

## TUNISIA

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**JOSEPH WALTER NEUBERT**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Tunis (1950-1952)**

*Mr. Neubert was born in Montana. He attended Yale University and served in the US Army in World War II. Entering the Foreign Service in 1947, Mr. Neubert served as Political and Economic Officer in Yugoslavia and Tunisia. Following Russian language studies at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, Mr. Neubert was posted to Moscow, Soviet Union, where he served as Political and General Services Officer. From Moscow he was assigned to Tel Aviv as Political Officer, where he served during the 1957 Arab-Israeli War. This Oral History is a self interview, done in 2007.*

NEUBERT: In January 1950, I was posted to Algiers after home leave. After having gotten married in Rome (another story) and having spent some time in the United States, I ended up in Tunis. Not exactly Algiers, but not too far away. Anyway, I was “chief of the economic section” -- not hard to be since I was the whole economic section. However, everyone likes a grand title. The fact is that the local employees did all the work and I signed off on it.

These were still the days when the French controlled Tunisia -- Bourguiba was “in a villa outside Paris” -- and most of our work was with the French. It was only later when riots began and grenades were thrown that life became problematical.

We lived all the time in Tunisia in a French middle class enclave south of Tunis called Megrines Coteaux. Our neighbors were all French middle-class bureaucrats. The great virtue to our house was that it had been built by the Standard Oil manager before the war and had central (oil) heating. And never be confused by the ads in the tourist brochures about visiting “Sunny North Africa in Winter.” It can be hell. There is basically little heating -- and lots of cold wind. Even snow. So we -- with our central heating- were popular. But not without price. I became an expert on antique Esso burners and spent many an hour fiddling around, up to my elbows in oil, trying to ensure heat. Whatever else Esso had done, it had failed to leave a competent cadre behind on its machinery.

Nevertheless, this was better than my colleagues had. Mainly, they had no heat. They lived with kerosene heaters and hot rocks thrust between blankets just before bedtime.

Life in Tunisia -- basically a lovely place -- had a variety of interesting aspects. For one thing we were caught up in the rising Arab nationalism. On one occasion, I even received honorable mention in the New York Times when I "quelled a riot." This was scarcely accurate. One Saturday morning I was the duty officer in our offices across the square from the Residence Generale (of the French governor). Several hundred Arabs, men and women, emerged from the Souks (Arab area) two blocks away and, in the square before the Residence Generale and our office began to demonstrate in favor of Bourguiba and the Neo Destour party. They were, predictably, set upon by the riot police and scattered. All, I should say, of the women (some 200) fled to our second floor office. I let them in. Then, when the first French riot police (with Tommy guns) arrived, I stepped (with some trepidation) in front of the door and said (imitating Petain) "Ils ne passeront pas." Well, they didn't. Although there was a lot of teeth gashing. Finally, I said, "Take me to your leader." And while this question was being researched, I got back inside to try to persuade a couple of hundred agitated females that they could sit down and stop worrying. We even arranged coffee and tea for them.

When I went to see the Brigadier in charge of the troops, he readily agreed that he had no quarrel with the women and would permit me to escort them back to the Arab quarter. He then withdrew his troops and the ladies and I sent to the Arab quarter, where I bade them fond farewell.

Not all my contacts with the Arabs in Tunisia were as happy -- and incidentally I loved the French equally -- but that is just life. For example, in the early summer of 1951, I bought a lovely 20 x 14 foot Kairouan carpet -- all white. That fall, the U.S. Sixth Fleet paid a visit to Tunis -- that is to say that Admiral Gardener and his carrier, the Coral Sea, anchored some miles off shore (Tunis is a shallow road stand). Anyway, at one point the Admiral and many of his colleagues ended up at my house -- until about four A.M. -- when the last was fished out of the pool and sent on his way. As you can imagine, many an hors d'oeuvre was ground into my Kairouan carpet.

When I finally staggered out of bed the next morning, Ali (what else?) my cook, said that someone had stolen the carpet. He had not wished to disturb me, but he had washed the carpet and hung it out to dry, and someone had rolled it up and fled with it on a bicycle. So -- that was the last I ever saw of the Kairouan carpet. But I couldn't really blame my Arab cook/housekeeper.

Ali and his wife, Fatima (what else?), were delightful people and always determined to do their best. Arabs, as a rule, had little use for pets -- dogs, cats, whatever. One day a kitten appeared in the yard, terribly maltreated and near death. He (as it turned out) was spooked and I couldn't get near him. But I asked Ali to leave milk and eventually I was able to touch him and treat his really terrible wounds. Well, he -- Skookurn -- turned out to be a wonderful friend. He became a big Persian tomcat, who would come when called, shake hands, and generally be sociable. (What he did at night, I never inquired into.) Anyway, both Ali and Fatima became entranced with that beastie and begged me to let them keep it when we left. So we did (with reluctance; I'm still carting around one beloved old cat). Maybe there is some thing to cultural exchange, after all.

The Arab preference to ignore hard truths (rug stealing) is matched by a general preference to put the best possible face on any event. I recall one incident in Tunis that makes the point well. The Consul General had gone on leave.

Another vice consul, John Sabini, was asked (as a bachelor) to stay in the residence -- located near an Arab quarter- during the Consul General's absence. He was to occupy the house with one Arab servant, Ali (what else?). John was a decorated (Navy Cross) Marine veteran and had a handy .45 pistol. He told Ali that he (Ali) could carry his shotgun in the yard (seven-foot wall) but that he could only shoot into the air (John had no intention, if thievery should take place, of getting punctured by Ali).

Well, needless to say, a few nights later, thievery, or attempted thievery, did take place. John awoke one night to hear strange noises in the garden and, taking his .45, went to investigate. About the time he arrived in the garden, he heard a shotgun blast and finally found Ali standing over an Arab, wounded in the legs, who had been attempting to steal a hose. John was furious with Ali. "I told you to shoot into the air." Ali, looking properly contrite, said, "I did. But he jumped."

In Tunis, I came to know a lot about such curious things as the railroad system and the olive oil business. In those days, the State Department had a program of "basic reports" on almost everything economic. So I trudged around the railroads and examined the olive oil business. I even went to examine the potash business. But, mainly, I found that I was playing bridge with the French, who ran all these things. I surely didn't object -- even though I play bridge badly. But I was never sure I understood whatever was really going on.

The only report I ever wrote that amused me was one called "Tuna Fishing in Tunisia," and that was not because of special insight but onomatopoeia. (I have to admit that visits to the fishing traps were interesting.)

Upon one occasion in 1949, I went to the south with friends to visit an Arab potentate near the oasis of Tozeur, south of Gafsa. We had been invited by a friend from Mozambique and his wife. The friend had gone on ahead. His wife and I and my wife went together, in a big, bouncy Buick convertible. About a hundred kilometers from Gafsa, we hit a rock and broke the gas tank. From there on, we raced for Gafsa against a declining fuel level, but eventually had to plug the leak with cork and tar. This ruined the carburetor and we staggered into Gafsa hours late.

The railroad people in Gafsa took over and fixed the tank and carburetor. In the meantime, we went by taxi to Tozeur and spent the night at a lovely tiny French hotel overlooking the oasis. What a delightful place. The oasis sank perhaps one hundred feet under the desert. Perhaps a mile in diameter, it held thousands of people and trees (date palms). That evening, we listened to total quiet. The next morning we went down to total noise. And total flies. And total chaos. The question of total flies was the most important. The date palms were in sugar. And the flies were everywhere. They covered the faces of all- children and adults -- and us. We brushed them off -- the Arabs did not. And it didn't do us much good. So we got away as fast as we could.

The incident makes totally believable the story that the British in 1943 were able to pick up German soldiers fleeing Tunisia in Arab caravans simply by observing which “Arabs” brushed off the flies.

It was, incidentally, then that I had my first, last, and only experience with (a) sheep’s eyes and (b) riding a camel. With all deference to my hosts, neither is an experience I would wish to repeat. Of the two, riding a camel (terrible beasts) was perhaps the least irritating. I say irritating because camel hair is irritating, unless you are wearing cast-iron slacks. But the sheep’s eyes are psychically distressing. One sits around the large couscous tray in the tent of the chief. Then, as the guest of honor, one is given a sheep’s eye and other goodies -- which must be eaten before the meal begins. So you eat them. Well, I don’t like oysters either. So I ate the proffered delicacies-or swallowed them. Aside from that, the reception by the Bedouins could not have been warmer.

In the summer of 1951, my wife and I went to the Isle of Djerba. This is an island that was once a rest area for the Romans. In 1951, it was remote and isolated, the Roman bridge long since destroyed. We went across it with our car on a fishing boat. While we were there, our car was the only one on the island. And we never drove it. We walked. And what a lovely place it was. The population was perhaps half Arab (red fezzes) and half Ashkenazi Jews (black fezzes). And all of them were delightful people. We stayed at the largest (and only) hotel-about 10 rooms. We spent our time walking about the island and taking pictures. Today, I understand it is a new Miami Beach, with high-rise hotels. What a pity.

During my time in Tunisia, it was necessary each year from the members of the Consular Corps to go to the Bey of Tunis’s in-town palace to kiss his hand on his birthday. And for all of the local Arabs, French, etc. to do likewise. I remember well my first experience. I was standing, clad in a seersucker suit, in the courtyard as we inched our way forward under the unrelenting sun. Just in front of me was an English Consul, clad in those days in toupee and British Consular uniform, complete with medals. I observed, eventually, that all the medals were the same -- and there were several. I was so gauche as to inquire why they all looked alike. He looked pityingly at me and responded, “That’s reasonable, old boy. They are all alike. But it wouldn’t be appropriate to wear only one, would it?” I forgave him his view of this, when he advised me that it would be wise to seize the Bey’s hand and kiss my own thumb rather than a hand that had been slobbered over by so many thousands of other folk. So I did.

Some of the things that happen to you in the Foreign Service remain forever inexplicable. One evening, as I was preparing to leave the office at about seven p.m., I found I couldn’t close my safe, a four drawer cabinet. One drawer would not close. After a good deal of sweating and swearing (it was, after all, martini time), I managed to get the drawer out and found it was being blocked by a small canvas bag. I took out the bag and the safe then worked properly. Satisfied on that point (among other things, I was the Security Officer), I turned to examine the bag.

Well! It contained \$9,980 in twenty dollar gold pieces! After counting it, I tossed it in the safe and went home for my martini.

The next morning, I reported my “find” to the Consul General and asked if this was something we knew about. He knew nothing of it, nor did our limited files cast any light on the subject. So we told the State Department about all this and asked for (what else?) instructions. Some months later we were informed the State Department knew nothing of the matter, and it was suggested we forward the “trove” to the Treasury. We might have done so (and, indeed, eventually did), but at this point a Tunisian citizen showed up and told us that he had just been released from a French prison where he had been incarcerated since 1945 for selling gold on the black market in Tunis. He further said he had been acting as an agent of the “American Military Mission” in Tunis and had been apprehended while selling two twenty dollar gold pieces out of \$10,000 in gold pieces given him by the mission. He said he had been told the French had returned the other 498 gold pieces to the “Americans.” What the Tunisian wanted was not the money, simply a statement that we (the U.S. government) had asked him to do what he did so that he could clear his name. Well! We went back to the State Department and asked for a check with Defense and CIA (the old OSS files) to see if some such statement could be made (we were convinced that this was indeed the explanation of where the gold had come from. After all, we had inherited our safe cabinets from the Military Mission).

More months passed. Finally, we were told that no one in Washington knew anything about the whole business. So would we please stop fooling around, send the Tunisian on his way, and ship the gold to the Treasury. So we did.

Not everything in Tunis was fun and games. At one point the Consular Officer had to go off to Malta to replace an ailing officer. I had to take over his duties in Tunis. Most of this was routine. But not all. One day, I had to decide whether a visa applicant (a Hungarian, married to an American citizen) had joined the Communist Party in Hungary in 1947 of his own free will. I decided he had (and refused his visa) since Ferenc Nagy and the Smallholders were still in power at that time. The applicant in question went home and hanged himself. His wife, naturally, took umbrage. And his brother, a Tunisian resident, came to my office and, pulling an automatic pistol, wanted to shoot me. In the end, he didn't, but I had many a bad moment wondering whether I had done the right thing.

On a lighter vein, I also had troubles with the old business of “seamen and shipping: at this time. There weren't too many American ships in Tunis then. But there were some. And, off one of them, came a stranded American seaman. I became aware of him when he was delivered to my office by two policemen one morning. He was tousled and hung-over, and clad only in trousers. No socks and no shoes.

It seems his ship had sailed the day before. He had been found, as is, in the park -- would I take care of him? Or should they put him in the clink?

I talked to the sailor. He had no documents, but I decided he was for real and said I would accept responsibility for him. There began the difficulty. The cops vanished. I gave my boy a carton of cigarettes and bought him new shoes, socks, and T-shirt, and told him to hold fast until I got him a passage.

The next morning, I had the same cops, the same sailor, the same pants, back in my office. He had obviously sold the cigarettes, shirt, shoes, and socks, for more booze and here he was again. The French police were very understanding. They said they would, as friends, put him away in the prison lock-up. I agreed. They did, and there he stayed until a U.S. flag ship came in, when I could insist (legally) that he be taken as a work-a-way. Even that didn't go smoothly. I had arranged to let him out the day before, and he immediately came around to beard me in my office (not, I suppose, surprising to my colleagues who kept reminding me he was from New Haven and I was a Yale graduate) and pursued me around my desk several times as I tried to make him see light -- and me, an escape. Eventually, he "worked away," and I breathed several sighs of relief.

My career in Tunis came to a premature end. In 1949 in Belgrade, I had applied for German language and area training. During my time in Tunis I pursued a course (in French) of German language training. Then in February of 1952, I received a telegram from Washington -- report to Washington by March 1 for Russian language and area training. I laughed. Surely a misprint; I had never applied for Russian training. We packed up and I rehearsed my new-found German. But, in Washington, it turned out there was no misprint. The Foreign Service Institute had had one too many German applicants and one too few Russian and had decided that, since I already knew Serbo-Croat, "I wouldn't mind." Anyway, mind or not, I started on March 1 to study Russian, and began a love affair that still enchants me.

**JOHN T. BENNETT**  
**Assistant Program Officer, USAID**  
**Tunis (1957-1960)**

*John T. Bennett was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1929. When he was nine, his family moved to Washington, D.C.. He attended Sidwell Friends High School in Washington, and graduated from Harvard in 1950. After receiving his undergraduate degree in Government, he studied at University of California Berkeley, where he received a master's, then a Ph.D. in agricultural economics. He has also served abroad in Vietnam, Guatemala City and the Dominican Republic. His personal account was given in September of 1996.*

BENNETT: Late in 1957 I went back to finish the basic training course, and took three months of French. We students fought the system, which was actually very good in teaching language effectively. The problem was the attitude of the staff who were simply unpleasant. Then I was assigned as assistant to the Admin Counselor in Tehran. I was not overjoyed, as I wanted to see if my economics was of any use in the Service. My old boss thought it was a terrible assignment and somehow it got changed -- I was detailed to what later became AID and assigned as Assistant Program Officer (Economist) in the mission in Tunis. I got a couple of months working in the Washington headquarters and went.

We had a good sized aid program in Tunisia, on the order of a hundred technicians and many technical assistance projects covering the waterfront of agriculture, industry, banking,



handicrafts, public administration, education, etc. There was also a sizeable commercial import program -- financing for such imported necessities as petroleum -- and food for work and food for sale under PL 480. My job was to provide the economic rationale for a program of that size, though ultimately the justification had to be political.

The latter was relatively easy -- the French were fighting the independence movement next door in Algeria and the war came over the border every few days. On one of the first few days we were in the Claridge Hotel (a rundown and misnamed dump, but the best there was) in downtown Tunis, we were kept inside because there was a huge demonstration and parade. The wind blew and the dust swirled and the crowd roared, hang De Gaulle, get the French out, etc. It was powerful and frightening. We were under curfew for fear of an incident involving a foreigner. The French management of the hotel was also suspicious of us, perhaps out of fear as much as anything. At night, the Tunisian army put up barricades on the roads and stopped every car, looking at papers and shining lights in the passengers' faces. Scary.

The economic justification was not so simple. The country was poor, but the drain of its military effort and the general upset made rapid growth problematic. It became a holding operation, waiting for the war next door to end so that we could perhaps do some serious development work.

Basically, the war drove events in Tunisia and we had to wait. We got a few programs going, but the Tunisians were very suspicious of the US, not without justification. Moreover, their domestic politics made it difficult to be seen cooperating. I got to know quite a few Tunisian and Algerian professionals. They were understandably bitter about the French, but less than I would have expected. They also expected more of the US than they were going to get. Individually, however, they could not have more cordial.

Tunisia at the time was authoritarian with Bourguiba still running things pretty much out of his hat. Many of the ministers and senior civil servants were competent professionals, but the government was generally not very competent and was focused on domestic control and Algerian political issues. It was frustrating for us who wanted more to happen on our watch than was likely.

We found a house in a suburb called Amilcar on the train line out to the headland and the old Arab village called Sidi Bou Said, a whitewash and blue trim traditional architecture that was considered the most desirable place to live. Amilcar was between Carthage and President Bourguiba's house and we often saw him strolling on the main road with a contingent of assistants and bodyguards. Our house was on a cliff called the Falaise Rouge, for its red soil. We looked across the Bay of Tunis to a peninsula on the other side, perhaps 5-10 miles across. It gave one the sense of detachment from the rest of the world, although there were a few houses nearby on the inland side.

There were the ruins of a Roman bath down the hill on one side and the ruins of a Roman cathedral down the hill on the other side. Carthage was a hill of ruins only a ten minute walk away. It was covered with French villas used mainly as summer places -- many stood empty at the time because the French found life increasingly difficult and were leaving.

When it rained, the dirt often washed away to reveal Roman coins and bits of glass or ceramics. There was also the remains of a Phoenician port at the bottom of the hill. It seemed tiny, hardly big enough for a rowboat, but perhaps it had shrunk over the years.

We decorated the house in wild colors. The floors were old tile with Arabic designs. Slippery when wet and hard when fallen on (our daughter lost one tooth on them), they forced us to seek a way to liven the place up. We painted the walls in one room bright red and blue. Another was green with white trim. The walls themselves were poorly finished, so the color also distracted from their disrepair.

We had all got the flu while in the hotel and were dreadfully sick. I have never felt so bad -- I ached for a week. Then I got hepatitis shortly after moving into the house, which laid me up for a week. I felt bad enough so that I thought I had a relapse of flu, but the identity of my illness became clear when I turned yellow. The illness kept me in bed for a month and sent me to Tripoli twice, to get a medical checkup at the hospital at Wheelus Air Force base. It gave me a chance to see lots more roman ruins.

My first boss in Tunis was a German jew who was very smart, very demanding, and very prickly. I suppose the relationship was good, but it was never comfortable. He was irate that I tried to learn Arabic, arguing that my French was imperfect enough so that I should concentrate on it. He was the one who taught me about deadlines. He set them, with plenty of room, but then he accepted absolutely no excuses for failing to make them. Not hard to understand, but the first time I was late was the last. He was replaced after a year by a much more easy going man and I enjoyed working for him.

I also spent a lot of time working for the Director and two Deputy Directors. As the economist, I had to pass on or provide the justification for many things. It was a strange experience to be that junior and that powerful.

I got to know the staff of the mission (called the US Operations Mission or USOM, the predecessor of AID) quite well. One of my favorites was a soil conservation engineer from Wyoming who was out directing a program to create low bench terraces to prevent erosion. The terraces were built up by making a few passes with a plow running along the contour, a very efficient process. The other secret was to keep the goats and sheep off the land, so that the vegetation survived. With vegetation, the terraces prevented a heavy rain from washing the soil away and creating spectacular mud rivers in the stream beds. Where there were no terraces, we saw some that were miles across and 10-20 feet deep.

He also pushed the construction of small earth dams built with hand tools in washed areas. This was part of a food-for-work program, in which surplus wheat was used to pay laborers for the work -- getting something for a make-work program. My colleague in the program office had developed this program. He was a member of the former Paris USOM, as were many of the other Tunis officials. They constituted a separate group within the Mission and were a bit difficult to deal with. He was also a Christian Scientist and a bit sanctimonious.

I was particularly an outsider, because I was State Department, as well as new boy and very young as well. Similarly, the Embassy was standoffish because we were not part of their crew. Still, we did develop friends around the Mission and the Embassy.

Outside of servants and Tunisian employees in the office, we did not have as much contact with Tunisians as one would have liked and expected. This was a discovery that repeated itself in other posts. One simply got wrapped in the routine of the office and that meant dealing with other Americans or writing for them. The American foreign aid program had developed its own methods and procedures and they were highly bureaucratic. Some of this was the consequence of sending people out who had very little sense of how economic development takes place. Mission directors were political appointees, and some were blatantly political with nothing else to recommend them. Congress then got into the act and insisted on management controls centralized in Washington that then became a game to get around.

At the time, I thought the system was reasonably good. One created a rationale for the program that was developed for a particular country. Later, however, I would decide that the system got bureaucracy bound. At the time, I got deeply involved in trying to make the system work.

My boss got me involved in this, through his program meetings with the division chiefs, who came seeking money for their proposals for the following year. Each program had its own plan, with activities and a budget. Part of the problem was that the US imposed its own requirements on the foreign country which rarely has the same ideas about what it wants to do and is often unwilling to follow the procedures the US advisors suggest.

The meetings were often fairly tense. Division chiefs were the peers of my boss and the Mission Director or the Deputy was put in the role of mediating or adjudicating. Few of them were anywhere near as bright as my boss nor as articulate and logical. They often felt dreadfully abused. That made it harder for junior officers like me to navigate the perilous waters of such personal relationships.

We got some advantage, however, when working with some of the juniors in the divisions, we learned that things were going on which the division chief didn't know about. One guy we discovered came in in the morning, disappeared all day, returned late in the day, and spent the intervening time in a bar. It was no wonder that little was happening in his project.

Tunisian society was pretty badly fractured. The departure of the French (and Italians, the other large European group) and then of the Jews took the middle out of the pyramid of skills. The Tunisians would learn in time, but in the interim, there was a hole. Muslim fundamentalism was always there but was growing in this period of uncertainty. Still, the common man was reasonably well treated, and there was little violation of civil rights that was common in so many parts of the world.

All of this had its comic aspects. While I was being treated for hepatitis, my doctor simply up and returned to France without saying anything. One day he made a house call and the next, he was gone. It suggested that the French were feeling a lot more worried than appeared on the surface. And of course, the war in Algeria always raised the possibility that they would be attacked or

held hostage.

Many of the Tunisian elite probably felt closer to the French than their Muslim brothers, but it was not politic to say anything. Moreover, their actions had to be guided by how they would be seen by other Muslims. They had to be very careful. Such situations allow for very little tolerance.

I was not sad to leave Tunis, as I was looking forward to something a little more stately. We left at the end of the school year, assigned to Washington for 3 months of something they called mid-career training. Having been in the service only 5 years, that seemed to me to be stretching the point. On the other hand, I took it as a compliment -- that I must be doing something right. I later learned that they were having trouble getting enough people to fill the course.

**RICHARD N. VIETS**  
**Information Officer, USIS**  
**Tunis (1957)**

*Ambassador Richard N. Viets was born in 1930 in Vermont, served in the U.S. Army and went to Georgetown University. He joined USIA in 1955 and served in Afghanistan, Tunisia and after a break reentered the Foreign Service in 1962 serving in Japan, India, Romania, Israel and was ambassador to Tanzania and Jordan. He was interviewed by C.S. Kennedy 1990-1992.*

*Q: Going on to Tunis. What were you doing there?*

VIETS: I used to talk about myself as deputy head of the USIA office in Tunis. In fact there were two of us there! As I said, this was just at the moment of Tunisian independence so the Tunisians were scrambling about looking for assistance in every single area of governmental and private activity you could think of. So our agency operation there was a very busy one. Lots and lots of people were coming from the United States.

*Q: Tunisia had gained its independence fairly peacefully.*

VIETS: That's right. Habib Bourguiba was the great figure at that point and for many years after.

*Q: My understanding is that he had a very strong positive feeling towards the United States.*

VIETS: He did. He was a tremendous admirer of President Eisenhower, who was in office at that point. Despite what one would have to say had been a spotty, if not questionable, record of American subservience to French colonial policy in North Africa for a considerable period leading up to Tunisian independence, Bourguiba was a great admirer of many aspects of the United States and its institutions. In consequence, we had ready access to him and, I like to think, a certain amount of influence.

Our access to him was immeasurably enhanced by the fact that we had on our staff at that point, the USIA staff, an extraordinary woman who was Polish, a displaced person, who Bourguiba had almost "adopted" as a daughter. There was a period, I recall, when he would not receive anyone who couldn't talk to him in French or Arabic, without her acting as an interpreter. This lady, I should add for the record, subsequently, became my wife. So I have a certain bias in my description of events. But she played a very, very interesting role during that period in our relationship not only with Bourguiba, but in a sense even more importantly with the FLN political leadership. But that is another story and one which I don't want to get into here.

*Q: I would like whatever you can say. There was a tremendous debate within the American government over what we should do about Algeria because you had the European Bureau saying, "Look, we don't want to mess around with NATO, we have to keep the French happy." This led to our problems with Indonesia too. Yet at the same time the colonial situation, even in those days it was pretty obvious that this thing was not going to go on. Algeria was hopelessly divided with a very strong colonial element there. What were we doing?*

VIETS: Your characterization is absolutely accurate. The Europeanists in the State Department were the dominant force until quite late in the day in North Africa, in our relationships with the incipient North African independent governments and institutions. The historians may quarrel with me, but it seems to me that this period marked the beginning of a structural change in the American government's pro-French orientation of "well, it is their backyard and we shouldn't mess in it since we have all these NATO obligations, etc." Also a lot of just plain Francophonism, if one can coin that word, I think drove a great deal of our North African policy. But a seminal event in my memory at that time was a speech on the floor of the Senate by a man named Jack Kennedy.

*Q: Who was the Senator from Massachusetts.*

VIETS: Who was the Senator from Massachusetts. I think that speech was in 1954. It rang alarm bells that the law of diminishing returns was beginning to set in by our almost blind support of a very myopic French colonial policy in Northern Africa. I don't think that is overstating the situation.

*Q: No, I don't either.*

VIETS: In later years of my career, as you know, I spent a certain amount of time working in Israel and Jordan and I saw so many segments of Israeli society acting, behaving, thinking in much the same manner that many of the French "Colon" did during the 1950's.

In any case, in answer to your question, obviously we had to adhere to the policy lines laid down by our political masters in Washington. But I can recall vigorous dissent messages flowing back and forth for the first months of my time there. Our mission was still a consulate general. We had not been elevated to an embassy, even though the country was independent. Again, our Embassy in Paris, I remember, had a hand in insuring that this did not happen for many months.

*Q: To get a little feel of the atmosphere, did you sort of look upon the Embassy in Paris as being*

*overly sophisticated?*

VIETS: We certainly looked upon it as being an extension of the policy interests of the Quai d'Orsay. One has always to understand that emotions in such circumstances can run very high. And they did! But you see these issues through rather small sets of political, social binoculars. And as I look back on it, I realize this was really my first introduction to the frustrations of disagreeing with policies handed down from on high. I don't want to put too fine a point on this or mislead anyone who reviews these records, but in our defiance of Washington and our embassy in Paris I think we sailed pretty close to the edge in Tunis during this period in finding creative ways to deal with the "outlaw" FLN leadership in Tunis through various emissaries, including Bourguiba. My late wife was very active in this regard...she wasn't a US citizen, so she wasn't under the same constraints we were. But we did not spend a great deal of time informing Washington of those activities.

*Q: This is the type of thing that I think is good for somebody to understand the record, that there is an awful lot going on out there that just won't get in the record. Most people are individuals and have their own agendas and see things. The Secretary of State may make his orders, but the written ones are rather meager out in the field. How about with the Tunisians? Here you are with USIA talking about America. This must have been rather difficult. It is hard for us to get away from our independence as a former colony and then to sort of cool it when we talk about French colonialism.*

VIETS: It was extremely difficult and again I was so often reminded in the last years of my career...working with the Israel-Arab conflict and the Palestinian problem...of exactly the same dilemma of having to work within the constraints of a policy laid down by the President and the Secretary of State and the Congress looking over your shoulder constantly and constantly interfering -- policies with which you found yourself sometimes in major disagreement. It creates plenty of creative tension among the professions! And on occasion when you felt yourself veering too far towards the edge you ask yourself, "Should I get out?" You are still a loyal soldier, but where do you draw the line?

*Q: With the Tunisians was this coming up?*

VIETS: Yes, constantly.

*Q: Every time you saw a Tunisian, Algeria came up.*

VIETS: Absolutely. As I say, you had to be creative while still attempting to be fundamentally loyal to policy. We were able... and I think more so perhaps in those days than now because there weren't quite so many layers of people then between you and the senior policy level in the Department and the White House... to make our arguments and then hope that those arguments were registering and getting through. And over a period of time the policy changes, of course. In the case of Tunisia how much of a policy correction was due to our efforts as opposed to broader considerations of policy, is somebody's doctoral thesis.

*Q: You certainly were absorbing in these two years two quite different atmospheres.*

VIETS: That's right.

*Q: When did you leave Tunis?*

VIETS: I left in July or August, 1957. I had become frustrated by the US Information Agency. It seemed to me that it was becoming very sclerotic in its management of itself. In those days there were still a great many hangers on from the old Office of War Information, in senior managerial positions of the Information Agency. These people were all approaching retirement but they were still running things. There were a lot of cold warriors. There were a lot of people who weren't, in my judgment, terribly competent. It seemed to me that it was an organization that had a dead hand. I became very impatient with it. I was young and impatient in any case. So I resigned. I had enjoyed a very rapid run with them. They were very liberal in their promotions and all that. But I decided I did not have the patience to wait for these people to move on into retirement.

I also had a very itchy foot and was still a bachelor. I had been exposed on several occasions over the last couple of years to a government program called the Office of International Trade Fairs. This organization operated in the most wonderful free-wheeling manner you can imagine. The GAO, General Auditing Office, would jump off the roof today if any office ran itself like the Trade Fairs office did in those days. I thought this would be great fun for a couple of years to just wheel and deal around the world putting up trade fairs. So I joined them and spent the next two years hurtling around the globe in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, doing this.

**VINCENT W. BROWN**  
**Assistant Program Officer**  
**Tunis (1957-1959)**

*Vincent W. Brown was born and raised in the San Francisco area of California. He graduated from the public schools there. He attended UCLA for one year before being drafted into the Navy. At the end of his service, he returned to UCLA and graduated in 1949 with a degree in business administration. After graduation, he and two friends toured Europe, where he began his involvement in foreign service. He has also served in Zaire, South Korea, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The interview was conducted by W. Haven North in May of 1997.*

*Q: What was the ambiance like in Tunisia when you arrived?*

BROWN: Tunisia had just won its independence from France. The situation was still tense when we arrived. French troops remained in the country. We were housed in a charming villa in a suburb of Tunis called Gammarth. In order to go to work every day we had to go through a number of road blocks manned by Tunisian soldiers. Fortunately, after about six months the French soldiers were withdrawn without major incident.

The Tunisians were very friendly, and easy to work with. Our major contact was the Planning Ministry. The French remained very much involved in the operation of the Tunisian government and many of the technical positions were filled by French civil servants until Tunisians could be trained to take over.

*Q: Given the circumstances, what kind of a “ development program ” did the Mission run. What activities were assigned to you?*

BROWN: USOM (United States Operating Mission) as it was called in those days, ran a development program of useful activities in areas in which the new Tunisian government could use help. It was not an integrated development program as we know them today. The major fields were agriculture, education, and public administration. The French were very much the number one donor with their position further reinforced by French nationals placed in operating positions within the Tunisian government ministries. We cooperated informally, but discreetly with the French, since the Tunisians were deadly serious about controlling their own destiny once they were independent.

As assistant program officer I performed the usual program office duties: preparing budgets, helping design projects, preparing study missions to the US, as well as preparing reports on our aid program. In addition, I was given two additional responsibilities that I enjoyed immensely.

The first involved the launching and execution of the Work Relief Program (the first of its kind). It was designed as a field test to see if it was feasible to use “food for work” -- in this case sacks of surplus US wheat. Working with the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture, we developed a number of pilot projects in the field (which were later replicated throughout the country) which employed farm labor to do simple projects involving manual labor -- such as terracing, dikes or small earthen dams for water spreading, improvement of local markets, simple farm to market roads connecting villages with the main roads so that the export of farm products was facilitated. The local farmers were paid in surplus food furnished by the USDA. The government put up the money for the simple tools, and paid the local supervisors, and record keepers. (I don't think we had PL 480 yet.) Tunisia is a small country, and the infrastructure in roads and communications was relatively well developed, so I visited regularly most of the rural projects, met with local organizers, etc. Reporting was simple -- numbers of workers employed, kilometers of rural road improved, number of water spreading dikes installed, local markets improved, etc. I don't recall any estimates in terms of additional olive trees planted, more wheat grown, etc.; but after the first year we could see the impact of these simple activities on village life.

My second special assignment was to work with USIS to assure that our developmental activities were reported to the Tunisian people on the radio and in the local press. The USIS staff was very energetic and had good relations with their Tunisian counterparts. The Tunisians were very cooperative and our assistance effort was easily publicized and well received by the people.

Our USOM Director was a political appointee -- Admiral Elliott Strauss (retired). Although Strauss was new at the development business, he was a fine individual and very intelligent. With a very experienced Don MacPhail (Bureau of the Budget and the Marshall Plan) as the Deputy the USOM ran smoothly. My direct boss and head of the Economic Analysis and Program



Division, was Charles Breecher, an economist of great talent and imagination. I learned a great deal about government operations from both of them. I worked in French in all my contacts with the Tunisian administration. Even at the village level most officials spoke French; Arabic was not essential.

We loved Tunisia, but on completion of my two years there, I had been overseas about ten years, and the Agency decided that I needed a tour in Washington, DC. I had never served at headquarters, and I approached my US assignment with some trepidation. However, the US experience provided solid foundation for future overseas work -- i.e. learning realistically what it takes to get things done and how to do them in the Washington setting.

**SLATOR CLAY BLACKISTON, JR.**  
**Chief, Economic Section**  
**Tunis (1958-1960)**

*Slator Clay Blackiston, Jr. was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1918. A Foreign Service Officer, he served in the Netherlands, Germany, Haiti, Palestine, Washington, DC, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and India. He was interviewed in 1992 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

Q: *What were you doing in Tunis?*

BLACKISTON: I was head of the economic section. I arrived there, as I described in the earlier interview, by ship from Palermo having driven from Beirut to the toe of Italy and then ferrying across to Palermo. At that time the major development was, of course, the Algerian rebellion against the French which was going on full bore. While I was there there was an attack on the Tunisian border town of Sakiet Sidi Youssef.

Q: *This was a major political incident.*

BLACKISTON: It was. The FLN, the Front for National Liberation for Algeria, was using this as a staging area. The French had built an electrified fence along part of the Tunisian-Algerian border, but this had been breeched of course. Bob Blake, head of the political section, and I and some others went there to see what this town looked like after this attack. It had been leveled. I guess you would call it a village.

The first Ambassador I had when I was there was Lewis Jones, the second was Newby Walmsley. Walmsley had been DCM in Moscow and he was really a Russian expert. There was a big emphasis then on using PL 480 funds to loan to the Tunisian government for the purpose of paying workers in grain to do reforestation and other projects. Tunisia was of importance to us, far outweighing its actual power as an Arab country, because of the fact that Bourguiba was relatively well disposed towards Israel. At least he was not in the forefront of countries that were opposing Israel and this we considered to be a big point in his favor. So Tunisia was favored with a lot of foreign assistance.

Bourguiba had made big efforts to modernize the country and also to liberate women. I think, if I recall, a law was passed prohibiting plural marriage; also, he encouraged women to eliminate the veil. This was not entirely successful; most women wore a head covering and they would hold the edge of it in their teeth, which covered part of their face. There were many liberated Tunisian women. There were a number of Tunisian artists who were quite popular and well-known; a lot of their works appeared on Tunisian postage stamps. There was a lot of infighting then in the Neo-Destour party with Bourguiba seeking to maintain his preeminence. He had become -- there was a lot of self-glorification. He had built his own mausoleum down in a place called Monastir, which was his birthplace. It was a domed structure which I saw. Of course, his picture was on postage stamps. I remember one Tunisian, who was teaching me Maghrebian Arabic, asked if pictures of living American presidents were on postage stamps and, of course, I told him they weren't. You could see what he was getting at. Bourguiba was known as Al Mujahid Al Kabir, that was his Arabic title which means "The Great Struggler"; and of course he had spent time in Tunisian prisons under the French.

*Q: You were saying that Tunisia was not a very exciting place at the time, but what about this political crisis? Were you privy to whether we were leaning on the Tunisians to cut out their support for the Algerian revolutionaries or were we quietly saying it was a good idea? How were we treating that?*

BLACKISTON: Well we had liaison with the FLN representative in Tunis. He was a quite well-known person, so well known that I have forgotten his name. But I knew him. The person who conducted this was Bob Blake, the head of the political section; there were constant interchanges, presumably mostly to get their attitude towards things. We certainly had not taken an official position favoring Algerian independence, I think we were trying to sort of straddle the fence. You may remember that Bobby Kennedy came out favoring Algerian independence.

*Q: Well actually Senator Kennedy, John F., came out in about 1958.*

BLACKISTON: Yes, that's right. So there was sort of an equivocal position. But we did have close liaison. This FLN representative spoke quite good English. Perhaps he had been educated in the United States -- he had an American wife. I think on a couple of occasions when Bob had to be out of town, I was assigned to go and convey some point or other to him, but I was not the person; it was the head of the political section.

