and then you were an inspector. I can't remember if we covered it before, but tell me how that appointment came up.

BARBOUR: The appointment came up, I guess, in the usual fashion, my experience up to that point was all western European, and bilateral, but the European Bureau, as you know, is not in a position to have much influence on who goes to its posts. And that's how I happened to go to Suriname.

Q: *Just for the record, why does the European Bureau not have too much control over...*

BARBOUR: Because it is that bureau in the Department that has the fewest professional ambassadors, always. And sometimes very few indeed. In any case, I wound up going to Suriname which ironically is probably, after French Guinea, the most European part of South America. It's the smallest country in South America, and we had there a small embassy. I might mention that during the confirmation process, which was delayed at the instance of the senior Senator from North Carolina...

Q: *Jesse Helms.*

BARBOUR: Yes. One of the alleged objections, which he was said to have, and these were all spurious, was that it was not known whether I spoke Spanish. And I said, "Tell the good Senator that I do, but they don't." It was not at all an unpleasant assignment, it was not all uninteresting. The country is extremely diverse in its ethnicity, in its origins, in its history, the people are charming, are lovely and the kind of people who could teach all things such as manners and inter-racial relations. We had a very pleasant three years there, demanding, stressful, they were not agreeable, interesting, entertaining they were, we don't regret the three years there at all.

Q: *You were there from '84 to '87. Before you went out to Suriname, there had been some concern about Suriname. There had been a coup, and it came about the time when we were getting concerned about Cuban expansion and all that. When you went out there in '84, what did you see as American interests in the area, and American concerns?*

BARBOUR: By 1984 the Surinamese situation had settled down. It had gone through a rather blissful period thanks to the Dutch who saw in Suriname, I guess, beginning in 1950s and then in the ''60s, an example they did not want to repeat after their fiasco in Indonesia. Consequently they had spent a lot of money building up Suriname at a time when the major industry, aluminum, was also rising, indeed doing very well on the world market. So that by the mid-1970s Suriname was a very well endowed, very prosperous little country. Well endowed in terms of social infrastructure, well endowed in terms of physical infrastructure. They had a very good civil service, it had a professional police force, it had an educational system, public health system, a telecommunication system, good roads for that part of the world. It was a model, to

such an extent that the Dutch about 1975 said to Suriname, "All right, now you can be independent." And the Surinamese responded, "Not on your life, we like things just the way they are." So in the end the Dutch bought the Surinamese independence by another billion and a half dollars in forgiven loans, and development grants. Unfortunately, as I recall in 1976, independence was in 1976, it was voted by a small majority of the legislative assembly, very small, I think one vote if I'm not mistaken. Some years later after a period of not too successful self administration, the very small army, all Dutch trained of course, the army non-commissioned officers had developed a number of grievances, bread and butter grievances of various kinds, and they decided that they would stage what was later called coup d'etat, but was probably intended to be more in the nature of an armed demonstration. Anyhow, they shook the tree and lo and behold to their astonishment all the fruit came down and fell into their laps, and the country was theirs. They, having been trained in the Netherlands during a period of Dutch radicalism in the universities, and Dutch societies, professed to have very radical ideas themselves, and decided they were all left-wing. They weren't sure, but events showed the accuracy of their doubts just exactly what that meant. But they professed all kinds of left-wing slogans, etc.

Then in 1982, I forget the exact year, the Bishop in Granada, counted among his few friends in the western hemisphere, the Commandant de facto, autocrat, can't really call him a dictator, autocrat of Suriname, and they made a lot of their friendship. Then you had the trend in Granada we all know about that led to a situation there, that led to our intervention, and that left only Suriname, as you just said, among the states in that part of the world with radical left-wing official views.

And, of course, along with Bishop, came Castro. That never amounted to anything at all, except in print, and I think there was one visit to Havana during which, of course, the Cubans made a lot of their visitor. But nothing really came of it. Even so, the junta in Suriname was left in charge of the country in the aftermath of Granada, very uncertain of itself, very worried, and then they did a very terrible and stupid thing, they rounded up the corps of the intelligentsia, and murdered them. This I think was 1982, murdered them all which erased all the possibility of the military leaders ever being accepted again in polite western society. The Dutch suspended all of their aid, and we did the same with our minuscule program. And they were left to wallow in this slough of utter darkness that they had created for themselves.

There had been some internal security concerns there for the safety of the American community, that my predecessor, Bob Duemling, had dealt with very effectively. There had been some minor turbulence within the military which resulted in one of them being found hanged in his cell. So it was not by any means a bright spot on the Caribbean horizon. So I went there in 1984 into that kind of situation. What were our interests at that time? Not many. They were strategic you might say to try to do what was possible to eliminate that stain on the Caribbean ascription. They were commercial, to do what we could to help Alcoa, which ran Alcoa, the Surinamese aluminum company. And to give democratic elements every possible helping hand. So that's when I went.

