

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

**EDDIE DEERFIELD**

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## MEMOIR

My name is Eddie Deerfield. “Eddie” is my birth certificate given name, not a nickname. I was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1923, the oldest of three children. My family moved to Chicago in 1927. Graduating from high school in June, 1941, I was hired as copy boy on the Chicago Times, then left to enlist in the United States Army Air Corps after the American base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii was attacked by Japan on December 7, 1941 and we entered

World War II. I was trained as a radio operator and gunner on B-17 bombers, known as “flying fortresses.” My crew of 10 men arrived in England in June, 1943. I flew 30 combat missions against targets in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe. On our sixth mission against aircraft factories in Kassel, Germany, our heavily damaged bomber crashed in the North Sea. On our 14th mission, we bailed out of a burning B-17 before it crashed in the south of England. Missions against Berlin, other military targets in Germany and pre-invasion targets along the coast of France predated my 30th mission when I was wounded by flak (anti-aircraft fire) over Saarbrücken. I left England in September, 1944, as a Technical Sergeant with a Distinguished Flying Cross, four Air Medals and a Purple Heart to train on the B-29 “Super Fortress” until World War II ended in victory in August, 1945. Some years later, I received the Legion of Honor in the rank of Chevalier from the Republic of France.

Returning to the Chicago Times, I progressed from apprentice reporter to features writer, and then decided to use my GI Bill (U.S. government fund for advanced education for military veterans). I earned honors as a freshman at the University of Illinois, and then transferred to Northwestern University where I received a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism in 1950. While at Northwestern, I accepted a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves (USAR) and was activated in April, 1951.

I served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Group during the Korean War. I commanded a psychological warfare detachment based in Pusan, Korea for 14 months. Returning to civilian life late in 1952, I joined WGN-TV in Chicago as news editor. Seven years later, I moved on to public relations, and was vice-president in the Chicago office of an international PR (public relations) firm. I remained in the Army Reserves, participating in active duty training and completing correspondence courses at the Command and General Staff College, retiring in 1983 in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

My career in diplomacy began in 1966. The war in Vietnam was raging and the Cold War with the Soviet Union was a continuing threat. The United States Information Agency (USIA) was calling for help in telling America’s story to the world. So, early that year when a team of USIA recruiters came to Chicago, I took the oral and written examinations for the U.S. Foreign Service. A short time after that, Mary Lee (my wife) and I were invited to Washington, DC for preliminary briefings. Six months later, we were in India. This was the beginning of a 22-year career in the Foreign Service, with assignments to seven posts and one tour in Washington. Those posts were Madras, India; Islamabad, Pakistan; Blantyre, Malawi; Vancouver, Canada; Kampala, Uganda; Lagos, Nigeria, and Calcutta, India.

I was forty-two years old when I arrived at the American Consulate in Madras in 1966 with the title Information Officer to begin my first overseas assignment. As I looked back on my years as a Chicago Times reporter, WGN-TV news editor, and corporate public relations executive, I wasn’t sure if I had made the right career decision. Ted Sills, president of the PR firm, had declined my letter of resignation and granted me two years leave of absence, fully expecting me to return. Our first home overseas was called “Mayfair,” built large and gracious in the British Colonial style, although it wasn’t long before we were introduced to floods caused each year by cyclones. My first speaking engagement in Madras was to address a crowd attending the inauguration of an American space exploration exhibit. Chief

Minister Annadurai (the position of chief minister in India is equivalent to that of governor in the U.S.) was guest of honor.

I traveled through the four states of southern India to meet with the media and a wide variety of audiences. I made book presentations, spoke to Rotary and Lions Club members, cut ribbons at dedications, inaugurated a basketball team tournament, moderated a discussion on the role of small business in India, and even presented a typewriter to an association of journalists. I met with and exchanged views with the vice president of India and the chief minister of Maharashtra when they visited Madras for a ceremonial function. I lectured extensively at colleges in Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Trivandrum and smaller communities. I worked in harmony with scores of editors of Indian newspapers to tell America's story. My intent was not to defend our role in the Vietnam War but to explain the events leading up to our involvement and our rationale for being there. I arranged a grant for the editor of an Indian pro-communist newspaper in Madras to visit the United States. On his return, that paper's editorials were far more reasonable and less critical of the U.S. than they had been. An event that gained considerable favorable publicity was the presentation of the American annual Helms Trophy to India's Krishnan, recognized as the year's most outstanding international tennis player. It was covered in English language journals, as well as in the local language press. In another project, I escorted a group of journalists from Calcutta on a visit to a NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Agency) flight center in South India and briefed Ambassador Chester Bowles when he brought a delegation from New Delhi to Madras.