*Q: Were we under attack by the French because our Embassy was being too friendly to this movement?*

BLACKISTON: I think they were very suspicious of us. You see at that time the French were in Bizerte, that was a French naval base; ultimately they got the French out, the French had to leave. We were much concerned about that, as to what use that base might be put, but of course nothing really bad happened out of that. Now...I have sort of lost my train of thought here. I can cite an example of where French suspicions came into play. Oil, of course, exists in Algeria and it was being developed in southeast Algeria not too far from the Tunisian border -- I beg your pardon because Tunisia doesn't go that far south. It was farther south than the southernmost part

of Tunisia. I wanted to go to visit those oil fields and the Embassy was prepared to authorize me to go to see these oil fields but the French turned me down, would not permit me to go. I can't imagine what they were afraid of, but nevertheless they wouldn't permit it.

*Q: How were these two Ambassadors, Lewis Jones and Newby Walmsley? How did they run the Embassy?*

BLACKISTON: Well Lewis Jones had been to Harvard and the head of the CIA, Station Chief, had been to Harvard and I think they had been there together, as well as my predecessor. Do you want me to cite names?

*Q: Sure.*

BLACKISTON: Well Frank Coolidge was the CIA Station Chief, and an awfully nice guy; who had been, incidentally, in the French Foreign Legion. Apparently he had gotten out; as rumors had it, this was the time of President Coolidge, somehow through his family's intercession with Coolidge they got him out which is quite unusual. At least that's the story. And he was in OSS during the war and as I understand it he was dropped into the maquis. On reflection I don't think he could have been a contemporary with Lewis Jones because I think he would have been older. He was a good friend of ours. His wife was also a Coolidge, they were from Boston. My predecessor was a fellow named Jimmy Burns, and he had been at Harvard and I think he had been a contemporary of Jones. And the number two economic officer that worked with me, Tom Smith, was also from Harvard. So it was very heavy Harvard laden group there. Now as for Newby Walmsley, he came without much knowledge of the Arab world, but Tunisia is a little bit apart. Actually the government officials don't, I guess it is like in Algeria, really speak Arabic, they speak French all the time. He and I got along quite well together; he was very kind to me and I liked him a great deal.

*Q: How did the two Ambassadors get along with Bourguiba from your viewpoint?*

BLACKISTON: I think they got along o.k. Bourguiba, you know, was probably showing some signs of the mental problems which later caused his being deposed. I think he was something of a megalomaniac; he did have some good ideas. Like so many reformers in the Muslim world, they often don't quite succeed. It has happened in Afghanistan, it has happened with the Shah in Iran, it has happened in other countries; you might even say under Ataturk in Turkey where the rank and file adhere to their religious beliefs and are not prepared to change.

We were the six who opened the school, and I was there for twenty-two months learning Arabic - I thought. In fact, we were all taught to speak a dialect which is fully usable within perhaps one hundred kilometers of Tangier, and since Tangier is on the northwestern coast of the continent, it doesn't really take in an awful lot.

**RICHARD E. UNDELAND**  
**Radio Officer, Assistant Information Officer, USIS**

## **Tunis (1958-1962)**

*Richard E. Undeland was born in 1930 in Omaha, Nebraska. He became deeply interested in Foreign Affairs during World War II. He graduated from Harvard in 1952 with a degree in English Literature and received an MBA from Stanford. One of his professors at Stanford nominated him for a scholarship of unrestricted study in Egypt, which he did from 1955-56. In addition, he has also served in Saigon, Algiers, Beirut, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Tunis. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy between July and September of 1994.*

*Q: What did you do next?*

UNDELAND: I was transferred to Tunis as the Assistant Radio Officer, in fact the Assistant Information Officer, but it was easier to justify this new position if it were somehow tied to producing radio programs for the Voice of America. I spent the next four years there, 1958-1962.

*Q: What was the situation in Tunisia at that time?*

UNDELAND: Tunisia had obtained its independence in 1956, although the agreement permitted French troops to remain stationed for a while at the air base next to the Tunis airport and at the naval base in Bizerte, both sore points to Tunisians. The United States was first country to recognize independent Tunisia and in 1957, our economic aid began, followed in about 1960 by military assistance. It was the first Arab country to accept the Peace Corps, in 1965, I think. Thus, we had from the outset the closest of ties with Tunisia, with a history which predated the 1956 independence. In 1942 while in jail, Bourguiba sent his famous letter to Habib Thameur, one of his colleagues in the independence struggle, who was questioning whether it might not be best for the Tunisian independence movement to line up with the Germans, in order to fight the known enemy, the French and their colonialism. Remember Tunisia was then occupied by the Germans. Bourguiba said, absolutely not, and he presciently predicted several things that came to pass. They were: relatively soon after the war, Tunisia was going to gain its independence, but it was still going to want and need a close relationship with France. There were too many good things for Tunisia that would come out of this tie, but reliance only on France would be risky and not in Tunisia's interest. There had to be an alternate, and it could only be the United States, which would emerge from the war victorious and the world's most powerful country. The U.S. would be a close friend. He was right on all counts. Bourguiba, that bigger than life figure, forcefully and carefully played the U.S. card, so that he and his leadership benefited mightily from this relationship with us. But I feel the U.S. benefited from him as well.

*Q: There was an American diplomat before your time, Homer Doolittle or something...*

UNDELAND: Hooker Doolittle, a colorful name and a colorful person.

*Q: Hooker Doolittle was the consular office who befriended Bourguiba when he was...*

UNDELAND: Absolutely. He was our Consul General in Tunis after World War II and played a not insignificant role in the independence struggle, not hiding his pro-Bourguiba, pro-

independence feelings. There is now a Hooker Doolittle Street in Tunis, which speaks to his importance in the minds of Tunisians. Sympathetic to Bourguiba, convinced he and his group would achieve Tunisia's independence, Doolittle helped give the Tunisians a confidence they might otherwise not have had. He was a diplomat who made a difference. As a sidelight, my office as head of USIS when I returned 30 years later -- in the center of the city directly across from the French Chancery and looking out on the main square -- had also been Hooker Doolittle's. (By the way, that office also has its unsavory past, for it had been that of commander of the Gestapo during the Germans' six month occupation of Tunis in 1942-43, but that is another story.) From this prominent place just across a small street from their Embassy, Doolittle was seen by the French as a thorn in their side. He was prickly, stubborn and never wavered. Traceable in part to Doolittle were the early American recognition, the economic assistance program and Bourguiba's sense of kinship with America.

*Q: What was the Tunisia like that you found, and how did we fit into it?*

UNDELAND: I stepped into a very welcoming and positive official atmosphere. The U.S. was respected and wanted by the new Tunisia, which needed to do so much and do it all rapidly. Independence institutions and priorities had to be quite different from those of colonial times. Very little was in place, where all you needed to do was change the name on the door. It needed leadership and institutions and the sense of Tunisians not only doing things but also putting their mark and character on them. It was a heady time for those who had worked for independence and yet very often daunting, and even humbling. They believed they could do it all at once, as did Bourguiba, at least the public Bourguiba, and we were the key supporter.

But the closeness and warmth of official relations did not carry over nearly as much as one might have expected into cultural and social and personal arenas. I'm not sure I understand all of the reasons, but some of the wariness and negative views of the U.S. came from the French educated elite and went back to ideas formed during their days in France, mostly as students, and their taking on the coloring of the anti-communist French left, which in all but perhaps security terms resented and looked down on America and Americans. It was particularly true of Tunisians in education and media circles, which is where we in USIS were most concerned. This dichotomy was galling, although in retrospect maybe we gave it more weight than it in fact merited. It was an anomaly that affected the kind and caliber of personal contacts and worked against developing the human relationships we wanted. At the same time, it must be admitted that we and the country profited from the talents of these persons, whose ease with Western ways helped communication and cooperation. Many, including Bourguiba, had come out of Tunis' elite College Sidiki and then French universities. With the backward view of decades, I am more understanding and tend to down-play the negative attitudes towards the U.S., but I must recall how much we then disliked it and how powerless we felt to do anything about it. It seemed so absurd to hear from Tunisians that Americans had taken over the leadership of Western imperialism (despite our support of Bourguiba and his struggle!) and that the U.S. was a country without culture or couth, that Americans were brash and unsophisticated, ill equipped for world leadership role and all that garbage.

The result was we worked closely and usually quite well with Tunisians and Tunisian institutions, but saw very little of these persons outside purely work or official situations. I

remember a Tunisian trying to explain this phenomenon to me, saying that Tunisian officials didn't have money for restaurants and their small homes and apartments were not suitable for entertaining. Moreover, they felt uncomfortable coming to our places and not being able to reciprocate. Fair enough, but that was only part of it. Anyway, we largely went our own ways outside the office. When I returned as PAO, this had changed 180 degrees, with hardly the slightest trace left of those attitudes.

We and most of the rest of the Mission lived in the outskirts of Tunis on the coast, Carthage, La Marsa, Gammarth and Amilcar -- the PAO specifically wanted us there -- which was delightful, but in retrospect a mistake, for it removed us all too much from the life of the city. Maybe our personal relationships would have been better, and I would not have made the comments I just did, had we all lived in Tunis. On the other hand, it did give me the chance to meet informally, albeit briefly, President Bourguiba on several occasions. He loved to walk over the fields of Carthage, which he could do by merely coming out the door of the presidential palace in Amilcar. I was also given to such walks with my three year old son, and when our paths crossed, we stopped, and chatted for a short time before heading on our separate ways. He always had an aide or two with him for companionship, but no security of any sort. A magnetic personality, you could not but be captivated by him, although he did have the unfortunate, though well intentioned, practice of reaching down and patting children on the head. My son didn't like it and shied away, but Bourguiba didn't seem to notice. We didn't think anything about his seemingly total lack of security precautions; it was natural, the way things were. What a far cry from what we have come to find everywhere in the world only a few decades later, including Tunisia.

We felt USIS was significant in Tunisia. We thought we were doing important things, which were generally appreciated. Our various exchange programs sending people to the United States and bringing Americans to Tunisia, were not only well received, but perhaps given too much credit for helping with development and strengthen our ties. Using AID money, USIS was central in establishing the Bourguiba Institute of Languages, which was the country's main English-teaching facility and was incorporated as a special institute into the university. In Tunisia, of all countries where I have served, our efforts to get the activities of the AID program better known were generally appreciated, although I felt we sometimes pushed too hard. USIA was in the middle of things, and I had the good feeling that I was also in what I was doing.

*Q: How were the French seen? You mentioned the troops stationed at the airport and Bizerte, and they must have been in many other places.*

UNDELAND: No, only in those two, and one of them not for long. One evening, while driving home after work, I pulled over to the side of the road, just opposite el Alouina Airport, i.e., the Tunis Airport, and watched the French forces stationed there lower the Tri-color for the last time. Then they piled into their trucks and cars and went to the naval base at Bizerte. The Tunisians were elated and were impatient for a similar departure from the big Bizerte base, but that was not to come easily or without pain. The Tunisians started a campaign of harassment, which was not wise, for it had no chance of succeeding, but it did so infuriate the French, they unleashed troops on a rampage through Bizerte. Taunted and provoked, yes, but nothing that should have brought this kind of response. Unspeakable outrages were committed against the civilian population. To drive home their point and cause maximum humiliation, the rape, killing and pillage were

committed largely by troops from Senegal and by the *harkis*, i.e. Moroccan, Algerian and perhaps some Tunisian soldiers in the French Army. Sickening stuff. We had problems with the Tunisian government at this time, because they had called on us to make the French stop, and we did much less than was expected, at least so far as I was aware. The French seemed to go out of their way to use American munitions, so that shell cases and such clearly marked "Made In USA" were lying around. We felt certain this was done intentionally to implicate us. Individual Tunisians were also unhappy with us. An official at the radio station told me he and other Tunisians now felt they could never again count on the United States as a completely reliable friend. He went on saying, "we'll cooperate and work with you, but only when it is in our interest to do so." I remember replying by asking if that were not really best for the both of us? He thought for a moment and then agreed probably it was.

Three decades later I got to know the 80-year-old Bahi Ladgham, a close Bourguiba colleague and at one point Prime Minister, who was long known as particularly pro-American. He recounted some history I had never heard, saying at the time of Bizerte he personally had gone to the Americans seeking a guarantee we would not allow French forces to reoccupy any of Tunisia and particularly would prevent them from marching south on Tunis from the Bizerte base. He and other leaders feared the attack on the city of Bizerte was a prelude to wider action, perhaps an attempt to stamp out Tunisian independence all together. Ladgham told me he got the assurances he sought from the U.S. So whatever the popular sentiments, I think it safe to say Bourguiba and his entourage never had any question about America's basic reliability vis-a-vis Tunisia.

You asked how the French were seen. The answer is mixed and for many reasons, but there were always enough slights and incidents that kept the Tunisians on their guard, taking nothing for granted. For example, there was the telephone story.

A young Tunisian returned after getting an engineering MA or Ph.D. in the States and was hired by the government phone company. In looking over the system, he noticed some wiring that didn't seem to make sense, so he started tracing it only to discover the wires led into the basement of the French chancery, feeding into a sizable covert listening operation. The French had tapped the system. The Tunisians were irate, as expected, and let off a storm of indignation. It was all over town, fueling talk that, whatever else, the French could not be fully trusted, however much one might deal with them. Then there were the little slights and other things stemming from the colonialist mentality, which kept cropping up and bothering the Tunisians. They were rarely more than pin-pricks, but they occurred often enough that Tunisians were always on the look out for them.

*Q: To get a feel about the Bizerte crisis, what exactly happened to start it?*

UNDELAND: I don't recall all the details, but the proud, newly independent Tunisians saw the Bizerte base as an unacceptable presence, a challenge to their sovereignty and dignity. They mounted a campaign of provocations, demonstrations, strikes and some minor skirmishes just outside the base perimeter. What they thought they would accomplish other than infuriate the French I never understood. In any case, the French came to feel they had had enough of it and it was time to teach the Tunisians a lesson. They then unleashed their fury and vengeance. If there

is more to it than this, I didn't know it, and a French diplomat in Tunisia decades later told me this was essentially the whole story.

*Q: Had the French been planning to pull out of there too or not?*

UNDELAND: Not at all. For them, the Bizerte base was a vital link in the French military position in the Mediterranean. Remember this was during the Algerian war and anyway, France had long held the predominant military position in the western Mediterranean, which it was striving to maintain. There were a number of French who felt that they should not have given up their control of Tunisia and acceded to its independence. Indeed, I ran into a couple of them with this view, long time Tunisian residents, 30 years later!.

The French never discovered how to deal effectively with Bourguiba. But he understood them very well and played on their psychology and weak points. French educated and married to a French woman, he not only had native-speaker French, but was bicultural as well. It's amazing how fully at home with French and French ways a number of Tunisians of his generation were, and how even today this remains true among some in the older generation, i.e. those over 50. Bourguiba's tactics were very simple and repeated over and over. After a heated political struggle, for the most part non-violent, he would finally agree to something with the French, but hardly was the ink was dry on the agreement before he was back insisting on more.

The French were infuriated by this, and they tried all sorts of things to deal with him, toughness, the nice guy act, jail, banishment, exile. Nothing worked for them In that era, Bourguiba was -- of course you have to think first of all of Gandhi -- one of the handful who made the struggle to independence essentially non-violent. I think it was harder to do so and succeed against the French than the British -- look at the sad histories of Algeria and Indochina -- but Bourguiba pulled it off. A truly great visionary and national leader.

*Q: It must have been a difficult position for the Americans there in your type of position, but also for the rest of the Embassy. We had a commitment to keep France in NATO, which was a major element in stopping Soviet expansion, and yet we were all for newly-emerging nations, particularly friendly ones such as Tunisia. Were you under restraints about reporting on the French, on how we dealt with them in the situation there?*

UNDELAND: The French looked on Tunisia as their preserve and resented our presence and active role. They saw us as trying to replace them, the "us" being the Anglo-Saxon, English speaking, bogeymen, but it was much more the Americans than the Brits.

We in USIS had little contact with the French, partly because the French didn't want it, but also we did not see them as important to our activities and didn't make particular efforts to see them. Some Tunisians were amused by this French defensiveness vis-a-vis us and would regale us with stories of French pique. As to reporting, we in USIS were under no restraints, but we rarely did so, for we didn't normally have a whole lot of note to report.

Your question, however, seems to relate more to the bigger picture. I didn't know details about Embassy relations with the huge French mission in Tunis, but they saw more of their *chers*



*colleagues* than we did. I never heard of our political officers and others being under any restraints, reporting or other, but then I was the junior officer in a separate organization, situated a couple of miles from the chancery.

Despite the many tensions in Tunisian-French relations, some of them serious, the French had an awful lot going for them. Many of the Tunisian elite had been educated in France, a surprising number, as I have noted, were bilingual and even bicultural. They had major schools in Tunisia. In those days, their vast property holdings had not yet been nationalized, though they knew they soon would be; they had the best agricultural land, the wheat fields, orchards and vineyards. Commerce and industry were largely French. They owned and ran the leading hotels. In fact, the foremost hotel in Tunis was the Hotel Majestique, in Kairouan, the Hotel Splendid. How French can you get? Probably most important was Bourguiba's fundamental commitment to the French relationship, however much tested by events. The French felt that whatever independence might bring politically and economically, they could and would hold on to their dominant cultural position and that Tunisians in leadership echelons would look to France as their second home.

So far as I knew, any important difficulties the U.S. had with France were not to any significant degree played out in Tunisia.

I was personally in the midst of one brouhaha involving France. A couple of CIA types accompanied the body of the revolutionary Frantz Fanon, who had died in the U.S., back to Tunisia. He had requested to be buried on Algerian soil, which in fact was done with these Americans present, all having gotten through the Morice Line, that up to 50 km wide open free fire zone just inside the Algerian border, set up by the French to prevent infiltration. A photo was taken of the Americans at the grave site, which got into the hands of AFP in Tunis. The Information Officer was away, the Ambassador couldn't be reached and the PAO refused to have anything to do with it. The Political Counselor told me, indeed ordered me, to confirm the story to AFP, over my objections. I did as told, only to see the whole thing categorically denied the next day by the Department spokesman. The French were incensed, lodged a formal protest and the foreign press, mostly French journalists, was hot after us. The Ambassador decided to handle it by making me the only one to answer queries, and then ordering me to disappear for 3 days. A lot of bird life around Lake Ichkeul got watched, while the office and Joan, my wife, gamely fielded the phone calls. After a short while it blew over and was of no interest to AFP and the others.

*Q: How about the cultural side, dealing with the situation that seems to occur anytime we come across the French, as you have just mentioned? How did you try to counter their looking down on Americans as "cultural barbarians" and that sort of thing? Or did you?*

UNDELAND: We found their cultural haughtiness unpleasant and demeaning, but, as I've said, we were not paying all that much attention to the French. But we did not like it at all in the mouths of the Tunisians, as happened all too often. This was our focus, not the French.

*Q: I have the impression that while the French are always aghast at the popular, commercial standing of the United States in movies, music, things like that -- American culture imperialism as they sometimes call it -- kind of takes over without any involvement of the American*

*government. How did that fit into the Tunisian experience?*

UNDELAND: You have a good point. It happened in Tunisia, and nearly everywhere I've been. Films, television series and other programs popular music, rock and the rest of it, that have been so popular with Tunisian youth, at least in the cities, are not an American monopoly, but certainly the United States is the leader and have long been so recognized. Two factors in Tunisia worked to increase the popularity of American popular culture over time. A highlight was Willis Conover's triumphal visit to Tunisia. Conover did the "Jazz USA" program on the VOA and had a far wider Tunisian audience than we had realized. In general, American popular culture has become more easily available to Tunisians, and they have become accustomed to and appreciative of it. Films, TV and radio have been the main vehicles. Another factor is that universal education created a far larger number of young people attuned to popular Western culture. French attitudes and reactions towards the Americans in this area have not, I believe, had a significant effect with young Tunisians, i.e. the generations after that one mirroring of the French left.

*Q: What would you say were probably the most successful things that you were involved in at that time?*

UNDELAND: First and foremost were the various programs that brought Tunisians and Americans together, that is, into face-to-face contact. The Fulbright exchanges both ways, speakers, the then Leaders and Specialists exchanges, now called International Visitors, and a host of others. This has been where long term impact has best been made, and in Tunisia or elsewhere, we have never come up with any real substitute for direct contacts. Out of these came ongoing personal ties, but also institutional ones and the willingness and desire for more information and interaction. You can't measure it, like counting the numbers of bars of soap sold or dollar profits, but I am absolutely convinced the effect has been over time more than merely considerable. And it is not just with the person who has had the usually happy and profitable experiences, but also with others in his or her circle, with whom he/she has shared experiences, observations and the like. The multiplier effect has been immense, though we often hear of it only much later, if at all, and then often by chance. These are the activities, which have most changed attitudes fundamentally. I don't mean to say it is a normal result, but how often Tunisians and others back from their visits to or studies in the States have offered up examples of where they had previously had wrong negative impressions. Exchanges have paid us big dividends.

A second area of major impact, again in Tunisia and elsewhere, has been our involvement in English teaching, whether directly, which we have not done in Tunisia, or through working with local institutions, which was the case in Tunisia. Closely related are our libraries, where most of the clientele are students, many products of English teaching efforts we have run or supported. For Tunisia's growing English proficiency, our library and that of the British Council have been the main sources for reading and audio visual materials. In recent years, satellite TV has brought in CNN and other English language programs, and before that the VOA and BBC had certain language impact.

Essential to our task is providing complete, reliable and timely information on public expressions of American foreign policy and the politics and climate behind it. In the Tunis of the 50's and

60's, getting this information was a cumbersome affair, with often garbled reception which had to be cleaned up before our French and Arabic translators took over. Everything had to be translated. Our daily information bulletins went to government offices, the media and some selected individuals, professors, lawyers, and others we wanted to have this information and who themselves sought it. Important perhaps today and forgotten tomorrow was often the case, but we had the duty and obligation to be the reliable source on the public side of the American Government, on what it said and on providing context.

Again, I have never been a particular fan of press placement, but we had a lot of it in Tunisia, although next to none of a political nature. I remember the post and Washington looked on it as something we did quite well. We also were big in showing documentary films around the country, in villages and cities, and in distributing publications at the same time. I cannot measure just what effect they had, but I do recall that when we had to cut back on them, we received cries of protest. My hazard is they were more useful than we realized. For USIS, is popularity worthwhile in its own right? Not a meaningless question, as far as I'm concerned, although Washington usually didn't agree.

The post went from the active, hands-on, try anything leadership of PAO Harris Peel to the almost literal abdication of his successor, who was rarely in the office and then doing God knows what behind closed doors. He did keep the Ambassador happy, but the planning, designing, execution and evaluation of what we were up to was handled collegially by the CAO, IO and myself as the junior member of the triumvirate. It worked well, so no substantive complaints, but in my 35 year career, I never encountered anything like this abandonment of duty. Personally, this non-PAO was stimulating and likable; it was just he didn't do anything.

*Q: Talk a bit of the Embassy. You had two Ambassadors, G. Lewis Jones and Walter M. Walmsley. What was your impression of how they operated? Did you have any feel for them?*

UNDELAND: Frankly, I was no great fan of G. Lewis Jones, who within the Mission did what I considered some pretty despicable things, although I was far down the line and they did not affect me personally. Still, in representing the U.S. interests and promoting American-Tunisian ties, I think his record was pretty good. He, so far as I knew, got along well with Bourguiba and those around him, although I don't believe he saw the President all that frequently. Relations between the two governments were excellent and becoming broader and deeper. Jones, as ambassador, was the key American figure, and it is on this that major judgments should be made.

The highlight of his tour was the 1959 visit by President Eisenhower, the only American president ever to have come to Tunisia while in office. It lasted only a few hours but was long seen by Tunisians as a big deal, helping build up their confidence and sense of importance. Indeed, I encountered favorable references to it when again assigned to Tunisia many years later.

Walmsley also got on well with the leadership. He had a reputation of being temperamental and difficult, but I found him attractive, often amusing, and felt his views on Tunisia were well founded and ably presented. For some reason, he took an interest in me, although my job dealings with him were few.

*Q: What didn't you like about Jones? I'm trying to figure out style of ambassadors and all this.*

UNDELAND: He tried to recruit his, may I say, "agent", in every section of the Mission, who would report all scuttlebutt and rumors, particularly any hint of scandal or impropriety or anything titillating, directly and only to him. The PAO, Harris Peel, rightfully would have none of it in USIS, where the Ambassador had targeted the CAO, and this confrontation got pretty messy before it was over. This was the only time I ever encountered such shenanigans in my 35 year career. His vanity knew no limits. However, Jones later became Director General of the Foreign Service, so my view of him was obviously not shared by everybody. I might add an immense sigh of relief went through the Mission when he departed, with one section head raising a glass at the airport as the plane carrying Jones taxied down the runway to take off and said, "the Ambassador is dead; long live the DCM."

*Q: I take it Walmsley, then, was an easier person to deal with.*

UNDELAND: I'm not sure I would use the word "easy", but I, from my junior position, vastly preferred him. I found him likable, humorous, approachable and for the most part considerate, although he had a temper and did not like to be in any way challenged. For me, a friendly autocrat sums him up. He got along very well with Tunisians. Military assistance began and steps were taken that would be leading to Tunisia being the first Arab country to have the Peace Corps. In a sense, it was perhaps more testing for Walmsley than Jones, for the reality and complexity of the nation building tasks lying ahead had largely replaced the glow of independence and its immediate aftermath.

*Q: Could we go back to the Bizerte thing. How did it affect us?*

UNDELAND: In Tunis, we were not hunkering down or avoiding contacts or otherwise acting as if we were threatened. We refrained from some public efforts, but the library remained open throughout, if I remember correctly, and we were seeing people pretty much as we always did. The Tunisians welcomed this stance, although we were criticized for not more strongly opposing the French. The blatant use of American munitions often came up in our conversations. We must remember the Bizerte crisis didn't last very long, and although the lingering bad feelings against the French sometimes also touched us, they quite rapidly lost their immediacy.

*Q: Do we have any USIS operation in Bizerte?*

UNDELAND: Nothing at all. Our only operation was in Tunis, although the touring film van and an occasional special program reached some outlying places. Every year, we put together modest exhibits, sometimes embarrassingly modest, which were mounted at the annual Sfax and Sousse fairs.

*Q: How about the Algerian situation? You were there until 1962. Was that bubbling at that time?*

UNDELAND: Very much so.

*Q: Were we under constraints not to talk about things like Senator Kennedy's speech of support*

*for Algerian independence, and things like this? Was our Embassy divided? How did we treat the whole Algerian thing?*

UNDELAND: We in USIS had no official dealings with the Algerian provisional government people, except to provide them with our information bulletins and Agency publications. I knew a couple of them, though not well. With the Embassy, it was a different affair; specific officers were designated to have contacts with the Algerians.

The GPRA, that is the provisional Algerian government, was headquartered in Tunis, with the blessing and yet apprehension of the Tunisian Government. There were areas near the border completely under Algerian control, for example, around Ghardamaou, which were closed to all others, even Tunisians, except for farmers who had long lived there and I suppose some local officials. I once tried to visit the antiquities site at Chemtou, which is located in that area, but was politely turned away by the Algerians. The Tunisians, officially and popularly, supported the Algerians, which was a bone of contention for them with the French. At the same time, the Tunisians sometimes found the Algerians overbearing and didn't like being cut off from parts of their own territory, which were in reality Algerian territory, at least temporarily.

You mention Senator Kennedy's speech; I don't remember our putting out the text, but if we received it we certainly did so. An American senator speaking out on North Africa was always grist for our mill. What the French thought would not have influenced us one way or the other.

*Q: In your meetings with Tunisians, did you find yourself guarded in discussing what was happening in Algeria?*

UNDELAND: Not at all. It was a subject that came up all the time, but I was not privy to intelligence and other information at the Embassy and therefore didn't have much hard to contribute. But neither did the Tunisians I knew. I fear these conversations didn't contribute much to the sum total of human knowledge. Far more front and center in my talks were American-Tunisian and the Tunisian-French connections.

I did, however, fairly often encounter among Tunisians negative attitudes towards the Algerians, but they were usually quite different from the resentments against the French. A Tunisian summed this up by noting he could never justify what the French were doing in Algeria, but while the Tunisians often didn't like what the Algerians were up to or how they were going about it, still they understood and might have acted in exactly the same way, if they and the Algerians traded places.

*Q: Did our ties with Israel play somewhat different Tunisia from the way it had in Lebanon?*

UNDELAND: Quite differently, and yet it was an emotional issue in both places, though understandably less so in Tunisia. Things Israeli were not so pressing or immediate. Part of the difference lay with distance and a group of priorities that were removed from Middle East politics. Another reason was Bourguiba, who wanted good relations with other Arabs, but without paying too high a price for them. He was one of the first Arab leaders to promote accommodation with the Israelis. There were many press items attacking Israel and our closeness

to Israel, but they were not let get out of hand or be too intemperate. The government run radio station didn't touch the subject. Having said this, I don't mean to indicate the Tunisians were oblivious to Israel or didn't care about it. In the main, they shared the feeling of other Arabs.

This might be a good place to bring up how Tunisians looked on themselves and where they saw themselves fitting in. I think it fair to say most of them wanted to strengthen their Arab relations and assert an Arab identity, but they realized they were not numerous, were far away from the Arab heartland, had other interests and were not taken very seriously by Middle Eastern Arabs. They knew they could not be more than peripheral to Mideast Arabs, which wasn't satisfying, but what else could they be? They were obviously not European and couldn't be, though some of the elite came close. Certainly, they were not black Africans and scorned the thought. If you did not want to cause resentment, you'd better be sure to call them North Africans and not just Africans. Yet, the North African designation was also not satisfactory, for it was such a divided, small, non-homogeneous area, that if it were their sole basic identity, it would marginalize them. The best they were and are able to come up with was Tunisian Arabs, unsatisfactory and yet they couldn't come up with anything much else. And yet it is not far from the mark, for Tunisians yesterday and 30 years ago were quite different from anybody else.

*Q: Nasser, was he a factor?*

UNDELAND: Nasser was a factor everywhere in the Arab World, but for those loyal to Bourguiba, and they were most Tunisians, he was far less important than in most Arab countries. He made a mistake in taking on the Tunisian president and waging a radio and press war against him; Bourguiba responded forcefully and the majority of Tunisians lined up behind him. The more traditional South, but not Sfax, and conservative Kairouan in the center had problems with Bourguiba's outspoken and unrelenting modernizing push. There, Nasser made some inroads, but they were never strong enough to pose a serious threat. Bourguiba didn't like Nasser's bombast, his seeking an Arab unity but only under him, his challenge to the West, and probably what he saw as Nasser's lack of sophistication. It should also be noted Cairo was the refuge for the Ahmed Ben Salah, who had openly challenged Bourguiba and when defeated had fled to Egypt, where he was welcomed.

A far bigger challenge to Bourguiba came from his being considered by some as insufficiently Muslim, particularly when he went after the sun-up to sun-down fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. He said he didn't care whether anybody fasted and then caroused and feasted most of the night, so long as they were on the job at the usual hour and worked effectively. He could not accept that Tunisia, a young country just starting out, lose a month of serious work to maintain this tradition. This was taken by some as an attack on Islam, and there were serious disturbances in Kairouan and places in the south.

*Q: Were we playing any role in the opposition to Nasser, were we just pushing American policy or did we get involved in some of these quarrels?*

UNDELAND: There was nothing I was personally involved in that would indicate such a role, but it was clearly evident we were far happier with Bourguiba than with Nasser. I've neither heard nor read anything that indicates Bourguiba ever asked our help against Nasser or that we,

on our own initiative, offered it.

*Q: You left Tunisia in 1962, is that right?*

UNDELAND: The Summer of 1962, yes.

*Q: Still not going back to the United States. You spent far less time in the United States than anybody I've interviewed.*

UNDELAND: That may very well be. In a 35 plus year career, I was assigned to Washington for only six years. After Tunis I went to Alexandria, Egypt, as Branch Public Affairs Officer, an assignment I asked for.

**HAROLD L. DAVEY**  
**Political Labor Officer**  
**Tunis (1959-1961)**

*Harold L. Davey received his undergraduate degree in international affairs from the University of Nebraska. There, he was both active in politics and labor unions. He has also served in Canada and the United Kingdom. He was interviewed by Don R. Kienzle on March 14, 1995.*

DAVEY: So I came to Washington still on home leave without any onward assignment. Jim Taylor arranged for me to get a couple of weeks more consultation in Washington. And about this time a vacancy came open in Tunis. The Labor Reporting Officer there, Cliff Nelson, had all of a sudden been assigned to Salisbury, Rhodesia, and left on direct transfer. So I was assigned to Tunis to be the political-labor officer replacing Cliff Nelson. We sent out word that I would like his house, since I had four children, and they arranged for me to get the house much to the chagrin of other people at the Embassy who had had their eyes on this lovely beach house. But the Embassy figured that it would avoid problems just to say, "His replacement has it." So the public affairs officer and economic counselor didn't fight over it, and the post did not have to decide which one to give it to. So I got Nelson's job and his house and his dog and that worked out all right. I got there a week or so before he left and he took me around on consultation.

Before I left Washington, I had a chance to attend a debriefing of a Tunisian labor team that Ike Golden was programming. The team included the heads of number of unions and vice presidents of the Tunisian Labor Confederation. They were in Washington and I was there, and when I got to Tunis, they associated me with their trip, although I had absolutely nothing to do with it. I got the benefit of the good will of the program that Ike Golden and others from the Labor Department had arranged. So it was a bonus for me as Political-Labor Officer at the post for the next two years.

*Q: Can you put dates on your tour of duty in Tunisia?*

DAVEY: I went to Tunis in September 1959 and left in September 1961. Tunisia was an interesting assignment. Of course, Tunisia is a French-speaking post, as I said before, and there was AFL-CIO involvement with Tunisia over the years. So there was a close relationship at the top [of the respective labor movements]. And Tunisia was in the ICFTU. In fact, the ICFTU had some meetings there, which I had an opportunity to report on and to meet Irving Brown. Omar Beku was the head of the ICFTU regional organization at the time of that 1959 meeting in Tunis.

And Tunisia was a leading country in Africa, so there were other Pan-African meetings held there. I remember one UGTT convention, when a lot of people came up to visit. It was during the American elections when Kennedy was elected, and we had a group of people out to our house, some from Kenya and elsewhere. We listened to the returns during the night, and by morning [the outcome] still wasn't sure, so we went back to the UGTT convention. It looked like Kennedy was going to win, but it was still a little bit in doubt. So these were the opportunities that I had in Tunis in the labor field.

On the other hand, there was a problem with an undercurrent of feeling that the Tunisians were too close to the United States. It was sort of a precursor of this question of Moslem fundamentalists that they have today, although it wasn't that at the time. Ahmad Tlili was head of the Tunisian Trade Union Movement. He thought it best not to be too close with the Embassy, because he was accused of being a valet of American imperialism. So because of that feeling, contacts had to be rather limited, and that was on the difficult side.

But we had a few trade union teams come through-like in the trade fair program. It was very useful to program them and arrange talks with others and so on. In fact, as a result of those teams that had come out, when I got back to Washington [and worked in the Department of Labor], I requested ten grants in the labor field per year for the whole world, so we could send them out to various regions. I got those grants for a couple of years for the Labor Department to administer. Although we had a couple of special teams come out to Tunisia, we could have used a lot more.

One thing to note on Tunisia, the Tunisian Labor Movement was very active in the area of cooperatives. Habib Achour, who was a leader of the UGTT, although not President at the time, was the head of their cooperative movement, and there was a very interesting way that the Tunisians would use this cooperative movement as an answer for unemployment. One time Bourguiba arbitrarily banned horse-drawn and camel-drawn carts in Tunis during the daylight hours. Animal-drawn carts could only carry from say midnight to 6:00 a.m. during the night. Sort of an overnight thing. Well, the Tunisian answer was for the union to set up a cooperative for these former cart-haulers, teach them how to drive trucks and taxis, and take away from the Italians the taxi licenses, which they had at the time, and then get a loan from the Tunisian Cooperative Association to buy all the trucks they needed, so they had brand new trucks. And one of the strangest things was that it was easier to teach a Tunisian cart driver how to drive a truck than a small taxi, and that was because he was not literate and could not make change for the taxi.

But, this just illustrates how the Tunisian labor movement would try to do things through the cooperatives. Part of our program at the Embassy was to try to get some American cooperative leaders to come out to Tunisia, so that we would have a tie with Tunisia labor cooperatives. In



fact, we got a man out there, Glen Noonan, I think, was his name. He and his wife came out and had a very good program, then went on to Kenya as part of an African tour. He died in an automobile accident over in Kenya. But anyway that was part of our effort. We sent in reports on programs like that. I know when I came back to Washington, I found some of this had been incorporated in a book that George Lodge, [Assistant Secretary of Labor for International Labor Affairs], had written called, *The Plowshares of Democracy*, and there was something on the Tunisian experience, which had been cranked in there.

*Q: You mentioned that there was a close relationship between the AFL-CIO leadership and the Tunisian trade union leadership.*

DAVEY: Yes, Ahmad Tlili.

*Q: Could you describe how that worked and was there an AFL-CIO person resident in Tunis?*

DAVEY: No, we had no one resident. It worked with occasional visits by [AFL-CIO European Representative] Irving Brown, plus meetings at the ICFTU and [the Tunisian labor leaders] would be invited to the AFL-CIO convention. Of course, it pre-dates, I guess, the merger of] the AFL and the CIO in some ways. In fact, the Tunisians used to claim they might have had a role in bringing the AFL together with the CIO, because Farhat Hashad, who was the first President of the UGTT, was invited to the United States by the AFL to go on a speaking tour. This was before Tunisia had attained independence. And he came to the United States and he was at an AFL meeting and he believes, or his followers believe, that he had a role in the rapprochement between the AFL and the CIO.