Our introduction to Suriname was significant in that...there's only one airline connection between the United States and Suriname, and that is Suriname Airlines, SLM. So when we were going there, we arranged to take our dog whom we turned over to the airlines here, had him transferred him to Suriname Airlines in Miami, and we stopped off for a couple of days in Haiti, just for a

kind of orientation. While we were there we received a cable from SLM saying, "Fear not, your dog will be on board, and so will Mr. Van who will look after him and meet you on your airplane's arrival in Port-au-Prince. This, I must say, is rather typical of Surinamese way of doing things. I started off by saying that they're wonderful people, and indeed they are.

The President paid an unofficial personal visit to New York during that summer, and my wife and I went up and took him and his family out to lunch, very informal, very personal. Our daughter came along and we had a very convivial, jovial, happy time. It was also part of our introduction to Suriname.

Q: *Let me ask a question. Here is this government which had in the recent past slaughtered the elite of the country and you're taking one of the men who was responsible for that?*

BARBOUR: Here we had, on the one hand, this terrible image of a government which had slaughtered the intelligentsia. In fact, it was a kind of para-government. By that time the military had allowed into prominence again a civilian government. A President, a Prime Minister, a cabinet, all civilians, and all officially unconnected with the military. So we chose to deal with the government. But I did go there, and this period when Suriname had its dark aura about it, and I give you these two introductory notes because they were quite different from the image that Suriname enjoyed in Washington. So we assumed the image was correct, and these pleasant realities were aberrations.

Shortly after we arrived we were invited to the installation of the new trade union leadership which was to have been held at the presidential palace. And I thought I would go to that. I was certain these were all the left-wing voices we had heard so much about, that it would be nice to see what these radicals really looked like. So I went. As we stood on the broad white veranda of the president's official residence looking out over the grass and the park, the labor leaders arrived and took their places on the other side, and I noticed one of them was wearing, not a T-shirt, a sweat shirt which said, "America," on the front. And then as we waited the band struck up Amazing Grace, and in came the president with the appropriate ministers, and they had their ceremony, and after that there was a reception, and I had a chance to speak to some of these labor leaders, and found them extremely congenial.

Q: *Were we in consultation with the Dutch, because this had been their bailiwick for so long?*

BARBOUR: The Dutch had an ambassador there, a very active, a very impressive ambassador, the French were there, Indians, Chinese, Russians, various others. The Dutch were looking after their vestigial interests, maintaining a presence, maintaining a flag and with it hope that better days would come back. They were like the French in much of French Africa, very present, very much a factor, but very low key and not actively or directly involved in many things, and do things that they did participate in officially, for example. Anyhow, I give you these elements of introduction because our whole stay in Suriname was marked by this congeniality, this enormous good humored dignity that the Surinamese have, that made our stay there very pleasant. I mean, I had contact whenever I desired with anybody there. I obviously visited them from time to time, I visited the military commander, who like everybody else there, was unfailingly courteous.

Q: *But he was the de facto leader for so long.*

BARBOUR: He was the power behind the throne, and undoubtedly responsible for the murder that I frequently as we talked, had in the back of my mind, is it possible that this person can have such bloody hands. In our very first meeting he asked whether American policies, and Dutch policies, were the same. And I said, "No, they're not the same, but," I said, "and I know you don't like to hear this, we do come together on the question of civil rights in this country." So we talked about human rights. And he listened very courteously, and then he said, "You're quite right, I don't like to have that question put at me that way. But I asked the question, and you gave me a fair answer." We never had any difficulty dealing, even when the topic of our conversation was the sort of thing that those on the receiving end don't like to hear. But they were always pleasant, always very courteous, as were all our dealings in that country.

Q: *We're talking about the Reagan administration when you were there, whose approach to human rights was much more low key than that of the Carter administration. Did you find that Suriname was just so far off the political radar that nobody was paying any attention to it, or were there human rights abuses, people in jail or what have you, that we were pushing on, or anything of that nature?*

BARBOUR: The situation got worse later on. In human rights policies the Reagan administration were less activists than during the Carter administration, but they were no less present. It was a significant element of our policy interests in Suriname to push for them. Later on in the latter years of our stay there, a small civil war developed, insurrection of a man, which generated a reaction inside Paramaribo, and in the countryside, troops would go in and there would be killings, and rampaging, and things like that by the army. We began to have more acute civil rights problems, and we began to talk openly about them. Then there were arrests, there were even killings, never objectively documented. Let's just say we were involved in doing what we could about them.

Q: *What did we do?*

BARBOUR: Well, in public and in private. And the nice thing about dealing with people like the Surinamese, you can say what you want to say. You can say what needs to be said, and so can they, and they don't get offended, you don't get offended. But I remember talking to the Prime Minister once about a column in one of the newspapers that was written by a local Protestant minister, a very witty column, very amusing, but telling in its barbs. The Prime Minister said, "Well, we're going to bring him in here." And I said, "Oh, that's fine. Let's see you'll have human rights, you'll have freedom of the press, and you'll have religious issues, all in one bundle. That's really great." He said, "Maybe we'll just give him a talking to." Anyhow, I think that sort of thing is called interventions, we had lots of interventions of that kind which really, if we succeeded in dampening down some of their intentions to take reprisals, they served our purpose. We also went public. I gave one local talk on it, I wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper shortly before I left, and the issue was human rights. It was there, and it was a factor. Libyans came in. The military decided they didn't have any friends anywhere, they might as well have the Libyans, and of course, Qadhafi promised them all kinds of things. So he went to Tripoli, and the Libyans came and set up a--what did they call it--an Islamic Society, which was right down the street

from my residence, and one of my new assignments, self assumed, was to get them out of there. And I had a lot of talks on the issue, I never succeeded in getting them out. But again, you could deal frankly with them. I would say to the Prime Minister, or the President, or the Foreign Minister, "Why don't you just throw them out, they're not doing you any good. They're coloring your image, nobody around here wants them. The Guianese don't want them here, the French don't want them here. Why don't you just throw them out?" They didn't, but at least you can't say that we didn't administer our points.