It's difficult to gauge the effects of public diplomacy. It's as much an art as it is a science. The Communist Party was strong in parts of South India, particularly in the state of Kerala. There were frequent protest marches ending at our American Cultural Center in Trivandrum. Recognition that I was making an impact came about in a very unusual way. About a year after I arrived in Madras, the Soviet Union's news agency TASS sent a story to the Indian media accusing me of being the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) chief for south India. Disinformation was one of the USSR's (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) Cold War weapons. The tactic of naming me as a master spy didn't work because I had earned the trust of my Indian contacts.

Mary Lee was often at the microphone as chief guest at various charitable and social events. We found time to visit the Taj Mahal under the light of a full moon, and, on another holiday, spent a memorable week at an island palace in Jaipur in a suite with dazzling stained glass windows. It was time to move on to another country. Our son, Scott, was now three years old. Much of his education in the ensuing years as we served in hardship posts was at boarding schools in Europe and the U.S.

In Islamabad, the new capital of Pakistan, I served in the office of Ambassador Joseph Farland as Press Attaché. My principal duty was to advise him on public diplomacy issues and to accompany him on travels throughout Pakistan. I wrote speeches and policy statements for the ambassador and helped arrange his public appearances. Sometimes, the going was rough. Crowds waving anti-American signs and banners would attack our vehicle with sticks and curses. The Pakistani police never interfered, but stood by to make sure

things didn't get out of control. Despite a military coup in March of 1969, it was pretty much business as usual for the American Embassy.

On November 12, 1970, East Pakistan, which later gained its independence and became Bangladesh, suffered a devastating cyclone and tsunami which claimed more than a thousand lives. As emergency supplies began to arrive from the United States, I went to Dacca in East Pakistan with the ambassador. We were aboard a U.S. Army Huey helicopter as bags of food were dropped to the survivors. I had the responsibility of planning and conducting news briefings for scores of American journalists who swarmed into the area. Later that year, the U.S. Department of State presented me with a Meritorious Honor award, "For extraordinary skill and dedicated service in establishing and conducting under extremely difficult operating conditions an information program for U.S. news correspondents in East Pakistan in the aftermath of the cyclone disaster of 1970."

Ambassador Farland was an enthusiastic sportsman. Traveling with him meant the chance to fish and hunt. In the Swat Valley in the north of Pakistan, trout fishing was great fun and we ate the catch that night. Chuck Yeager, the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound, had been assigned to our embassy as U.S. Air Force Attaché and we went duck hunting together. There were the usual social engagements, both with Pakistani friends and with friends from other embassies in Islamabad. We had a small American theater group in the diplomatic community and I appeared on stage in a play called the "Typist and the Tiger." My most vivid memory was not of the performance itself, but rather the desperate effort to get back to Islamabad from Chitral in northern Pakistan by Jeep through a snow storm in the mountain passes so that I could go on stage that evening.

My third posting was at the American Embassy in Blantyre, Malawi in East Central Africa. H. Kamuzu Banda was the self-styled "President for Life" when I arrived in 1971 as Public Affairs Officer. At best, he was a benevolent dictator but not keen on having democracy preached in his country. I arranged exchange programs bringing in American professors to lecture at the University of Malawi and sending local leaders to the United States on various grants. We conducted a program on the life of Martin Luther King; a space program on the Apollo mission, an exhibition honoring Malawi's leading soap stone artists opened by the mayor of the city. There was a presentation of books to Chancellor College of the University of Malawi and even a gift of a motorcycle to the country's Red Cross Society. In retrospect, I believe that my most effective action was in publishing a 20- page monthly magazine called USA News. The contents were selected to emphasize the advantages of living in a democracy. The publication was circulated across a wide spectrum of Malawian society and generated many favorable comments from readers. This advocacy of democratic principles was a continuing thorn in President Banda's side since he had already declared himself president for life. But, the closest I came to being terminated in Malawi was not due to presidential action.