But, be that as it may, he did come to the United States and the French, of course, were very unhappy that the AFL had invited this Tunisian labor leader to the United States. But the AFL policy was to do that, and that's one of the reasons that they had the close relations with the UGTT later on after independence, because Irving Brown and George Meany, who was very active in international affairs even before he became [AFL-CIO] president, had this policy.

*Q: Did the UGTT have close ties with the French labor movement at all?*

DAVEY: Well, they had some ties even with the CGT, the Communist Union, which, at that time, was the strongest union in France, and some ties with the *Force Ouvriere*. The Tunisians were very French in every way, and were kind of part and parcel of French culture. Bourguiba used to like to critique Charles De Gaulle and the other French leaders, because Bourguiba was very articulate within the spirit of the French culture.

Farhat Hashad, by the way, was assassinated. Some say by the French Red Hand, which was a sort of pied noir colons ["black foot French colonists"] group. There are pictures of his car with something like a hundred and five machine gun bullets in it. He became the martyr of Tunisian independence, because he was assassinated. Presumably his efforts to get support from the United States and others around the world for Tunisian independence was the reason he drew all this ire from the French colon group. This occurred just before Tunisia got its independence in 1956. There was, of course, a big, big funeral for him in Tunisia.

*Q: What was Bourguiba's relationship with the trade union movement?*

DAVEY: Well, Bourguiba, the nationalist leader of the country, drew support from all elements—labor, management, academic, and so on. So he had a close relationship with the labor movement and when Bourguiba became President, I used to say that the Tunisian labor movement was not independent. The most it had was varying degrees of autonomy to operate from within government. The Tunisian Labor Confederation President, Ahmad Ben Salah, who later on became the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, tried to set up a separate labor party. But Bourguiba did not want a labor party and a management party; he wanted only one party—what he called the "Neo-Destour Party" or the New Constitution Party. So he opposed this [formation of a labor party] behind the scenes. And the first thing that happened was that Habib Achour, leader of the cooperatives, tried to form his own labor party.

So all of the sudden there were reports in the Tunisian papers that a rival trade union had been formed in the south of Tunisia by Habib Achour. There was consternation for several days, then UGTT President Ben Salah recognized that Bourguiba and the Party were behind it and he was not strong enough to buck it. So Ben Salah resigned as the head of this other union and they merged back. And Ahmad Tlili was then made President of the combined union. So Bourguiba's relationship with the trade union movement was to use it for support. But he didn't want it to be fully independent and oppose him or anything. After I left, there were more episodic evidences of opposition.

I like to compare Habib Achour to Thomas Becket in English history. Becket was a friend of the king, when the king was a prince. They got along very fine until Becket became the archbishop and he had the ring on his hand and he started acting like the head of the church. And then when Becket disagreed with the king, Becket was murdered.

So, Habib Achour, as I related earlier, had been the loyal Bourguiba follower in helping to oust Ahmad Ben Salah. Later on, when Achour became president of the union, there was another incident. There had been a period of inflation. Bourguiba decided to devalue the currency, but he did not allow wages to rise enough to offset the higher cost of imported goods, which resulted from the devaluation. And so there was agitation in the unions to get more of a wage increase than Bourguiba wanted. Achour was pushing for the union people, the workers, to get a raise in their wages.

In the meantime, there was tension, and then one of Achour's fishing cooperatives had an incident where some Italian tourists were killed. A boat blew up or something. They popped Achour into jail on sort of trumped up charges. Eventually Achour was let out and the thing was eased over.

*Q: Was this during your tour in Tunisia?*

DAVEY: No, it was after. I was in the Labor Department at the time working as the Near East and South Asia Area Advisor. I was not in the country. This was years after I had left. And one time about four years ago, I was out in Tunisia on a trip doing a report on exports processing

zones, and we arranged to call on Achour. This was during another period of great tension between Achour and Bourguiba.

Now I should say that way back in the 1930s and the 1940s Bourguiba and Achour had worked together in the nationalist movement. Achour was the loyal follower of Bourguiba. I think Achour might have spent more time in French jails than Bourguiba did. Bourguiba was noted for the number of years he had been in prison as a nationalist leader, but Achour was right up there. I don't know which one had the most number of years. So they were companions of the fight from the early days, and these falling outs were difficult. Sometimes, Bourguiba would go off for medical treatment during one of these periods of tension, when he would come back, Achour would be at the airport greeting him along with other dignitaries, and they would embrace, which was a sign, "Okay, we are back together again."

The time when I was there six years ago was another period of tension. Bourguiba was becoming very senile at that point. It was not long before he was deposed by the head of the military. Achour and company were agitating once again for more wages and more independence, so there was a bout going on. I was allowed to meet with Achour just a couple of weeks before he was arrested again. The government had already taken away the union's right for an allocation of wages, the check-off system, and their right to use the place where they worked as a union meeting place. So the government was playing hardball and had formed another rival union to Achour's, trying to bring Achour down. This was typical of the way things worked there in Tunisia.

*Q: Didn't Achour go into exile in Geneva or something of that sort?*

DAVEY: I don't remember his going into exile. He was sick and in a hospital, and I think he was relieved [of his union responsibilities]. He was also jailed and people would go down to visit him to make sure he was all right. And I think he is now completely out of house arrest and everything. After all, Bourguiba is gone [and no longer there to charge] Achour. But as a condition of getting out of house arrest and so on, Achour had to eschew any future leadership of the Tunisian trade union movement and he is now effectively retired.

*Q: How were your relations within the Embassy in Tunis? Did you get support from the front office for your work as a labor attaché?*

DAVEY: Well, I used the title "political-labor" because technically I wasn't the labor attaché at the time. Although I did a lot of labor work, I had other straight political work to do. There was not all that much encouragement from the Embassy. There was sort of a tacit understanding that if I wanted to do labor work and had time, that was fine. There was a recognition by the political section that the labor in Tunisia was very important, and sometimes, the Chief of Political Section would also do some overall reports on Tunisian labor. So there was support for what I did in the labor field and no real opposition. And I didn't have any difficulty. As I said, we were able to get some grants. For one thing, the Trade Fair program which operated out of ILAB (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, US Department of Labor) brought a couple of labor teams to Tunisia, which are very useful. We got a grant for a cooperative leader to come out, so there was some support there. But I did not have enough time to devote to some of the other

labor things.

*Q: Any other observations that you would like to make about your tour in Tunisia, before we turn to other things?*

DAVEY: Well, the last few months there, we were really kind of "under wraps" because the Battle of Bizerte. Bourguiba had provoked the French into attacking Bizerte. He was under a lot of tension due to the lack of economic progress and a feeling bubbling underneath of the people and the workers and so on. He struck out and started agitating to get some of that oil that had been discovered on either side of Tunisia in the Sahara. Libya had it, and Algeria had it. Bourguiba looked at the map and he saw that Tunisia came down to a point which made it less and less likely that Tunisia would get any of that oil. So he would developed these theories-He had sort of a "fireside chat" like Roosevelt's-and he would say, "Okay. The Sahara's like a sea, and all the riparian states ought to have an equal right to the oil revenues based on how much frontage they have." Well, neither Libya nor France, which was running Algeria at that time, thought much of that idea.

Then Bourguiba had another idea that the border should have gone straight down instead of going down to a point. That would have given Tunisia more chance to get oil. And that idea didn't work either. He also tried agitation. He sent Ahmad Tlili with some union and other demonstrators down to the French-Algerian border post on the southern border, and he sent some other workers and demonstrators and women up at Bizerte and tried to block the French base up there.

Well, Bourguiba turned to something that had worked before after the Sakiet Sidi Youssef incident, which occurred just before I arrived there in 1958, when there had been some incursions by Algerians from Tunisia into Algiers. The French had bombed the Algerians on Tunisian territory at Sakiet Sidi Youssef, in what we would call today "hot pursuit." In the Tunisian papers it was always emphasized that the French used American B-25 airplanes to bomb Tunisia. But anyway, the Tunisians' anger was at the French and so the Tunisians put a blockade on all the French bases inside Tunisia, and there was a world-wide condemnation and so on. In fact, it was sort of like a Berlin blockade. The French had to fly themselves in and out by helicopter. They had a military air base outside Tunis and they had Bizerte. That went on for about six months until they worked out the agreement.

[In this later Bizerte confrontation] Bourguiba thought he could do the same thing with De Gaulle that he had done with the previous French Republic. De Gaulle did not take kindly to the "Drapeau de France" (French flag) being insulted. So, boom! In came the French Foreign Legion, and it was quite a slaughter. There were about thirty-four Frenchmen killed and I think about fifteen hundred Tunisian men, women and children.

The Tunisians had American military aid, but they were so leery about American involvement that they never let us have a MAG (Military Assistance Group) or a military training group to teach them how to use and repair the equipment. So they were trying to get out these tanks to go up there that had been in boxes for two years, and the tanks didn't work. They hadn't been maintained and so forth. So after this Battle of Bizerte, our contacts in the labor movement and

our contacts with political people were just sort of cut off for the last six weeks or so I was in Tunisia and it was kind of rough.

One other thing I should mention is that Tunisia was quite a pioneer in using US food aid in the Food for Work Program. It started before I arrived. They had a small, like forty-thousand man year, program. Bourguiba was inspired by a Frenchman, Gabriel Ardant, who wrote a book called, *Le Monde en Friche*, which means, "the world lies fallow." His thesis in the book was "Everywhere there is work to be done, and everywhere there are unemployed people that could do the work, but the work is not being done. So why don't we marry the two by giving food [for work], sort of like the CCC" [Civilian Conservation Corps], the US public works program of the 1930's, which was a partial inspiration as well. So Bourguiba asked for some US wheat to be a payment in kind. And they gave them a cash stipend and said [the work done was the equivalent of] 40,000 man years. That's how it started.

Then in November 1959 there was an election campaign for President. I was there at the time. Bourguiba had one Communist opponent, who was going to get like two-tenths of one percent of the vote. During the campaign, Bourguiba promised every Tunisian in the whole country a job in this Food for Work Program . All they had to do was just go to the "governorate," the local administrative authority, apply, and they would be put to work.

Now Tunisia has used these kinds of work programs in interesting ways, and they have been rather productive. They didn't build roads because the French left a good road network, but they were doing a lot with these programs to build up agriculture. I remember they were planting apricot trees around the hillsides, and it was going to take seven years for the trees to blossom and bear fruit. They were also doing other things in that sort of area and were innovative. And while it was "food for work," the Tunisians couldn't actually use the American wheat, because it was different from what they use. We had the durham and they wanted a kind they could use in their couscous. So they took our wheat, went over to Rome and exchanged it for the type of wheat they liked.

**PHILIP BIRNBAUM**  
**Program Economist**  
**Tunis (1960-1963)**

*Philip Birnbaum was born in Union City, New Jersey. At age 12, his family moved to Teaneck, New Jersey. In 1950, he graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in business administration. After he started graduate courses at Columbia University, he was notified that he was accepted for a Fulbright . Once he received MA from both Columbia and Cambridge, he went on to receive a Ph.D. in international economics and foreign trade from Harvard University. He then served in the Army for two years. Mr. Birnbaum has also served abroad in Tunisia and Morocco. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on February 22, 1996.*

BIRNBAUM: I went out to Tunisia in February 1960, as the program economist. In 1960, Tunisia had been independent for about four years. Bourguiba was the father of the country. He was a very charismatic leader, who had a very good understanding about the need to modernize the Tunisian society to promote economic and social development. First, he took the women out of the veil and gave them the vote which, for an Islamic country, was extraordinary at that time. Next, Bourguiba changed the traditional way of observing Ramadan in Tunisia. Of course, one couldn't eat or drink during the daylight hours, but once it got dark, not only did one eat and drink, but one carried on singing and dancing, with some cafes open right through the night. So the next day, it was almost impossible for these people to work. Bourguiba insisted that no modern state can really give up 30 days of production to observe Ramadan. He insisted that at midnight everything had to be closed down so that people could get a night's sleep and be prepared to work the next day. There were a series of riots when he made this change, but he persevered. There were other important factors fostered by Bourguiba's leadership. Tunisia really had a meritocracy, with a lot of young people in the government. Their ambition was to get further ahead in the government and they were very dedicated. The country was very fortunate, it didn't have a landed aristocracy. They were all the same petite bourgeoisie and basically working toward the same objectives. One talks now about ownership of the program and good governance, both of which were prevalent in Tunisia, and there was really little corruption. Bourguiba's program was called Neo-Destour Socialism, but the program was moderate. It was based on what was called the French radical socialism, which they used to say was red on the outside and white on the inside, like a radish. One minister, Ben Sallah, was much more of an ideologue, and he wanted to set up collective farms, and nationalize many sectors, but Bourguiba just put him out. He had to leave the country. In sum, it was a very good environment to work in and in which to develop an aid program.

In those days, an AID mission was staffed like a table of organization in the Army, where you had one of each kind of activity. You had an industry officer, an agriculture officer, a labor officer, a training officer, a community development officer, etc., and of course everyone was expected to come up with a project.

We had the standard assistance program, including technical assistance, and capital projects, as well as a big PL 480 program. In Tunisia, we had one of the first food for work programs. It had started after a flood in 1958, to clean up the mess, and then the program expanded, and by 1961 or 1962, there were almost 100,000 people employed in food for work, all over the country, doing terracing and planting trees. Bourguiba, after a while, decided that it wasn't dignified for people to work only for payment in kind. We were paying them with PL 480 wheat, and with soybean oil, or cotton seed oil. For people who were underemployed, the ration was enough to support a family, or even an extended family. When Bourguiba decided that payment in kind was not dignified, they reduced payment in kind and give them partial payment in cash. The cash payment was too much of a drain on the budget, so that didn't last very long. This just shows how a program evolves, and then the next thing that happens is that it can get out of hand.

Minister Ben Sallah said "Those people didn't realize they were unemployed or underemployed until you (the US) told them so." Being unemployed became a job description. If you asked somebody what his job was, he wouldn't say he was a farmer, or a ditch digger; he was a *chômeur*, the French word for unemployed person. The minute he had that title, he was entitled

to the Food for Work program. In the end, it got out of hand, and had to be cut back.

*Q: Who was the director in Tunisia?*

BIRNBAUM: The director, when I first came, was Admiral Strauss, and he was succeeded by D.C. Lavergne. We arrived in February 1960 and in November 1960, Kennedy became president. Kennedy changed the agency from ICA to AID, and declared the Decade of Development. Under this program, the USAID program was to concentrate on a small number of countries and hopefully in a ten-year period, consistent with the Rostow take-off theory, a country would be in a position to take off economically. As the program economist, I helped Harry Lennon, the Program Officer, develop a multi-year program for Tunisia. In the Africa region, Nigeria and Tunisia were selected. Tunisia was selected because Bourguiba was a moderate, not only in his economic policies, but in international relations, for example he always took a moderate position on the Middle East problems. We thought Tunisia was a pretty good economic candidate and developed a program which received a \$180 million pledge of US assistance for a three year period.

*Q: This was a long range assistance strategy situation -- is that what they called them? Where you made a multi-year commitment?*

BIRNBAUM: Yes. It was a multi-year commitment, a \$180 million for three years, which, on a per capita basis put Tunisia in the top ten of all aid recipients in the world. It was an enormous amount of money for a small country. And then there was a question of spending money effectively. In the end, we couldn't commit \$180 million in three years. It took more like five or six years, and initially, it wasn't supposed to include PL 480 programs, but the amount was so large it was necessary to do so.

*Q: What was at that time during the shift from ICA to AID, what was the primary characteristic of a different style? There was obviously a change of policy, and change in administration. How would you characterize what was different about AID compared to ICA?*

BIRNBAUM: Before the establishment of AID, you had the Development Loan Fund, which handled the capital or major investment projects like the roads, and ports. With the establishment of AID, capital projects and technical assistance operations were integrated, which makes for a better program. Another big change was President Kennedy's support for the Decade of Development, that we were going to make a big effort for accelerating growth in a number of developing countries.

*Q: Was there another concept of development process? You talked about Walt Rostow's take-off theory. Was that the sort of driving concept?*

BIRNBAUM: The very fact that the President was interested in reformulating the USAID program and put his name behind it was very critical. The Peace Corps was started then and there was an emphasis on international relations and American leadership. The Marshall Plan had come to an end and we were talking about development in what got to be called the Third World. We were engaging in major programs for development in Nigeria, India, Korea, Latin America.

You had the presidential push behind the AID program with aid levels that were pretty significant.

*Q: What was the main direction of the Tunisian program? You mentioned a lot of projects, but what were you really trying to do?*

BIRNBAUM: One of the things that was very interesting was that the Tunisians wanted to develop a national economic plan. And here was a capitalist country, the United States, telling them that the plan was a good idea; you should have a clear-cut plan of where you want to go. All the time that we were in Tunisia, the French were still there in large number. Very often the US was giving very different advice from the French. I remember some French people saying that the US is encouraging the Tunisians to develop this multi-year national economic plan but they don't have the resources to support it. We were saying that's the basic problem facing poor countries. To develop they really have to live beyond their resources, and that's the purpose of foreign aid: to provide the external resources, so poor countries can increase their standard of living and increase per capita incomes. Tunisia's first national economic plan, I think, was a five-year plan. There were 12 governates or provinces in the country and they decided that the three poorest provinces were going to get most of the resources, because the idea was to bring them up to the standard of the best provinces, which were in northern Tunisia. We stressed the efficient use of resources, pointing out that the standard of living was not all that high in the best provinces. Furthermore, the poor provinces are mostly arid, with little rainfall, so that one won't get much return on any investment of resources. It was a big discussion on getting a better balance in terms of efficient use of resources. But what they did have in that plan, which is interesting, now with all this concern about poverty reduction, was increasing education and health services, low-cost housing, etc. So, if one looks at Tunisia's performance over the last 30 years, I believe in terms of performance in poverty reduction and the provision of basic human services, that it probably rates among the top performing developing countries.

One could ask how important was foreign aid in helping Tunisia? I'm looking at a perspective of having served there for just three years, but I've been following events in Tunisia since then. All the things we are talking about now as essential for development, was something that they recognized: the idea of leadership, ownership of the program, being concerned about not only a higher rate of growth, but also poverty reduction. They really had the solid basis that you need for foreign aid to be effective. You can give a lot of foreign aid, but if there's a lot of corruption and there's no commitment, then there will be few results. Bourguiba wasn't completely a saint. He had opposition, which he did not tolerate, and some of the opposition were actually assassinated. He ran a single party system for almost 30 years, which is not exactly democratic, but in other ways they had the best country setting for aid to be effective.

One of the projects I was involved in was the Oued Nebana Dam. Tunisia is an arid country, with only one river - some people said it wasn't a river, but a stream, which flowed all year round. Bourguiba made up his mind he wanted a multipurpose dam on this river. Despite the fact that there's a school of thought that there was never a multipurpose dam built anywhere in the world which was economically feasible, we went forward in designing this small dam which had a very small power complex, and it was not going to irrigate a large number of hectares. The US Bureau of Land Reclamation staff came out to look at this project and they said if we build this dam, it



will be the most expensive acre of water anywhere in the world. We were having these problems trying to get the cost benefit ratio to come out positive. In those days one used an OMB cost/benefit circular that was used in building dams in the American West. Somebody looked at our figures and said "You didn't include recreational benefits." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well, you will have a big lake behind this dam, which can be used for boating and water skiing." I said, "I don't have the guts to put in recreational benefits for these poor peasants." So we struggled to keep the costs down. There was a big discussion about the construction of irrigation canals, and to keep the price down, we were going to use compressed earth, which if done right, in that kind of climate can last 50 or 60 years. The Tunisians said, no, that the canals should be reinforced concrete, which of course would have increased the price significantly. The French advisors favored reinforced concrete because when they ran this country, it was French companies that did all the work; so it was just an internal revenue transfer from the French taxpayers to the French companies. We finally convinced the Tunisians that the dam didn't have to be built like the Roman aqueduct but it would last 50 to 60 years and would cost a great deal less. It was one kind of experience that we were involved in and there were other learning experiences.

When Tunisia became independent, a lot of the French and Italians left the country. They were the technicians, so there was a terrific shortage of mechanics. AID approached the problem by financing the establishment of a trade or vocational school concentrating on automotive mechanics. It was called Ariana School. We built the building, we brought in the equipment, etc., but the one thing we didn't have control over was the curriculum. The French and Tunisians took over, and we were shocked to see that all the students were going to wear white gowns, and that the curriculum featured physics, chemistry, and very little hands-on work on the engines. We said, "People are waiting for these mechanics to fix broken down tractors." I remember we made the point that you can go into a garage in America, and a guy can change the points and the spark plugs, and get the engine timing perfect. Then if you said to the mechanic, "Do you understand the principles of the combustion engine" he'll say, "What are you talking about?" The French, said, "Oh, but that's the problem!" We lost out on that one, and they taught the chemistry and the physics, and the first two classes that came out of the school were useless, and people came to complain that obviously these kids had never seen a motor. There were several of those kinds of experiences.

*Q: I gather there were similar issues at the higher education levels, where the French disparaged American degrees, American education?*

BIRNBAUM: There was the problem of degree equivalency. The French educated Tunisians would not recognize the degrees that US universities provided at the same standard. It got to the point where they would grudgingly say that a US master's degree was equivalent to a French undergraduate degree. I think a bigger problem, as in many other countries, was that we send people for training and they got good training, but very often, given the low salaries in the government, they went to the private sector or overseas. A lot of people were lost that way.

*Q: What happened to the dam?*

BIRNBAUM: That's the most important footnote. The dam was built in a most arid, eroded part

of Tunisia, near a major city, called Qairouan. When building a dam, one always talks about the possibility of the once in a hundred year flood. Later many years after the dam was built, there was a major flood with some loss of life. They said if the dam wasn't there, a good part of Qairouan would have been washed away with a greater loss of life. So the dam justified itself. But in terms of a pure economic operation, it was a very high cost operation. At one point, we were prepared not to go forward but it was a political decision, Douglas Dillon, the number two man at the State Department at the time, got involved when Bourguiba objected to AID saying we weren't going to finance it.

That reminds me that at some point my boss, Harry Lennon, who was the program officer, was to be interviewed by a reporter from the New York Times. Something came up, and Harry had to leave the office, so he said, "OKAY, if you meet with the reporter, you should be very alert, because these guys are looking for a story. They don't want the good news, they want something that is news making." So I described the AID program to the reporter who was about as young as I was. And then he said to me, "Well, what part of the USAID program is politically driven?" I said, "One hundred percent. It's part of our foreign policy which has multiple objectives: political, economic, as well as humanitarian objectives."

*Q: Do you think we achieved our political objectives with the support of the AID program? Or were we achieving them?*

BIRNBAUM: One political objective was to promote moderation in the Middle East situation and Bourguiba always maintained that position. Another foreign policy objective during the Cold War was to support people who followed our ideology. My next assignment was Algeria, and there was 180 degree difference compared to Tunisia. Algeria was a country that went the Soviet way, while Bourguiba was following a much more moderate policy. Tunisia was a country with which we shared some common ideals and Tunisia was very often a supporter on the U.N. votes which concerned the US So, I believe it was a happy marriage between US political objectives and a development program that had a reasonable impact. At the same time, we were supporting what Tunisians wanted to do and they seemed to be on the right track in terms of having an effective economic and social program.

*Q: The political objectives and development objectives weren't at cross purposes, which they can be in other places.*

BIRNBAUM: Right. In certain countries especially during the Cold War we supported people who were following inefficient economic policies which were a waste of resources. I believe the things that made the difference in Tunisia, as I reflect on it, is that they understood the importance of people participating in the economy: small business, small farmers, etc. That's the most important thing if you want to get development. A society where everybody can get equal access to foreign exchange and credit and the corruption is pretty minor. Bourguiba also saw the importance of modernization and political participation. He put the emphasis on being modern and always appeared with a suit and a tie, but when he relaxed, he wore a jallabah. But in public appearance, always the modern man. In 1956 the women had the vote and in the 60s, they were talking about family planning. There could be open discussion, and there were some small family planning programs. So that, on all accounts, Tunisia was a relatively open society.

*Q: Did you meet with Bourguiba yourself?*

BIRNBAUM: No, I never did. I was too junior. Maybe I met him at a signing ceremony.

*Q: But what kind of impression did your colleagues have of him?*

BIRNBAUM: Bourguiba was a first rate leader, a dynamic speaker, and in that part of the world, a speech often lasted two or three hours. Bourguiba attracted young professionals into the government. The young people that we worked with were really quite impressive, well trained, and there was a fairly high rate of education.

*Q: So your contacts in the government were quite dedicated, competent?*

BIRNBAUM: Yes. In that sense, Tunisia was a very good place to work, especially for a young person like myself. I remember we came up with a new project, a big range management project. And we went to see the people in the Ministry of Planning, and they said "Ce n'est pas inscrit dans le budget, (It's not in the budget) we have no money for it this year. It will have to wait a year." It is difficult to tell an AID technician that the project that he's working on has to wait a year. So I had a bright suggestion and said, "How about a little deficit financing?" And they said, "Would you explain what you mean?" I said, "The Central Bank could open up some supplementary credits to the budget, and we could do the project this year." They said they liked the project, but we'd better go see Mr. Hedi Nouira, the head of the Central Bank. I did go and explained what the problem was; that there was no financing in the budget for this project, and we had to have a contribution from the government. Would the Central Bank be prepared to advance some additional credits to the Government? Mr. Nouira said, "In Arabic there is no word for central banker, so they use the same word as conservative, and the answer to you is no." So we had to wait a year for that big range management project in the south of Tunisia.

*Q: He was a very conservative central banker then, for sure.*

BIRNBAUM: Yes, one worries that introducing people to deficit financing is like introducing people to liquor, who have never had it before, and once they start...so I don't know if it is a good idea.

*Q: What about the people in the embassy? Did you have much contact with the Ambassador?*

BIRNBAUM: As you can imagine, when we put forward the idea of a \$180 million aid program and Tunisia as one of the candidates for the Decade of Development, the Ambassador was very excited.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador?*

BIRNBAUM: Ambassador Walmsley. We were meeting with him for a while almost every night, to go over drafts and the argumentation in support of the \$180 million program. We worked fairly closely with the Embassy. One incident that I remember very well was Senator

Ellender's visit to Tunisia. He would come to an embassy and he would sit at the Ambassador's desk, and everybody would be sitting around him. He would ask all the senior people, what their job was. "What do you do here? How many staff do you have?" The economic counselor of the embassy was a Frenchman who was a naturalized American. Here is Ellender saying to him, "What do you do here?" He responded that he was the economic counselor of the Embassy, and he started to describe his functions, and he said, "And one of my functions is to liaison with the AID mission." And Ellender exploded, saying, "Liaison with AID? What are they, a foreign power?" And he said, "When I get back to Washington there will not be a separate Embassy economic section and a separate AID mission. You people will be one!" Of course, we never heard any more on that issue. I remember all the embassy officers quite clearly. It was a small group, and we worked well together.

*Q: How about the relationship with the French, since they were so dominant in the situation there?*

BIRNBAUM: You have to have luck in your assignment, that is when you get assigned to a country. The French were very predominant in Tunisia, even after independence. Their culture and language predominated. They had a very large Residence outside of Tunis, in a town called La Marsa, and the Tunisians decided they would widen the road from La Marsa to Tunis. The French Ambassador's garden was astride the road, and he received a notice that his wall was coming down, and he had to give up 20 or 30 feet of his garden to put the road through. The French looked upon the residence as sovereign French territory, and that the Tunisian couldn't unilaterally do this. Anyhow, they did it. The French Ambassador left in a huff, and there was talk about recalling the Tunisian Ambassador from France. The Tunisians said in effect to the French, "Look, we have another powerful friend. And that powerful friend is the United States." So, we served a purpose for them and it also helped us with implementing our aid program.

When President Kennedy was elected, Bourguiba was the first head of state to visit Kennedy. And that was a big political plus for them. There was a funny incident about an exchange of gifts. Bourguiba knew that Mrs. Kennedy was a horsewoman. So he made a gift of two thoroughbred Arab horses which were shipped off to the United States. Now the question was, what was an appropriate gift from the US to President Bourguiba? Well, Bourguiba was very friendly with Tito, who had a magnificent yacht, and he used to take Bourguiba up the Adriatic to his magnificent home on one of the islands in the Adriatic. Well, the message went back to Washington that it would be very nice if we could find an old US destroyer escort and have it refurbished into a little yacht for Bourguiba. The answer came back that that was not in the cards, so then another message went back which said, "How about a helicopter?" The message came back, "Well, the helicopter's expense doesn't bother us, but helicopters have to be maintained very carefully, otherwise they are very dangerous, and that would mean that we would have to provide a crew, and that's not in the cards either. So to make a long story short, the official gift from the US government to Bourguiba was an antique banjo clock! And for about a year, all my Tunisian friends said, "What is a banjo clock?" So I think Bourguiba was a little disappointed with the gift.

**LEO G. CYR**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1961-1965)**

*Ambassador Leo G. Cyr received his undergraduate degree from Holy Cross in 1930. After teaching high school for a year, he decided he would like a career in the foreign service. He enrolled in Georgetown's Foreign Service School, where he received his master's degree in 1933. He has also served abroad in Morocco, Cameroon and Rwanda. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 4, 1988.*

*Q: You were there for a relatively short time, basically as a fill in. Then you received what was a more substantive post, going as DCM to Tunisia.*

CYR: Yes. I got a telegram from the Department saying, "You have been transferred to Tunis as DCM."

*Q: Had you asked for this assignment?*

CYR: Over the years I may have listed it on one of those "where-would-you-like-to-be-assigned" forms, but I wasn't working for it. And I had stayed with Barrows long enough for him to get his feet on the ground.

*Q: He was a career officer?*

CYR: He was a career officer. He was an AID man at one point, and he had been integrated. And I was sent to Tunis, where I was under Ambassador Walmsley. The situation was fairly normal.

*Q: At that point Tunisia was completely independent of France. But what was our policy towards Tunisia at that time?*

CYR: One of very close cooperation, and one of feeling that Tunisia was very important to us. One of feeling that they were most anxious to be very close to us. I can recall going with Ambassador Russell to see Bourguiba one day. And in the course of the conversation Bourguiba made the statement, "You can rest assured that when the chips are down we are with the United States."

*Q: Was Bourguiba using the United States as sort of a counter-force to the French do you think? Concerned that the French might have undue influence there?*

CYR: Possibly. If so, not unduly. He may have had thoughts of that kind, but I would say that it was not a blatant situation in that regard.

*Q: I think when you were there was a period that there was a sort of a confrontation with the French over the naval base at Bizerte?*

CYR: Bizerte. Yes.

*Q: What was the situation at that time?*

CYR: As a matter of fact, within days after I arrived there was gunfire at that base during Ambassador Walmsley's reception to introduce my wife and me to the local community. I remember that diplomats and Tunisian officials began to slip out of the reception when the news broke. I am not quite sure how to describe our position. It was one of concern over the Franco-Tunisian controversy that was going on, and trying to cope with it as best we could. We weren't trying to push any particular bill of goods, as I remember, we were just hoping that the whole thing would settle down.

*Q: And sort of keep our heads down. Were the Tunisians trying to get us involved in this?*

CYR: Not to my recollection, no.

*Q: How would you describe Bourguiba's method of government?*

CYR: Well, it was certainly a strict, paternal, hands-on sort of approach. He felt very much that he was in charge. That his was almost a divine right of kings. I can understand his staying on the way he did, because he could never conceive of anyone else being president of Tunisia. And so, what happened because of that.

*Q: We're speaking of Bourguiba's staying way beyond the time of his competency.*

CYR: That's right. He should have left earlier because of his physical condition.

*Q: Well, did we have much to do with the Tunisian government, or was it pretty much just to be there?*

CYR: No, we had quite a bit to do with the Tunisian government. We had a substantial AID program under Lavergne, who was a very good AID man. And we didn't take them lightly. We thought they were important, and we acted that way.

*Q: Well now, there was pressure, and there continues to be pressure, on the Tunisians from Algeria. Were there problems at the time you were there?*

CYR: During my time there were Algerian Nationalists hovering around in Tunisia seeking its help and support in obtaining Algerian independence. One of our jobs was to keep in contact with them. Bill Stokes was our political officer at the time, and he was our specialist on that. He was an excellent political officer and kept track of these people. We did this to keep informed, not because we had any special fear, that I know of that this or that was going to happen.

*Q: Let me ask, how about the CIA, were they overly involved, or not, or how did you feel about them?*

CYR: They were well represented. And I do not feel that they were excessive in any way, but I

feel that they were competent and did a good job, and were in there, really in there.

Q: *Did they keep you informed?*

CYR: Yes.

Q: *How about AID? How was this run? Was this a problem?*

CYR: No. This was very well run, and under both ambassadors. I was there under two ambassadors, Newbold Walmsley and then Ambassador Francis Russell. In both cases Lavergne, the AID Director, kept the ambassador very well informed. And they were very close.

Q: *Well now, you went back to Washington in 1965 to '66 as a Diplomat in Residence.*

CYR: Yes.

Q: *Where did you go?*

CYR: Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

Q: *Was this of your choice?*

CYR: I didn't initiate anything, but I had to agree that I had been in Tunis a good length of time. It was '61 to '65. And it was put to me that it was a re-Americanization program, and I was completely agreeable to that.

Q: *Well, I'd like to return once again to Tunis, because we hope to use this for young officers who are coming in to read about this. How did your ambassadors use you as a DCM?*

CYR: The first ambassador was a little difficult to get along with, and I didn't know what was going on at the time. Do you want me to go into personnel details?

Q: *I would just as soon, yes. Because we can edit this later, but I think it's very important to understand how personality affects operations.*

CYR: Well, this ambassador, a career minister in rank, had been in the Foreign Service for a long, long, time. He had a very definite opinion as to whom he wanted as DCM, and the department suggested candidates one after another, one after another. And no go. I later learned that he had turned down candidate after candidate, saying "this man has had no experience with Africa, but I think my man is the man for the job". So eventually the Department came up with my name.

Q: *And he couldn't say that at all about you.*

CYR: He knew that I was one of a long line of Mr. Africas, so to speak.

Q: *Yes.*

CYR: And so I went to Tunis and then he started taking it out on me.

Q: *Do you think that this was a little bit of a ploy, where you were the unwitting shuttlecock between the people in personnel and the ambassador?*

CYR: It's possible, or he may have thought it was not so "unwitting" on my part. I can assure you that if the Department was indulging in any such ploy, which I seriously doubt, I for one knew nothing about it. His attitude towards me was baffling, to say the least. If he was having problems with AF, my long association with AF may have troubled him. But I had no way of knowing what was on his mind. I had no idea that I was the last of a long list of candidates. I was just happy to be assigned to Tunis out of the blue.

Q: *It made perfect sense.*

CYR: In other words, it had never occurred to me that the Department might be party to some ploy. I got off the plane in Tunis and the Ambassador met me at the airport. My predecessor had been living in a leased house - I'm not sure whether he or our Government had taken the lease. To remedy a dearth of conversation, I asked the Ambassador "Can you tell me if David McKillop's house was furnished by the Government?"

He said, "What house? We've let that go." Well, this struck me as rather strange, even a bit abrupt. So I thought "Well, I'll just have to think this over a little bit." Actually, it turned out that the house was still available, still within reach, but if things were left to go the way they were, I'd have to start from scratch. As tired as we were after our night flight from Yaounde, my wife and I were whisked to the Ambassador's residence for an intimate luncheon with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr and his wife. Mrs. Walmsley couldn't wait to question my wife about her previous experience with supervising wives. Her reaction was "Oh, so you've had experience. Well I'll need your help, but don't try to take them away from me." In spite of the low profile that my wife adopted, wives soon began to come to see her more often than my wife considered wise and, for some reason, they would never park in front of our residence. We learned eventually that Mrs. Walmsley had requested the wives to bring their problems to her.

I had received home leave orders before leaving Yaounde. So, after a good night's rest, I informed the Ambassador that since we had no place to stay - we were parked in the Hotel St. Louis in Carthage, which was quaint but we were cramped - I had decided to send my family ahead on home leave, and that I would follow as soon as convenient. It developed that the Ambassador had to make a quick trip to Washington. At a reception in Washington, a Department officer asked my wife if she knew that the Ambassador was spreading the story that the DCM's wife had left his wife all alone in Tunis?

Eventually I came on home leave, and arranged that my predecessor's villa would be Government-leased and furnished, as I had told the Ambassador I would do. Also, the Department received a letter from the Ambassador, either asking that I not return or hinting at it. I don't recall that I ever knew which. In any event, Assistant Secretary G. Mennen Williams, of



late memory, called me into the Department and said, "What's going on out there?"

And I in effect said, "Well, you tell me. I don't know what's going on, but let me say to you, sir, that is his post, and if he doesn't want me there, please reassign me. On the other hand, if you want me to go back, I will go back and I'll take whatever he dishes out."

And in a few days I got the word "go back", which we did, arriving there on New Years Eve. There was a party at the Ambassador's residence. I'd have given a hundred bucks if I hadn't had to go, but we just had to show. We were coolly received, and the Ambassador's wife started working on my wife. We got through that evening, but were not so lucky at a subsequent reception that took place at the Ambassador's residence. The Spanish Ambassador was dean of the Diplomatic Corps and his mother, a Contessa, lived with him. She was a wonderful Spanish lady of the old school, a close friend of Mrs. Walmsley and of my wife. At some point in the party, Mrs. Walmsley asked my wife to sit with the Contessa, a fairly elderly lady, and Kitty was happy to do so. They were entertaining each other as usual, when someone beckoned to Kitty. She hesitated, but the Contessa said, "Go ahead, Kitty, go see what they want." Kitty had no sooner left her side than Mrs. Walmsley stormed up and said, "How dare you leave the Contessa alone after I told you to stay with her?" All this and more in the presence of many guests. So now le tout Tunis would hear of the feud in the American Embassy. As the Contessa was leaving, Kitty apologized to her. With Mrs. Walmsley standing nearby, the Contessa squeezed Kitty's hand and said, "You don't have to apologize, Kitty, I know that you would never do anything to hurt anyone's feelings."