There was an internal security situation that came up once, and I called on the Surinamese commander about it. It concerned a Libyan trigger man who came into town. We knew it, we followed him around...

Q: *A hit man, an assassin.*

BARBOUR: ...a trigger man. We knew him, we knew when he came in, we knew he was, we knew he'd been around to look at the embassy. We had a good deal of interest in why he might be there. This was after the April attack on Tripoli, April 1984.

Q: *When we bombed Tripoli.*

BARBOUR: In reprisal for the night club bombing in Berlin. That's right. Shortly after that this fellow arrived. Mind you, I never had any instructions for dealing with the Surinamese. I had carte blanche to say whatever I thought needed to be said. So in this case I went to see Colonel (inaudible), and I said, "We know this man is here. We know who he is. We know that he was given a visa and was permitted to come in." And I said very pleasantly, "And I think you should know that if anything happens to any American here, you will be held responsible by my government." He didn't react really. I said, "But anyhow, here is his name." And I gave him the card on it. And that afternoon, I guess it was lunch time, I was home, and somebody dropped by to see me, and said, "He's leaving tomorrow at noon." Which was good. It was good in another way which has since become known in that we were able to follow him around, he was arrested in another country, and we got a whole suitcase of all his paraphernalia, and all his documents and things like that. So that was nice. But the point is not that we scored this counter intelligence coup, but the fact that we could talk to the Surinamese in that kind of manner without giving offense.

Q: *In the first place, was there a difference did you find between the civilian side of the government, and the military side of the government?*

BARBOUR: No, but there became a more difference later on. I will give you another little anecdote, a little revealing anecdote, and then I'll tell you about the difference. The relations with the military junta were officially chilly. Personally in a little place like Paramaribo, you run into everybody all the time. So, in fact, we talked to them. I've had some of them privately to lunch to talk to them. Relations were not bad. And we knew when they'd go off to Miami and have a weekend in Miami on the town, and come back. So we gave a visa to one of them, he went off to Miami with his girlfriend. And about 2:30 one morning, the Foreign Minister called me and said he had something urgent, and asked if I could go to see him. The Foreign Minister calls, you go,

unless he makes a habit of calling at 2:30 in the morning. So I went to see him. And he said, "Can you tell me, Mr. Ambassador, why Captain (inaudible) has been arrested?" Captain (inaudible) was a member of junta, I hadn't the faintest notion. My first reaction was that he and his girlfriend were on the town and he'd gotten into a fight in a bar. And I said, "No, I haven't the faintest idea, I'm sure it's nothing political." So anyhow, I had no telegram, I had no information, I had no nothing, but during the course of the night I found out that he had been arrested in a DEA sting operation. Arrested, taped, filmed, and everything else. He had been the willing participant of a sting operation showing that he, as a member of the Surinamese junta, was willing to open up the country to drug trafficking. So it was all on tape as he negotiated prices, and entry points, and things like that.

But by the opening of business the next day, the morning newspaper and the radio all had scare stories about an American plot against Suriname. Little did they know, Suriname was not a country we had ever plotted against, but the CIA was involved, and the Americans were all against Suriname, and they were even hinting of big demonstrations, and stir up the people. So at that point too I went around to see Colonel (inaudible), and at the end of the morning he agreed to receive me. We talked about it and I gave him the information.

Q: *You got the information from?*

BARBOUR: By phone, scarce as it was, and I gave it to him and I said, "Now what I want you to know is that we only know what we know, and it concerns Capt. (inaudible). And this campaign that is being stirred up, all these allegations, the excitement, really doesn't do anybody any good because at this point we only know what we know." Meaning we don't know anything about anybody else. And the Colonel, who was no fool, got the point 100%, and without batting an eye, "Oh, well, in this case the Foreign Minister is not speaking for the government." And that was the end of it. The afternoon newspaper, evening television, nada. It was a minor affair. I went that afternoon when I went to play tennis, I was a national hero because the civilian elements of the country, in or out of government...in government worked with the military either under duress, out of fear, or because they made a lot of money on the side. Outside the government the civilian element hated the military, but tolerated it. But we were careful not to seem opposed or any threat and you had this element of forces who existed there, co-existed, and until this little civil war started, co-existing with amazing congeniality.

But when we were there I would add on a personal note, one could travel all over the country, and Suriname at that time was 99% virgin Amazonian jungle.