While fishing alone on Lake Malawi about a mile off shore, a sudden storm overturned my boat. I wasn't wearing a life jacket but there was one in the boat and I managed to retrieve it in the water. That was about five in the afternoon. It took me three hours fighting the stormy waves to reach a rocky outcrop in a bay just off shore. It was pitch dark by then. I planned to

spend the night on those rocks rather than take a chance of walking through the jungle to find the nearest residence. Mary Lee had sent out the alarm when I failed to return and about 10 o'clock that night she was on a boat with a powerful search light. She spotted me on the rocks and the boat took me aboard. The next day the Malawi Times carried a story of "near disaster" for an American diplomat and it was picked up by the Reuters news agency. The story commented that the bay I reached was infested by crocodiles and snakes. I continued my duck hunting with Malawi friends but my days of fishing on Lake Malawi were over.

After almost eight years abroad, my next assignment was in the Washington office of the United States Information Agency as chief of the Africa Press Branch. I headed a staff of about 25 Foreign Service and Civil Service personnel, who prepared and transmitted a daily news roundup called the Wireless File to all our posts in sub-Saharan Africa. It contained the latest news, features and official texts, and was high priority reading for every officer at African posts from the ambassador on down. I attended regional conferences in Africa and met with officers in the field to exchange ideas on how to improve the file content. In 1976, the agency was ready to send me overseas again. I would have preferred an assignment in the Near East South Asia area or in Africa. Instead, a benevolent personnel office sent me to Vancouver, Canada.

I was to establish the first USIS (United States Information Service) branch post serving the four western provinces of Canada. That responsibility had been handled in the past by our embassy in Ottawa. I located office space, hired staff and began three years of contact with political leaders, prominent journalists, university professors, community and cultural leaders with the goal of improving United States-Canadian relations over contentious issues. A highly respected American professor of economics accepted my invitation to lecture at universities in British Columbia. As things worked out, he was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics the following year.

I traveled extensively throughout British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, explaining United States policies as they related to our northern neighbor. Rosalynn Carter, President Carter's wife, came to Vancouver to attend a conference on the problems of mental health and I worked with her and the White House staff in arranging the visit. And, I didn't miss out on the opportunity to do some salmon fishing north of the border.

After three years, I again asked the U.S. Information Agency assignment people to send me to a post in Africa or back to the Indian subcontinent. I got far more than I bargained for. In 1979 shortly after the overthrow of the brutal dictator Idi Amin in Uganda, I was assigned to Kampala as Public Affairs Officer. My mission was to establish the first U.S. information and cultural presence since the severing of diplomatic relations seven years earlier. The United States and several other foreign governments had calculated that there would be relative peace in Uganda after Amin fled the country and a highly respected university leader was installed as president. They were wrong. The new president lasted about six months and there were two bloody coups followed by a tainted election.

My wife and I flew from Washington to Nairobi, Kenya where I was to pick up a Volkswagen Kombi Van and drive it across the border to Kampala, Uganda, a journey of

several hundred miles. Before leaving Nairobi, the American Embassy arranged to have their Marine guards take us out to a Kenyan police gunnery range for target practice. We worked with a 12-gauge shot gun and a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson revolver. Mary Lee's shoulder was black and blue from the shotgun's recoil for weeks after that. We were issued both weapons as well as ammunition, tear gas grenades, gas masks, bulletproof vests and steel helmets, which we loaded into the van for the drive from Nairobi to Kampala. The border crossing in the van was a hairy experience. The African nation of Tanzania had helped in the overthrow of Idi Amin and its troops armed with AK-47 machine guns controlled the borders. Their soldiers in camouflaged uniforms were mostly illiterate young men from Tanzanian villages, unable to recognize or understand the meaning of a diplomatic license plate or diplomatic passport. Things turned really tense when I refused to let them search the van. There was a standoff of about a half hour during which I said repeatedly in English, "American Embassy." Nothing worked. Finally, I yelled, "Now, I go, I go" and began to drive slowly away from the border checkpoint expecting a hail of gun fire in our direction. We never looked back until the van was well out of their range.

Uganda was in a state of near-anarchy. There was virtually no law and order. One morning, a few months after we arrived in Kampala, my Ugandan driver was shot and killed and the USIS van stolen less than ten minutes after he dropped me off at the new American embassy. In another episode at three in the morning, my wife and I were under attack in our residence. I drove the gang off with gun fire from the .38-caliber revolver which had been issued to me in Nairobi. The violence was not directed at us as Americans, but by criminals intent on stealing whatever they could get their hands on. They killed as they robbed indiscriminately. The police were helpless. They were outgunned by the bandits.