I reported nothing to the Department, but for some reason Deputy Assistant Secretary Wayne Fredericks decided to visit Tunis. He got a cold shoulder from the Ambassador, who was obvious in his determination to be cavalier with Fredericks. It wasn't too long thereafter that the Ambassador was recalled and named Consul General to Montreal.

To avoid imbalance in my comments on this subject of petty tyrants, let me say that during my years in the Department and the Foreign Service, I had contact with men whose stature I will revere for the rest of my life. To them, pettiness was a foreign substance. My role models were Averell Harriman, Dean Rusk, Livingston Merchant, G. Mennen W "Soapy" Williams, George Allen, Charles Yost, Garrison Norton, Joseph Satterthwaite, John Dickey, Jack Jernegan.

*Q: How was he as a political reporter, and dealing with Bourguiba and all? Was this affecting him there too?*

CYR: I thought he was an excellent reporting officer, perceptive and professional. How he was with Tunisian officials when I was not around, I do not know. I can't judge his normal personality, because from the day we met, he was under the influence of that DCM-picking bee in his bonnet. It didn't help my case when President Bourguiba turned to me and recalled when he as a nationalist had been received by me as a Department officer at Union Station some ten years earlier. Nor when Foreign Minister Mongi Slim would turn to me or my wife during a dinner party and recall the good old days in Washington when we worked together on Tunisian affairs.

*Q: Apparently you weren't being used. How about your next ambassador?*

CYR: The next ambassador, Francis Russell, was my Assistant Chief in the World Trade Intelligence Division when I first came into State. I was from Maine and he was from Maine, and he was a God-send to me. Well, it was just like night and day.

*Q: Well, how did he use you?*

CYR: I would say he made very good use of me. He had been ambassador to Accra, so he was familiar with Africa, but I was more familiar with Northern Africa. I've never had any feeling that he didn't use me properly. I feel that we were very good friends, and we remain so to this day.

*Q: I'm thinking more of the role of the DCM. It varies between ambassador. Were you basically his alter ego, or the Chief Executive Officer, or what?*

CYR: Well, I would say that Ambassador Russell was a hands-on ambassador, who would want to be in charge himself. He was a dedicated officer and less likely than most to go off and leave you in charge, but I felt I was alter ego and I don't think he underused me. He was away once when I signed an AID agreement with Tunisia. In other words, I think he was just right.

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*Q: Before moving on to your time in Kigali, we were talking in our break here about the problem you had with Ambassador Walmsley and his wife. I wonder if you would, one, repeat the problem you had of the furniture, just in brief. Just to give an idea of what can happen. Then we were talking about types of senior officers, and I wonder if we might discuss this a little more.*

CYR: I was indicating during the break that Ambassador Walmsley had probably chosen to dislike me, because of my assignment to Tunis as DCM over his own choice. And as an illustration of the type of things that my wife and I put up with, I mentioned the fact that a neighboring American ambassador, a very close friend of the Walmsleys, came to visit them in Tunis. While there Mrs. Walmsley brought the wife of the visiting ambassador to our DCM residence. And after having a cup of coffee and exchanging a few pleasantries, they rather flippantly decided, "Oh, wouldn't it be nice to change the furniture around in this room." And so they called the servants in, and my wife watched in disbelief as they decided where they wanted to put this piece of furniture and that piece of furniture. My wife managed not to laugh, but she gave me an emotional description later. We said nothing, leaving them to grapple with their own self-esteem. What had possessed them? Had one of them suffered from similar treatment?

*Q: As we move on in this project interviewing officers, something we might take a look at, and that is the personality trait that seems to crop up more often than not, and that is this use of power by people who become ambassadors or principal officers.*

CYR: Yes. During our break, we agreed that all organizations have them, but that the Foreign Service seemed to have more than its share of petty tyrants. And that often they chose wives who

proved to be able assistants in this regard. I said that, during my association with Ambassador Walmsley, I was daily reminded of Cicero's opening remarks in Pro Archias: "How long will you abuse our patience, O Cataline." I saw him as a prime example of a type of officer who often develops in the Foreign Service. He makes a name for himself, and then his true colors begin to surface. He abuses his staff and his wife does likewise with staff wives. He - and so she - shows himself petty, mean, immature, childish, pompous, inconsiderate, arbitrary, or any one or all of these.

I put the rhetorical questions to you: a) does the frequency of such cases suggest that a certain type of person is attracted to a career in the Foreign Service; or b) is it the Foreign Service experience that molds good men and their wives the wrong way? c) Would a study in depth of this question be justified? There was the pre-Rogers Act [of 1924] crowd. Then the post-Rogers Act. Then the pre-Wriston [reorganization of the early 1950s] crowd. Then the post-Wriston crowd. It could be that each crowd thought its members were the cream of the crop and lorded over its successors, inflicting indignities that festered until one reached the top. Perhaps there were role models in each crowd whose insufferable attitudes became regarded as status symbols to be imitated?

**TERRENCE A. TODMAN**  
**Political Officer**  
**Tunis (1961-1965)**

*Ambassador Terence A. Todman was born in 1926 and raised in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. He attended Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico. He received his draft notice while in Puerto Rico. It was while in the Army that he developed a desire to enter foreign service. After leaving the Army, he received a degree from Syracuse University. He has also served in Tunis, Togo, Chad, Guinea, Costa Rica, Spain, Denmark and Argentina. He was interviewed by Michael Krenn on June 13, 1995.*

TODMAN: Fortunately when I returned from Baghdad I found that the assignment had been changed from Baghdad to Tunis, which was great, because Baghdad at the time was an inferno.

*Q: I came across a number of State Department documents, all the way from the 1940s, all the way, really, up into the 1960s talking about where the State Department could and could not send black Americans to serve, because of the country's practices and so forth. One of the areas that they seemed very tense about, was sending black Americans to Arabic nations. Did you find any problem?*

TODMAN: Absolutely not! I am prepared to say that that business about not being able to send blacks was purely concocted within the State Department; it was made out of whole cloth. It was a total lie. I never found in any of the places that I went to that there was any question of any resentment or anything. The only question that people ever had, and you would get this as they got to talk to you, you would feel some doubt: "Does this person have the influence with his own

country, to be able to get for us what we need?" But as far as color, as far as any of those other things were concerned -- zero. The problem has been, and is, in the United States of America. The only opposition that I ever found, anywhere, has been from Americans. I found it in Costa Rica: Americans, only Americans. In Spain: Americans, only Americans. In the Arab world? Not a hint, absolutely not a hint of it. And the Arab world would be the last place. You go through the Arab world and how many blacks do you find? And you find them doing everything. You find them in positions of importance, in their own country and they're all over. So, this was story concocted by Americans to keep from doing these things. It's damned nonsense.

*Q: Well, that certainly goes along with what I've heard from fellow ambassadors. That all of these that were sort of set aside as "Can't send blacks there can't send blacks there..."*

TODMAN: Nonsense, Nonsense! And the business of sending blacks to Africa is one of the worst. Because, again, the African countries are looking for the same thing any other country is: what influence does this guy have? And when you're up on the ambassadorial level, they want to know about that. Many people assume that the ambassador can pick up the phone and talk to the president and get something done. And it's one of the reasons, quite frankly, why in many places a political appointee is much preferred. Because they assume if this guy isn't career, yet the president picked and sent him here, he must be a buddy. And if anything happens he can... "Hey, Prez," and it's done. That's what a country is looking for. They're looking for a channel of direct communication and a person of influence. So, that's the only thing and that has nothing to do with color. And I think, frankly, that the career people are at a slight disadvantage in this, in terms of what the countries would like, because of their perception that the instrument of influence would be more a political than a career. But that's the only place where it exists. And the business about racial preference, absolutely not!

*Q: In Tunisia, you had the same job title. Were your duties any different in Tunis?*

TODMAN: Quite, because it was smaller and I was then at a higher level. Similar, obviously, but I dealt with and covered a great deal more. And I got into the business of negotiating, as well. I was the only person in labor affairs; I was head of labor activities. So I dealt with the leading Tunisian labor leaders. And, from the India experience, I had extremely good ties with the AFL-CIO, with George Meany personally, Irving Brown, who is since passed, I got to know Lane Kirkland. And I dealt with the leadership of the Tunisian labor movement: Habib Ashour, Mohammed Benazzedine, all of these people I saw on a regular basis. I also dealt with the ministries a great deal more directly, because as I said, it was a smaller operation and I was at a higher level. I did a lot for the ambassador there, again because of my knowledge of French and Arabic.

*Q: Who was the ambassador there?*

TODMAN: Russell [Francis H.]. I started out with Walmsley [Walter N.] and went on from Walmsley to Russell. I did a lot of the translating for him. I accompanied him for things where either French or Arabic was needed. I served as his liaison with the aid mission. We had a big aid mission in Tunisia and I served as the ambassador's liaison with that to make sure that the political input was getting in there. I helped to get the Peace corps established; that was the year

the Peace Corps first came out and the Peace Corps director who came out there did not have any French and hadn't lived abroad. So I became again being the introducer and liaison to help them get going. So it was a fairly responsible position. There was a lot involved in it.

*Q: You mentioned stunning some of the Tunisian communists into silence in reading them the Arabic. Was communism much of a problem in Tunisia when you were there?*

TODMAN: It was there. And obviously they were the ones who were always the most critical. That wasn't enough to change Habib Bourguiba [Tunisian president] from the things he wanted, nothing could change him. He had control of things. But again, he allowed the people to go ahead and say and do their thing. And what we were trying to do obviously, was to combat criticism wherever it was coming from. It wasn't enough to be a serious issue or to risk overturning anything. But it was there and it was important for us that it be dealt with.

*Q: You came into Tunisia, that must have been just after the Kennedy Administration came in.*

TODMAN: Sure, the Peace Corps started at that time.

*Q: You had served all during the Eisenhower years. Did you notice any changes in State Department procedure, the way things were working, the changeover to the Kennedy Administration?*

TODMAN: Yes, I noticed a change. I started with Truman. I noticed the change from Truman to Eisenhower; very dramatic. From Truman, with "the buck stops here," you send me our best recommendation and I'll take responsibility for it, to the Eisenhower group, "If you say it, it's yours and you'd better be prepared to defend yourself." But still there was a certain amount of predictability, I wouldn't say plodding, that's a charged word, but not much innovation. The major thing that one found with Kennedy was a sense of creativity, an excitement, a dynamism, a pushing out, of "let's try this new idea." It was an exciting time. For the State Department it was a difficult time, because many of my colleagues in the State Department saw themselves as caretakers of the good of the United States. There was a certain amount of resentment of this impostor, this innovator, coming in with these strange ideas about "let's do this instead of that and let's do it this way." and the Department did not move as fast as it should have. The result was that for a while the Department was left out. And the White House became a lot more active. The White House staff was doing things and a good part of what the State Department did was to circulate papers around the members of the department. They felt that things should be done in a certain way, they knew best what was in the best interest of the country. And they were going to insist that things be done in that way, that you look at the historical precedents and you respect them. This kind of thing hurt the department in the initial days of the Kennedy Administration.

Another thing that happened was that a generation was passed over, a generation of Foreign Service Officers who had expected that if they did well and didn't get out of line, their turn would come for the top positions, the few ambassadorships that we would get or the DCMships [Deputy Chief of Mission.] It would be their turn to be up there in these positions. And in the Kennedy Administration one felt more a plucking of people who were considered to be the brightest, the best, the most able. And the practice of moving up through the ranks, the whose

turn it is, stopped. There was a fair amount of disillusionment and disappointment among the people who had worked hard and thought, “OK, now it’s my turn,” only to see somebody else come in and get the Deputy Assistant Secretaryship or the whatever it was. So, for the State Department, my impression was that it was not a very happy time.

*Q: At least publicly, and in some of the actions the State Department took, Secretary Rusk said that one of his priorities was to try and get more black Americans in the State Department. Prior to 1961 it was still being called in many of the black newspapers the “lily white State Department” and so forth. And there were some programs set up by Richard Fox and others in the State Department to do that. Did you see any of that effort resulting in any changes in the makeup?*

TODMAN: Nothing significant, nothing significant. In fact, it was just after that we had to go out and bring in senior people from USIA and AID because we didn’t have anybody at senior levels in the State Department. And the recruiting efforts didn’t produce very much. There was no lateral entry, so you weren’t bringing in people at the mid levels or above the entry level. The record of the State Department had been horrendous, it’s been terrible throughout. There have been spurts at attempts to do things; Dick Fox tried some things, Eddie Williams tried some things, there were a few university programs to try and train some people. Something’s better than nothing, but you’re always talking about very little.

*Q: Not to break off from the development of your own career here, but why do you think that’s been such a consistent problem?*

TODMAN: A couple of reasons. One is American society as such. But another one is the Foreign Service, the Foreign Service Corps. There’s a group that develops; it’s an in-group. Once you’re there, you preserve and protect it, and you want only people like you. Then it’s a heck of a lot easier to protect your own position. Also, it’s an elite group and one of the ways to insure that you maintain the sense of elitism is to not have too many people in who’ll be different. That’s part of the elite, too. If you have a different accent, nowadays maybe it’s good to have one, but if you don’t fit the mold, then the people within the group make sure that you don’t get in. And it’s done from inside, because these are the people who man all the positions that are responsible for opening it up. You get senior leadership which says, “Yeah, we’re committed to change.” But the commitment never involves any follow-through of a personal nature. The one case in which I’ve ever seen that to work was in AID when the man who was head of the Africa Bureau said, “You will bring blacks into this bureau.” I wrote about it sometime and made a speech on it, because it was so impressive. He refused to allow anybody else to be appointed. He got, as you always get, the same story, “We can’t find anyone qualified who will do it,” and then you say, “OK, if you can’t find anyone then I guess I’ll have to yield.” But he said, “We won’t fill it.” And after a while the people who needed to get the work done realized that it was better to go ahead and get someone because he was serious about it. But that was the rare exception, people come in and make a lovely statement, you know, “This is what I believe in, this is what I’m going to do.” And I wouldn’t question the sincerity of the top people in making those statements. But I will state with absolute certainty, there was never any follow-up to insure that it took place. And if you don’t have that follow-up, you have a built-in, protective group that wants its own kind and is able to ensure that it goes that way. And wanting

your own kind doesn't imply and is not intended to suggest any animosity towards others. Exclusion often isn't because you hate one group or that you don't want them; it's often because you want some others and that effectively keeps out the other side, without there being any, "I don't want you around." It's not, "I don't want you around." It is, "I want him around and I only have room for one."

**WALTER C. CARRINGTON**  
**Peace Corps Director**  
**Tunisia (1963-1965)**

*Ambassador Walter C. Carrington was born in New York in 1930. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1952 followed by a LLB in 1955. He served in the Peace Corps in Tunisia and as director of the Peace Corps in both Sierra Leone and Senegal. In addition he fulfilled an ambassadorship to Senegal. Ambassador Carrington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 9, 1988.*

*Q: This is the Martin Luther King march?*

CARRINGTON: Yes, right. And I got a chance to participate in that. And I stayed in the country until shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy. So I was here for that whole period. And then went out to Tunisia and was there for two years.

*Q: Again with the Peace Corps?*

CARRINGTON: Yes, again with the Peace Corps. Spent two years in Tunisia from '63 to '65 and then went from Tunisia to Senegal where I was Peace Corps Director from '65 to '67.

*Q: Putting these two ones together, since we are looking at this from a sort of professional point of view, were there differences in how the Peace Corps fitted into the operations in Tunisia/Senegal as opposed to Sierra Leone? I'm speaking of American operations?*

CARRINGTON: No, again, when I try to think about the relations, for example, with the rest of the Embassy in Tunisia, we had a very supportive ambassador, Francis Russell. I can't recall any real conflicts with the AID mission there, nothing like we had initially in Sierra Leone. Things went rather smoothly in terms of our operations in Tunisia, vis-a-vis the rest of the American establishment there.

**DEREK SINGER**  
**Peace Corps Director**  
**Tunis (1964-1966)**

*Derek Singer was born in New York City in 1929. He graduated from New York University in 1952 and went on to graduate studies at Johns Hopkins SAIS. After completing his education, Singer took a job with CARE in Colombia and Bolivia. After two years in South America he joined ICA with positions in Taiwan, Costa Rica and Congo/Kinshasa. In 1960 he was recruited to join the Peace Corps at its creation and served in Bolivia and Indonesia. He became director of the Peace Corps in Tunisia in 1964 and then moved to the private sector in 1966. After a brief assignment with the UN in 1972 he returned to USAID, serving in Washington, Zaire, Kenya, Ecuador and Cameroon. After retiring from USAID in 1994 he did some consulting work in Burundi, Rwanda and Haiti. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on March 9, 1999.*

SINGER: Next, I returned to Washington for some training in North Africa and Middle Eastern affairs. After getting to know a little about the area, I became the Peace Corps Director in Tunisia. I remained in Tunis for a year and a half, and then resigned from the Peace Corps (and the government) in 1966.

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*Q: So, then suddenly you were reassigned?*

SINGER: Back in Washington. Thank goodness my family hadn't gone out there because it would have been difficult to turn around and go back again with them a few weeks later. I was assigned to the Middle East and North Africa affairs. A man named George Carter was the director of that regional office in Peace Corps Washington. I stayed there for several months as a special assistant to Carter on Middle East and North Africa affairs. I traveled a lot in the region, did some troubleshooting, conducted a few evaluations, attended conferences, and so forth. Then, in about 10 or 11 months, just under a year, an opening came up in that region in Tunisia. I was assigned to Tunis as the Peace Corps Director in 1965. I had a fascinating experience there as well. I was inheriting, of course, a program that had been pretty well established. The Tunisians liked the Peace Corps, we were in good political shape there. The foreign minister was the President's son. He was very sympathetic, in particular, to the Peace Corps, and he wanted to continue it even after Kennedy had gone, because the foreign minister had been the Tunisian Ambassador to Washington at the time and was very close to the White House. In fact, he had come to know John Kennedy quite well. Anyway, it turned out that my stay in Tunisia was about a year and a half.

Now there, we also had a very different group of Peace Corps Volunteers. Tunisia is largely an urbanized country, a small sliver of a country, located between its larger neighbors, Libya and Algeria. Educated Tunisians are bilingual, French and Arabic. It sort of has one foot in the Mediterranean, European-dominated Mediterranean culture and one foot, speaking metaphorically, in the Arab world, due to its location. Tunisia has been a "crossroads country" for many centuries as a matter of fact. The Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Phoenicians, the French, the Arabs, and others all took a crack at infiltrating their culture and their political rule into that country. It was a fascinating place. They liked the Peace Corps, but, as I said, it was a predominately urban country, and most of our Volunteers were assigned in



urban settings. They were English teachers on the one hand, in government subsidized, in some cases, government run higher language schools in Tunis, and the other large towns, Sousse, Sfax, and others, and they were architects and civil engineers chiefly assigned to road building, construction, and building design work for the Tunisian government. It was a very status conscious country. Let's just say much of what went on there was under government control, or at least strong government influence in many different sectors. Our Peace Corps Volunteers were well trained people. Most of them had undergraduate degrees in English, some graduate degrees in English, and in English teaching, or in Education. There were a few in ESL, English as a second language, and the architects were graduate architects, just out of architectural school but with architectural degrees. We had the American Institute of Architects as our contractor to supervise them and facilitate their work with the architects, civil engineers and draftsmen with whom they worked on a number of different projects around the country.

Our big problem in Tunisia was something I alluded to very briefly earlier. To a degree, our PCV's were cheap labor - labor that the Tunisian government, if not by using Tunisian nationals, could very well afford (and had afforded in the past) to bring architects and civil engineers in, in particular, from countries like France and Italy, which were very close, physically and culturally, if you will, to Tunisia itself. But, instead, when they were offered basically "free Peace Corps Volunteers" from the United States, with respectable professional credentials, as well, and without the necessity of doing anything except basically patting them on the back from time to time, giving them some supervision, and being nice to them in their offices in Tunis and larger towns around the country where they were based, well, they just jumped at that chance. Now, remember what I said before - there seemed to be a kind of correlation between the people who live in mud huts (or close to it) in the Peace Corps Volunteer community and the degree of their happiness, versus those who "live well" whose lives were often laced with dissatisfaction, grumbling and unhappiness. That correlation came up loud and clear in Tunisia. There were many unhappy Peace Corps volunteers, despite the fact that their professional jobs were interesting. I believe they caught on before too long to the fact that they were filling in because they were cheap labor for people who the Tunisians were perfectly capable of staffing themselves. Both from their own ranks, as I said, and from several European countries which had, in the past, sent in professional staff to fill those particular jobs. When they discovered this, many of the architect Volunteers just didn't like it. They didn't like it because they knew they really weren't that much needed and wanted.

*Q: They weren't doing interesting jobs?*

SINGER: They weren't doing what they knew the Tunisians themselves couldn't do. There is a big difference if you know that you are there because principally you are "cheap labor" and your employers, in this case the Government of Tunisia, didn't have to pay for them. It was just not very satisfying. That you are kind of being paid, not slave wages, but you are being paid a very modest allowance by the U.S. government through the Peace Corps Volunteer allowance. But they weren't really needed. They knew that.

*Q: They couldn't provide anything that was different from what others did?*

SINGER: That's right. Incidentally, our English teachers were a little bit happier because it

wasn't that easy to get English teachers with a native born American or English accents and what have you, which is the kind of English they wanted to have taught in their professional schools. So, that was a little different story there. But, the problem with the professional architects and civil engineers was exacerbated by the fact that we were, as administrators of the Peace Corps, also told not to let our Volunteers travel to Europe on vacation, or for any other reason. Now that was a real problem, because on a clear day, from Tunis you can literally see the southern islands off Italy in the Mediterranean. We are talking about an hour's flight between Tunis and Rome, and not much longer to the south of France. The temptation was enormous to go to those countries and to get to see Europe at some point during their Volunteer service of two years. One of my jobs was to try to stop that. I mean monitoring airports and going to travel agents, and checking on ticket issuing, that kind of stuff. In addition, we also had a policy which I was told to enforce, my staff and I, and that was, "Thou shalt not drive a car." PCV's were simply not allowed to drive cars or trucks. There had been a spate of accidents for one thing, and also the image issue, which you have mentioned yourself on a couple of occasions was there in spades. So, ironically, we had to allow the Volunteers to be chauffeured back and forth to work when they weren't within walking distance of their work, or there wasn't public transportation to get them to their jobs. That was perfectly permissible. That probably was the least they could do, to send Government cars to pick them up and take them back and forth to work. We had a lot of that. We also had a lot of attempts to buy the most popularized motor vehicle in the country, certainly in the cities and towns of the country. That was the mobylette, the mini-motorcycle, which a very large number of Tunisians rode all over the place. At that point, our doctor took a look at the number of accidents that were occurring before anybody was seriously thinking of wearing crash helmets, by the way, mid-1960s, and he said "No." Our doctor sort of put the kibosh on using the mobylette, and Washington said "Thou shalt not drive vehicles, and besides, you are not allowed to go to Europe either." That plus the perceived exploitation of some of our people...

*Q: Is it possible also that, particularly the architects and engineers, they were a little more sophisticated professionally, a little more advanced probably than some of the other Volunteers and, therefore, had a little different expectation of their status?*

SINGER: It is certainly possible. It is absolutely possible. The AIA, American Institute of Architects staff there on site, to some extent, encouraged that feeling by building up professional self-esteem and appreciation as much as they could which is perfectly normal and rational for them to do, from their perspective. So, anyway, we are winding up the story on Tunisia. I stayed in Tunisia only 18 months, rather than the full two year or more tour which the Peace Corps expected. That was largely because of two things: First, I got hepatitis while I was living Tunisia. Fortunately, not too serious or life-threatening, hepatitis Type A, and I was hospitalized for a time, and it is a very discouraging kind of disease to have, and I became very discouraged, perhaps more so than the situation warranted. Anyway, I came to believe it was time for me to do something else, and get out of my situation. Secondly, Sargent Shriver stepped down during this time and the second national PC Director, man named Jack Vaughan, stepped into his shoes. So for me, the excitement of being in on the ground floor and what have you began to wear off. In general, I was becoming disillusioned by a combination of the fact that I had this nasty sickness, and Sarge Shriver, my captain, was leaving the ship. I became convinced it was time for a change. So, 18 months after I got to Tunisia, I left and I left the Peace Corps. I had been on loan

from AID for my first two years with the Peace Corps, and they asked me if I wanted to come back. I said "Not now, thanks - I just want to drop this whole government business entirely at this point in my career and go do something else for a while. I'll find something in the United States to do." So, that is what happened.

**EDWARD L. PECK**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Tunis (1964-1966)**

*Edward L. Peck was born in Los Angeles, California. He was posted to Sweden, Morocco, Algeria, Washington, DC, Egypt, Iraq, and Mauritania. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

Q: *Well, anyway, let's go on. You were assigned to Tunis as the economic officer.*

PECK: As an economic officer. As junior guy, yes.

Q: *Who was our ambassador then?*

PECK: Francis Russell, who died just a few months ago.

Q: *Let's see, we're talking about -- I always like to put time in. This is from 1964 to 1966.*

PECK: That is correct.

Q: *Francis Russell was one of our real pros in the business, wasn't he?*

PECK: No, sir. He came into the Foreign Service as an FSO-1.

Q: *So that's right at the top, equivalent to --*

PECK: Yes, he came in at the top. He had been a speech writer. He had written the famous Truman speech that was used as the "Point Four" doctrine. He had written some other things, and he was from a well-connected New England family, and a man of considerable skills. So he joined the Foreign Service, and I think his first post was in Tel Aviv. His next one, he was ambassador to New Zealand, then ambassador to Ghana, and then ambassador to Tunisia. And he served in Tunisia for, I think seven years. Never even learned French. To my knowledge, while I was there, he never ever set foot in the AID building, which was across the street.

I considered him to be in some respects a classical illustration of the problems of "clientitis." We were not allowed to report anything that was in any way questioning what Habib Bourguiba was doing in Tunisia.

Q: *"Clientitis." You might explain a little more for somebody who's not familiar.*

PECK: He did not want anything to affect relations between the United States and Tunisia, so that efforts to talk about economic mistakes or political errors got erased from our reporting. I got lectured twice by Russell on trying to report things which, from my perspectives needed to be reported. I did the Biweekly Economic Review, which had short economic snippets, which he never read. The DCM referred to it as the "biweekly disaster report" because it was the only reporting from the embassy which talked about the clay feet aspects of Tunisia's marble statue. The people in Washington of course knew, but the embassy was never allowed to report any of the things that were being done incorrectly, and there were lots of them.

So Russell suffered from that problem. He never tried to understand or in any way manage the AID program, which was the biggest thing we had going there at the time, and which made some serious economic development mistakes. I did not care for him much, although he invited me as a newly arrived junior officer to a luncheon at his house, where an incident took place which became later important in my life.

Russell had been given a parrot by Kwame Nkrumah, the then-president of Ghana, when he served as ambassador. The lunch guests were sitting on the sun porch of the residence, when the bird began to do the one thing for which Russell had kept it: It could whistle off-key the first three bars of "The Star-Spangled Banner." The bird did that, and Russell told the assemblage what it was that the bird represented, a gift from Nkrumah, and I turned to the lady sitting next to me and said, "Just before leaving the States, I heard a very funny parrot story."

It so happened that the end of that comment fell into a silence, and Ambassador Russell said, "Oh, then you must tell it." And my wife turned pale. And so I told this parrot joke, which was slightly off-color -- but very funny.

The lady sitting next to me was the Baroness D'Erlanger, who really liked the joke and took the trouble to make my wife and me her friends. Years later, when my family was evacuated from Algeria, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, my wife wound up in London. It was the D'Erlangers who took her and the kids in and helped them with various things, to survive the evacuation.

*Q: Well, two things I'd like to ask. One, you couldn't report, except sort of surreptitiously, the dark side of the Tunisian economy. Was there a sort of a conspiracy to try to get these reports out, or were you writing -- I mean not just you but the rest of the embassy -- were there efforts to get what you felt was a more balanced or truer picture to Washington?*

PECK: Yes.

*Q: Now how did this work? I'm speaking, you understand, for a researcher who's not familiar with this, and they only have the documents to look at. What should they look at?*

PECK: Well, let me step away just for a second because in later years -- pardon me -- I learned that one of the weaknesses under which my efforts labored was the fact that I was the new kid on the block and theoretically didn't know anything. Later on when I was myself a chief of mission, people would bring me in papers, and I would say, "No, no, you don't really understand the

situation." And had them accuse me of trying to protect the regime. In that case of course, they were wrong. [Laughter]

In the case of Tunisia, some of the stuff that I suspected or discovered and tried to report -- turned out to be correct while I was there. So the ambassador tended to look at me as a nice, you know, eager young whippersnapper who didn't really know a hell of a lot. That was part of it.

Take, for example, when I was the acting chief of the econ section. He sent for me one day, having just come back from having luncheon with Cecil Hourani, the Lebanese man who was the cultural affairs advisor to President Bourguiba, Hourani had spoken at some length about the wisdom of Tunisia adopting an economic policy like Lebanon's, of permitting money to flow freely in and out of the country as a means of overcoming its relative economic weakness. Hourani had gone on and on about banking and transfers of funds and blah, blah, blah.

Russell wanted to report this to Washington, so he called me into his office and dictated to me about an eight-page telegram on the subject. I went back to my office and tried to write the message with a little less freshman enthusiasm, because if Tunisia had opened its borders to the free flow of funds -- phew! -- everything would have left. Because Tunisia was not Lebanon. All of the former French colonists, and all the other former residents, who had had their funds blocked, would have taken everything out the door the very same afternoon.

So I tried to shade the report a little bit. The ambassador took it and rewrote it in the way that Hourani had told him and sent it in as a priority cable. I tried to tell Russell, face-to-face, that economically this was not a sound idea -- politically it wasn't either -- and that he should consider that Hourani was a cultural advisor, and really wasn't an economist. Anyway, he sent the cable in, and Washington kind of snickered.

That was the kind of thing where, had he sent the cable in with a footnote saying, "As Washington is well aware, this might not work, yet it's nice to know that's what Hourani is talking about because he does have access to the president" -- blah, blah, blah. We didn't do that. We sent it in as a great idea, that he, Russell, wanted to be authorized to encourage. Washington said, "No, don't do that."

*Q: Well, were there other ways that you were getting back to Washington?*

PECK: Yes. Through the Biweekly Economic Review I would stick little snippets in about the crop failures, or marketing programs that had gone awry, or the imposition of certain collectivization programs in the middle of Tunisia, which I suggested were not only going to be totally ineffective but could perhaps create some unrest. The political office x'ed out that last part, and six weeks later there were riots in Sahel region. You know the feeling: "Hey. Hey, guys, I saw it coming." I was sure I was smarter than they were.

But the embassy at large knew that Ambassador Russell wanted very much to keep a shining, glowing image of this perfect little country. The phrase that he used was one that Habib Bourguiba had said to him. At that time Tunisia had the highest per capita economic assistance program that we had anywhere in the world. Bourguiba said, "I know what America wants from

Tunisia. It wants a little Tiffany window on Mediterranean Avenue." And that's what Russell wanted.

*Q: Well, now the ambassador wanted this, but were people traveling back, I mean was --*

PECK: Perhaps.

*Q: -- there other communication between -- the thing of saying this is a bunch of nonsense, or --*

PECK: No, not so much that, but the people in Washington tend to know, even if you're not reporting it, because it comes to them other ways. By travelers, by visitors, by other governments' reports, you know, from newspapers -- they have an idea. You can't really close the door. [In fact if we ever get around to it, the tombstone of my own career was rubbing Washington's face in something that was not being reported directly from a neighboring country, and of course they knew all the time. They just didn't want to embarrass anybody by admitting it.] You can't keep those things secret.

*Q: So that if somebody looks at the official documents, there's another element, I mean. One should not rely just on the official documents.*

PECK: By no means. In fact there are always two foreign services. They're interchangeable. One consists of the people in Washington, and the other consists of the people overseas, and they change roles when they change jobs. So the skeptic from Washington goes out and becomes the supporter of what's happening overseas, and vice versa. So they know. There's a certain amount of skepticism and healthy reluctance to accept at face value everything the embassy says, because many embassies are reluctant to report the bad things.

*Q: Well, it upsets your relations with the host government.*

PECK: It can. It makes it difficult when you've written in, repetitively, that the foreign minister is an absolute dolt on economic development. Then when you go in and report that he's asking for more funds for other reasons, you've sawed the legs off your own proposition. Why should the U.S. help that dunce?

*Q: Speaking of economic work -- you're saying the AID program was the highest per capita at that point.*

PECK: Yes, sir. I believe it was.

*Q: And you said that we were taking the wrong course. Without going into great detail, could you explain where you felt we were off?*

PECK: Well, it's the kind of thing that AID programs face worldwide. It wasn't just Tunisia. You wind up making economic decisions for political reasons.

*Q: You were saying, economic decisions are made for political reasons.*

PECK: Yes, you always do that. The countries do that with their own activities, and assistance programs do them for the same reasons. If you're going to build a sugar beet factory, it should be built near a harbor, because that's where you're going to ship the product. But you wind up building it on poor ground way inland because your trying to do something for the region. So the United States got involved in a couple of those programs, which were questionable at best. We had a massive, massive program, thousands of acres being planted with fruit trees, for the purpose of letting Tunisia diversify its exports [which at that time were mostly wine, and the French, the major market, weren't buying any] without really exploring whether or not Tunisian fruits were going to be able to compete in the Common Market.

I got into a very heated argument once at an AID meeting. I was the embassy representative to USAID, and I brought up the fruit issue, "Do we want to continue to assist them in this?" And someone said, "Dammit, if we help them raise hundreds of thousands of tons of fruit, they will be forced to find a market." I said to the guy -- it was a big mistake -- "You must be the guy who was in charge of the wine-making program" -- Tunisia was pouring wine into the sea, with no place to sell it. I thought that was dumb, but I should not have personalized the attack.

The ambassador paid literally no attention to the AID mission and its program, and it was the most visible, most active part of our presence there, at the time.

**ARTHUR L. LOWRIE**  
**Political/Labor officer**  
**Tunis (1964-1967)**

*Arthur L. Lowrie was posted as a Foreign Service Officer in Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Washington, DC, Iraq, and Egypt. He was interviewed in 1989 and 1990 by Patricia Lessard and Theodore Lowrie.*

LOWRIE: I was shortly thereafter assigned to Tunisia as a Political/Labor Officer where I spent three years, again in a very interesting and pleasant, exciting post working for the most part with very enjoyable professionals. My Ambassador in Tunisia was the late Francis Russell who was a very different kind of Ambassador from Ambassador Rountree and other real professionals that I had known in Syria, for example James Moose and Charles Yost. Francis Russell was very much the public relations type Ambassador who was very energetic, looked the part, very much seeking to improve both governmental and popular opinion in its relations with the United States. Lots of traveling around the countries, lots of visits, but unfortunately in his desire to put the best possible face on Tunisia-US relations, President Bourguiba, etc. carried over into his reporting back to Washington as if the main purpose of the reporting was to provide justification to use back in Washington with the Congress and the bureaucracy to support continuing large aid program. The chief of the Political Section, Steve McClintic, and I found this intellectually dishonest. He paid a very high price for expressing his differences of opinion and his more skeptical view of Bourguiba -- in fact it ended his career. I paid a smaller price later on. But Francis Russell was, in fact, the only Ambassador I ever had who without actually telling lies,

always preferred to twist words to put his most favorable possible interpretation on events.

My major task in Tunisia was following the labor union (the UGTT) and Bourguiba's attempts to end any semblance of independence it still possessed. This was of particular interest to the United States because the UGTT enjoyed the support of the AFL-CIO and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. George Meaney and Irving Brown were very active in countering Bourguiba's moves.

**FRANÇOIS M. DICKMAN**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Tunis (1965-1968)**

*Ambassador François M. Dickman was born in Iowa in 1924. He graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1947 and received an M.A. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He served in the U.S. Army during both WWII and Korea. Ambassador Dickman joined the Foreign Service in 1951 and served at posts in Columbia, Lebanon, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. He served as the Arabian Peninsula Country Director until his appointment as the Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. He was interviewed by Stanley Brooks beginning February 2001.*

*Q: And what was your next assignment?*

DICKMAN: My next assignment was Tunis. After four years in the Office of Near Eastern Affairs flipping back and forth between NE/ECON and the UAR desk, I looked forward to this posting. I was being assigned as the embassy's economic officer. On the other hand, I regretted leaving a messy situation to my successor on the UAR desk, who was Mike Sterner. In mid-January 1965 when it became public that the United States was not going to negotiate any new PL480 agreements, Nasser's angry response was to say, "Let them drink seawater."

We flew to Tunis in the first days of 1965. The officer I was replacing, Charles Taqey, had already left. We stopped in Rome on the way to see about registering our daughter, Christine, at St. Stephens, a private American high school, for the following academic year. The American school in Tunis only went through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. But leaving Washington, DC in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade is difficult for any child and it was especially so for Christine. We thought she could finish her year by going to a French school in Tunis and using the University of Nebraska high school correspondence course. Well, Chrissy struggled for the next six months. The students at the lycee were less than accommodating or friendly. It was a mistake on our part. We should have tried to get her into St. Stephens as soon as we reached Tunis. Our son, Paul, did not have the same problem. He fit in easily, entering the American school in Tunis in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Two years later, he attended St. Stephens in Rome.

Although the furnace didn't work, we felt we were lucky to be able to move into a beach house at Gammarth, which is located some 20 minutes by car from the embassy in Tunis. But it would



take several months before our household effects arrived - this time because of a stevedore strike in the United States. So, we had to camp out with whatever odds and ends the embassy could provide.