Q: *Did we see the Soviets and the Chinese doing anything there that we considered...*

BARBOUR: I could never figure out why the Soviets were there, except I guess they were sucked in on the coattails of Castro, and Bishop. The Soviet ambassador was, I think, basically a well-intentioned person. His wife made no bones at all about her feelings toward the regime at home. She was quite outspoken, and spent as little time in Suriname with her husband as possible, was therefore a pleasure to be around when she was there. The Chinese were there, I think, because they had a sense of mission. They'd built a lovely sports complex in the Chinese fashion. They said, "Which would you like to have? A stadium, airport terminal, or the various

things they have in their catalogue. The Surinamese chose a stadium, which is a large complex. The Chinese said, "Let's see, this is July 1, 1981, it'll take 18 months, and we'll let you know what we need." In Chinese fashion doing things in a country like Suriname, they need very little. Everything and everybody is important except the basic laborer, and they delivered it on time, just as they said using Chinese workers, Chinese engineers, Chinese design, Chinese raw materials, Chinese prefabricated materials, and that was that. So why they were there, I never figured out.

Q: *Were there, say American missionaries, or any people like this?*

BARBOUR: Yes.

Q: *My experience in Korea somewhat about the same time was that when you had a government that was essentially repressive, our missionaries very quickly find themselves at odds with them because they're supporting their laity who are usually being oppressed. Was this a problem?*

BARBOUR: The missionaries there kept out of politics entirely. They had their feelings, of course, but they were totally apolitical. The Surinamese church, Dutch Reform, Mennonite, much more active. There is a kind of national church in Suriname, and it is the Dutch church. As I said, one of their ministers wrote a newspaper column, his wife worked in the embassy which occasionally made it inconvenient. The head of the church, the pastor, gave delightful sermons, full of innuendo, lots of little asides that must have made the military squirm, but they would sometimes go as dutiful churchgoers, would sit in the audience and find all this acceptable within the limits of the convinuality that reigned in Suriname.

Q: *Did Suriname ever get onto the agenda of our Congress and saying we've got to be more beastly to the Surinamese?*

BARBOUR: No, Suriname was essentially off our screen, that's the reason I never got any instructions. It was an idyllic life in some ways for an ambassador, and as I said, I could make such representations as I felt the situation called for, and report them afterwards.

Q: *Was Castro's stake pretty well gone by this time?*

BARBOUR: They had lost interest in Castro. They saw that Cuba was no model for them to follow, and they very pragmatically decided not to pursue it. They maintained an embassy there, there was no Cuban embassy Paramaribo. No, they did not, they had lost interest in Castro.

Q: *Did you get any reflections from our moving into Granada in '82?*

BARBOUR: That was before my time.

Q: *If things really get bad, and a country turns septic, the United States is not only able, but willing to...*

BARBOUR: Your question reveals you know a lot more about this subject than you would think. It was given far more credit than it deserved. There was always the possibility, and I guess the conviction in the circumstances you just described, the Americans might indeed come charging in some day, who knows. They didn't realize how unimportant Suriname was to us.

Q: *In interviewing one of your predecessors, apparently we did take a look at it when it looked like Cuba might be expanding, Granada was bad, and the sum total was after taking a long hard look, sure we could probably send a battalion in and do a number, but then what? and there we are. And is it worth it? And the answer came back, no. Granada served as a certain sign saying things can go just so far, and the United States can do something.*

BARBOUR: It did in attitudes.

Q: *Was Suriname on our blacklist? I'm talking about exchanges, sort of the stock in trade of what the United States does, cultural, shows, etc.*

With Suriname did we have exchange programs, and cultural shows, and this sort of thing?

BARBOUR: What we had was very small anyway in objective terms. We did have an USIS operation. We did an IVP, an International Visitors Program, I think we had six or eight a year of visitors we sent to the United States, obviously chosen to further the causes that we were supporting there, democratization and human rights and things like that, as well as occasionally technical grants. They were all very effective. We didn't have cultural presentations, I think we were simply not on the circuit for those. We had an occasional speaker. No, it was not entirely off the screen, it was just too far down on the list of priorities to merit much.

Q: *By the time you left had the civil war was going, did we have any particular interest or concern about the civil war one way or the other?*

BARBOUR: At that time we were concerned by its implications. The army reacted very harshly. Just before it broke out we had been authorized to offer a small IMET program, International Military Education and Training, and to that end we had offered an English language laboratory which included when it was assembled some instructors in training programs, and things like that. That was a big change. I had offered it to Barza, and he had leaped at it with alacrity, and this at a time when the military were slowly withdrawing from political life and letting the civilian government act more and more on its own. The trend was somewhat encouraging. Anyhow, the first thing we did was cancel that program. Our interests were really to keep out of it. They hired an American helicopter, they chartered it with a couple of soldiers of fortune on board. They brought it over from, I think, down through French Guinea, brought it in the back door, brought it into action against Brunswick, and then the first day of operation it was shot down. Therefore, there ended American involvement.

Q: *Did you have American mercenaries?*

BARBOUR: We did. One was killed in the crash, the other was injured and was hospitalized--the French got involved and one of the men got killed. Anyhow, one or both were hospitalized

for a while. They were working for the government, the military, and no reason for the Surinamese to be unkind to them. So, no, we did not have a problem. The military Attaché saw them a couple of times and that was that. They didn't want to have anything to do with us, and we were quite happy when they left.