Gordon Beyer, our ambassador, and the entire embassy staff were ready to tough it out and he gave me unlimited support. I found a vacant building for a cultural center, furnished it, hired staff, brought in books and opened the U.S. library which was crowded from day one. Relations with Makerere University were reestablished. A visiting American professor was brought in. Ugandan scholars, journalists, and other potential leaders were sent to the United States on international visitor grants. Two diverse and unique USIS projects stand out. We helped refurbish the National Theater of Uganda for a production of American playwright Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth. I directed an all-Ugandan cast, and the two leads in the production were honored that year with the Ugandan equivalent of Broadway's Tony awards. Working hand in hand with the Ugandan Sports Press Association, we helped organize the nation's first soccer tournament in years. For two weeks, a huge American flag flew atop the stadium next to the Ugandan flag as some 20,000 fans cheered for their teams.

The ambassador asked Mary Lee to revive the old international school, which had almost ceased to exist during Idi Amin's regime. As headmistress, she did a magnificent job in rehabilitating the school property, hiring teachers, and building a student population of 80 children of grammar school age. The teachers, students, and parents held a farewell ceremony in her honor. The Department of State awarded her a Tribute of Appreciation Certificate "in recognition of outstanding service as headmistress of the Lincoln School, Kampala, Uganda, from 1980 to 1982." Near the end of my tour, I received USIA's Superior Honor Award, "For outstanding performance in re-establishing an Agency office in the

turbulent, war-ravaged nation of Uganda and for consistent excellence and creativity in carrying out a program under severely restricted physical conditions and in an unpredictable and violent security environment.”

In 1982, my next assignment was Lagos, Nigeria to head the largest USIA operation in sub-Saharan Africa. I had the pleasure of managing a huge budget and a talented staff of American Foreign Service officers and Nigerian nationals. As a member of the country team, I worked closely with Thomas Pickering, recognized as one of America’s most capable ambassadors. We developed a comprehensive program on all aspects of public diplomacy. There were not only frequent meetings with the media, but Nigerian reporters were able to participate in press conferences with leading American officials in Washington on USIA’s world television network. There was a military coup, but it was relatively peaceful as those things go, and the change of government had little effect on U.S.-Nigerian relations. The post’s coverage of the 1984 United States presidential election for our Nigerian audience earned the USIA annual award for creativity. We were instrumental, too, in securing the support of American business interests in Nigeria for that country’s Olympic boxing team. My three year assignment in Nigeria came to an end in 1985. Thomas Smith had succeeded Tom Pickering as ambassador, and he hosted a gala farewell for us at his residence.

I was facing mandatory retirement in 1988 at the age of 65. I had been asked to return to Washington for my final tour of duty, but wanted to finish in the field, preferably in India where I had started my diplomatic career two decades earlier. The position of Branch Public Affairs Officer in Calcutta was open, professionally a step down from my previous assignment as Country PAO in Lagos, but at this stage a career move upward was not of paramount importance. Our posts in India have always had outstanding staffs of national personnel and Calcutta was among the better of the best. Our Indian staff’s relationships with the media, university and cultural communities was strong and enabled me to accept speaking engagements and meet local leaders throughout northeast India for exchanges of views on a wide variety of America-oriented subjects. I moderated a seminar for journalists on “Media Power in a Democracy;” conducted briefings for journalists on American foreign policy; inaugurated art exhibitions; addressed Rotary Club meetings, spoke to students and faculty at numerous colleges, met with members of the Indo-American Society and chaired a seminar on the American political system. We introduced Calcutta audiences to visiting American entertainers sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency. This included performances of the musical, “Once Upon A Mattress” and a country music band called the “New Grass Revival”.

Mary Lee met with Mother Teresa and offered to help by teaching English as a second language to novices coming from villages and she also raised money for the Holy Order. My biggest surprise in the Calcutta assignment was an invitation to play a role in film director Bijoy Chatterjee’s production of Dristidaan based on a story by Tagore. After getting clearance from our embassy in New Delhi, I accepted and was cast as an eminent British surgeon in India during the Victorian Era. I tried to save the eyesight of a young woman going blind because of lack of proper care. Mary Lee had a walk-on role as a patron at a chemist shop.

As scheduled, I retired in Calcutta in 1988 on August 24 when I reached the age of 65. While at agency headquarters in Washington to complete administrative processing, Mary Lee and I were invited by Ed Penney, the Near East South Asia area director, to his office for a retirement party attended by the staff. The director raised a glass of champagne as a toast in presenting me with the United States Information Agency's Career Achievement Award, and read the citation to the assemblage, "For over two decades of distinguished service as a Foreign Service Officer, serving with a high degree of professionalism in Asia and Africa, as well as in Canada and Washington, to promote a better understanding of his country among peoples abroad." I acknowledged the award by raising my glass to the scores of American Embassy, Consulate and Washington-based personnel who, along with scores of talented local employees in each of my postings, had made it possible for me to gain the career recognition.