Francis Russell was the ambassador and Leo Cyr the DCM, who would soon be replaced by Jim O'Sullivan, who later was replaced by Ed Mulcahy. With me in the Economic Section was Edward Peck, later to be replaced by Harry Sizer. The Political Section was headed by Steve McClintic with Art Lowrie as his assistant. There was a large, well established AID mission with a number of ongoing projects. It was headed by Tracy LaVergne, who was later replaced by Stuart Baron. There was also a large Peace Corps contingent. The wife of its director was a sister of Ted Sorenson and hence got a lot of attention. In addition, the Ford Foundation operated the Family Planning Center.

The year before our arrival in Tunis, the few thousand highly mechanized foreign owned (mainly French) agricultural lands had been nationalized by the government for redistribution to the hundreds of thousands of landless peasants. Compensation was to be in non-convertible Tunisian dinars. It had resulted in the departure of a large number of French citizens who aside from the agricultural sector provided a number of useful services. General DeGaulle had reacted imperiously by stopping the purchase of all Tunisian wines, which at the time was the country's leading export. Because of warm weather, Tunisian red wine had a higher alcoholic content and it was used to blend with French Bordeaux, a practice known as "coupage" [French: cutting]. Except for Francophone cultural activities, the French government had pretty much ended its economic assistance to Tunisia by the time we arrived. As a result, the Tunisian economy had been severely affected and it was in basically very bad shape. The nationalization had even caused a problem for our AID program. A couple of landowners with U.S.-French dual nationality were threatening to apply Section 620E of the Foreign Assistance Act, which called for stopping economic assistance if there was uncompensated expropriation of assets owned by American citizens.

The Tunisian economy was further affected by the actions of Ahmad Ben Salah, the second most powerful Tunisian after President Habib Bourguiba. While Bourguiba was the chief of Tunisia's only political party, the Neo-Destour, Ben Salah, through his hard work and honesty and as a leading exponent of state planning, had gained a very influential position in the party. At the time, Ben Salah was the minister of planning and finance. I think he had previously been Minister of Agriculture and Economy. In 1962, Ben Salah had pushed through a three year (1962-1964) economic plan and had been influential in pushing for the repossession of foreign [owned] lands. Before we arrived, the Tunisian government had already begun a stabilization (i.e. austerity) program under the direction of the International Monetary Fund. Meanwhile, Ben Salah had embarked on a new four year plan to cover the years 1965-1968. Among other things, the four year plan called for establishing state-organized agricultural cooperatives in these repossessed [colonized] lands, as well as putting the retail sector, including the small shops, into cooperatives. This was not a very popular move.

One of my first tasks in Tunis was to help negotiate a new Title I PL480 agreement, which as I remember amounted to about \$40 million. It included wheat, tobacco, and soybean oil. Soybean oil was mixed with Tunisian olive oil for domestic consumption. This allowed Tunisia to export

olive oil, which had now become its main agricultural cash export. Having previously been involved with the PL480 program in Egypt, I was very familiar with the financial and reporting requirements of the program. It involved negotiations with the foreign office's secretary general, Ismail Khalil, and his successors, Muhammad Megdiche, and Habib Bin Yahya, all of whom I would later meet as Tunisian ambassadors. Bin Yahya would, in fact, become the Tunisian ambassador to the United States in the '80s.

I should mention that in my work as economic officer, I had the complete confidence of Ambassador Russell, who was very generous in his evaluations of my performance. During the three and a half year tour in Tunis, I was responsible for administering the Title I program, which represented in monetary terms about half of our annual economic aid to Tunisia. This involved certifying the arrival and condition of different shipments, ascertaining that Tunisia was meeting its usual marketing requirements, making sure that Tunisian dinars generated by the sale of these commodities had been deposited in the bank, and assuring that a portion of local currency was available for the embassy's local expenditure with a small amount earmarked for conversion into U.S. dollars. This meant constantly badgering the Cereals Office (Office de Cereales), the Vegetable Oil Office (Office de l'Huile), and the tobacco monopoly, which were often tardy in making the required local currency deposits.

The AID mission was responsible for overseeing the Title II PL480 grant program, which provided flour and was used as payment-in-kind to unemployed Tunisians who were busy planting hundreds of thousands of eucalyptus trees. AID also supervised the Title III PL480 grant program for foodstuffs provided by Catholic Relief, CARE, and other non-governmental organizations. The PL480 program was an excellent form of economic assistance, especially for a country like Tunisia. I think it did a great deal to tide the country over a very difficult period in its economy.

In addition to PL480, I did a lot of economic and financial reporting, including the semi-annual economic reports, Tunisia's budget, its balance of payments, and its gross national product. I left the commercial work, such as our participation in the Tunisian trade fair, largely to Ed Peck and Harry Sizer. I worked very closely with the AID mission, especially Glenn Lehman and Patrick Demongeot, who were both excellent economists. Because Title I generated so much local currency, we were in a strong position to virtually dictate to the Tunisians just how this local currency would be allocated and used within Tunisia. One of our tasks was to convince the Planning Ministry that Ben Salah's four year plan (1965-1968) and its push for agricultural cooperatives was unrealistic and that its projections of economic growth were wildly optimistic. Much of the first three year plan had been financed by medium-term French supplier credits used by France to boost exports. Normally, these credits required repayment within three to seven years. Many of these supplier credits had now become due. This had added to Tunisia's economic woes because of its very limited foreign exchange reserves, much of which were being used to pay off the principal and interest on these supplier credits.

At the time, we made little headway in encouraging Ben Salah to modify his push for agricultural cooperatives under his four year plan. However, after many meetings with the director of the plan, Sadok Bahroun, we finally forced the Tunisian government to adopt an annual economic plan. It reviewed the performance of the economy during the previous year, the

investment goals to be achieved in the current year, which included the use of the Title I generated Tunisian dinars, and budget projections for the succeeding year. As part of this exercise, we also encouraged the Tunisians to reduce capital investment financed by foreign supplier credits and to try to renegotiate these supplier credits. One result of this effort was to make Tunisian economic planning more realistic and to encourage the government to look for other sources of foreign exchange, especially by building up a thriving tourist industry, which had begun to attract many European visitors to Tunisia's beautiful beaches, especially Germans and British.

One project that made effective use of U.S.-owned Tunisian dinars generated by Title I PL480 that I am especially proud of was the Smithsonian Mediterranean Sorting Center northeast of Tunis. With the increased pollution in the Mediterranean, Smithsonian scientists wanted to classify as many marine species as possible before they all died out. So, an agreement was worked out whereby \$60,000 worth of U.S.-owned Tunisian dinars were initially allocated for this purpose to cover the Center's local administrative costs and to hire a few local employees.

I should point out that Washington's generally favorable reception of our aid program was facilitated by President Bourguiba's foreign policy. For example, along with his general pro-western approach, he was one of the few Third World leaders who supported our stand in Vietnam. Also, shortly after we arrived in Tunis, Bourguiba embarked on a lengthy visit to several Arab countries, during which he tried but failed to get Nasser to withdraw troops from North Yemen. Bourguiba lectured different Arab leaders that a direct military confrontation with Israel over its diversion of Jordan waters should be avoided and that there should be a pacific solution with no victim. After having visited a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, Bourguiba inferred that Arab states shared a responsibility for their plight. As you can imagine, Bourguiba was heavily criticized for these views by other Arab leaders, as well as by many Tunisians but who did so in a private manner. But on the other hand, the Johnson administration viewed Bourguiba's statements as those of a true statesman. This resulted in several high level visits. I recall particularly the visits of Averell Harriman and Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

However, the strong feelings of the man in the street over the Arab-Israeli question really came out on the day of Israel's surprise attack against Egypt on June 6, 1967. The attack had come after Nasser had asked the United Nations to withdraw its military presence in the Sinai at Sharm el Sheikh. We learned about Israel's action on the car radio while coming to work. I recall telling Margaret, who had come to town, to head back home directly. Once the radio carried Nasser's reckless accusation that planes from the United States' Sixth Fleet had been involved with Israel in destroying Egypt's air force, mobs converged on the British and American embassies. The British embassy, which was downtown in the center of town, was burned to the ground. We rolled down all the shutters, which were beginning to be pelted with stones, and barricaded the front entrance to the chancery. However, we could not protect the cars that were parked in the courtyard in front of the embassy, which were all trashed. As the crowd assembled and began using a ramrod in trying to open the entrance, I spotted an individual who had climbed a tree and had entered the second floor balcony. At that point, we began defending ourselves using tear gas within the embassy as well as lobbing tear gas from the roof, where most of the embassy personnel had taken refuge. The Marines had been wisely instructed by administrative officer Zack Geneas not to fire any weapons. Fortunately, the tear gas seemed to do the trick. For some

reason in all the excitement, I was not bothered by the tear gas. After about a half hour, the crowd began to disperse. By then, Tunisian authorities attempted to remove the crowd to a spot a few blocks away. We felt particularly fortunate that the crowd had not discovered the gasoline pump located behind a high wall in the back of the courtyard. That could have made the situation much more dangerous had the mob discovered it. Ambassador Russell at the time happened to be in Washington, DC to be on hand for a meeting between Tunisian foreign minister, Bourguiba, Jr., and Secretary Rusk. Upon hearing of the mob actions, Ambassador Russell hurried back to Tunis.

*Q: Last time, you were describing the mob action outside and inside the embassy of Tunis. You remained on in Tunis for some time, I take it?*

DICKMAN: Yes, I did. It so happens that at the time of the demonstrations, we were scheduled to depart for home leave and had made arrangements to fly to Rome to attend our daughter's graduation from St. Stephens, a private school in Rome, and to pick up Paul, who by now was also attending the school. We were then to go to Naples for a leisurely boat trip home. However, our plans for the boat trip went awry. As we were boarding the plane for Rome, I was paged by Ambassador Russell's secretary, Louise Farnus, instructing me to stay in Tunis, but she couldn't tell me why. Since the baggage had all been loaded, I said I could not delay the Tunis Air flight, so we flew to Rome. At the airport in Rome, I was paged again, this time by the DCM and told to report to the embassy, which I did, where I was told that the Secretary and Ambassador Russell had instructed me to return to Tunis. Embassy Rome had canceled the boat reservation, so the family and I flew back to Tunis the next day. What had caused the flap was the visit to the embassy by Deputy Prime Minister Bahi Ladgham and Planning and Finance Minister Ben Salah the day after the demonstration. It was intended as a gesture of apology and a promise to help pay for the damages.

During the tour of the embassy, which was guided by political officer Steve McClintic, Ladgham took exception to a remark made by McClintic which was misinterpreted as Tunisia showing cowardice toward Nasser for not stopping the demonstration. This remark apparently settled in Ladgham's craw who sent a message to Tunisia's foreign minister, Bourguiba, Jr., who was meeting with Secretary Rusk in Washington. Ladgham asked that McClintic be removed. While this whole episode was very unfair to Steve and his family, the Department ordered them to pack their bags immediately for an assignment in Paris. During the next three weeks, I became the notetaker for meetings between Ambassador Russell and President Bourguiba and other officials.

Despite the angry public reaction to Israel's surprise attack and pressure coming from Egypt and neighboring Algeria, Tunisia did not break diplomatic relations with the United States. Once the dust had settled, we flew home for a shortened home leave to visit our parents in Wyoming.

In a way, Tunisia was our reward post since it was the only non-hardship post in my career. There were so many places to visit in Tunisia, such as the ancient Roman village of Douga, the Colosseum at El Djem located in the center of the country, which is nearly as large as the one in Rome, the ruins of Sbeitla near the Kasserine pass, and of course the magnificent collection of Roman mosaics at the Bardo Museum. We were within a couple of miles of Carthage and an easy drive to the Phoenician ruins at Kerkuan on the Cap Bon Peninsula, it made one realize how

the area had once been one of Rome's granary. On almost every sunny afternoon, if we weren't visiting another place in Tunisia, we would go for long walks with Iraq's former Minister of Education, Fahd Jamali. Fahd was a graduate of Columbia and a disciple of John Dewey. Following the 1958 military coup in Baghdad, he was jailed for several years until he was allowed to leave and go into exile in Tunisia where he taught at the University. He was a grand old man of Arab politics and a true Arab patriot. He died about a year ago.

As in our other posts, Margaret's abilities as an organizer were called upon again. This was still the day when the role of the wife in support of her husband and the image she projected of the United States were still evaluated. Margaret received the highest marks and unquestionably helped my career. Mrs. Russell, the ambassador's wife, was a strong believer in volunteer activities and in "two for the price of one." She was the honorary president of a very active American Women's Club of Tunisia that met regularly and had a number of different activities. These included reading for the blind and bringing the first Braille typewriter into Tunisia, working with Peace Corps volunteers at the orthopedic hospital, weekly visits to an orphanage, Tunisian study groups, and a pilot project on mental retardation. Margaret held several positions in the organization, including being its president for at least a year.

**MARILYN P. JOHNSON**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Tunis (1967)**

*Ambassador Marilyn P. Johnson was born in Boston in 1922. After graduating from Radcliffe College in 1944 she continued her education at the University of Geneva and received an MA from Middlebury College in 1952. Her foreign service career has included posts in Tunis, Niger, Moscow, Islamabad and an ambassadorship to Togo. She also spent time working for USIS and USAID in Guinea, Cameroon, Mali and Washington. Ambassador Johnson was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin on August 4th, 1986.*

*Q: Or MacDonald's hamburgers. When you got to Tunis, did you feel that this was practically being back in the States? It's so westernized.*

JOHNSON: It's westernized, but at first they said... I think I was the first woman, at least the first woman cultural affairs officer there, because they said, "It's an Arab world, but Tunis is different." They didn't know how it would be for me as a woman, dealing with the Arabs who prefer men, they say. I think the times have changed. I think a woman can negotiate with the Arabs and they look at her as a professional rather than as a woman in that case. I knew that there might be some problems. I had no problems. The Tunisians were... It was another culture, it was Mediterranean culture. I think that they have absorbed so many people from other countries. The Scandinavians were down there in the twelfth century or thirteenth century. There are blue-eyed Berbers and people in Cap Bon that are fair and blue eyed.

It's an international culture there, and I didn't feel that I was back in the American culture but it

was the French culture. But the French culture you find in all of these countries in Africa, you know, good French bread, croissants. We didn't have any of the good things at the beginning in Guinea or in Mali because they were in the Soviet sphere and the French had turned their backs to Guinea. They were still a little bit in Mali. But normally you feel the French influence in the schools and in the culture.

*Q: What were your living arrangements in Tunis?*

JOHNSON: In Tunis I had an apartment right in the middle of town. At one time Henry Loomis was deputy director. He'd been Voice of America director and then deputy director of the agency. He evidently went out to Tunis and was at the PAOs home, which was a beautiful home out in La Massa on the sea. That was where most of the diplomats lived. He said no. We at USIA were catering to the people and we should be where they could get to us easily or by public transportation. So they gave me the apartment. It was actually the apartment of my predecessor, which was a beautiful old apartment in the downtown area right over a general store, the Magasin général, a department store that overlooked the entrance to the medina.

It was also opposite the British embassy. We were there in 1967. When I first went to Mali in the summer for that seminar for teachers of English I had asked for somebody to clean the house and cook and do the washing. The driver, the USIS driver, found a young boy about 16 years old that he said was a good person and would do all of that. I found that he was. He was intelligent. He had gone to a Catholic school for about six years so he knew how to read and write, which was of inestimable value when you want to leave a message for them. He didn't speak any English but I spoke French so it didn't matter.

When I was going to Tunis I took him along with me to Tunis. There I took some of the Voice of America tapes for learning English and he studied VOA tapes to learn English because we knew that Persis was coming to visit, and of course he wanted to come to the United States, also. So he learned English and Persis came to visit.

In 1967 one morning she wasn't feeling too good, I guess, and he came in to bring her tea and she said she didn't think she would get up. She didn't want to get up that early, and he said, "Madame, il y a une manifestation." It was the students and the rioters at the time of the 1967 war who had come to our center, and thrown a rock through the window.

PERSIS: Which was just up the street.

JOHNSON: It was on the corner right up the street. Then they were heading down to the British and Persis saw the whole thing. She saw how it started. They weren't a particularly mean group, but they were protesting American support for the Israelis.

PERSIS: Diagonally across the place from us.

JOHNSON: But she saw what sparked them off was a truck unloading wine across the street, and one person got a bottle and then they all went... It set off the spark.

*Q: Yes, it does, doesn't it?*

JOHNSON: Then they went and set fire to the British embassy. The ambassador had a beautiful Jaguar, I remember, that was parked there. It had burned up. But he was very philosophical about it. He told the story. As he was coming down to see if they had to get out - there was one staircase and they were escaping the fire up above - he was coming down the staircase and the rioters were going up and they made way and said, "Pardon, monsieur l'ambassadeur." [laughter]

*Q: What had they done? They threw a rock through the window of the...*

JOHNSON: They threw a rock through our library window and then went down the road. I was there and went down and we brought the people upstairs. We got people out of the library and brought the others upstairs. Then we were ready for when they came back, but by that time the police were on the scene, and they rocked a few cars that were out in front of the Center but they never did come in and destroy anything because the police were there to channel them. They went past USIS and then down toward the embassy and they did try to climb in there. The Marines fired tear gas. They burned cars in the American embassy.

*Q: You were at the USIS building?*

JOHNSON: I was at the USIS center, the American center, which was separate from the embassy.

*Q: Now, is that the library?*

JOHNSON: That is the library. The library was on the first floor and our offices were above, in a building downtown.

*Q: Were you frightened?*

JOHNSON: No, I wasn't. One time I remember, I was in Mali, they were having an affair, a women's meeting, and there was one of the BBC broadcasters who had come down to cover it. I had taken her home for lunch, I think. I was driving her back and we drove into a bunch of people demonstrating against the United States. "A bas les Etats- Unis" or something. I said "Vive l'Amitié Américaine-Malienne." This BBC reporter said, "You'd better be quiet. Don't let them know you're an American." Individually they were not harmful.

PERSIS: Marilyn doesn't say it aggressively. She says it.

JOHNSON: You try to be friendly with them.

PERSIS: And humorous.

JOHNSON: I wasn't afraid in either case. But you try to preserve people. You don't let them be down there in the library. You get them secure and then I think we said, "Everybody go home in a different direction."

*Q: Did they burn papers at the embassy at that time?*

JOHNSON: No, they didn't get in. They held them off, I think they burned cars. They got up on the balcony and that was about it. The Marines were ready to fire. They burned the door of a synagogue.

PERSIS: The Tunisians were fairly wonderful about it. In fact, as Marilyn said, I watched the whole thing. The whole place was filled. Then as the people came out, as the fire got started and they came out of the embassy, they came into the place and the people opened up the way for them. I said to Marilyn, "I wouldn't have been afraid." I was up on a little balcony about two stories up, I guess. I wouldn't have been afraid to go down in that group at all. I know that the embassy said that everybody should stay at home, so forth and so on. We did stay at home, but I think the Tunisians are different, too. But it was very interesting.

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*Q: Did you have much to do with the FSOs?*

JOHNSON: Of course, as I say, the ambassador and I, always with the political officers, we were working with them. Not so much with the economic officers at the time. Now, of course, it's a very important thing. And the administrative. I remember the admin officer. My best friend in Tunis was the personnel officer, Velma Lewis. We played golf together at the Tunis Club. We got to know a lot of the diplomats from other embassies and a lot of the Tunisians that way. Yes, I did. I liked the Foreign Service life but I also thought that USIS work was a lot more interesting because we weren't doing the political reporting, but we were out knowing what was going on and working with the people.

**JULIUS S. PRINCE**  
**USAID Population Study**  
**Tunis (1967)**

*Julius S. Prince was born in New York in 1911. He graduated from Yale University in 1932 and also received an M.D. from the New York College for Physicians and Surgeons, an MPH from Columbia University and a Dr. PH from Harvard University. Mr. Prince served from 1942 to 1946 in the Royal Canadian Medical Corps as a major overseas. He worked with USAID in Ethiopia, Tunisia, Cameroon, Ghana and Zimbabwe. Mr. Prince was interviewed in 1994 by W. Haven North.*

*Q: I had the impression that there was a great deal of resistance to population programs in Africa, particularly official opposition?*

PRINCE: Well sure there was. You couldn't get people to agree on a population policy. It all



depends on how you looked at it. If you insisted that they have a "full population policy" or a "White Paper," dealing with it specifically by coming out and saying, "it is our objective to control the size of the population in this vast country or something like that, it was "no go." Or if it was run in such a way as to appear to be put upon them rather than internally developed. Tunisia was a beautiful example. Do you know what happened in Tunis?

*Q: No.*

PRINCE: Well (and I was in on this at the beginning and had an opportunity to help to stop it and correct it), they had gotten off with the idea that family planning had to be done in terms of female sterilization primarily and/or intrauterine devices (IUDs).

*Q: They.. being the Tunisians or who?*

PRINCE: The Tunisians. It was the medical profession there that had that idea. "Scoopy-dos" as they used to call them; tying off the Fallopian tubes. This was a startling discovery to me; that their own medical profession was responsible for such an idea. Anyhow their attitude came pretty close to abortion obstetrics; and gynecology specialists apparently had few qualms about even that. But this was not abortion; it was female sterilization. They had mobile units; they didn't have a fixed unit or a series of health centers or anything like that out of which to operate. They had small clinics (each staffed by one or two dressers) in many villages around Tunisia which you would have noticed if you have been there. But they didn't have any kind of public health, other than immediate emergency health care. The doctors said we will have these mobile units with ob/gyn [obstetrician/gynecologist] specialists in them to travel around the country and provide these IUDs or female sterilizations. They got the women's clubs together and sold them on the idea and then the women's clubs almost coerced the women in some of these villages to participate in the program. Well, I guess it was in the early '70s, I went to Tunisia and had a look at the situation because by then Bourguiba was beginning to get into trouble from this program; there was such a backlash to it and nobody knew why. I will never forget the first place I went where there was one of these mobile units. I walked into the clinic and here was this depressed, sad looking female Russian gynecologist sitting in her clinic, with not a patient in sight! I inquired around and it seemed that the people were not going there because they had been told by the women's clubs that they had to go. (I was told that they had to go to these clinics to at least have an IUD put in.)

So they were in almost open revolt. On top of that a few of them had gone to the IUD clinic; you know in the beginning the women's club had told them they had to go; so "we ought to." And the ob/gyn lady MDs, bless their hearts, put in the IUD with no explanation, no nothing (quite possibly because they spoke only Russian!), no counseling or anything to the women about what to expect. Then they went off; they had a schedule of when they were going to visit there again with the mobile units but it was very inaccurate. They sometimes came and sometimes didn't. You can imagine what happened when the women started to bleed. In a Muslim society a bleeding woman; oh boy, so of course that had the potential of causing terrible complications with their husbands. Consequently they just rose up in arms and refused to go. So this all had to be "taken down" and the authorities in the country had to begin to use the concept of developing decentralized health facilities staffed by qualified people, not by a doctor who knows nothing

about the sociocultural aspects of the subject, but instead by qualified people who were Tunisians not Russians or other foreign gynecologists. So we had to help them train the necessary maternal child health aides again and nurses and midwives.

*Q: You got the government and the Tunisian doctors to agree with a different program?*

PRINCE: Yes. But an early glitch in that whole thing was, unintentionally of course, abetted by the World Bank. This was their "first" health program. They came to me (among others, I suppose) and said we'd like your advice on this idea we have for Tunisia. So I went over there, on 19th and Pennsylvania or something like that... My office was here in this same building practically. When I walked in, there were a couple of Indian doctors and one French doctor. They said here's what we are planning to do, (they had an architect, too, and brought out this rendering of a very fine, fancy-looking maternity center) I said what's this; they said this is a maternity center. But I said this looks awfully big to me. "Well, of course it is a hundred bed maternity center." I said, "What are you going to do with a hundred bed maternity center?" "Well, we're going to have the women come and give them really expert maternity lying-in services and all that prenatal, postnatal, the works." I said but how many... what percentage of the population do you think are going to be able to do that?" "And where is the money coming from?" "Oh, we're going to pay for the whole thing." The next thing I heard... I said, "you know you are playing into the hands of the Tunisian ob/gyns; they want to have a nice hospital where they can bring their patients and then charge them and pull in a good fee for it. But the number of patients they see will be minuscule compared to the number who need it, both from a medical and family planning point of view. I think this is just the wrong thing to do." They went ahead and did it anyway and, of course, that's what happened. They ended up with private maternity hospitals - one or two of them very, very expensive. You know, like two or three hundred thousands dollars a piece. That first program they headed into was a disaster. I think it tended to dissuade the Bank from undertaking any other health/population programs for a while. I wouldn't blame them because they were, perhaps, poorly advised. That was only a small part of the picture but to give you some idea of the difficulties... you mentioned difficulties.

One of the other difficulties was convincing the leaders of a country that some kind of integrated maternal child health family planning program was good for their country and good for their own reputation and standing, etc. So we needed some kind of training program for country leaders; and the Smithsonian Institution came to our assistance with that idea and set up a program for meetings to be held with top notch demographers and sociologists and people like that to attend and teach courses.. a whole meeting, not so much teaching courses but informal information meetings for the ministerial and interministerial groups that might be involved in such activities. That became a project which again, was funded centrally; and Steve Sinding became the project manager, in due course. In fact, without him nothing would have happened once the original 2-4 year contract with the Smithsonian expired.

*Q: He was where?*

PRINCE: He was an AID employee in the AID Office of Population; I don't recall what his specific position was, but, as noted, he became the project manager for the Smithsonian project. He did a fine job with it. It was very difficult logistically.

*Q: He would invite senior officials to some?*

PRINCE: Right. I don't know whether it was evaluated but I suspect one might have found it too expensive; not very cost effective in terms of reaching all the people who need to be convinced of the merits of country-sponsored population policies in Africa.

**FREDERICK H. SACKSTEDER**  
**Tunisia Desk Officer, Office of North African Affairs**  
**Washington (1967)**

**Political Section Chief**  
**Tunis (1967-1969)**

*Frederick H. Sacksteder was born in New York in 1924. He received his bachelor's degree at Amherst College and served in the US Navy during World War II. His career included positions in Germany, France, Spain, Tunisia, and Mexico. Mr. Sacksteder was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.*

*Q: Later we had our ambassador, his aides and others all swimming in the water just to show that it was all right. I've interviewed one of the aides who had to endure that. I thought this would be a good place to close for today. You left the secretariat in '66, where were you assigned then and we'll pick it up from there?*

SACKSTEDER: Then I took over the Tunisian desk in the office of North African Affairs.

*Q: You were on the Tunisian desk from when to when?*

SACKSTEDER: It was from September to December '67. In December, after a few weeks on the desk, I made a trip to Tunisia and North Africa to familiarize myself with the situation.

*Q: We'll pick it up during this Tunisian desk period. Today is August 25th, 1997. Fred let's talk about the Tunisian desk. As you saw it when got on there, what was the situation in Tunisia in '66?*

SACKSTEDER: It was the Destourian Socialist Republic, and by that I mean it was a one party, very benevolent, dictatorship. President Bourguiba was, in effect, president for life. He had all of the right instincts that appealed to us so that he was always well received in Washington and so were his representatives. In fact, an earlier ambassador to Washington had been his own son, better known as Bibi, then Foreign Minister, who was very popular with the administration and who left to his successor a network of firm friends of Tunisia said to exist even today. Not unlike other country relationships, there is an organization in Washington called the American Tunisian Association which consists largely of veterans of service and admirers of Tunisia and what Tunisia stands for. What Bourguiba stood for was moderation, education and toleration. In

keeping with this he was the first Arab chief of state who advocated rapprochement with Israel and the recognition of the presence of Israel, that it was going to be there, and the Arabs would have to learn to live with it. In other words, politically, our relations were excellent.

Our concerns with respect to Tunisia were mainly with its neighbors, both Algeria and Libya. They already presented certain problems with respect to stability and as they say poor Tunisia happened to have picked to be between the two of them, the nut in the nutcracker.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria at that time?*

SACKSTEDER: Algeria was still getting over the trauma of achieving independence, which had not been the case in Tunisia. Tunisia's had gone very smoothly and the French had graciously vacated Tunisia with the installation of Bourguiba. But that had not been the case in Algeria. Of course on the other side, we're talking now about post-monarchy Libya and a good deal of uncertainty about where Qadhafi was going to go. There was no great confidence that he was going to imitate Tunisia, he'd seek other models in his pursuit of power.

Our principal efforts in Tunisia were in the field of development. In fact it was during my tenure on that desk that we came to the conclusion that we had to help Tunisia with a minimum of what you might call self defense. One of my projects, I won't call it an achievement, which came to fruition during my tenure on that desk for that year was the conclusion of an agreement to establish a U.S. military liaison office in Tunisia (USLOT) with the mission to provide a very, very low level training for the very small Tunisian armed forces.

As I mentioned earlier, Bourguiba's main concern was the education of his people. In this respect he really was in a way continuing what had already started before independence, the redevelopment of an educated middle class. There was a high level of literacy in the country which in turn was part of Tunisia's problems because of limited natural resources. Tunisia was faced with the problem of placing educated individuals in the labor force. One way that Tunisia did practice this was exporting some of its brain power mainly to Europe, and especially to France. We had a large economic aid mission in Tunis at that time and a very sizable, very active, Peace Corps contingent that was highly welcomed by the Tunisian government and people.

*Q: I would think with the large Peace Corps and other elements there, you would be running afoul of the French.*

SACKSTEDER: As a matter of fact, in a way, we were. Let me preface this by giving you a little background on the situation in our embassy in Tunis. Our ambassador, who had been there for a long time, was Francis Russell. Francis Russell had been primarily a departmental officer. He served as head of Intelligence and Research, and had had one prior Embassy in Africa, but that was Ghana, English speaking. Ambassador Russell didn't speak much French and was very dependent upon interpreters. My principal job turned out to be that, in addition to running the political section.

There was, let's say, a lack of genuine sympathy between Ambassador Russell who, because of

his long tenure, had ended up being the Vice Dean of the diplomatic corps, and the French ambassador, who was the Dean of the diplomatic corps. Ambassador Sauvagnargues was most anxious to take another post but the French refused to let him leave until it was certain that the diplomatic corps deanship wouldn't pass to the American ambassador. He was kept on there, somewhat against his will (*contre son gré*), and he had very little to do with the American ambassador with whom he could hardly communicate. He finally achieved his reward after Ambassador Russell left when he in turn was transferred to Bonn as the French ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany and after that tour became foreign minister. So the Quai d'Orsay paid him back for his extended stay in Tunis.

*Q: What was your impression of the reporting from Tunis at this particular time? Did it reflect the ambassador? How did the ambassador fit into this?*

SACKSTEDER: When we talk about reporting, I'm trying to figure out how best to answer that question. My Washington recollection is that we were receiving only limited reporting primarily in the form of the week-q.

*Q: That's the weekly roundup.*

SACKSTEDER: The weekly roundup was like the Outlook section of the *Washington Post* on Sundays. That was the principal source of our reporting. The principal reporting officers at the time that I was on the desk turned out to be the DCM, Ed Mulcahy, who later served as ambassador to Tunisia, and my predecessor in the political section who actually did not do very much reporting. He tended to rely on his second secretary, Stephen M. Block, a fine writer who was primarily interested in labor issues, so that there was good contact between the embassy and the Tunisian labor unions. Really, there was not that much more. The embassy was always responsive to requests for specific opinions, about either developments or personalities, but not terribly forthcoming other than that.

*Q: Did we see any meddling or attempts at meddling with Tunisia by its two neighbors, Algeria or Libya, or with the Palestine Liberation Organization?*

SACKSTEDER: The PLO was still a long way from Tunis at that time. It was only much later that they made their headquarters there. Yes, there were evidences of attempted meddling as you call it on both sides and considerable concern on the part of the Tunisians that some of the more extremist elements might want to upset the stability and the calm in Tunisia which was very much the first concern of Bourguiba. Which again takes us back to the question of why we felt that Tunisia needed to improve its defenses, and it took some convincing the Tunisians to accept it, for Bourguiba was not very favorably inclined toward his military. The military, of course, had no power in the country. When we urged him, for example, to agree to having a very small U.S. military liaison team, I think he thought about it for a long time before agreeing, perhaps encouraged by his son the foreign minister to say yes.

I might mention that during my initial orientation visit to Tunisia in the fall of 1966, in addition to the opportunity to travel around the country with one of the young embassy officers as an escort, I had the occasion to meet President Bourguiba because my visit coincided with a visit,

the first, to Tunisia by the Commander of the Sixth Fleet. Alluding as I had earlier to the problems of our ambassador with the French language, I was roped in as both the ambassador's and the admiral's interpreter for calls on high authorities including a long visit with President Bourguiba. Over time, I ended up forming something of a friendship with him. My brief tenure on the Tunisian desk was otherwise mainly dedicated to keeping the paperwork flowing, coordinating the aid and other programs with the various agencies involved, i.e. Defense, AID, Agriculture, Peace Corps.

*Q: The aid program being?*

SACKSTEDER: The aid program consisted of the traditional aid components: technical assistance, PL480 food exports which generated the counterpart funds that were always so useful to us abroad. The substantial accounts in counterpart funds enabled the Department to route considerable travel to Africa through Tunis in order to take advantage of those funds for the purchase of transportation.

*Q: One further question and we will be following through on this, but what about Nasser who was still riding high in Egypt at the time. How did we consider Nasser vis-à-vis Tunisia?*

SACKSTEDER: Let's consider how Tunisia looked at Nasser, and Nasser at Tunisia. There was virtually no contact at that time because Nasser had taken unkindly to Bourguiba's suggestion that he ought to put his head back on properly, be realistic and understand that the only hope for the Arab world was to reach an accommodation with Israel. Bourguiba flatly told him that however much you beat your chest and beat the drums, you are not going to part the United States from its support of Israel, and the United States is still our most important outside contact. Nasser obviously didn't like that. I don't recall whether the two countries maintained real diplomatic relations or whether they had left it down to a sort of interest section in some other embassy, but there was no real contact between the two.

*Q: You're on the Tunisian desk. In '67 you left. Where did you go?*

SACKSTEDER: I went to Tunis as Political Section chief. A situation arose at the embassy which created some problems for us. This was at the outbreak of the 1967 war...

*Q: We're talking about the war between Egypt, Syria and Israel.*

SACKSTEDER: Correct. There was a "manifestation" outside the American embassy in Tunis and the Tunisians were faced with one of those decision making situations which most governments like to try to avoid. In other words, were they going to follow the line of the majority of the Arab states which chose to break relations with the United States, or were they not? In our view there was very little likelihood they would.

Parenthetically just at the time of this outbreak, this '67 war, we were staging in Washington, in cooperation with the Smithsonian, a very major exhibition of the mosaics from the Bardo Museum in Tunis. This had all been geared up and planned and the mosaics were in place. The question arose, given circumstances, do we open it or do we quietly pull the rug on this? The

Tunisians flatly said no, we are going through with it. On the eve of the scheduled opening the foreign minister, Bourguiba Junior, arrived accompanied by some Tunisian cultural people and press, and personally presided at the opening. Ambassador Russell was already in Washington on consultation.

As the officer in charge of Tunisian affairs, I accompanied the Tunisian ambassador to meet his foreign minister at National Airport, and as we were leaving the airport to escort him to the embassy, the Minister took me aside and said “We have a problem and you’re going to have to take care of this problem.” I said, “What is the problem?” He said, “I’m afraid one of your senior officers in Tunis has so upset our vice premier that he has asked me to PNG this officer.” We already had some indications from the embassy that there had been a little set-to. The Vice Premier had called at the embassy to express concern and to apologize for the manifestation by that small mob. The Foreign Minister continued, “This particular officer had seen fit to express very strong views about this event, saying that this was inexcusable, etc., etc.”

We can understand that in a moment of emotion somebody might lose their cool and say things that they shouldn’t have said and that they probably regret saying. At the same time, obviously, we have to placate the Vice Premier. “You’ve got to remove this individual.” He was in fact re-assigned to Embassy Paris to work on African affairs.

*Q: Rather than going through the declaring persona non grata which means headlines and all of that.*

SACKSTEDER: Exactly. So there was never a word in the press about it and it was all done as you might say between gentlemen, very quietly. This put the Department in the situation where we had to find a new political officer. To make a long story short, after trying a number of people who we thought highly qualified but none of whom were either available or interested, it turned out that I was asked to take the job.

*Q: You were in Tunis from ‘67 until when?*

SACKSTEDER: ‘69.

*Q: How did you find the atmosphere at the embassy? You had been looking at it from the perspective of Washington, but what was it like in Tunis?*

SACKSTEDER: Let me preface this by saying again, here was a desk officer going to the country for which he had been a desk officer. As I said, in the case of Madrid it posed some problems because of my relatively low rank and the fact that the ambassador had me dealing with the heads of all the sections of a very large embassy on an equal level. In the case of Tunis it was different. First, the DCM, whom I had known before he was assigned to Tunis, was extremely supportive and cooperative. If I had any bureaucratic jurisdictional problems with any of my colleagues, it was only with one or two of them, who were perhaps somewhat resentful of the fact that both the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission relied very heavily on my advice. It was a small, but harmonious embassy. In truth the only officer at the embassy with whom I had a few problems was the administrative officer, who was somewhat impatient at my

impatience because he was not doing a thing to get me housing. In effect, he told me if you want housing, you go look for it. I thought it was supposed to be his job and so we had a little bit of friction there. And my first days in Tunis were taken up with a visit by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, for whom I served as interpreter, from French to English and vice versa.

*Q: You were there in the aftermath of the '67 war which was a real shocker there as well because the Israelis really ripped the Egyptian army and the Syrian army apart and they took over the West Bank including all of Jerusalem. There were accusations flying around that the Americans had joined in the attack. Mainly because it was almost a matter of disbelief that the Israelis could do so much damage to particularly the Egyptians. How did we approach this saying, one, we weren't involved and, two, sort of repairing relations?*

SACKSTEDER: It may be hard to believe for those who were serving in other Arab countries but we saw no evidence of any feeling on the part of the Tunisians that we were "the bad guys" in any way. The incident that had taken place at the embassy, the little manifestation; you can't dignify it as a riot because no damage was done, just a little bit of arm waving and shouting.