Q: *Did the civil war have any connotations. I mean, were there good guys and bad guys?*

BARBOUR: Not really. The Dutch were, I think, unofficially backing the rebels. There were Dutch soldiers of fortune involved. It was all a micro-war, the number of people involved never more than a couple of hundred on each side. A big operation would be a couple of hundred people on both sides. But it was in the jungle. Unfortunately they blew up the bridges to French Guinea, and they cut down power lines, and they did unfortunate things. And the situation in the capital, Paramaribo, needless to say got rather tense from time to time. There were rumors of eruptions into the city, but they didn't take place. We became more concerned about you might say law and order in the city, but in fact we never had any reason to feel injured by the situation.

Q: *Then you left there in '87.*

BARBOUR: October, '87.

Q: *As you went what was your impression of whither Suriname?*

BARBOUR: It was going downhill, had been going downhill economically ever since the little war started which is probably about a year, and therefore had been going downhill politically. There were political tensions between the military and the civilians had increased including between the military and the civilian government. And then the military had agreed that there could be elections. These elections were free and open. There was a large coalition against the military. The military ran as a party, that is they and their supporters ran as a party. There was a coalition party of, you might say, the Creoles and the Hindustanis, the Indians, you might say the commercial and the white collar elements, it was a big alliance. The campaign was open. The coalition had a very catchy campaign song, it was charming. And, of course, they triumphed. They got 82-83 percent of the vote. I left just before the vote. I decided I would not stay through the voting. My successor was due to follow and I thought this is a good time to break. But they got that overwhelming percentage. And I left then personally on a note of hope that a new political scenario was being created, that this new coalition would take over with a civilian government, with real political backing, and it would gradually impose itself vis-a-vis the military. Well, unfortunately it didn't gradually impose itself, or if it did, it did so with such gentleness that it was hard to see it. Corruption increased, drug trafficking began. This little insurgent army in the bush itself got involved in the country and things became much worse in the country. I ended on a good note but it was not justified.

DENNIS HAYS
Ambassador
Suriname (1997-2000)

Ambassador Hays was born into a US Navy family and was raised in the United States and abroad. He was educated at the University of Florida and Harvard University. Entering the Foreign Service in1975, he spent the major portion of his career dealing with Latin American, particularly Mexican and Cuban, Affairs. He also served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Burundi, and from 1997 to 2000 as U.S. Ambassador to Surinam. Ambassador Hays was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2001.

Q: OK. You went to Surinam in early 1997. You had described earlier the discussion of putting rafters, Cuban refugees, there, and the military had gone down and had discussions with senior people in the government that you didn't have anything to do with. Why don't you talk about what you did do in Surinam and what the situation was there at that time, in 1997?

HAYS: Surinam is a wonderful place. It's the end of the earth, but it's a wonderful place once you get there. The key things that influence Surinam right to this day are: 1) they were a Dutch colony and not a British or French colony, and 2) there wasn't a very strong independence movement there. The Dutch literally had to kick them out of the nest, and the story is, with some verification, that they actually bribed a few of the local parliamentarians who by a one vote margin voted for independence. As part of the golden parachute, the Dutch gave basically the right of free immigration for a time period. When they gave that it was like, who wants to go to Holland? It's cold and rainy and gray. You can be in the warmth of Surinam and live like Dutch citizens. This was in 1975 when it became independent. By 1980 the government through petty corruption and just inefficiency was falling apart, and there was a protest by some sergeants to get better pay, better conditions. When they did this they discovered that the government collapsed around them, and they had an opportunity, which they seized, to take over the government. Their leader, a guy named Desi Bouterse, took over at that time. By a year or two down the road he was also having a lot of problems maintaining control. There was a fairly active democratic movement opposed to him. His grip was getting looser and looser. Curiously, there was a Cuban connection. There was a Cuban colonel, Gonzalez was his name, who came in as an adviser. People told me he told Desi, "Look, the reason you have these problems is because you didn't have a bloody revolution. People don't fear you."

By 1982, there was a famous incident when Maurice Bishop from Grenada came and paid a state visit to Surinam. Desi held a big rally for him and got about 1,500 people to rally to meet Bishop. There was a labor leader, Cyril Dahl, who held a counter demonstration and got 15,000 people out. So Desi was terribly embarrassed by this number one and then to add insult to injury, that night at the state dinner Cyril, who was the head of the union among others, including the electrical workers, cut the power to the Presidential Palace. So there's poor Desi with his revolutionary comrade-in-arms sitting in the dark. That was late October. Whether that played directly into the events, I'm not sure, but in early December Desi and company decided to strike. They went out and rounded up about twenty people they thought were their opponents -- labor leaders, attorneys, a couple of the military guys who had turned against them, and took them to this old fort and tortured them and killed all but one of them. This sent a huge shock through Surinamese society, because this had never happened before. The Surinamese didn't kill each other, they were calm and peaceful with everyone getting a piece of the pie. It was clear that the

revolution was now blooded and it was likely that more of this was going to take place. I'm doing this as a lead-in.