After retirement, I served as president of the 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association, chairman of the Foreign Service Retirees Association of Florida, wrote a novel The Psy-Warriors, and was editor of the three volume Hell's Angels Newsletter—A World War II Retrospective. Looking back on three careers as a journalist, member of the military, and diplomat in the field of public affairs, if I had to do it all over again I wouldn't change a thing.

Addendum  
Added December 2012

As my wife and I enjoyed a drink before dinner one evening, talk turned to our time overseas in the Foreign Service. Mary Lee was at my side through 22 years at seven posts. We had been reviewing a written account of those memorable years as part of the larger family history. As we reminisced, it came to us that we had not included some happenings that were so bizarre or outlandish that they seemed out of place in our proper historical document.

My first posting was in 1966 as USIS Information Officer in Madras, India. We introduced ourselves to the Madras elite and diplomatic community by extending invitations to a reception in our new home. One of the invitations went to my counterpart at the consulate of the German Democratic Republic. In preparing the guest list, it hadn't occurred to me that the U.S. didn't have diplomatic relations with communist East Germany. The very puzzled GDR representative came to our reception and thanked me profusely. Rumors swirled about a possible change in American relations with the communist regime. Eventually, the incident was recognized as a friendly gesture by the new boy on the block, and U.S.-GDR relations returned to "business as usual."

A few weeks later, my wife invited some Indian ladies to tea. She had also supervised the preparation of small cakes and a large bowl of fruit punch. Soon after the guests arrived, she told the servant to bring in the cakes and the punch. He told the cook, "Madame said to bring the cakes in the punch." When the bowl arrived on the dining room table, numerous small cakes were bobbing around in the fruit punch. Maybe the guests assumed that the soaked cakes were a new American delicacy.

M. S. Subbulakshmi was the most revered exponent of Carnatic classical music in South India. We became friends with the vocalist and her husband, a Madras journalist, and were invited to attend her next concert. When that evening arrived, the USIS driver dropped us off and said he would be parked nearby. We passed through a garden and entered the building expecting to be asked for our tickets. Instead, we were profusely welcomed and garlanded. It soon became clear that this was not Subbulakshmi's recital hall but the site of a wedding celebration. Apparently, the bride and groom's families each thought we were on the other's guest list. It would have been awkward to hastily excuse ourselves, so we stayed for refreshments and then left. The driver made some calls and was given the correct location of the music hall. We arrived late but not too late to enjoy the talent of the breathtaking classical vocalist.

In 1979, shortly after the overthrow of the brutal dictator Idi Amin in Uganda, I was assigned to the American Embassy in Kampala as Public Affairs Officer to establish the first USIS presence since the severing of diplomatic relations seven years earlier. Our house was a two-story structure with electricity but no water. We hauled water piped from a spigot at the Embassy into a steel drum in the trunk of our car, and then pumped up to a tank on the roof of the house. For the upstairs bedroom, fortified as the "safe room," we made cardboard curtains out of the sides of boxes in which our belongings had been shipped. Food was also in short supply. When a Ugandan friend said he was buying a whole beef from a farmer and would sell us a side if we shared the cost we jumped at the opportunity. We hired a butcher to do the carving, and he was waiting in the garden when the meat arrived. Almost immediately, when the side of beef was placed on a table, two vultures swooped in. For the next half-hour, until the butcher finished his work, Mary Lee fought off the vultures with a kitchen broom. Considering the time and the place, acquiring the beef was more than worth the complication.

When we were in Lagos, Nigeria where I served as the Embassy PAO, we often hosted official visitors as guests for short stays in our residence. One such visitor approached us at breakfast one morning and, with an embarrassed smile, said, "I'm afraid I've broken your toilet seat." That afternoon a young Nigerian employee, recently hired I learned later, brought a new seat to the house and was directed to the bathroom by one of the household staff. When I came home that evening I inspected the job. The young man had installed the fixture upside down so that the lid was below the seat. Over the years, traveling from post to post, I carried a set of tools to make minor repairs in assigned housing. I reversed the installation.

In retrospect, not including those odd happenings in our memoir was clearly an oversight. They were very much part of our lives in the Foreign Service.

*End of memoir*