*Q: Not an unusual thing for any of us who served in a troubled part of the world.*

SACKSTEDER: For example, to be quite frank about it, the Tunisian government made sure, through their control of the press, that there was no agitation. As already mentioned, the relationship between Tunisia and Nasser, in particular, but some of the other Arab countries as well, were far from cordial. Tunisia had, in a sense, put its eggs in the American basket and kept insisting on being a reasonable country at a time when so many of its neighbors were far from reasonable. Later on we will come across events that took place some years later in connection with the Mauritanian decision at that time to break relations with the United States. Mind you, Morocco did not, of course, but Mauritania wanted to be more Arab than the Arabs and break relations with the United States. You could sense that there was a wave of anti-Americanism prevalent in much of that part of the world. Tunisia was not at all of that bend.

*Q: You say you were often the interpreter for the ambassador, Francis Russell. When he saw Bourguiba did you sense how relations were between the two men?*

SACKSTEDER: They were good. Had they possessed the ability to command a common language, they would have been very, very close. They were close but separated by the bridge of language which it became my job to provide. During my time in Tunis Bourguiba made a state visit to the United States, not his first incidentally, but of course he was president for a long time. He was making his second state visit which went very well. All of this of course was covered in the press profusely and very positively.

During that time, now that we had a military liaison office, we began to stage short visits by units of the Sixth Fleet into Tunisian ports. It happened that on one such occasion we had a Division of destroyers go into the port of Sousse where Bourguiba was at that time in residence. The ambassador asked me to go down there to represent the embassy, and to make arrangements; we didn't have a naval attaché who would have normally done that. When the ships came in I called on the Division commander and captains of the ships and briefed them on the situation and on



the program that had been set up. To their great surprise they, and I escorting them, were a major feature at an event involving the president. It was his birthday. All of this by the way was in Arabic which none of us could understand, but it was praising Bourguiba in song and in dance, etc. As it turned out this group of Americans including these senior officers in uniform and I, were seated in the next row directly behind the president and in his official party. It was all over the newspapers that these American officers were celebrating Bourguiba's birthday.

*Q: During this '67 to '69 period, any problems with Algeria, Libya, or Egypt?*

SACKSTEDER: No. With Egypt, as I indicated, relations were so bad that there were virtually no relations between Tunisia and Egypt. Obviously there was a diplomatic intercourse with both Algeria and Libya. My recollection is that at one point the Tunisians, as an expression of their discontent with Libyan attitudes, closed the border with Libya. It was only a gesture, but it conveyed to Libyans that Tunisians were not happy with what Libya was saying. In a sense, it was unfortunate for Tunisia because Libyans were among the major sources of tourist income, particularly in southern Tunisia and the island of Djerba. I really can't recall anything very significant happening during that period. Now on the other hand, this was the time when in another part of the world a lot was happening. For example, in Vietnam we had Tet.

*Q: The Tet offensive was in January of '68. We also had the takeover of Czechoslovakia by the Soviets in the summer of '68. Did any of those have any impact?*

SACKSTEDER: In a way they did, because the Tunisian position with respect to Vietnam was supportive of the United States. There was in Tunis a quite active South Vietnamese embassy. The ambassador was "Little Min" as opposed to "Big Min" who was also a general and a leading figure in South Vietnam.

*Q: They were both generals and I think he was probably put out there to pasture.*

SACKSTEDER: Yes, put out to pasture. He cultivated the Tunisians extensively. This brings us around to the question of communism. The Tunisians were firmly anti-communist and they were very sympathetic of the efforts of the South Vietnamese. Those were the major events that took place during that year but the echoes in Tunisia were I think overwhelming pro-Western in orientation. China, for example, had a small embassy in Tunis but no ambassador. As it happens, the Chinese embassy was virtually across the street from our embassy.

*Q: In those days it was the People's Republic of China.*

SACKSTEDER: Yes, the People's Republic and it was during the time of the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution, the coverage of which in the Tunisia press was very negative. Our security people pointed out to me that the political section, where I had my office, happened to have windows facing the Chinese embassy. They insisted, to the regret of my secretary who had to work by artificial light, on covering the windows on that side so the Chinese couldn't look in. But the Chinese embassy had no role in the community, they were tolerated but not really given any significance. I think the only thing the Chinese did during my time there was send some Ping-Pong players to put on an exhibition.

Q: *You left Tunis in '69, where did you go?*

SACKSTEDER: In January of '69, after only fourteen months, I transferred to New York to the mission to the UN. The reason for the early transfer was my wife's medical condition which concerned the Department's Medical Director and the doctor stationed at Tunis.

**EDWARD W. MULCAHY**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1967-1970)**

*Ambassador Edward W. Mulcahy was influenced to go into foreign service by his father, a Navy radioman who traveled extensively. During his teen years, Mulcahy was an avid orator in the Catholic high school he attended. He received his degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1943. Within eight weeks of the Pearl Harbor bombing, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve. At the end of the war took the foreign service exam and passed. He has also served in Kenya, west Germany, Ethiopia, Southern Rhodesia, Germany, Nigeria and Chad. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 23, 1989.*

Q: *I want to move on to Tunisia. You were assigned there as the deputy chief of mission from 1967 to 1970 and we'll be returning to Tunisia. So maybe we'll just look at it, how it was then briefly and then we'll come back in some more detail. The ambassador in Tunisia was Francis Russell?*

MULCAHY: Yes.

Q: *Could you describe a little about how he operated an embassy and used you as a DCM?*

MULCAHY: Yes. Francis Russell had been five years in Tunisia by the time I got there and I served my first two years under him as DCM. So he had spent seven years in Tunisia by the time he left there in 1969. He retired because he'd reached the magic age of 65 and was a career minister. This was the ultimate age that he was able to stay on, too, and only because he was a career minister. Otherwise, we retired at age 60 according to the Foreign Service Act at that time.

Francis was very much loved in Tunisia. He had very little French. He had not spoken French before he came there and had studied it but never felt secure in using it as he always wanted an interpreter handy. He didn't care whether the Tunisians provided the interpreter or whether he brought along one of his officers or brought me along to do the interpreting in French. Fortunately, the person with whom he had the most frequent relationship in the Tunisian government was Habib Bourguiba, Junior, the son the president who was foreign minister all during that period. He spoke excellent English with an American accent so that his effectiveness was not at issue there. Russell could read short speeches for presentations and that sort of thing

that had been prepared in advance for him. But he was a gentleman. He was a warmhearted man, a great liberal in every sense of the word, an ambassador of whom I think we had reason to be very, very proud. He had instant access to the President who was approximately the same age as himself. He succeeded in building up a very important AID organization in Tunisia. I think at the time I was there our annual AID package, including a small military mission -- we'd never called it a MAAG but it was a MAAG. . .

*Q: A Military Assistance Advisory Group.*

MULCAHY: That's right. I negotiated that agreement as DCM and as chargé with the then minister of defense who was absolutely opposed to having anything called a MAAG. It was not popular among the Arabs. If you took a MAAG, you were in the American pocket which Tunisia did not want to be, didn't have to be or anything like that. So we invented a euphemism for MAAG, in any case, U.S. Liaison Office/Tunisia. That pleased everybody.

Our combined assistance programs came to about \$75 million a year which was pretty generous for a country of 8 million people. I said then, and I say now, even in retrospect it was true, that you got \$8 million worth of performance for what you gave them. They utilized American aid more honestly, more thoroughly, more sensibly than just about any other country I know of. I'm very partial to Tunisians, but that statement is the absolute verity. They are a sophisticated people. They are probably -- this is not patronizing, I don't mean it in a patronizing way -- about as "Westernized" an Arab state as any except perhaps Lebanon at one time.

**FRANK G. WISNER**  
**Tunisia Desk Officer, Office of North African Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1969-1971)**

**Economic Officer**  
**Tunis (1971-1973)**

*Ambassador Frank G. Wisner was born in New York in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1961. He was stationed in Saigon, Dinh Tuong Province, Tuyen Duc Province, Tunis, Algiers, and Dacca. He later served as Ambassador to Zambia, Egypt, the Philippines, and India. Ambassador Wisner was interviewed by Richard L. Jackson on March 22, 1998.*

*Q: Well Frank, after Vietnam, the Tunisia desk -- and I was in that office at that time -- must have seemed pretty tame and kind of a decompression. I remember, I think we had Jim Blake and Harry O'Dell, and I must say, your preoccupation with Vietnam didn't seem to detract from your focus on Tunisia. You were busy and all over the Department in those years.*

WISNER: Well, it perhaps is a bit of my nature that, when I get into something, I love it so much it becomes the most important thing in all of American foreign policy. That said, I was asked to come back and take on the Tunisian desk by John Root, Jim Blake's predecessor, former DCM in

Algiers who remembered me from that time. He was recruiting and, gosh, we had a wonderful office. Wingate Lloyd was doing Morocco, and was followed by Paul Hare at my request, Rocky Suddarth was doing Libya, Art Lowery was there, Charlie Bray was deputy at one point. We had some really, really good officers in that office and David Newsom was Assistant Secretary of State for Africa -- you remember in those days AFN was part of the Africa Bureau. But that said, it was an interesting and not unimportant time. Tunisia is a small country, but it was a stalwart friend of the United States. It had shown much more flexibility in the Arab-Israeli confrontation. Bourguiba, the president, stood by us on a couple of occasions during a lot of radicalism in Algeria next door and, while I was in Tunisia, the Libyan Revolution took place and King Idriss departed. David Newsom was the ambassador at that moment. Tunisia was a real island of moderation and a place of friendship for the United States, so preserving this foothold on the North African coast and in the Arab world was not an inconsequential priority. The Tunisians were very worried. Would we stand by them? Would we stand by them politically, economically? Would we stand by them if they were pressed militarily?

And it came at an important time for me--1969. You were quite right, it was a decompression from Vietnam. The test was whether I could find a bridge back into the conventional foreign service, into the life and workings of the Department. I'd never worked in the Department of State. I'd joined and had gone abroad. Could I take all that energy and enthusiasm that you build up, that sleeplessness, that pressure of a war and convert it into a more organized, bureaucratic routine? I was also newly married. I'd married a beautiful French girl and we were setting up home in Washington for the first time, so all of these matters were before me. It turned out to be sufficiently exciting as a government experience to contain the Vietnam in me, if you will, and it was still here where I could get my life back together and start a new marriage, so it was overall a perfectly wonderful experience. Now in this there were some policy complexities. The ambassador in Tunis, Francis Russell, had been Dean Acheson's press spokesman. Frances Russell was an old fashioned foreign service officer, and he certainly brooked no second guessing from some puppy of a desk officer in Washington. He had a bit of an imperious nature, but what was important to Frances Russell was where Tunisia stood with regard to the United States. What Tunisia did internally was Tunisia's business. Now this was a reasonable, reasonably nice way to look at things. It was a kind of old Cold War approach to matters, in a correct and traditional diplomatic approach to a relationship.

But the fact is that Tunisia was going through a perfectly hellish internal experience. Following some of the trends in the region, it had gone towards nationalization of the key commanding heights of the economy and then under a brilliant, but maniacal, virtual maniac of an economics minister. By the time Ben Salah had become Minister of National Economy, Education and Finance, about every movable asset in the country was taken over. He used to say, when he came here to the United States, "I don't know why one man could run GM, we've got about the same gross domestic product, GM and Tunisia, and I can run Tunisia the same way, like a big corporation." But he went for maximum socialization, began seizing land and tearing down property divisions and creating a really deep social disturbance in the country with a view to creating the new Tunisian man. Bourguiba sat back and looked at all of this, watched it, as the traditional leadership including his wife began to have second thoughts as to whether Ben Salah was out to take full charge. The ambassador was determined not to question the internal evolution of Tunisia. And yet I figured that we had to be attentive to these matters and even have

a voice, because, if Tunisia didn't stand on its own two feet, how could we stand with it. We'd just been through an experience in Vietnam, and it had taught me at least that.

The crisis came about with a terrible flood that ravaged Tunisia and, in the wake of that flood, Bourguiba grabbed control of the country and sacked Ben Salah. We were able to begin to reorient some of our aid programs, intensify our dialogue with the Tunisian government, begin to argue that new economic priorities needed to take over. That would give Tunisia some growth, some employment, try to move it, nudge it towards a free market and use the influence inherent in the American position, using aid as a lever. These were experiences I'd had in Vietnam, not as a club but as a point of influence and so I found I had a very interesting time. As Tunisia came under these various hammer blows, it was time as well to see if our allies would think in terms of a Mediterranean policy, and I tried very hard with some success to create a dialogue inside the Western Alliance over Tunisia. The purpose was to create a consensus among western allies to accelerate aid to press for domestic reform--opening Tunisia to market forces. It ran up against the stone wall of French skepticism about further American inroads into the neighborhood, but some Italian and Spanish interest. But it was a way of beginning to look, in my mind, at the Mediterranean as a whole, where we had important national security principles at stake. The American Sixth Fleet was a major bulwark in our NATO and Cold War defenses.

*Q: Tunisia and North Africa were at that time the jewel in the African Bureau crown. David Newsom had been ambassador in Libya. The director, Jim Blake, had been his DCM. It moved in '73, under Henry Kissinger, to the Near Eastern Bureau. You were happy enough then to be in the Africa Bureau?*

WISNER: Well, I was and wasn't. The point of gravity in the Africa Bureau was south of the Sahara. And we felt we had more in common with the Arab East than with the South and Sahara. The North African account is a very complicated one, for it doesn't fit neatly anywhere. When the Black September crisis in Jordan broke out, we all stood watch with our Middle Eastern colleagues. In the crisis period surrounding those events, but when the staff meetings went on with what was going on in Zaire or something else, it really didn't touch us very deeply. We operated pretty much as a self-contained cell within the Africa Bureau. David Newsom, as you quite correctly pointed out had lots of interest in us. But I think, while it isn't entirely easy, the fit between the North African bureau and the Middle Eastern bureau -- particularly when it still had India and Pakistan and the Assistant Secretary was just going mad trying to handle the peace process and everything from Morocco to Burma -- none-the-less has more logic than having it in the Africa Bureau.

*Q: So you then followed a logical progression from Desk Officer to economic officer in Tunis.*

WISNER: Well, there was a personal reason as well. The ambassador of the day, Arch Calhoun, had been the political counselor in Saigon when I was there. He also happened to be a family friend, so he asked me if I would come out and serve as his economic officer, and I was very, very pleased to do that. I was ready to go abroad. My wife had seen Tunisia which sort of had a French environment to it. We moved out, had a beautiful home on the edge of the Mediterranean in Gamarth. We had a couple of lovely years in Tunisia, visited much of the country. I found the job fascinating. First of all, it was my first real economic assignment. I had been able to do the

six-month economic course before I went out, and I argue that it was one of the most challenging and effective training programs the Foreign Service has ever put before me, and one of the few I ever had the opportunity to take also.

*Q: So you took integral and differential calculus?*

WISNER: I did those things and hated them, but I learned enough calculus to feel that I wasn't entirely at sea but...

*Q: Has it stayed with you?*

WISNER: The calculus hasn't, but the economics have and the way of thinking about economic subjects has. In fact, when I got to Tunis, I was able to plunge in, be able to understand the language of national income accounts, the World Bank and the Fund, which were heavily involved with Tunisia, and be able to offer judgments to our AID mission and work towards a coordinated AID - embassy approach to Tunisia at the annual meetings of the World Bank Consultative group in Paris where AID policies were coordinated among the many donors. I was able to represent the embassy's economic side, the economic policy side, and work in that way for a greater integration for economic and AID policies. I found Tunisia interesting furthermore as the first opportunity that I had to work closely with American business and to try to help that business get a foothold in Tunisia, solve business problems from disputes over repatriation of profits by the motion picture industry to getting the Bordens company to open a new investment in textiles for the European market in Tunisia. These were first attempts at what became a dominant feature in American government policy. So let me point to, in summary, two points: as an economic officer in Tunisia, trying to work for economical restructuring and greater emphasis on the free market became part of my life in the '70s and working with American business to open doors for greater economic interaction between our business community and the country in which I was assigned. I started that fully ten years before it became a leitmotif for operations in the Foreign Service more broadly. In the beginning, I have to argue that my ambassadors were very skeptical about arm wrestling with the AID mission director and trying to use economic policy influence and they were shy about getting involved about commercial matters. I remember going to Ambassador Calhoun and asking him to approach the Prime Minister and the government over oil concessions. We wanted to win and not let the Italians and French win them. I wanted Amoco to get them. And he was very shy about doing that. He felt this wasn't the role of an American ambassador. I felt it was and have believed it ever since.

*Q: This was an uphill battle, our business presence must have been modest in what was then regarded as a French chasse gardée. You were opening up for business in competition with the French?*

WISNER: In many cases, though by no means in all. Tunisians were looking to diversify their own economic interests. They were looking for connections with the United States, so it wasn't just a one-way street.

*Q: Bourguiba at that time was in his heyday. He was at the top of his game. Do you have some observations about him?*

WISNER: Well, when you remember that Bourguiba began to rise to political prominence in Tunisia while Franklin Roosevelt was president of the United States, he had a long innings as the British put it. His batting was once again reasonably strong. His relationship with the United States had been reestablished, he was in command of matters at home, he was seen as something of a national savior, having reversed his own economic policies to the pleasure of his fellow citizens. But he was clearly an older man. His son, Bibi, had suffered a stroke and was to suffer yet another one. His wife was in ascendancy, she and her Ben Amar clan were major players in the country and its policies and orientation at that time. It was the beginning of his last great stand, if you will. His last great moment on the Tunisian stage and after that his medical problems, which were sort of hardening of the blood arteries, the arteries flowing blood to his brain, began to become more and more of a fact. He began a long downward slope, but he had broken the country out of the control of Ben Salah, opened it to a more disputatious political process, and Tunisia survived due to its own internal dynamics, its inherent stability, its cultural unity, but also due to this long period of stable rule that Bourguiba had brought to bear.

*Q: Tunisia was then, as it is now, sandwiched between bigger neighbors. There was a lot of idealism still about a United Arab Maghreb? What did you think about that then?*

WISNER: There wasn't much of a view that there could be either a united Arab world or a United Arab Maghreb. I was reasonably close to the then-somewhat dissident former defense minister Ahmed Mestiri. He used to speak of Arab unity, wehdeh, as a piece of chewing gum an Arab picks up every once in a while, puts in his mouth to refresh the taste, but it didn't have any real effect on his behavior, and even less so North Africa. The Tunisians looked with great skepticism at the Algerians who were radicalizing their own revolution at that point, seizing more and more land, socializing the land holdings in the country. And then, on the other side, with the Libyans who were beginning their erratic behavior under Qadhafi's rule. It was towards the later part of my stay, a brief period where Tunisia came under the powerful influence of Masmoudi who was a corrupt sort of figure. He tried to link Tunisia more closely with Libya and had to eventually be reined back in by the president. Masmoudi had arguable Arab and Maghrebian credentials, but a lot of it was for his own personal enrichment.

*Q: Next door, Qadhafi had come in on Labor Day '69, and Wheelus Air Base was being phased out, Peace Corps was being thrown out. You were probably looking across the border with a feeling of some consternation.*

WISNER: Real consternation, if not threat. Not that I thought that the Libyans could do anything of immediate danger to Tunisia, but the pressures were on. They were more political than economic. The Tunisians were feeling the need to increase their armaments. Our capacity to provide additional military assistance was limited, so our ability and willingness to provide a security guarantee for Tunisia was limited. Therefore we were having to use diplomacy to mask in a political sense that which we were not able to do with tangible hardware or formal alliance arrangements. The Libyan situation did bring a lot of pressure. It was to bring even more pressure later on as Qadhafi increased his own obstreperousness and began pressing occasional dissident movements outside his borders, including in Tunisia and in the Mediterranean which began to be very, very disruptive. The Tunisians were immediately in harm's way and have,

throughout all these years, stood by a strong friendship with the United States with virtually an unbroken record in a volatile part of the world, and we have been pretty good to the Tunisians, too.

**SCOTT BEHOTEGUY**  
**USAID Deputy Director**  
**Tunis (1970-1973)**

*Scott Behoteguy was born in Ohio in 1917. He received a BA from College of Wooster in 1939 and an MBA from UPenn in 1942. After serving in the Navy for four years he took a job at the Office of Foreign Liquidation Commission in France. After a couple of years at that post, he continued his stay in Paris while working as part of the US delegation to OECD during the Marshall Plan era. His career in ICA, and later USAID, included tours to Cameroon, Tunisia and Haiti. He also worked in Washington at the Near East South Asia bureau and in Ankara as Economic Coordinator of the Central Treaty Organization. Mr. Behoteguy was interviewed by Stuart Van Dyke on August 11, 1997.*

Q: *Where did you go then?*

BEHOTEGUY: I went to Tunisia as the Deputy Director of USAID. That is a long story.

Q: *Who was the Mission Director?*

BEHOTEGUY: A newly-appointed political appointee, Sumner Gerard, was new to AID. The thought was to have someone as Deputy Director who knew something about AID procedures, and they asked me if I would go. I kind of liked the sound of sunny North Africa. I had visited Tunisia once or twice but had never served there, so I accepted the assignment and went there for two years as Deputy Director. Sumner Gerard was a likable enough person. He was very Republican, very political, especially at the time of the mid-year elections the next year, when he told us how much he had contributed to the party and so forth. There was some suspicion that he had gotten the appointment by his financial assistance to the party; I don't know. Subsequently, after my departure from Tunisia, he did end up as Ambassador in Jamaica. We got along on a personal basis reasonably well, but on a professional basis it was not my happiest association - certainly my least happy one in the AID program. For one thing, he was persuaded (this was in 1970 you understand), that an AID Mission Director was somehow as important or more important than the Ambassador. He was looking at the language of the original bi-lateral agreement between the United States and Tunisia some years before, and some language therein led him to that conclusion. By this time, you recall, the idea of the Ambassador as head of the country team was well established throughout the world. I, as delicately as possible, pointed out to him that he wasn't superior to the Ambassador in United States relations with Tunisia. That didn't help I guess. Anyway, I spent two years there. It was kind of a relaxing assignment because I didn't have too much to do. Sumner Gerard was a sailor; he loved to use his sailboat around the Mediterranean, and often was off for quite a long time. I remember when it was time



for the annual fitness report, he asked me to remind him of some of the things I had done, as sometimes supervisors do to subordinates. I mentioned that I had been Acting Mission Director in total for almost half of the previous year, on so many occasions on so many days. That did not find its way into my fitness report.

*Q: So you left there in 1973?*

BEHOTEGUY: No, I left there in late 1972. In the late summer of 1972, I had been called back to serve on a senior personnel panel. Actually, the AID people back in Washington thought, although I hadn't complained personally, that I wasn't too happy in Tunisia. They called me back for personnel panel work. I was there for six weeks chairing an FSR-1 senior personnel panel. It was during that time, or shortly thereafter, about the time I was going back to Tunisia, that Herman Kleine asked me if I would like to go to Haiti and reestablish the AID Mission which had been closed 10 years earlier.

**EDMUND JAMES HULL**  
**Peace Corps Volunteer**  
**Mahdia (1971-1973)**

*Ambassador Hull was born in Iowa and raised in Illinois. He was educated at Princeton and Oxford Universities. After service in the Peace Corps, Mr. Hull joined the Foreign Service in 1974 and had postings in Amman, Beirut, Jerusalem, Tunis and Cairo as well as serving as Ambassador to Yemen from 2001 to 2004. In Washington, the Ambassador served on the National Security Council and as Advisor to the Secretary of State on Counterterrorism. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005*

*Q: What happened?*

HULL: I was accepted and I was sent to Tunisia. Oddly enough, when I was senior at Princeton I had a roommate who was studying Arabic, and I thought that was the oddest choice of any language I could imagine. And then I found myself in the Peace Corps in Tunisia and, after brushing up my French, I started studying Arabic. That was the second step that really determined my career, I think, gaining a capability in Arabic via the Peace Corps.

*Q: What were you doing in Tunisia?*

HULL: I was at a lycée in Mahdia teaching English.

*Q: What's the town or city?*

HULL: Mahdia is a city of historical importance. It is located on the coast about midway down the coast of Tunisia, between Sousse and Sfax. Mahdia was the capital of the Fatimides. The Fatimides were a Shia sect that came to power in Tunisia and then moved east and conquered a good deal of the Islamic world and actually founded the city of Cairo and established a Shia

Caliphate in Cairo that endured for, I believe, centuries. So they started in Mahdia and moved to Cairo as did I in stages of my Foreign Service career.

*Q: What was the political situation there? I assume you were in Tunisia from 1971 to 1973?*

HULL: Right. And what they told us as we entered the Peace Corps was the one thing we could count on was that there would be a change of leadership during our time in Tunisia because President Bourguiba was very old. It didn't happen, of course, and then when I went back to Tunisia as the political counselor in 1987 – that would've been fourteen years later – that change of power still had yet to occur and actually did occur.

*Q: What was the Peace Corps training like?*

HULL: It was excellent training. They took us to Colorado, they took us to Colchester, England and then they took us to Mahdia. They taught us French, they taught us Arabic, they taught us about Tunisian culture and Islamic culture and the fasts and the feasts and the tenets of Islam. It was a very good introduction to North Africa.

*Q: You were doing what?*

HULL: I was teaching English in the high school.

*Q: How did you find the high school system?*

HULL: It was French. It was just transplanted from France. It was called a lycée and it acted like a lycée. We graded on a twenty point scale, most of the teachers were Tunisian, but there were French “co-operants” (volunteers) there and the Peace Corps volunteers there. We made \$160.00 a month and we lived very well on \$160.00 a month. Our problem was that we were entering a strange educational culture, an educational culture not quite Truffaut's “Five Hundred Blows” but pretty strict and pretty compulsory. The big mistake that American teachers made was they became too close to their students, and therefore forfeited respect, and they graded too liberally giving 16s and 17s out of 20, sometimes even 20 out of 20, when every French teacher knew that you graded around 10,11 or 12 so that you always had the option of failing a student. That's the way you kept them in line.

*Q: Did you fall into that trap?*

HULL: I kept the distance from the students and the respect, but I was a more liberal grader than my French counterparts. Besides the numerical grades, we were meant to record “appreciations” (comments) and there I kind of ran afoul because of my inadequate French. Most of the “appreciations” were things like “tres bon” (very good) or “peut mieux faire” (can do better), and I got bored with writing these on my students' report cards so I started cribbing from my fellow teachers. There was one that particularly appealed to me which was “il essaie, mais ces moyens sont limites” (he's trying, but he has limited capabilities). I wrote that for one of my students that I really liked and admired for his efforts. Then I got an unexpected visit from his father wanting to know why I was dismissing his son as dull and unable. I had to explain it was not his son, but

my French that was inadequate.

*Q: How was the role of Bourguiba at the time you were there?*

HULL: This was still I think a good time for Bourguiba. He was progressive in a number of areas, and Tunisia was developing. I think Tunisia was a relatively good place to live in North Africa. Certainly for women, perhaps the best place in the Islamic world to be living.

*Q: It had two difficult neighbors, Algeria and Libya. Had Qadhafi taken over by this time or not?*

HULL: Qadhafi took over in the early seventies, but he was still in his enlightened phase. He wasn't yet identified as the menace that he became later. But when I returned to Tunisia in 1987 both Libya and Algeria were very, very problematic vis-à-vis Tunisia. But in the 70s, at least as far as I was aware, there wasn't a lot of regional tension.

*Q: Algeria, this was after the Evian Accords and all that, wasn't it?*

HULL: Right. Algeria was progressing. I hitchhiked through Algeria to Morocco and came back by train. I hitchhiked in Libya. I slept in the ruins of Subratha; it was before the anti-Americanism and the violence. It was still relatively normal in both countries.

*Q: Did you have any feel that Algeria, in particular after this civil war, or whatever you want to call it, Algerians got out, both Algeria and Tunisia got out from under French rule. The Tunisians had kept their French ties, and it didn't seem to disrupt the country the way Algeria sort of went down hill certainly economically. Did you see that difference?*

HULL: At the time I wasn't aware of it. It depended upon how the French related to the country. France incorporated Algeria as a province of France. They wanted Algeria to be as French as Paris. In Tunisia they never had that ambition, and therefore the rule in Tunisia was always lighter. Also the Tunisians were able to gain their independence primarily through political moves. So the two situations were very different.

*Q: How did you find the students?*

HULL: The students were challenging. They did challenge, and they would take the measure of the teachers and if they could get them on the run, they would do it. Not all of the students, but there would be classes, especially what they called the technical classes. These were the more vocational-minded students who probably questioned the relevance of learning English to their futures given the fact that they were Arabic speakers and had already learned French. It was a big challenge, and it took a certain amount of courage to go in, especially to a technical class and maintain control and get them to learn something. So I generally, especially with the technical classes, went in with a very heavy hand in the first couple of weeks coming down pretty hard and then after establishing who was boss could afford to relax a little bit. I actually had some good results with those students after gaining their respect.

*Q: Were the classes mixed?*

HULL: Yes, they were mixed.

*Q: Was this a special school?*

HULL: No, it was a standard Tunisian lycée, but Bourguiba had no problems with mixing the sexes.

*Q: Did Islam present a problem or a factor?*

HULL: Islam in Tunisia is a very natural phenomenon. The Tunisians are very comfortable with Islam, and they practice it, but not fanatically. We were able to participate in the feasts and we were able to go to such places Kairouan, which is an historic Islamic city, and visit the Grand Mosque there. We would be there on Islamic feasts, and no one raised an eyebrow and it caused no tension. There was an openness that I think is much rarer today.

*Q: Did you find yourself up against the Israeli factor of America there?*

HULL: I knew very, very little about the Middle East at this point. I remember one evening in Mahdia with some teaching colleagues running into an extremely articulate Arab who spoke English very, very well and who was politically extremely sophisticated and then to learn that this was a Palestinian. I think this was the first glimmer I had that there was an issue out there, and a people out there who had a very special view of the Middle East. Little did I know at the time that I would eventually marry a Palestinian from Jerusalem.

*Q: Did the embassy cross your path at all?*

HULL: We tried to stay far from the embassy. I was still recovering from my university days. I didn't want to be associated with the embassy, and I didn't think I needed the embassy for very much. But we did give into cheese burgers at the snack bar when we were up in Tunis, and at one time I had to go to the health unit to try to get condoms which I failed to do. In fact, I was kicked out of the health unit for even asking for that service which meant I had to go to the local pharmacy. Since I didn't know the word for contraceptive in French, I had to explain in imperfect French and with gestures what I wanted. Then I was kicked out of the pharmacy as well. So my initial contact with the embassy wasn't very productive.

*Q: I have to ask, were you able to get this vital piece of equipment?*

HULL: I think I finally consulted a Larousse and got the right French word, which is "preservative", and that did the trick.

*Q: When you were teaching there, did you run across the French establishment?*

HULL: Very much so. The "cooperants" were of course a phenomenon unto themselves. They were teaching not only in Tunisia but all over the former French empire.

*Q: They were a little like a French Peace Corps weren't they? They were part of the military system. Weren't they young people?*

HULL: They weren't necessarily young. They were teaching professionals. It was more like USAID. They got a salary from France, and then they got a salary from Tunisia. Together that made their work quite remunerative. The French in Mahdia, included a lot of sailors especially people from Brittany, and several of them brought their boats down to Mahdia, which had a beautiful fishing port. They actually started a sailing club there, and I joined and learned to sail in French which caused some problems when I got back on the Chesapeake. It was a wonderful pastime and gave me a lot of contact with the French "cooperants" whom I liked.

*Q: There wasn't any tension between the American Peace Corps and the French "cooperants"?*

HULL: No. In fact they taught me sailing, and I taught them English.

*Q: I take it that you weren't aware of some of the winds that were blowing through the Middle East which got worse and worse and worse.*

HULL: Only vaguely. I was aware of the 1967 war, but that was back when I was working as a journalist in Springfield. No, in Tunisia we were somewhat removed from the real crises.

*Q: You left in the summer of 1973 so you missed the October War?*

HULL: I was planning to do a third year in Morocco, and I was studying in Morocco, but I had taken the Foreign Service exam at our embassy in Tunis, and I had passed. I came back to Washington and took the oral, and then was notified that I was accepted. So I was in transition between the Peace Corps and the Foreign Service, but actually in Morocco in October, and I remember the October War from that context.

**JOHN HURD WILLETT**  
**Consul**  
**Tunis (1971-1973)**

*John H. Willett was born in Massachusetts in 1941 and received his BA from Kenyon College in 1941. His career has included assignments in Gaborone, Tunis, Bordeaux, Paris, Rome, Strasbourg and Rabat. Richard Jackson interviewed Mr. Willett on December 21, 1998.*

*Q: But still, you left there for Tunis then, your next post. You had a few second thoughts what this Foreign Service was all about after that first experience.*

WILLETT: Yes.

*Q: And what did you find in Tunis? Where did they put you in that embassy?*

WILLETT: There I was Consul. I had my own building. It was a consular job with a lot of political overtones, and I worked closely, off and on, with Frank Wisner, who was the economic counselor there at the time. The first Ambassador was a man named John Calhoun, who left under a cloud.

Q: *A very traditional, old line sort of a person.*

WILLETT: Yes, well, he was replaced by one of the men I came most to respect in the Foreign Service, Talcott Seelye, who hailed from my neck of the woods. Seelye Hall at Smith College in Northampton is named after his family. He was from western Massachusetts, he knew Mt. Holyoke, he knew the nooks and crannies of New England lore, and I just liked him tremendously.

Q: *Calhoun was asked to leave by the Tunisians or from our point of view?*

WILLETT: Us.

Q: *Something in his personal life.*

WILLETT: Yes....

Q: *I see. I see.*

WILLETT: So, in Tunis, I was living out in Sidi Bou Said in a lovely house overlooking the Bay of Tunis. I still had my Land Rover and I could still go horseback riding; it was a lot of fun. I made friends in the artists' colony at Sidi Bou Said. That painting there is by Brahim Dahak, a fairly well known Tunisian artist, still living. And I became friends with Frank Wisner. He lived in La Marsa, I think it was, or perhaps Gamarth? I can't remember. I could almost see his house from mine.

Q: *A little house on the beach.*

WILLETT: Right on the beach. Frank took me on a hunting trip once, in the mountains on the Algerian border.

Through the Consulate I made friends with a number of Tunisians. One of my best friends was Hammadi Assid, who eventually became the Paris representative of the Arab League, and who died young of a heart attack. Hammadi also lived in Sidi Bou Said, with his German wife, and we palled around a lot. It was Frank who introduced us, and we stayed friends over the years. Hammadi also introduced me to Chadli Klibi, later President of the Arab League, whom I saw on a couple of occasions in Washington.

So Tunis sort of erased those first six months in Botswana, which I don't want to paint as a miserable time. It was just that the professional side of my life there was less enriching than I'd expected. In Tunis it blossomed. I found myself drafting a few rudimentary political reports,

helping the Ambassador, taking trips with him. A couple of these were disastrous -- I mean, really disastrous, one of them almost fatal. On a boat in the Bay of Tunis, Talcott Seelye ruptured his esophagus and, with ten hours to live, had to be flown out. They operated on the airplane. That was a close one. Then we got lost in the Chott el Jerid in the south of Tunisia. But we remained friends through it all, and though I haven't seen him in years, it was always a pleasure when we got together and reminisced. I know that Talcott has become a controversial figure...

*Q: I had drinks with him Tuesday night. Well, John, this was maybe a dozen years or so after Tunisian independence, and Bourguiba had consolidated pretty well. He was beginning to set in motion the famous reforms. I don't know whether the episode of drinking water on television in the month of Ramadan was in that period, but how did this all seem to you then, the evolution of Tunisia, the impact of Bourguiba, the progressivism, the growth of the middle class for which the Tunisians are so famous?*

WILLETT: Although I'd been led to believe that life in the Arab world was tricky, risky, that you had to watch it, that the people were dour and reserved and anti-American, I felt very little of that in Tunisia. I don't remember the drinking of water. I do remember an embarrassingly candid television appearance where at one point Bourguiba he held up the pinky of his right hand with his thumb pressed to the back of it and talked about being born with one testicle no bigger than a *pois chiche*. He said, "*Il y en avait une qui n'était pas plus grande qu'un pois chiche.*" That was a little shocking on national television; it was obvious he was getting senile.

*Q: It was obvious, at that time.*

WILLETT: Yes. It was obvious he was getting senile, because he'd wander in public.

*Q: Was he still calling for his old friend Hooker Doolittle?*

WILLETT: I don't remember that. I do recall that his minister of foreign affairs, Masmoudi, was pushing for union with Libya, which really drove us through the roof, because this was only a couple of years after Qadhafi's coup in Tripoli.

*Q: The coup was in early September '69.*

WILLETT: Yes.

*Q: Then, in fact, we were still in the process of closing down, negotiating out of Wheelus.*

WILLETT: Exactly. But Masmoudi's scheme didn't come to much. There was one dramatic day when the Tunisian/Libyan border was airbrushed out of existence and everything was supposed to become one.

Tunisia had high unemployment, even though it was doing better than most other countries in North Africa. That's when the open/porous border motif went the way of all flesh, because all these Tunisians went to Libya looking for work. The Tunisians themselves are an open people, easy to deal with. They produced wine you could buy and drink. They were by no means

ultraorthodox Islamists.

*Q: Bourguiba himself was very much pushing in that direction, very much pushing for an expanded role for women, education for women --*

WILLETT: Exactly.

*Q -- getting away from the chador, and so on.*

WILLETT: Yes, and in fact, I would compare Bourguiba in certain respects, certain respects only, to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in that he took an archconservative society and managed to turn it around. This is not to say that Islamic extremism doesn't exist at all in Tunisia; it does. In fact, there was a period a few years ago when we were very worried about the direction Tunisia was heading. But the Tunisian people are sophisticated and worldly, and I think they've arrived at a middle ground in all of this.