Q: This was in 1982?

HAYS: This was in 1982. By the late 1980s, Bouterse was trying to maintain his power in the army, but he was prepared to turn civilian control over to the government, which happened. There was then what was called the "telephone coup" in 1990 where Bouterse called the president and said, "You're screwing up. You're out." And he took over again. And then there was another time after that a few years later when he pulled back once again and allowed new elections to take place and a democratic opposition government came into power. Just before I got there in the '96 time frame, there was yet another election and a political party which he was identified with won. A man named Wijdenbosch became the president of the country and he was seen as a lieutenant of Bouterse, but Bouterse himself did not come forward. When I was on my way down there, the question was, do we deal with Bouterse or not. When Barry McCaffrey had gone to Surinam to talk about placing refugees he dealt with these guys, Bouterse and his lieutenants.

Q: He was the Southern Command?

HAYS: He was the Southern Command, at that point. In the interim, the embassy was recommending and apparently the Department was prepared to accept a level of engagement with him. De facto he was in power and so we need to talk to him, and we have American business that wants to get into oil. None of that is going to happen if we don't talk to this guy. I felt very strongly that that was a mistake and would send the wrong message right from the start for the American ambassador to meet with this guy. I might mention it hadn't really been an issue for my predecessors, because he was not playing that role at that time. The other government was in power. In fact, both of my predecessors said they had never met him, whereas when I got there he was all over the place, at every reception, every party, every everything, you would run into him. Nevertheless, I felt very strongly that we shouldn't have anything to do with him, and quite frankly, because it was Surinam, the Department was prepared to humor me. They didn't insist. They said well we've got the shrimp guys, we've got the oil guys, we've got the other guys and we'll try to work it out. I feel that the Wijdenbosch government certainly had its problems, but they increasingly separated themselves from Bouterse and his hard core. I believe that Bouterse is still involved in narcotics smuggling, and I think he's got a piece of alien smuggling and other issues that are around there. On top of everything else, it would've been a mistake to deal with him, although most of the other embassies did in fact. Their ambassadors would go see him and invite him to national days. Except for the Dutch. The Dutch were busy trying to indict him at this time for both drug smuggling and for human rights, the deaths of '82.

Q: He had no official position at that point?

HAYS: He was head of the party that had won the election, and so by that, especially in the beginning, it was felt that he was pulling all the strings. I think that became less and less the case until at the end when there was another election he and Wijdenbosch ran on separate tickets,

separate parties. They had split completely and this impacted on both of their vote totals. Surinam was one of these countries that, even more so than Guyana, had a small population and a big land area, the size of the state of Georgia. The population was only half a million. Another key factor is that in the eighties when all of this was going on, literally half of the population left the country and took advantage of the opportunity to go to the Netherlands. Disproportionately, of course, it was the educated, the entrepreneurial group, and the professionals that went. The country is still recovering from having half the population, like 350,000 of 700,000 go. It's now gone back up to half a million, although I think it's more like 600,000.

The difference between Surinam and Guyana is that in Guyana you have basically the two large population groups; the Afro-Guyanese and the Indo-Guyanese who are engaged in a zero sum fight. I win you lose, and vice versus. In Surinam, you have not only the Afros and Indos, but you also have a large Japanese population, a huge Chinese population, the Iranians and the Maroons, the escaped slaves from the river system. If you want to see an African village of the seventeen-hundreds, the only place in the world is Surinam. They still have the same customs, the same food, the same dress, the same language and everything. The amazing thing is if you look at continental drift right where South America goes into Africa, Surinam and Ghana touch. Most of the slaves brought to Surinam came from Ghana. Geologically, 500 million years later they are only next door.

Q: I can remember being in Ghana from '89 to '92 when there was very much a feeling of a Surinam connection. It was partly Jerry Rawlings who thought the connection was close.

HAYS: Jerry and Desi were buddies. You also had a slightly larger European population, you had Sephardic Jews who had been pushed out of Brazil in the eighteen-hundreds. At the same time there was a potato famine in Ireland there was one in Holland and massive numbers of Dutch moved to Surinam in less than two or three years. The ones that didn't die of yellow fever or malaria re-migrated to New York at some stage. As a result, no one group can dominate; so everybody has to have a deal and whatever government there is will have somebody from each of the ethnic groups represented. So everyone gets a little piece. With the exception of 1982, it may not be efficient, but they don't kill each other over these things because everybody gets a piece.

As a country, on my way down there, the big issue was Asian logging companies that were going in and clear cutting vast swaths of the Amazon and how to convince the Surinamese they need to stop this. The average Surinamese would go, "Trees? There are billions of trees, so they take a few; so what? They grow back." So it was tough to get beyond that, and my predecessor did some good work and I tried to follow up on it. But at the end of the day, what happened is that the dynamics of it, the economics of it, changed to where there wasn't quite the pressing need for it. So there was still logging, but it was a little bit better controlled and a little bit better taxed and authorized. The other issue, of course, is gold. There are 40,000 Brazilian gold miners that operate illegally or semi-legally in Surinam, mostly in the south, but increasingly they follow the gold and the gold is in the north.