I became friends with a Tunisian named Abbas Feriani, a wine producer, Château Feriani. We used to buy his wine. Tunisians would dance, discreetly, but they would dance. You could see them drinking in public. The beach restaurants north of Tunis were lined with Tunisians enjoying the sun, in bathing suits, drinking wine. It was a relaxing and pleasant place, an agreeable place to work.

*Q: The PLO headquarters were not yet there.*

WILLETT: Yes, the PLO was there.

*Q: They were already there.*

WILLETT: No, the PLO headquarters were not there, but there was a PLO office.

*Q: But the Tunisians were nevertheless fairly focused on the Middle East situation, considered themselves more involved in it than, say, the Moroccans were, where you later served.*

WILLETT: They were more involved in part, I think, simply because they were closer to the situation by 800 miles. And they did have Qadhafi right next door. When as a young guy with a backpack I hitchhiked across North Africa in the spring of 1968, there was a significant difference between Tunisia and Algeria in the way I was received. The Algerians were a hard people, decidedly opposed to the United States, whereas in Tunisia, the fact that the hearts of the average man were firmly with the Palestinian cause did not translate into the kind of open hostility I encountered in Algeria, or, to a certain degree, in Libya -- surprisingly somewhat less in Libya -- or, of course, in Egypt, which was on the front line.

Mind you, being in the Consulate, my day-to-day chores involved not so much politics as, you know, who gets a visa, who doesn't get a visa. I remember one of the most astounding days in my brief consular career was when a tall, elegant, obviously aristocratic man walked into the Consulate asking for a visa. I said, "May I have your passport, please?" and he replied, "Yes, you can have my passport." The man turned out to be King Carol of Rumania, who'd be damned if he



were going to ask the current Rumanian Government for a travel document. They wouldn't have given him one anyway, so he'd made his own, handwritten, with his family seal in wax and a photo affixed, saying he'd "bestowed" this passport upon himself. It had his full name, his date of birth, his marital status, etc., and pages he'd sewn together with thread, and stamps. After consulting with the Department, we gave him a visa, the only one I've ever delivered to somebody with a homemade passport.

*Q: But now you were the only consular officer. You were the head of that consular section. You were there in that separate building across the courtyard, I guess, from the Embassy in Tunis.*

WILLETT: Exactly.

*Q: That was considerable responsibility. There were all sorts of things that came through there. I suppose it was mostly visas, but you had your range of welfare cases, maybe some American drug cases --*

WILLETT: Oh, yes.

*Q: What were the highlights on the consular side?*

WILLETT: Well, I remember one of them. There was a death, and I had to tell the woman, who was coming out of a coma, that her husband had died in their car accident. That was rough. I had to visit a lot of Americans in prison, once to inform a young druggie that his father had died. There was one guy named Ilonga, a Mozambican traveling on a Haitian passport, and he almost succeeded in conning me. He'd been staying at a fancy hotel in Tunis and run up a \$10,000 bill. For some reason I never understood, the United States looked after Haitian interests in Tunisia. What Haitian interests in Tunisia were I could not answer, but nonetheless, we were responsible. It turned out Ilonga had a history of gulling consular officers all over North Africa and southern Europe; he eventually went to jail. At one point I'd been foolhardy enough to lend him some money. Against all consular regulations, I locked up his passport in my safe and told him I wouldn't give it back until he returned the money he owed me. It wasn't the U.S. government that had made him a loan, it was Willett. And miraculously, he came up with the money. But he got into a lot of trouble with the Tunisian authorities.

Other times I simply helped traveling Americans resolve their less dramatic problems. Or every now and then there were trips that I helped coordinate, CODELS and whatnot. But I was still a young officer, on the sort of "grunt work" end of things. I wasn't involved in policy-making; that was reserved for the political and economic officers.

*Q: But as the head of your section, you would go to the country team meetings.*

WILLETT: Yes.

*Q: And hold up your end, report on what was going on.*

WILLETT: Yes. And under my tenure there, the place was physically revamped. Old files that

had been kicking about for years were finally cleaned up. One of these files involved the Baron d'Erlanger and his American wife. He'd owned 50,000 olive trees that had been nationalized when the country became independent, and he had a gigantic compensation claim against the Tunisian government. One entire safe drawer was filled with thick files going back 15 years to 1956, Tunisian independence. Every consular officer who'd ever served in Tunisia since then had had to deal with this major problem, which I inherited. Well the baroness died, and one day Ramón Bertomeu, a wonderful old man, former Spanish Republican who'd fought Franco, fled Spain and wound up in Tunisia working in the consular section, where he'd been for 13 years, came into my office with this cubic foot and a half of files and dropped them in the wastebasket, saying to me, "*Ainsi terminent tous les dossiers.*"

*Q: In that embassy were there people who took any interest in consular affairs, if you got into a tough case you could consult with -- the DCM, the Ambassador? You were pretty much out there on your own, I suppose.*

WILLETT: Pretty much so, but of course, there were cases that I felt I had to call to the Ambassador's attention because U.S. interests were involved at a somewhat higher level than just, you know, another visa given or refused. After all, visa policy of the United States has always been pretty strict. When you turned a Tunisian down for a visa, you had to be prepared sometimes for a rough reaction, especially if the phone calls had been coming in to the Ambassador saying, "Look, this is my great aunt's second cousin's niece once removed, and if you don't give this visa, this is a personal affront against me, minister of A, B, or C, Mr. Ambassador." Then things got a little touchier.

*Q: Were these the years of the tremendous floods in Tunisia, when we brought in Sixth Fleet helicopters.*

WILLETT: Yes.

*Q: And was the consular section involved in that?*

WILLETT: Yes. There were many deaths. The wife of somebody in the American community was swept away when a *oued* overflowed and carried her car off a bridge. She and her husband were in the car. He was able to grab a tree branch and survived. I remember going through a similar situation in that storm in my Land Rover, on a mission somewhere or other, and not making it. I had to turn back. It was a terrifying scene. Roads I knew well had lost all familiarity. They were under these raging torrents, and at one point I think the only reason I wasn't swept away myself was because the Land Rover is a heavy car with a high wheel base; the water was able to move under it more easily. There were hundreds of deaths, and many farms were destroyed.

*Q: And it was Talcott Seelye who was able to talk the Sixth Fleet into coming in on fairly short notice, and that gained some favorable notice for the United States?*

WILLETT: Yes, we did help out the Tunisians with aid, which we gave with no strings attached. I think the formal AID program there was administered by Sumner Gerard, who'd sailed his boat

over the Caribbean.

Talcott Seelye, under whom I served for only a year and a half, was one of the better ambassadors I ever worked for. He showed me that, while it's not always true, the Foreign Service has generally a meritorious system, that it does try to reward the best. It doesn't always succeed, that's for sure, but it tries.

*Q: Thinking of that, could you tell then that Frank Wisner was on his way to where he subsequently got in the Foreign Service when you observed him sur place?*

WILLETT: No, I just liked Frank because he was -- well, you know, everybody liked him. We enjoyed one another's company, did things together. His French wife Genevieve was already suffering ill health, and I thought Frank handled the situation with great elegance. The administrative officer was a guy named Richard Salazar, who got in trouble later on. The infamous Salazar case. But I liked most of the people I worked with there.

*Q: Well, as our profile became higher there with the flood relief and an aid program, was it felt we were somehow in competition with the French? They, of course, regard Tunisia and North Africa as a *chasse gardée*. You were very much a francophone, a French speaker. How was it with the French?*

WILLETT: The French were, of course, omnipresent, and certainly, they did regard the powerful presence of the United States as a threat to their perceived *chasse gardée* in the three big *Maghrebien* countries; but I never sensed that the United States was consciously out to supplant the French, never once. It just happens that we're a big country, and we're everywhere. We certainly weren't about to make an exception of Tunisia, that is to say, make ourselves invisible. There was a certain illogic to this French reaction. I would say, Dick, also, that it persists, to this day. I saw it again in Morocco when I was there. It's perhaps inevitable. When you'd speak with French diplomats, you could sense a certain wariness, you know. How forthright can I be with this guy? How is he going to use what I tell him to harm French interests here? Something like that. We used to joke about it sometimes, about the so-called competition, which from our point of view wasn't a competition at all, but was seen as such by the French.

*Q: You talked earlier about Bourguiba's progressivism and the modernization and liberalization of Tunisia, but there was an undercurrent too of charges of corruption and the role, perhaps, of Mrs. Bourguiba, "Bibi," and I don't know who else. How was the entourage and the level of corruption there, vis à vis other posts you served in?*

WILLETT: Well, you're quite right to make reference to Ouasilah and to Bibi. He was considered a hopeless poor second to his father, unworthy of assuming the reins of the country. Ouasilah had a lot of nicknames which I can't mention on this tape, and was seen as a thoroughly corrupt person. I would say she resembled Imelda Marcos a bit. She had so much money and seemed to have no real interest except in getting more. When you began exploring, you realized just how deep her interests lay. She seemed to have a finger in every major economic pie that the country was cutting up. I don't even know what happened to her. Is she still alive?

Q: *I believe both she and Bibi are, but I don't know.*

WILLETT: Bibi was very ill.

Q: *Yes, I knew that.*

WILLETT: I'm not sure what he had, diabetes or something. He wasn't really involved in politics, more a playboy, would-be businessman, exploiting his father's position to the hilt.

Q: *Well, John, before we leave Tunisia, is there anything we've missed and anything you want to say?*

WILLETT: I would only say that I left Tunisia with feelings of great fondness. As the ferryboat went north towards Marseilles, I thought I could see in the distance, probably my imagination, the white roofs of Sidi Bou Said. My heart was heavy, because I realized I was in a profession where you can get very attached to something then leave it, probably forever. It's not a coincidence that when I finally got married years later, my wife and I began our honeymoon in Tunis. I showed Chantal the house I'd lived in, the places I'd visited, and we drove through the country on a kind of nostalgic -- for me -- revisit of the country where, five years earlier, I'd served in my first real Foreign Service job.

**TALCOTT W. SEELYE**  
**Ambassador**  
**Tunisia (1972-1976)**

*Ambassador Talcott W. Seelye was born in Beirut, Lebanon. For the past four generations, his family worked as missionaries to Lebanon. His family moved back to the States when he was eleven years old. He graduated from Amherst University in 1947, following two years service in the Army, with a degree in history. After a year of teaching, he decided that the Foreign Service was an ideal career for someone like himself, with such an international background. He was interviewed on September 15, 1993, by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

Q: *You were in Tunisia from 1972-76. What was the situation?*

SEELYE: Let me tell you the story of my arrival. As you know Tunisia is bilingual -- French and Arabic -- and before I left I was told I would be received at the airport and would be expected to make some remarks upon my arrival. So I asked colleagues in North African Affairs whether I should do it in French or Arabic. Some said French and some said Arabic. So I decided to do it my way. I prepared my remarks and had them written out. I arrived and started out in French for the first half, and in the middle I switched to Arabic. It was like the difference between night and day. People who were looking bored suddenly perked up when I started Arabic. The chief of protocol almost jumped out of his seat. The correspondents came up to me afterwards. And that was the reason I had done it that way. I felt this switch from French to Arabic would cause

attention. And from then on I noticed when I traveled around Tunisia people would comment that they had seen me speaking Arabic on TV. So it turned out to be a good thing to do.

*Q: I take it that Tunisia was not a post where we sent people who spoke Arabic?*

SEELYE: I was the first Ambassador to do so. This was unusual.

*Q: Would you say that as a practical thing Arabic was really what was spoken further down the line?*

SEELYE: No it was a break for me, essentially. I had never used French in the Foreign Service, although I had studied French and took a little Berlitz under the GI Bill while waiting to enter the Foreign Service. So I saw this as an opportunity to improve my French and keep up my Arabic. I used my French essentially with the Tunisians, although not always, because Tunisian Arabic is quite different from the standard Arabic. So when I spoke to a gardener I had to speak in French. But an educated Tunisian could understand standard Arabic, of course. So I used both, actually. I think it was good to have an Arabist there because it is an Arab country, a member of the Arab League. They were pleased to have somebody who speaks Arabic.

*Q: What was the situation when you arrived?*

SEELYE: Well, I was told before I arrived that President Bourguiba had six months to live, a year at the most. He is still alive at the age of 90 something. He was already getting somewhat senile and had had some illnesses. The result was he was under medication, under doctor's care. They would sort of pump him up in the morning and he would be alert and dynamic and his charismatic self, and in the afternoon he would kind of sleep off the drugs. So he was fading but was still a powerful president. I found him to be the most charismatic head of an Arab state that I ever met and I have met Faisal, Assad and Hussein, all very powerful in their way, but he was charismatically powerful in his personality. He had sparkling blue eyes and his chin would stick out when he addressed you. And he was very well disposed toward the United States. He considered France and the United States his two best "friends" without exception. His American connection started really with a Foreign Service officer. You probably have heard the story many times.

*Q: Hooker Doolittle?*

SEELYE: Yes. Hooker Doolittle was our consul in Tunis in the early forties. When the Germans invaded North Africa in 1942, Tunisia became a German protectorate. I am not sure whether Hooker Doolittle was there during the occupation, but he certainly was there when the Germans withdrew in 1943 after we defeated the Germans. Habib Bourguiba, who had been arrested by the French in the thirties for his activities as a Tunisian nationalist, had been incarcerated in France. When the Germans defeated France in 1940 they only occupied Paris and a portion of France. When we invaded North Africa, they occupied the rest of France, which meant they occupied the town in which Bourguiba was incarcerated. They released him from prison and told him they wanted him to support them there. Bourguiba said he would not do that, but they left him alone and he went back to Tunisia. Somehow Doolittle got to know him and realized that

while Bourguiba was a nationalist, he was a Francophile. He was not opposed to French influence or contacts. So when the French came back in, after the Allied victory, the French Resident General heard about this American consul who was interfering in internal affairs of French-Tunisian activities. One day Doolittle went to the French authorities because at that point Bourguiba had gone into hiding because the French wanted to rearrest him. Doolittle told the French authorities that this was a good man who was friendly to France. He just wanted an independent country. Doolittle recommended that Bourguiba be left alone. Finally, Bourguiba managed to escape at which point the French were quite upset and complained to Eisenhower about the American consul who was interfering in their affairs. Eisenhower got Doolittle transferred to Alexandria as vice consul to stamp visas at our consulate there. And ironically three or four years later, he was still there when Bourguiba applied for a visa to go to the United States to work for independence.

Well, Bourguiba recalled Doolittle with such warmth that almost every time I called upon him, the first thing he would talk about was Hooker Doolittle. And indeed, after independence, one of the first things he did was to invite Hooker Doolittle back, then retired from the Foreign Service, and gave him the red carpet treatment. So it was Doolittle who started the American connection, and then, of course in the mid fifties we were a strong supporter of Tunisian independence, and that reinforced it.

*Q: I understand there is a Hooker Doolittle Street there.*

SEELYE: Yes, I think there is. He was related to the famous General Jimmy Doolittle. So it is nice to know that your country was held in high esteem and that helped me a lot there.

*Q: What were American interests in Tunisia?*

SEELYE: The first interest was the opportunity for Tunisia to serve as a model third world country as a recipient of economic aid. Our AID program, of course, was developing. We thought that because of the enlightened nature of its society and leadership, plus a capable working class, we could make Tunisia a model for AID success. So we went in there with a substantial AID program and worked hard at that. That was number one.

Number two, as the Soviet fleet began to operate in the Mediterranean and flex its muscles, Tunisia became more important to us strategically -- located athwart the narrow Straits of Sicily. Therefore in a cold war context it had that kind of importance.

Then, I think in terms of Arab politics we saw Tunisia as a very moderate country. Bourguiba was a very moderate leader. And he had the guts to stand up and say what he thought. In 1967 he visited the West Bank, which was then part of Jordan, where he went to a Palestinian refugee camp. Here he announced that it was time for the Arabs to make peace with Israel. At which point Tunisia was kicked out of the Arab League for a while. But Bourguiba at the same time was a strong believer in a Palestinian state -- in Palestinians having their own country. So he was a moderate force in the Arab world and the Tunisians were important in that sense.

I guess those were the three important reasons.

Also, with Qadhafi of Libya next door it was important that there be a moderate counterweight in Tunisia.

*Q: In your contacts with Bourguiba, his son was foreign minister wasn't he?*

SEELYE: Not while I was there.

*Q: Was there anything implicit or explicit about if Qadhafi and Libya start messing around in your country we will give whatever support we can?*

SEELYE: No, that developed later. That developed in the 1980s when Qadhafi was flexing his muscles -- and before the Israelis bombed the PLO headquarters -- we had assured Tunisia that we would provide support if Tunisia were threatened. However, we hadn't expected the enemy to be Israel, of course. Bourguiba always kept his military very small. He wanted to keep the military out of politics. So he did rely on the Sixth Fleet umbrella. We had Sixth Fleet visits every now and then to reassure him. He once told me in the presence of the Sixth Fleet Commander that he considered the Sixth Fleet his "bouclier," his shield. But in my time there was no undertaking to defend Tunisia against Qadhafi.

*Q: What was the role of the French during this time?*

SEELYE: Their relationship was similar to ours. Bourguiba thought very highly of the French. The French Ambassador and I were the two ambassadors he would rely on. Once his prime minister was away from the country and he had a foreign minister by the name of Mohammed Masmoudi, who had been in cahoots with Qadhafi. I think Qadhafi was paying him off. Masmoudi kind of liked to cultivate the radical elements. I knew what Masmoudi was like and I tried to develop a good relationship with him. I knew he liked Cuban cigars, so I always brought one to him. One day, he persuaded the President to go down to Jerba, which is an island off Tunisia adjacent to the Libyan border, to meet with Qadhafi. The meeting was on TV. It was Sunday and we all watched and were surprised to see as the meeting went on that there was talk about unity between Tunisia and Libya. There had been no advance notice of anything like this. The next thing we knew there was Bourguiba being led in kind of a fog to a table and given a pen and he signed a unity document. It was announced that Tunisia and Libya had united. It shocked everybody else in Tunisia. Bourguiba flew back to Tunis that night and word of the unity declaration got back to the Prime Minister, who was in Paris. He immediately flew back to Tunisia and called me that night. The British and Italian Ambassadors wanted to see me. They arrived quite upset wondering what was going to happen. I said, "Don't worry, Bourguiba was in a funk when he signed the document and it won't last more than a couple of days." They said they were worried. Late that night I got a call from the Prime Minister who said that I had an appointment with the President the next day at 9:00. He didn't say why. So I put two and two together and assumed that he wanted me to discourage the President from going through with this.

Well, I decided I wasn't going to tell him what to do. I was just going to ask him a lot of leading questions. Where was the capital going to be? How did this affect the U.S. relationship? So I

spent my one half hour with the President just asking questions and raising issues, etc. and left it at that. Much to my surprise, in behind me came the French Ambassador. Obviously, the Prime Minister had called him too. I guess the French Ambassador provably more or less raised some of the same questions.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister obviously was working hard to turn the thing around and was pointing out the pitfalls and stupidity of the thing. Sure enough within two or three days the announcement was made that unity had been canceled. The whole thing was finis. And it was reflective of Bourguiba's just being at a low point and Masmoudi's being able to lead him down the garden path. Well, after that the son of Bourguiba (Bibi) was particularly upset with Masmoudi. One day he came to me and said, "The Prime Minister and I have been talking, we would like you to go and see the President and get him to dump Masmoudi." I said, "I can't do that. This is none of my business." I didn't even cable Washington for instructions. I found that as Ambassador you do what you think is right. I said, "Look, the U.S. can't get involved. Firstly, I can't go to the President, and secondly, how can I have more influence than you, his son, and the Prime Minister who is his designate? I just don't understand it." I still don't understand it to this day. And he went away unhappy. Masmoudi stayed on quite a while. I can't remember how they finally got rid of him. But to this day I am amazed that the son of the President would come to me on this. But again that showed the President attached a lot of importance to what the American representative would say to him.

*Q: Did you and the French Ambassador kind of compare notes from time to time?*

SEELYE: Yes. There was a great French Ambassador. Normally, as you know, the French try to undercut our interests. Often French ambassadors are undercutting us, and when I went to Damascus, that is later on, Dick Murphy said, "Watch out for the French Ambassador." But in Tunisia, he was very responsive. He happened to be a Protestant from Lyon, a very cultivated man, very cosmopolitan, very friendly to me. We used to compare notes all the time. In fact, he was one of the few people who understood and appreciated the modern art which my wife had borrowed for our embassy. His successor was a little different so I didn't have the same relationship. But we were together about two years, this French Ambassador and I.

One thing did happen which was amusing concerning the French. Just after my French friend left, Giscard D'Estaing came to Tunisia. He was President at that time. Everyday I used to look at both the French and Arabic newspapers. I would at least scan the headlines. When the Arabic newspaper came the day that Giscard arrived there was a picture of me on the front page. I wondered what I was doing on the front page. I looked under the picture and it said, "Giscard D'Estaing." If it had been my old friend, I would have called the French Ambassador and joked with him about it, but the new French Ambassador was a little bit stiff and I didn't know him. They had just put my picture in by mistake. I still have it as a memento, but you had to understand Arabic to understand the amusing aspect of it. I wonder to this day if the French knew about it because their officials didn't read Arabic.

*Q: What was the impact of the 1973 war? This is the one where Egypt made a surprise attack on Israel (Yom Kippur War) and did well in the beginning but it all fell apart.*



SEELYE: Well, the first evening of the war Bourguiba got on the radio and TV and said, "We have a Jewish community here in Tunisia which is loyal, it has been here for centuries. They are indigenous and part of our society. I will not allow anybody to hurt a hair on their heads. They are loyal Tunisians." He said that immediately so there would not be any outbreaks against the Tunisian Jewish community. And there weren't.

There was a coolness for a while against the United States because of our support for Israel and the fact that Egypt was getting defeated near the end. But it was never reflected in any overt action and it soon dissipated. I don't recall being called in by the Foreign Minister or Prime Minister to complain. Maybe they did, but I just don't recall it. Just sort of a coolness for a while. We had a lot of Tunisian friends, but for a few months they thought it was unwise to invite any Americans to their parties.

*Q: How did the Tunisians view Egypt? You had a new man in power, Sadat.*

SEELYE: Well, Tunisia had good relations with Egypt. They also had a common interest in opposing Qadhafi because Qadhafi was causing problems for both the Tunisian government and the Egyptian government. At one point Qadhafi sent across some agents to Gafsa in southern Tunisia and they tried to cause a demonstration and start some kind of uprising. But they failed. And, of course, Qadhafi was trying to do the same thing in Egypt. So the two nations had a common interest in opposing Qadhafi. As I recall, they got along pretty well, the Egyptians and the Tunisians.

*Q: Was there any concern at that time about what is now called Islamic Fundamentalism?*

SEELYE: No. In those days they pretty much didn't exist. Bourguiba, of course, was a secularist and one of the platforms of "Bourgabisme," as they called it, was to secularize as much as possible while being good Moslems. In fact, Bourguiba went so far one time during Ramadan - as you know during Ramadan you cannot eat or drink - of appearing on television during the day with a glass of water in front of him. He sipped the water while telling Tunisians you could be good Moslems and still drink water and eat food during Ramadan. He said you should do that because otherwise you lose productivity, and productivity is important to society's well being. Well, just about everything else Bourguiba had done to reform the country had worked, but this didn't work. That was too much. People would not accept that. But I didn't sense during my time that there was any active fundamentalist movement in Tunisia.

*Q: Did you get involved at all in trying to promote American commerce?*

SEELYE: To a very limited extent, because it was such a French market. There were very few American firms who showed any interest in Tunisia. The traditional problem with American firms, at least in the past, was that they didn't have the patience to spend enough time building the building blocks required for a market for their products. I found that all over the Middle East. They would go for a few days or a week and then leave, whereas the Japanese and the French would spend weeks and months cultivating people, getting a feel of the lay of the land and understanding the local mentality.

Also Tunisia was a French-speaking country and few American businessmen spoke French. So there was very little American interest in trade. I remember somebody coming through who wanted to involve his firm in agribusiness in Tunisia, and we encouraged the Tunisians to take a good look at this. But unfortunately in those days there was still an aftermath of the French colonial presence. In 1961, four years after independence, the French farmers were kicked out and all their lands were nationalized. Therefore, when somebody like an American agribusiness person came along and wanted to lease land for a particular period of time, the Tunisians turned him down because this had echoes of foreigners running the land. That would have been a good business opportunity for an American firm. Since then, the Tunisians have waived their requirement.

There was one company there that imported American used clothes in tremendous quantities. These American used clothes shipped abroad are often in very good shape. Otherwise there was minimal American commercial interest in Tunisia.

*Q: What about Algeria? Algeria had been independent for some time but was going economically down the tubes. Was Bourguiba and the group around him pointing to Algeria and saying, "Here it is not working?"*

SEELYE: Well, Tunisia wanted to maintain good relations with Algeria. During the Algerian revolution the Tunisians gave asylum to Algerians and Algerian guerrillas in Tunisia. They felt a strong identity with Algeria. But there was no way they wanted to copy Algeria economically because Algeria had become very socialist in its economy. Tunisia had its experience with socialism between 1967-69, when they had a man by the name of Ahmed Ben Saleh, a very bright, active minister of agriculture, who at one point had six portfolios, and decided to nationalize everything. Maybe it was partly the vibes from Algeria that carried over and Bourguiba went along with it. He went so far as to nationalize retail outfits. But the government had its comeuppance because when it tried to nationalize the olive groves along the coast in the south, which had been in private hands for ages, the farmers resisted. Some people were killed and suddenly these things changed. Bourguiba decided they weren't going to nationalize anymore. He kicked out Ben Saleh, arrested him. The whole focus of economic development shifted back to privatization. So from 1969 on, the whole emphasis was on privatizing and has been ever since. So Tunisia experimented with socialism and decided it didn't like it.

*Q: How about Tunisia and the UN? Did you find yourself going up, as every ambassador does?*

SEELYE: Oh, yes, those usual circular telegrams. Tunisia was pretty good at the UN, they were helpful to us. We never had any problems with them at the UN.

*Q: Were you ever called up while you were there to use Tunisia as sort of a cat's paw on some Arab problem we were having?*

SEELYE: One of the things that happened there during my early days was the sad occurrence in the Khartoum, Sudan, when Cleo Noel and Curt Moore were assassinated. Shortly thereafter, I don't know if it was a day or two after, my station chief came to me and said that he had a report that these assassins or their accomplices were coming to Tunisia. Now we know in retrospect

that those people were held in arrest, so it must have been their associates. There was concern about their intentions. So I cabled Washington and told them I just wanted to make sure they had this information. I indicated that we had two choices. I could share this information with the Tunisians so they could intercept them. On the other hand, I had been told by my station chief that if we informed the Tunisians, we would compromise a very sensitive source. I asked Washington what it wanted me to do? I got a midnight call from Washington saying to tell the Tunisians and to get a bodyguard. So I told the Tunisians and temporarily had a Marine bodyguard. The Tunisians were concerned about this report and supposedly they intercepted them, I don't know, and then assigned me a bodyguard from the Presidential Palace. That person became my bodyguard from then on, all because of the Khartoum business. You know once these arrangements start, you can never end them.

Now in connection with that whole affair, I remember after it happened I got instructions from Washington to go in and strongly complain to the Tunisians about this terrible thing that had happened in the Sudan and that we expected all friendly governments to publicly denounce it. So I went in to see Bourguiba on this and he unfortunately kind of passed it off. He didn't respond the way Washington had hoped he would respond. Washington was furious that Bourguiba had not out of hand said, "This is outrageous and despicable, I will condemn it and will go on TV tomorrow." A rocket came back from Washington instructing me to go back and tell the guy that he had to say something. Instead, I went to his chef de cabinet, a very nice and cooperative individual. I went to his home. I said, "I have a problem here. Washington is very upset that the President is not taking a stronger position about this. We are very upset about this. These are two very good friends of mine. It is a shocking incident. I am upset. Isn't there something that you people can do to be a little more responsive on this?" He said, "I understand." So he gave me a response which was just what I needed. I forget whether he used Bourguiba's name or not. Anyway he got me off the hook.

*Q: Were there any other events that took place while you were in Tunisia that you would like to mention?*

SEELYE: Yes, there is a dramatic event that happened there. In March, 1973, there were terrible floods in the Majerda Valley, north of Tunis. It had rained for many, many days and waters were rising and suddenly the dam at the head of the valley burst and the waters surged higher. The Prime Minister called me in at 4:00 that afternoon and said, "Please come to my office in a hurry." When I got there he said, "We have a critical situation developing. Our farmers literally have sought refuge on housetops as the waters are rising. We are afraid they are going to be washed away. We have to do something about it. What can you do about it?" I said, "Well, we have helicopters in the Sixth Fleet." "Oh," he said, "Can't you bring them here by nightfall?" I said, "Look, nightfall is only an hour and a half away. That would be a miracle. But I will try to get help by the first thing in the morning." So I went back and used a radio telephone to reach the Sixth Fleet Commander. Miraculously I got him. "Well," he said, "my main aircraft carrier with helicopters has gone off to Vietnam. I have another one headed north towards Sardinia that has a few helicopters on it which I will turn around forthwith and point it towards Tunisia. I will try to have the helicopters there by dawn."

I didn't check with Washington beforehand. I probably cabled Washington at that point telling

them what I was doing, I don't recall. I must have.

I then called the Prime Minister to tell him what I was doing. I said, "Would you like to go with me on the lead helicopter?" He said, "No, but I will assign one of my ministers." So he was at the airport with me first thing in the morning. The first two helicopters arrived and the plan was that we would go on a reconnaissance mission to see what the extent of the need was. Meanwhile we had a Tunisian non-com assigned to each helicopter who spoke Arabic for communication with those being rescued. We started off and hadn't gone but a few miles when we saw two people waving from a rooftop, with the water really way up there. So the other helicopter, as if this had been an exercise planned for ages, lowered a rope with a swing. The helicopter pulled up one guy and then pulled up the other guy. The Minister was looking out the window watching this and said, "Fantastique! Extraordinaire!" As if it had all been planned.

We realized that our helicopter would also have to go on a rescue mission. So we started to look for people to rescue. As we hovered over rooftops, we had a difficult time convincing people they would be safe being pulled up into the helicopters. They were scared. So instead of lowering the swing, we would lower a sort of a platform and this way we could bring up whole families. They were just scared to death with us hovering over them and the water just pouring around. The currents were heavy. Finally, we got about 40 people crammed into the helicopter, sitting in the aisles. We took them to high land. We did that two or three times. Then we returned.

Finally, helicopters arrived from Italy, France and Libya. But we were the first off. The minister was very appreciative. The Prime Minister called me up and said, "This is terrific." The helicopter pilot said to me, "This is the best thing we have done in the last year. Most of the time we just pick up our pilots out of the ocean. Here we are doing something useful."

So that is an example of the kind of thing we could do for Tunisia and they appreciated it.

**JOAN SEELYE**  
**Spouse of Ambassador**  
**Tunisia (1972-1975)**

*Mrs. Seelye was born and raised in Connecticut and educated at Skidmore College. She accompanied her husband, Foreign Service Officer Talcott Seelye on his diplomatic assignments in Germany, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Tunisia and Syria. Her husband served as US Ambassador to Tunisia, Lebanon and Syria. Mrs. Seelye was interviewed by Jewell Fenzi in 2010.*

SEELYE: We went home for a couple of years, and then we went to Tunisia, which was Talcott's first ambassadorial assignment. Tunisia is absolutely gorgeous. It's the land of the lotus eaters.

*Q: When were you there?*

SEELYE: We were in Tunisia from 1972 to 1975; it is the land of the lotus eater, and you just don't ever want to leave. The lotus eater, Odysseus, never wanted to go back to Penelope, and I never wanted to leave Tunisia. It was beautiful. We had an aid mission there. I was living in Carthage, and I absolutely loved Carthage. We eventually moved from Carthage to the most gorgeous new residence that Uncle Sam has, and that's why I spent a lot of time with the foreign buildings operation of the department when I was here before leaving making sure the design was correct. The design was a little bit off and they listened to me, thank goodness. I would come over here to the Foreign Service Institute before going out there; I saw the designs, and I knew that there were big errors in what could have been a perfectly gorgeous place.

*Q: Was it traffic patterns?*

SEELYE: I got my way. Well, they had designed a great big marble atrium, and as you walked in the door there was a little hall and beyond that was a huge atrium overlooking the sea. The sea was right below us, and it was magnificent. They were going to close off the atrium so it wasn't going to be usable. I said this has to be used. It can't just be closed off by glass everywhere. You have to be able to walk into it. So I was able to fix that. Then the dining room was going to be on the first floor down some very narrow little stairs. It was very unattractive but I spotted an unused empty space over in a corner near the narrow stairs in the plan. So, we widened the staircase and had this beautiful staircase that went down and attracted people to go down there for dinner. Otherwise, who wants to go down narrow, steep stairs especially in high heels? So we added a big landing with a lovely Tunisian window, and then you went down another little flight of stairs to a beautiful dining room. That was quite the experience to help design that residence, a design which has been copied for other new residences.

*Q: At least they listened to you.*

SEELYE: Yes. You know, they did everything they could. The architects took me to dinner here, they took me to lunch trying to convince me to give up my fight but I did not give in.

Back to Tunisia, we were very, very well greeted there because most American ambassadors were French-speaking, but he was an Arabist, and the press knew that. Talcott gave a little talk at the airport, both in French and Arabic which the press made much of. We first lived in Carthage waiting for the new residence to be finished. There was a big American women's club there which I was honorary president of. I was very impressed with these American women. One of the things we did was to work in an orphanage. These American women started to adopt little kids from the orphanage. Tunisians are very attractive people, physically. Maybe three or four were adopted. Finally, the government said, no more, that the American women were Christians, and these children were Muslims; so it was stopped. And they could not take any more unless the children were deformed or handicapped. You could have a handicapped child. That didn't stop those American women taking handicapped children. It was just incredible.

*Q: And they adopted them personally?*

SEELYE: Yes, they would take them home. One of the little boys had an intestinal problem, and they knew, checking him out with a local doctor, that it was operable, and so they intended to

take care of that problem once they got home to the U.S. They were just lovely people, all of those who did that. We, again, had a lot of visitors; we had Henry and Nancy Kissinger, and they stayed at the palace. I wanted to say to Nancy... well, I don't know how much I can say in these interviews.

*Q: You can say anything you want?*

SEELYE: Really? Even if it's not flattering?

*Q: Absolutely.*

SEELYE: Well, that is part of the story. Part of the problems is how to handle VIP Americans coming over and embarrassing you. Well, Nancy and Henry Kissinger arrived She wasn't particularly friendly, and she said to me how this was the end of their trip, and all of her evening dresses were worn out so she would wear her least formal dress for the dinner. It took me fifteen minutes to go to my home, put on my dress, and come back to the palace for dinner. So, I threw out the fancy dress that I was going to wear and instead, I put on my simplest evening dress. I got to the palaces and there she was wearing the most ornate, fancy evening dress you could wear. I could have kicked myself for listening to her.

*Q: She didn't want you to upstage her?*

SEELYE: Maybe, but she certainly wasn't very warm. She literally was addicted to Coca Cola and cigarettes. She was a non-stop smoker. I didn't dare talk much to her because she was a bit intimidating. It was a quick visit, we showed them the sights etc. They were well taken care of.

The next big visit was Nelson Rockefeller, and Happy was not at all happy. We met them at the airport along with the Prime Minister, and other Tunisian VIPs at this presidential plane. Most American top officials travel on these presidential planes; there must be a whole fleet of them. The president only uses a new one; the excess older planes were for these people.

So, the Rockefellers arrived. I had on a very old scroll around my neck, something written in old Assyrian—something from ancient Nineveh. Some relatives of ours had been there when it was discovered. He had come home with a lot of these scrolls, so I had one of these scrolls around my neck. The Vice President gets off the plane and he said, "Do you know what you have around your neck, Mrs. Seelye?" And, I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "Well, look what I have." As he pulled out one of the scrolls from his pocket which he used as a key fob.

*Q: Where did he get his?*

SEELYE: Oh, well it was from Iraq. Near the end of his life, he was buying up antiquities, ancient things in places like Damascus and Iraq, and having them copied and making a business out of it. So, he had his scroll, and I had mine. We went into the cars that we were assigned, and he was in the Prime Minister's car, and I got into the car that I was assigned. Happy was assigned to my car too but she said to her husband, "I don't want to sit with Mrs. Seelye. I want to sit with you." And he said, "No, Darling, you have to be with Mrs. Seelye. It's protocol." So,

there she was. She was like a little girl. And that night, actually the Tunisian women were impressed with her, because she was a rich woman, with no jewelry on, and just a simple dress. They commented, they noticed, and as Arab women like to dress up they were impressed that she wasn't showing off all of her jewels. The occasion for the visit was a celebration of Habib Bourguiba's 25<sup>th</sup> year as president so people had come from all over the world for this event. There was a huge tea party, and I would try to introduce Happy to various people, but she had no interest in meeting anyone, just talking to her bodyguards. That didn't bother me too much. What could I do about that?

*Q: But did they need a translator?*

SEELYE: The Tunisians? They didn't speak much English in Tunisia. Most Arabs speak a bit of English, but not in North Africa so much. So, I didn't have to do much work, but that night, the President's wife put on a big dinner party just for the women, especially for Happy Rockefeller. At the last minute I was told that Happy wasn't coming. She had decided to go to a little restaurant with her bodyguards. What an embarrassing thing. It was humiliating! So, all of the other spouses were there with their president's wives, and I'm there, the only person representing America.

*Q: And there wasn't anybody to take her place?*

SEELYE: No.

*Q: Did the press pick up on that?*

SEELYE: They did. And of course, there was no way to hide the fact that she was at a little restaurant with her bodyguards. She was not at all impressive. So, how do you handle problems like that? And that was way after her illness; she was just gloomy, for someone named Happy. She didn't know how to relate to foreigners. It was not as if she was exhausted. So, I apologized; I guess I probably said she had a headache.