Q: Small scale?

HAYS: Small scale, but 10 to 12 man crews, some river barges and these sorts of things. It's mostly unregulated. Most of them use the mercury recapture method but then dump the mercury. There are ways you can do these things and recapture the mercury through the process and use it over again. Mercury is relatively cheap, my father and my grandfather did it this way – the fact that they both died at 45 years of age doesn't seem to impact on them too much – so they continue to do it. As a result, you had this moving up through the country poisoning the river systems, killing the fish, prostituting the Indian women. It's a horrible kind of rolling force. One of the things I was always trying to do was to get the government to take this seriously and to deal with it. I was one that always believed that the Achilles heel of these guys is diesel fuel. They have to have diesel fuel to run their pumps and hydraulic systems and everything. And with gold you can put it in a backpack and you can walk it if you want. But with diesel fuel, it's big and bulky and messy, and you either fly it in or you bring it through the river systems. So you don't have to control the whole country, you just have to control the key points on the rivers and the landing fields, and you could have control over the miners. That never happened because there were people who are making a little bit of money from the Brazilian miners in terms of "concessions", and they would rather have that steady stream of income than take a chance, even though they'd make a lot more money doing it in a more environmentally healthy way and a more sustainable way but that's not their interest. Their interest was "This I got".

Q: Were there American mining companies interested in going in on a large scale?

HAYS: There were primarily Canadian. We represented Canada's interests there. I would get regular visits. In Guyana in my days there, the Canarc people wanted these huge, massive mines built. In Surinam there were similar ideas, and I had mixed feelings because they denude the landscape when they're done. But they kept pushing, and the Canarc people had production, they were actually producing gold in Surinam, but they were always under pressure that they needed to do more. There is also a story about people displaced by the rising waters of the dam that was created for the Alcoa hydroelectric facility for alumina production. The story goes that there were people in the camp who were negotiating pretty hard about what they were going to get to be relocated. When they noticed that the water was over their ankles, finally they were forced to move because, literally, their village was drowning. They relocated to a different area not too far from the shores of where the new lake was, but they felt fairly bitter that the planned schools, churches, community centers and those sorts of things never really came through. Now move forward 20 or 30 years, and it turns out that they put their village right exactly on top of where people wanted to build this massive gold mine. So then they had a new camp. They were negotiating tough and their position was, hey, we want you to build us the new village and then we'll see about moving to it as opposed to taking your word and go there and then you are to rebuild. That went back and forth and dragged on and on. I got an e-mail from a Surinamese friend that was on the board of this thing recently, and he said that they finally think that everything is done and they can begin construction by the beginning of the year.

Major U.S. interests included Alcoa and the bauxite. During World War II three-fourths of the aluminum for the Allied war effort came out of Surinam. In fact, there were upwards of 3,000 American soldiers based in Surinam during the War to protect the bauxite mining facility. There was concern German U-boats would come up the river.

The other World War II story is when FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt) was on his way to, I think, the Casablanca Conference there were two identical airplanes that were in his party. The one that he was not in crashed in the jungle in Surinam. There was still a descendant of the pilot looking for the wreckage, for where the plane had gone down.

Anyway, for alumina this huge facility that Alcoa built was the first major processing facility in the third world.

Q: They export alumina to smelter somewhere else?

HAYS: They would take some of it as aluminum but that wasn't economical and so while I was there there was only had a small percentage of that. They would ship alumina to Norway during the time that I was there for further processing. There's lots of hydro-power in Norway. A very short story on bauxite in Surinam. You may remember across the border in French Guyana it was close to Devil's Island and a bigger penal facility. The prisoners would occasionally escape and make it into Dutch Guyana. Maybe the Dutch would send them back or maybe they wouldn't. It kind of depended on how they felt or what the guy offered. So they caught this one French refugee from the prison, and they were about to send him back and he said, "Look, I know something that's of value to you. If you let me stay I'll show you what it is and where it is." And they said, "Well, be a little more specific." He said, "Well, I come from the area in France which is where bauxite comes from. In getting here I came across some hills that look exactly like some hills from my home region. So the Dutch said, "Okay, maybe that will work." He walked them back through the jungle and retraced his route, and they found the area where five years later they came in and started mining for bauxite. It was just when they were figuring out how to make aluminum, at the end of the eighteen hundreds. And so that's when the whole industry started.

The area was shrimp. If you go to Red Lobster, you probably eat shrimp that comes out of the Surinamese/Guyanese waters; the key factor there being the Amazon. It pushes out a great deal of sediment and the waters push it up along the northern coast of South America which is why there aren't beaches along there. You don't get any beaches until you get past the Orinoco. What you have is sediment-rich water, and as you fly in you can see the water go from blue to brown. That's anywhere from 12 to 50 miles off the coast depending on the time of year. But if you were a shrimp, heaven would be the waters off Surinam or Guyana because it's just so rich in stuff. So that's a fairly major operation.

Q: At the time you were there it was mostly American?

HAYS: No. They were bought by Americans. SEAPAK out of Savannah purchased most of it. There was a Japanese company there and, of course, all their good shrimp, 99% of it, went back to Japan, and 1% went out the door to the diplomatic corps. Then there were another couple of Surinamese-based companies with American investors. Unlike Guyana where there actually was an American company, these were local. Key factors that were kind of growing along the way - narcotics. Paramaribo became a through point to Europe because KLM had so many flights directly to Amsterdam and also cargo ships and things that would make that route. So we worried a lot about that.

Q: Was there a DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) office in the embassy?

HAYS: We had one that was not based fulltime with us. We had some come out of Curacao. I kept pushing in good State Department bureaucratic fashion to build that empire. I almost had them to where they were going to put an office in Surinam, and they may have after I left. I don't know that. Curacao was a great place to live, but the action was in Surinam.

The other thing that was happening was there was a very active alien smuggling route. One of the things that went well was our discovery of a route. What would happen was in Fujian Province in China you would have guys who would get the Surinamese Consulate in Hong Kong to stamp their passports, and then they would get on the KLM flight to Amsterdam and they would stay in the transit area so they never were admitted into Amsterdam. KLM didn't care, the Dutch didn't care and then they would fly to Paramaribo. From Paramaribo they would be flown to Caracas and then from Caracas they worked their way up through the island chain or Mexico and then come across (to the U.S.) It was clear there was Surinamese government collusion going on because they had had get that stamp in the first place to get on the KLM flights . We were able to pretty much up uproot that and got two Surinamese officials in China recalled and charged. We were feeling quite happy with ourselves which probably meant we put a damper on things for about a month. Then there was a new route that came along. But it's a huge industry and it's one that is going to continue to be a problem.

The way they work in Guyana where they had a similar problem was a little more formally organized. The people from China would come to Guyana, and they would work in a Chinese restaurant as a busboy or something and they would learn English and they would work their way up and save their money. After five years they would be the sous chef or the chef. In another couple of years they would buy the restaurant from the previous guy who now migrated to New York. They would need more people and after a few years they too would have enough money and the wherewithal to get to the States. And so it was a whole acculturation process. In Surinam, it was just get off the plane, get on another plane or get on a boat and away you go.

Q: Much American tourism?

HAYS: No. Very little. Again, it's hard to get to. They had FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) problems. They were a cap three country, and they could make cap two which means that you continue to run any flights you had but as an economy measure, they had decided to suspend service to Miami because it was low season and as a result they couldn't fly directly. So you had to go to Curacao and wait, and then finally fly down to Paramaribo. There's also very little infrastructure. The thing that Surinam offered as is basically untouched area. The only area on earth that can support human habitation that never has in big swaths. The Indians stayed in certain little areas and that was about it. In fact, there was a tribe that was so far up in the river systems that in 1967 they were contacted by first other Indians and then an ethnologist. The story goes that they didn't know there were any other humans on the planet. They had a village of about 250 people which was their self-sustaining size, and they were a good 50 miles from the nearest Amer-Indian village and there was just no contact. I suppose they would occasionally see a big bird flying overhead and wonder what that's all about. And this was in 1967. And here

you're isolated out there. Once you would get up into the river systems, it is pretty spectacular; nice little waterfalls, big anacondas, big crocodiles and those kind of things. There are couple of different groups, Conservation International has a number of projects there; the World Wildlife Fund also. They do the turtles, they do the coast and the CI does the interior. There is a potential there.

Q: And there is a large Surinam population in the United States?

HAYS: Most people still, if they have family ties, go to Holland. There are some, but nothing like say, Guyana or most other countries. They speak Dutch and so they are able acculturate a little quicker although most educated Surinamese speak English, unaccented English. It didn't do my Dutch any good. Everyone spoke perfect English. If they think about going to the big city, they go to Amsterdam.

Q: You studied some Dutch at the Foreign Service Institute before you went down since you had a long wait?

HAYS: Yes. I had nothing better to do.

Q: How long did you stay? You said you finally went in early 1997.

HAYS: I was there until the summer of 2000.

Q: A little over three years then?

HAYS: Yes.

Q: Anything else about Surinam that we should discuss? How big was the embassy?

HAYS: We had probably nine or ten Americans and then the usual 50 or 60 Surinamese. We went through the kind of embassy upgrade systems which made little sense. The embassy fronted onto one of the busiest streets in the city. And so we ended up buying the land on three sides of us, but the ambassador's office was directly on this main street. One of the instructions I got from the Department, I ignored completely. You have the front of the building and the sidewalk, then a two lane street, then there was a median and then there was another two lane street and across from that was a governmental office which was where the vice president and a number of other people sat. In the median strip was a human rights monument, a big huge abstract sculpture. After a DS (Diplomatic Security) team came by, they said, "Dennis, we want you to go and tell them to move the human rights monument, and then redirect the road around the embassy." It happened the day I had this cable was the anniversary of the 1982 murder. I'm looking out; the widows, the daughters and sons were weeping, the flowers and wreaths are there. And I thought, "Hmmm, and I'm going to go tell them to move the monument so that we can redirect the major street through town?" So I said no, no. We'll worry about that one later.

Q: Move the embassy!

HAYS: That was my suggestion two days before. We could have gotten something better.

End of Reader