*Q: It was in Morocco, there was fatigue. There were more fatigued women in Morocco than there were on the census?*

SEELYE: So, let's see, oh, this is the first place where we had marines guarding the house. The marines' duty was to take care of the chancery, not the residence, but my husband's life had been threatened. So, we had a marine on duty in the house. And I have to tell you that put the kibosh on my kids having any fun. They were roughly the same age as our older children. They couldn't go downstairs and get cookies because there were the Marines sitting right there guarding the entrance!

*Q: What year was that?*

SEELYE: This was 1972 to 1975. There was an interesting combination of women's club and doing other things, and of course, I explored the souk, I'm an explorer all by myself. I also learned to belly dance at this institute for performing arts-- the Tunisian Institute. That was fun. I

cried when I had to leave Tunisia. It was such a beautiful country. And then we came home, and that's when Talcott was sent out to Beirut when Beirut was really falling apart. They were in the middle of a civil war, and we had to get all the Americans out. They had killed the ambassador and we had closed the embassy. They sent him out and I stayed here.

He went out to Beirut as Presidential Envoy under Ford. We were closing the embassy; he stayed there for maybe two months, and he had to work with the PLO against Henry Kissinger's instructions because the PLO was running Beirut. And there was no way he could get Americans out of the city to the Sixth Fleet, who came as close as they could to the beach, without the help of PLO. They would have been firing on them. So, Talcott was successful in doing that and he had to deal with the PLO. I mean, Henry Kissinger, imagine saying you cannot deal with them when American lives were at stake

At that point it was forbidden by the State Department for an American official to speak to them. Well, Talcott couldn't have gotten anyone out of Beirut onto the beaches if he hadn't. So, he went ahead and did it.

**DAVID L. MACK**  
**Tunisia Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1973-1975)**

*Ambassador Mack was born and raised in Oregon and educated at Harvard University. Joining the Foreign State Department in 1965, he studied Arabic and devoted his career dealing with Arab and Middle East issues. His foreign posts include Baghdad, Amman, Jerusalem, Beirut, Tripoli, Benghazi and Tunis. From 1986 to 1989 he served as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. In Washington from 1990 to 1993, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs. During this period, the major issue was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the military actions that followed. Ambassador Mack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.*

MACK: I was on the Tunisian desk from the summer of 1973 to the summer of 1975.

Q: *During this period were there any major issues between Tunisia and the United States?*

MACK: Yes. We had a very strong relationship with Tunisia, including a large AID mission and a military assistance program. Tunisia was in many respects a favored partner of the United States, because of Habib Bourguiba's modernizing reforms and his generally moderate attitude toward the Arab-Israeli crisis. We also saw Tunisia as being threatened by Libya, and potentially by Algeria, in other words by more revolutionary states. We understood that Bourguiba was getting old and that his time in power would eventually come to an end, and we were interested in trying to build up the status of his chosen heir as prime minister. On the internal side, we tried to support economic reforms. I spent a lot of time trying to get some additional money approved for economic aid programs, trying to come up with a few additional military credits, and scrape



up a little more cultural exchange grant money. I worked very closely with the Tunisian embassy in Washington, as well as our embassy in Tunis.

Ironically, one of the great successes was when we were able to come up with a surplus U.S. destroyer escort, the Geary, which we could provide to the Tunisians. This was militarily a foolish thing, but Bourguiba wanted to have a flagship. They were totally unequipped to maintain, service, and provide personnel for such a ship. It was a very high profile issue in our relationships, and we were able to arrange it. I believe it was a grant, but it could have been a no-cost lease.

Thus it was that the Geary, with an American crew and Tunisian trainees learning from the Americans, proceeded on its way across the Atlantic, setting off in late September 1973. The Geary had entered the Mediterranean before the October 1973 war began. I was sent up to the Task Force area, and by this time Kissinger had come over to the State Department as Secretary of State. Joseph Sisco was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. It was an exciting atmosphere. While on the Task Force, I became aware that they were talking about the arms re-supply to Israel. The Tunisians were one of the countries that had sent token forces, medical forces, but they had sent token forces to the Suez front. I realized that paradoxically, while we were going to have this major supply of weapons to Israel, we would also be having a U.S. destroyer escort arriving in the port of Tunis at the very same time. I went to Assistant Secretary Newsom and said: "Sir, I think we better bring this to the attention of the Secretary." Newsom agreed. He didn't actually go to the Secretary, he took me to Joe Sisco. I suggested we could present this as an example of the fact that we're not anti-Arab. It surely will come to public attention, but it needn't be considered a bad thing. It would show that our re-supply to Israel in Israel's hour of need not to be overrun by the Egyptian army was not an anti-Arab move. Sisco asked me to write a memo to the Secretary, so I did. I don't know quite how the decision was made, but the decision was made to allow the ship to proceed. So along with the U.S. re-supply of Israeli armed forces this transfer took place. Of course, it was irrelevant in terms of the Middle East arms balance. It has been the bane of the Tunisian navy ever since. They could never do anything except on special occasions like Bourguiba's birthday, or the national day, when they would sail it around in circles in the Bay of Tunis so that he could see it, but it was never an effective fighting ship.

*Q: How did the Tunisians react to this what was called the Yom Kippur or October war of '73? You were on the desk by this time.*

MACK: The Arabs call it the Ramadan War, whereas for the Israelis it's the Yom Kippur War. I think the term October War is appropriately neutral. I was not so much aware of general Tunisian attitudes as I was of Tunisian government attitudes. Bourguiba certainly was appalled by the scale of Egyptian losses when the Israelis successfully counter attacked across the canal and cut off the Egyptian third army. Bourguiba presumed upon his good relationship with us to ask if we couldn't intervene to stop the slaughter. The Tunisians were grateful that the war did not continue any longer than it did. There had been no great sympathy for Nasser over the years, and there had been a lot of antipathy between Bourguiba and Nasser. However, Bourguiba had done the politically shrewd thing by sending this medical unit during the course of the war so the Tunisians were well placed to pose as they liked to as being the bridge from the United States to

the rest of the Arab world.

We reciprocated in many ways, with military assistance, with a large AID program. And we also would have had a visit of President Bourguiba to Washington, but he was too ill at the time to travel. He asked us specifically to receive his Prime Minister as head of state, and we did everything but receive him as head of state. We had a very lavish official visit for Prime Minister Hedi Nouira. It was kind of hard to find things to give substance to the visit, but the Tunisians badly wanted to establish a joint U.S.-Tunisian economic commission. This is a kind of European way of conducting foreign relations by having these joint commissions, and they wanted one with the U.S. Kissinger is probably the only Secretary of State who was ever enamored of the idea, perhaps because of his own European background. It was easy enough to get a decision from the Secretary that we should establish this joint commission, headed in practice by the Deputy Secretary. Officially, I think it was headed by Kissinger himself. For the first inaugural meeting, I believe Kissinger joined with Nouira to kick it off, and then it was delegated to us. It was delegated down to the desk to try to find some substance for this, and it was really hard. We had tried to scrape up and give some kind of core of meaning to all the little foreign currency grants. At that time we still held a lot of surplus Tunisian dinars, which were provided by law of Congress to various agencies such as the Smithsonian, and the Department of Commerce, etc. All these agencies had their little bit of appropriated Tunisian currency. They didn't like to be told by the Secretary of State or the U.S. ambassador, let alone by the Tunisian desk officer, how to spend their money, but it was politically useful to coordinate expenditures in the context of the overall relationship and resented by the Tunisians if they were not consulted in the process. One of the things we used the Joint Commission for was to establish in principle that use of these excess dinars would be coordinated between the two governments at the level of the U.S. ambassador and the Foreign Minister of Tunis. There was a lot of window dressing like that to make it look like this was a great success for Prime Minister Hedi Nouira.

I got drawn into other matters too in the Office of North African Affairs. I substituted for a while for the Libyan desk officer and for the Moroccan desk officer. I was even working on Mauritanian-U.S. affairs at one point. But most enjoyable in a sense was working on the Libya desk, because I savored one of those delicious little ironies. You know they say revenge is a dish best when eaten cold. I mentioned our economic relations had continued and flourished, both in the oil sector and American agri-business companies, etc. We had quite a booming trade with Libya. But we continued to suffer under this fairly artificial restriction on the size of our embassy in Tripoli, and political relationships were not at all good. At the time of their restriction on us they had maybe an embassy of six diplomats. Their embassy was taking care of hundreds if not thousands of Libyan students in the country, and was very active in commercial work. Libyan diplomats were also scurrying about the country, very much into Arab-American politics and trying to make sure that Qadhafi's green book got appropriate notice among the Arab émigré community in the U.S. While I was substituting for the Libyan desk officer, I asked the State Department protocol office to tell me the size of the Libyan contingent. I was informed that it gone up to something like 25 people on the diplomatic list. I had the pleasure of reminding the Libyans of the reciprocity of the agreement under which we had curtailed our numbers. They were shocked that we would apply that to them as well. For a time, it looked like they might remove the limit on the number of our personnel, which was my objective. We would not have been prepared to re-staff our embassy to any great degree, although the Department of Defense

would have liked to have sent a military attaché back. There were plenty of other agencies who would have liked to have sent people to Tripoli. In the end the Libyans bit the bullet and reduced their numbers to the ceiling of sixteen persons with diplomatic status. This procedure gladdened the heart of the FBI and others who had to keep tabs on them.

The mid-1970s was an interesting period at the State Department. I attended a number of meetings when Secretary Kissinger met with visiting Tunisian officials, including Prime Minister Nourira. I was just a note taker in best Kissingerian fashion. Desk officers were to be seen and to take notes, but not be heard. Still, it was great fun to go to a Kissinger meeting, and Kissinger impressed very well. I had remembered him as a somewhat eccentric professor at college and was really impressed by the degree to which he fit very well into the role of Secretary of State. I was one of those who were enthusiastic about having Secretary Kissinger as Secretary of State. It was quite obvious to me that, even as a fairly junior State Department official, I had much more influence with other agencies under Kissinger than I had enjoyed under William Rogers. As long as Kissinger was Secretary of State, other agencies knew that he could take an issue to the President. If they failed to settle a matter with the desk officer, at some point further up the line it would be settled in favor of the State Department anyway. This gave me, as a desk officer, a considerable amount of influence within the inter-agency community which I enjoyed using. I think I used it for the furtherance of Secretary Kissinger's and the President's policies.

*Q: During this '73 to '75 period that you were dealing mainly with Tunisian affairs, were there any threats to Tunisia coming from Algeria or Libya? Did you see any problems?*

MACK: Yes. It was during this time that Bourguiba, who was becoming increasingly eccentric, received Qadhafi on a visit to Tunis and agreed to unify Libya and Tunisia.

*Q: These unification things keep...*

MACK: They had a meeting in Djerba, and this resulted in the Djerba Declaration. Qadhafi was always seeking unification schemes. And, of course, Qadhafi appealed very well to Bourguiba's vanity, flattering him with the notion that he would be president of the union. Tunisians and Tunisia's friends were appalled. Once Bourguiba got back to the capital and the Tunisian establishment started working on him, he soon started back-peddling. As a result, this led to a very sharp deterioration of Libyan and Tunisian relations, and the Libyans engaged in some serious subversion. To some degree, [the Libyans may have acted] with the complicity of the Algerians. The Tunisians believed the Algerians knew about the subversion, but it's a little ambiguous. This led to a brief insurrection in the Tunisian town of Gafsa, which is a phosphate mining area with a very deprived working class. Some people in Gafsa were very easily subject to Libyan blandishments, and the Libyans spent quite a lot. The insurrection was put down fairly effectively by the Tunisians. But for a while it looked like Libya might try to intervene. There were shows of force both by the French and the U.S. The French participated directly, I think, in helping the Tunisians suppress the insurrection. The U.S. was involved in a show of force out in the Mediterranean in order to warn Qadhafi from trying to actually intervene with force across the border. This, of course, only made relationships between the Tunisian government and the U.S. all the closer. At the time I left the desk relations were really at a very high level.

**ARTHUR T. TIENKEN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1973-1975)**

*Arthur T. Tienken served as a Foreign Service Officer in Germany, Mozambique, Belgium, Washington, DC, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Gabon. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

TIENKEN: Tunisia was basically an Arab country rather than an African country, and you had to remind yourself from time to time that in fact it was on the African continent.

Q: *Yes.*

TIENKEN: And a member of the Organization of African Unity. The Tunisians didn't particularly look south of the Sahara at African problems, and so we spent very little time dealing with them on Africa. And my ambassador at the time was Talcott Seelye, who was one of the premier Arabists of the Department. That was his major interest. The problems that we had or the interests that we had in Tunisia were essentially Middle Eastern problems and/or Mediterranean problems but not African problems. From my own point of view, the Tunisians were one of the nicest people that I ever spent time with. Bourguiba, the then president, had a very soft spot for Americans in his heart. His was the only country that allowed Sixth Fleet port visits for years and years and years. And he made no bones about it. And he often decorated Sixth Fleet commanders. He genuinely, I think, liked Americans, and it showed. So dealing with the Tunisians was very easy. And Bourguiba certainly was not a radical Arab, so that his views on some of the Middle Eastern problems, particularly the Israeli and so forth, while I wouldn't say always coincided with ours, were a lot closer to some of our views as what ought to go on there than some of the other Middle Eastern countries.

Seelye left me pretty much to run the embassy, and he did much of the political work. He had a relatively easy time, I think.

Q: *No great crises at that point?*

TIENKEN: We never had any crises. Tunisians occasionally could be just as volatile as other Arabs when they had what they thought reason to be so. And, indeed, well before I got there, I think in the beginning '70s, they had, in fact, attempted to attack the embassy. And if there were incidents in the Arab world that they would take badly, there would be a certain amount of tension in Tunisia. But by and large, it was a peaceful, quiet place. There were no great differences of opinion or problems that we had to cope with.

**E. WAYNE MERRY**  
**Political/Economic Officer**

## Tunis (1974-1976)

*Mr. Grimes was born and raised in Alabama and educated at Notre Dame University. After service in the United States Marine Corp he joined the State Department and served as Diplomatic Courier until being commissioned as a Foreign Service Officer in 1962. A specialist in Labor Affairs, Mr. Grimes served in Glasgow, Valetta, Port of Spain, Kinshasa, Brussels, Tunis and Paris (twice). He had several tours of duty in Washington, DC and a year of Labor Studies at Harvard University Mr. Grimes was interviewed by James F. Shea and Don Kienzle in 1996.*

*Q: So where did you go then?*

MERRY: I went to Tunis.

*Q: So we'll pick it up going to Tunis.*

MERRY: OK.

*Q: Today is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2010 with Wayne Merry. When we left off you were off to Tunis. When did you go to Tunis?*

MERRY: I got my assignment to Tunis when I was still in the Office of Congressional Relations, which is to say late in 1973, for a posting that would start the next year in '74. As an untenured junior officer, this being my first overseas post, there was no particular rhyme or reason as to how these assignments were made. In fact, the story, which was not entirely apocryphal, was that the junior officer political cone assignments officer had a National Geographic map of Africa on the wall of his office and a dart on his desk, and that the day I was assigned he had a particularly strong throw because the dart hit high on the map. That's basically the way these assignments were done, because there was no particular reason why I should go to Tunis or why the embassy in Tunis should get me.

In fact, they almost didn't, because after I had been assigned I was made an offer by Graham Martin, who was preparing to go out as United States ambassador in Saigon, the last one as it happened. I had worked a bit on his confirmation hearings, which had been a protracted process because many senators thought he was the wrong man for the job, being very gung ho about a war the United States was getting out of. He would be needing a staff aide at the embassy and he asked me to go out with him. I was so completely green about the ways of the State Department that I declined because I'd already been assigned to Tunis, not realizing that with a single phone call from Martin to the Director General that assignment could have been altered and nobody would have cared one way or the other. I've long wondered what it would have been like to have gone to the embassy in Saigon at the end of our presence there, working for the last ambassador. I certainly would have seen a lot of history. Whether it would have been a beneficial choice or not, I'll never know.

In any case, I went to the embassy in Tunis in summer 1974, after a few months getting my

French up to speed, on what was essentially a probationary and training assignment. I have to say it was not, from my point of view, a very satisfactory one, which had nothing to do with the country. Tunisia was a place I liked very much. I traveled quite a bit in the country, in part related to my job, and I have nothing but positive things to say about Tunisia. I can't say the same about the embassy or my position in it. Embassy Tunis was a sleepy Foreign Service post in which the principal activities were tennis, bridge and things of that kind. There certainly wasn't very much work to do. This was before the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) moved to Tunis, and the country was under the leadership of an aged Habib Bourguiba. Everybody in the country of a political character was waiting for his passing, which was still several years in the future. Even though the country's economy was doing reasonably well, there really wasn't much going on. I was only at the post for 17 months, rather than a regular two-year assignment, because an inspector's team examined the post, and they quite correctly recommended that my position be abolished, which it was.

*Q: What position were you in?*

MERRY: I was divided between the Economic and Political Sections, a classic case that the last thing you want is be under two supervisors simultaneously. The lesser role was in Political, where there were already two full-time political officers. Based on my later experience in other political sections in other countries, I would say there was about enough work, really, for one, as there was so little going on in the country. One energetic reporting officer could have adequately dealt with whatever Washington needed, in terms of both political reporting and diplomatic activities in the limited roles we had. There really was almost nothing for me to do in Political except a few things related to customs and narcotics and the occasional official visit and delegation handling.

Most of what I did was in the Economics Section and it, too, was overstaffed. Again, there were two full-time officers, the younger of whom was very energetic, very capable, and certainly more than adequate for our requirements. My job was the administration of so-called Special Foreign Currency projects. This was a program which the United States conducted in a number of developing countries, to which we had contributed very large amounts of surplus American agricultural products under a law called P.L. 480, the "Food for Peace" Program, for which the U.S. had been paid in local currency, which was nonconvertible. Various agencies of the U.S. government could conduct business in that country using that local currency. The largest and most famous of these programs was in India, where, at one point, the program became so big that the United States government ended up owning a disproportionate share of the total Indian money supply. There was also a large program in Egypt and one in Morocco. The one in Tunisia was spending about \$3.2 million equivalent a year on programs administered by the Smithsonian Institution, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health. I was the in-country person who, in essence, represented those Washington agencies in the day-to-day supervision and management of their projects.

The projects were very diverse. One had to do with archaeology in the ruins of Carthage. Several dealt with public health issues. One concerned earthquake seismic studies and engineering, a particularly troublesome project. Another dealt with marine science. We financed the Mediterranean Marine Sorting Center, run by the Smithsonian, with P.L. 480 funds. There were

about a dozen projects in all. A number were very interesting but essentially self-managing. I would go out and take a look at them, from time to time, and talk with local sponsors. Sometimes there was an American scientist directly involved. Generally speaking, there was not much for me to do. A couple of the projects involved headaches due to personalities, or due to competing visions of what the money should be used for. In one case, the Tunisian head of the National Engineering School, who was a brilliant but very difficult individual, wanted to use the National Science Foundation's money for things that were not within the remit of the project and this created problems.

Thus, I was the person on the spot for about a dozen projects, from several American government agencies. It appeared that I was administering, in a very loose use of the term "administering," as much foreign assistance in Tunisia as was the Agency for International Development (USAID) which had a 49-American mission in-country. It was a classic USAID mission in which the overhead costs exceeded the program costs, not even counting the overhead costs that were buried inside the program costs. Here was I, on a half-time basis, overseeing a program that was, in dollar equivalent terms, as big as what USAID was doing. That was largely because the funding agencies in Washington knew what they were doing and it was my job just to carry out their remit.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

MERRY: The ambassador was Talcott Seelye, who was an Arabist, who had spent much of his career east of Suez. The embassy in its senior ranks, with one notable exception, reflected the old Foreign Service: East Coast, Ivy League, and rather snobbish. The great exception was the admin counselor, a man named Harold Vickers, who was the friend, champion and delight of almost all the younger people in the embassy, and not just the State people. He was a wonderful human being and a first class administrator. But most of the senior ranks at the embassy were, I would say, reflective of what the Foreign Service was like before my entry and untypical of the Foreign Service today, and not particularly representative of America as a whole.

An episode which illustrates the nature of the post was a July 4 reception at the ambassador's residence. Each member of the embassy staff was assigned a rotation schedule on a grid system so that we would circulate. You might have thought that adult members of the Foreign Service could handle their own movements at a reception, but no, that was not the front-office view. During the reception, for some reason, the prime minister of Tunisia approached me and initiated a conversation. I have no idea why, other than he had not attracted anyone else's interest. I was politely listening to the man and overstayed my allotted time in the grid position. The DCM approached, took me by the arm without a word, and pulled me to my next assigned grid position, leaving the prime minister of the country talking into thin air. Absurd!

Frankly, I found the entire experience fairly off-putting. This certainly said as much about me as it did about the post. I was a young, fairly brash person who was looking for something to do and was in a job that really didn't have more than two or three hours a day of actual content. In H I had done that much overtime in a normal day. I was, I think it's fair to say, not just frustrated, but bored. I also proceeded to get myself into a dispute with one of my two supervisors, the one in the Economics Section, over what, to me, appeared to be a significant conflict of interest on

one of the projects I administered. The head of the National Engineering School thought that the way to influence the American embassy was by hiring the economic counselor's wife. I objected to that as a conflict of interest and was basically told to mind my own business. As it happens, the National Science Foundation in Washington shared my concerns, but that didn't help me any. This was why, at the end of 17 months, when my position was abolished thanks to the inspectors, I departed post fairly joyfully. Later I had to file a grievance to get one of my performance evaluations removed from my file as prejudicial. This meant that almost half the time I was at the embassy in Tunis was ultimately not even reflected in my performance file; there was just a gap there.

The experience taught me that I would never again, ever, take an assignment at a place presented as comfortable to live. Never take a job that isn't going to be demanding and challenging and substantive and full, if not over-full. While I was there a woman friend came for a longish visit, which she enjoyed as Tunisia is great for a vacation. However, at the end she announced she would not be a Foreign Service wife for all the gold in South Africa. Based on my own experience at post, I could hardly blame her. Embassy Tunis at that time was, I thought, a parking ground for people who were not looking to be challenged.

*Q: There are parking spots. What was the situation in Tunis? How did it strike you as a country?*

MERRY: As a developing country, as an African country, as an Arab country, Tunisia then was one of the real success stories, largely because it had a ruling elite which hadn't made many egregious errors in the political system or in economic development policy. This changed later, under Ben Ali, with terrible consequences. Under Bourguiba, Tunisia was a semi-authoritarian state, no question about that. It was a highly elitist state, and that elite was very French-oriented. They spoke French more than they spoke their native Arabic, in terms of doing business. But they brought with them French standards of ability and administration, with a French orientation how a country should be run, which is very much top down, but also with a high degree of competence. Over the years, Tunisia was proof that if you conduct reasonably good policies over a long period of time, the results pay off. I had a lot of admiration for many of the Tunisian officials I had contact with—which was quite a few because of these various projects I administered—and I thought that Tunisia, as a country, was kind of a model for developing countries. However, because it was not doing anything egregiously wrong, Washington didn't pay much attention to it. It wasn't in crisis; it wasn't a problem. There was nothing fundamentally screwed up or wrong, so of course Washington relegated it very much to its back burner. When, decades later, it did go into crisis, the Bourguiba legacy was largely a thing of the past, sadly.

Tunisia is an interesting country historically because of the various civilizations that have been there over the centuries. The elite—because in practical terms I had almost no contact with ordinary people, most of the Tunisians I dealt with were members of the elite—were very conscious of the richness of their national traditions. They were beginning to reflect the difficulty of being a successful developing country that was Francophone in a world that was increasingly Anglophone. One of the problems you could see among younger officials was that being dead fluent in French was just not going to be enough in the world they were going to live in.



*Q: Well, too, they were blessed by not having oil, which is always sort of a poisoned chalice.*

MERRY: They had a little bit of oil but it was only really enough to take care of their own domestic needs. Their principal exports, then and now, were phosphates, olive oil, agricultural products, workers—for purposes of remittances—and then, of course, they had a good deal of tourism. None of these were fully adequate for a developing country with a large, young population. There's never enough jobs. But if you compare Tunisia with any other Arab country, any other African country, any other developing country—I mean, on almost any index—it came out as one of the more successful. I was there a long time ago, but for many years it avoided most of the egregious errors of other, comparable countries. Then, as we know, the Ben Ali crowd introduced levels of corruption and authoritarianism which altered the picture dramatically for the worse.

Under Bourguiba, Tunisia had pretty much southern European levels of corruption and nepotism, but it was still an opportunity environment in which a talented young person could get scholarships and advance in life; I saw several cases of that myself. Under Ben Ali, the country attained Middle Eastern levels of corruption, and the opportunities pretty much disappeared. I thought something that probably contributed to the uprising against Ben Ali was a broad public understanding of what they had lost; that their parents had lived in a country that really was developing and acquiring the attributes of a lower-end developed country, but that they themselves were living in a typical Arab despotism. They had seen better and knew the difference; that was the basis of the rage, I suspect.

*Q: While you were there, did you feel—I mean, you were obviously at the bottom of the food chain in the embassy...*

MERRY: Very much so.

*Q: Were there concerns about its two neighbors, Algeria and Libya, messing around?*

MERRY: Well, principally Libya. Relations between Tunisia and Algeria were pretty much all right, largely because Algeria's internal problems then, as now, were so convulsively bad. This was a time when Gaddafi next door was sticking his nose into Tunisian affairs and there were a number of incidents of either terrorism or domestic insurgency that clearly were sponsored from Libya. That was an issue. It was one of the few subjects that allowed me to do any serious political reporting. Among my miscellaneous junior officer roles, I was the embassy liaison with various law enforcement establishments in the country. My reporting reflected the official concerns about these issues, which were fairly serious. At the same time, the Tunisian leadership was very conscious about not overreacting and not letting a situation on its border get out of hand. Tunisia is a fairly small country, and everybody regarded Colonel Gaddafi next door in Libya as unpredictable. The Tunisian approach was to try to orient Gaddafi towards his more fundamental conflict and rivalry with Anwar Sadat in Egypt. If there was going to be a war anywhere, let it be a war on the Libyan-Egyptian border rather on their border with Libya, which strikes me as a very sensible policy for Tunisia.

I might add one point: when I was in Tunisia, the economy was at the end of seven years of fat

and was going into a period of lean. This was quite clear from all the indicators, and many of the economic officials we dealt with were fairly clear about this. They could see that the country's earnings from a variety of things would decline—the lines on the charts were going in a bad direction. This was largely because of global economic changes in the aftermath of the 1973 Middle East war, in which Tunisia, being a small country, couldn't really do very much but would be affected. A consequence in the embassy was that I saw something I would see again—not all that often, but I certainly saw again—the phenomenon of an American ambassador who didn't want to report bad news about his country, because negative developments within this country would somehow reflect on the ambassador's stewardship. It was extremely difficult for us to report back to Washington about the directions in the Tunisian economy, which Tunisian officials were quite candid about, quite clear-eyed about, and yet we just couldn't get reporting cleared out, to tell Washington that the good days had been very good but now this country was going into a period that was going to be considerably more difficult. I was quite surprised at this first experience of ambassadors who project their own ego on the country to which they are accredited. It's not the only time I saw this, but it came as something of a surprise to me.

*Q: 1973 or so, you left?*

**BARRINGTON KING**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1975-1979)**

*Barrington King was posted as a Foreign Service Officer to Egypt, Tanganyika, Washington, DC, Cyprus, Greece, and Pakistan. He was interviewed by C.S. Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Then you were Deputy Chief of Mission in Tunis from 1975 to '79. During that period was Ed Mulcahy the Ambassador?*

KING: I had three Ambassadors. I guess I have two claims to distinction: one is I believe I've had longer continuous Greek service than anybody else; and the other one is, I've been DCM to more Ambassadors than anybody I know of. I was the DCM for nine years to six different Ambassadors. I don't think anybody is even very close to that.

*Q: There's a saying you shouldn't be a DCM too often, or you'll get chewed up and spitten out.*

KING: Well, no, it seemed to work the other way. It was Ambassadors who kept leaving. Actually what happened was that the assignments just happened to work that way. So I had about a year with Talcott Seelye, who was an Arabist. I had two and a half years with Ed Mulcahy, and then after that I had about six months with Steve Bosworth. All good men.

*Q: What was the situation from '75 to '79 period in Tunisia?*

KING: Good relations. An excellent post from the point of view of living conditions, nice

people, none of this tension that the rest of my career has been, an interesting job. We had an AID program that was growing, military assistance was beginning to get started up. We had a close political dialogue with the Tunisians. I was in charge a fair amount of the time, so I got to have a number of meetings with President Bourguiba. I guess in a country with an elite that small, I probably knew just about everybody there was to know. Of course, in this job of DCM you spend a lot of your time not on the outside, but on the inside, because any Embassy that's run right, the Ambassador doesn't have to worry about running the Embassy, that's the DCM's job. When you do have to do something outside, is when the Ambassador is not there and then you suddenly change roles completely and you're the Chargé . And I did a lot of that there. I guess the concerns of the Tunisians, and to a certain extent our concerns too, were that they were going to be subverted in some way by either Algeria or Libya. Libya was a concern throughout the time I was there. Our relations with the Tunisians, I think, got increasingly better the whole time I was there.

*Q: Was Bourguiba in full control in that period?*

KING: He was in full control of the country, but he wasn't in full control of himself. He was senile, but nobody dared cross him so any whim of his was carried out even though it made no sense. He was a real force for stability in the country, and is what kept Tunisia on a straight course for so many years. But eventually he became just the opposite. He became the reason that Tunisia could not progress any further because he wouldn't accept anything new. He was violently opposed to all forms of Islamic fundamentalism, with which there had to be some compromise. So his solution was always to round people up and put them in jail. And eventually, long after I left, the situation got so bad that he was just sort of taken out of office, and put in the palace, at Monastir, where he still is. The problem with his mind was going on for many, many years. When I went to Tunisia, I read through files that he wasn't going to live much longer, or that his mind had collapsed, that were ten years old, and it was still going on. And when you'd go call on him, he would tell the same old stories that he'd told you the last time, and I asked people who had served there 15 years before and he always had the same set of stories.

*Q: I assume that Hooker Doolittle...*

KING: You know about Hooker Doolittle.

*Q: I talked to Walt Cutler on this, and when Archie Roosevelt...*

KING: I heard about Hooker Doolittle any number of times.

*Q: Hooker Doolittle by the way for the record, was an American Consul who befriended him in his earlier days.*

KING: Hooker Doolittle was also the brother of Jimmy Doolittle who bombed Tokyo. And Hooker Doolittle did indeed befriend Bourguiba and as his reward for doing so, the French asked the State Department to remove him, which they promptly did.

*Q: What was our concerns when you were there about...did we feel there was a menace both*

*from Libya and Algeria?*

KING: Yes.

Q: *What would be the problem for us?*

KING: Well, in both cases probably Libya was more of a threat, but at the time the Algerian regime was more radical than it probably is today. Our fear was that they would support an opposition element that would take over by violent means, or subvert the country in some way probably working with Moslem fundamentalists. Nothing really serious ever came of it. There were incidents all the time, people would infiltrate the country, they would capture people with a truck load of machine guns. This kind of thing was going on all the time. But the Tunisians had a pretty good control over the security situation, and one of the reasons our relations got better is that we helped them with security -- both the police, and the army. And as DCM I spent a lot of time with military people. The Foreign Ministry was very close to the Embassy. We had good working relationships at levels all up and down in the Foreign Ministry. We had a polite relationship with the French. We both had the same objective there. I think we're always resented in ex- French territory. We got along pretty well actually.

Q: *Did the French play much of a role there by this time?*

KING: Culturally, yes. In fact, it's a country in which virtually nobody, I mean just zero, speak any English, and although obviously Arabic is the language of the house, you really don't need it to function in Tunisian society. Obviously in a village you would have to speak their brand of Arabic, but if you were in Tunis, French is perfectly adequate.

Q: *One last thing. How about the impact of the Israeli factor in our dealings there in the period of Camp David, and all this? How did this impact? Or did it have much impact?*

KING: I think -- and obviously there's always an emotional element where religion and Israel are involved -- I think the Tunisians were more interested in appearing in the right postures as far as the rest of the Arab world was concerned, than really interested in the Israeli problem, which is very far removed from them.

**EDWARD W. MULCAHY**  
**Ambassador**  
**Tunisia (1976-1979)**

*Ambassador Edward W. Mulcahy was influenced to go into foreign service by his father, a Navy radioman who traveled extensively. During his teen years, Mulcahy was an avid orator in the Catholic high school he attended. He received his degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1943. Within eight weeks of the Pearl Harbor bombing, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve. At the end of the war took the foreign service exam and passed.*

*He has also served in Kenya, west Germany, Ethiopia, Southern Rhodesia, Germany, Nigeria and Chad. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 23, 1989.*

*Q: So you went to Tunisia again as ambassador from 1976 to 1979. Could you describe the situation in that period in Tunisia and maybe a little about the president of the country, Bourguiba?*

MULCAHY: Yes. Even in my first tour, President Bourguiba was losing his grip on the situation. I was surprised when I went back there that he hadn't deteriorated really more than he had health-wise. As of the time I left there in 1970, he was spending only two or three hours a day at his work. He was really getting too feeble and his attention wandering, to stick more than two or three hours a day. He made lots of public appearances in those days. But when I came back, he made very few public appearances. The photos you saw of him were still photos. They were protecting him as he was growing more and more feeble and senile. He would be quite lucid for a couple of hours in the morning.

The country was being run well, always by the same crowd who were a young crowd. I used to tell people during my first tour there that the average age of the cabinet then was young, it was like 40 years old. Of course, by the time I got back there they were ten years older. They tended to be the same ones. They were getting more impatient and intolerant of opposition which began to rear its ugly head more all the time.

The labor unions were troublesome despite the fact that a leader of the General Confederation of Tunisian Workers was one of the oldest of Bourguiba's comrades-in-arms in the days of the struggle against the French and had gone to jail with him and all that sort of thing. They had a general strike during my second tour there. That was the saddest thing in their history to that point, since Tunisians fired upon Tunisians for the first time in their history. There were a couple of dozen people killed in rioting and looting that went on with this general strike. The labor leaders claimed that it was police bully boys who did the looting and the smashing of windows and that their people were strictly forbidden to do that sort of thing.

The government claimed with a certain amount of persuasion and proof that the labor leaders were taking money from Qadhafi. Qadhafi hated Bourguiba because, in the interim while I was away, Qadhafi had offered and Bourguiba had accepted the concept of amalgamating the two countries. There would be autonomy in each region but there would be one central government. Bourguiba was to be the head of the government. Then Bourguiba was persuaded by his son and his Cabinet to renege and to back down from that. Qadhafi has never really forgiven him.

*Q: You look around at that particular part of the world -- Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, the UAR, Syria, Yemen -- and they have all gone into these unions and have gone out again with no desirable effect. At least there was a period where they were doing this.*

MULCAHY: Well, the Tunisian constitution says that it is the supreme purpose of the people to unite themselves with the other peoples of the Maghreb. This is a national cause -- that one day Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya should all become one happy nation. There are counterpart

clauses in the constitutions of most of the others -- I don't know that Libya has a constitution anymore, but has whatever is in Qadhafi's green book. But he's a madman.

*Q: Did you consider him a madman at that time?*

MULCAHY: I met him in Chad. He came on a five-day state visit while I was there. Because he spoke English and most of the other chiefs of mission didn't, I found myself talking to him over five days at least three times. I had short little conversations amounting up maybe to 15 to 20 minutes. We were having our troubles with him. We still had a post there but he just didn't believe that the United States understood him. He really hoped that we would. He said I understood North Africa and had visited Tripoli a couple of times. He spoke good enough English -- better than he comes across on television, really. I duly reported everything he told me but I just said, "Well, we certainly have come to a sad situation, haven't we, Mr. President? We must continue the dialogue and I certainly will inform my government the way you feel."

*Q: When you were ambassador in Tunisia, was Qadhafi trying to take over or put his own people in?*

MULCAHY: Once every summer he would rattle his sabers and we would react. We and the French, the Italians, and whoever else in NATO had a ship in the Mediterranean would all send them in to Tunisia for a visit. We'd sidetrack them from any other place, make them leave the Riviera, and sail overnight across the Mediterranean and come to Tunisia. Then we'd have fly-pasts -- usually the president was down at Monastir, at his summer palace half-way down the country. Ships from the nearest U. S. carrier would go over and stream red, white and blue smoke and the French would send a squadron of mirages down. We'd announce some new military assistance that was already agreed upon and I'd issue a press release. We had all kinds of things we'd do just to show solidarity. Qadhafi would kick out the Tunisians, such as the Tunisian schoolteachers and the waiters in the hotels. His people were unable to replace such skilled people.

*Q: Qadhafi would kick out the Tunisians who were working in Libya.*

MULCAHY: That's right. Then a few months later they'd allow them to go back in again. He tried while I was away the business of starting an uprising in Gafsa, down on the edge of the Sahara in central west Tripoli. He got groups of dissident Tunisians who came across and started blowing up the rail line. They were going to establish a rebel government inside the country in the mining town of Gafsa not far from the Algerian border.

They could cross this great salt pan, the Chott Jerid, at certain seasons of the year and come up there. Nobody would even see them. Nobody was out patrolling that wasteland and they could walk across or come across in four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Currently there seems to be a little better understanding. Qadhafi hasn't engaged in so many ventures.

I said to Prime Minister Nouria one time during the general strike, "I'm sorry to see that

Qadhafi's meddling again in your internal affairs."

He gave me pretty good proof that Qadhafi's money had gone to a lot of the labor leaders and to one of the newspapers.

I said, "One of the things is that, if you reflect back over what's happened since 1969 when he came to power, no foreign venture that he's ever attempted has ever been successful. Every one has failed."

He said, "I never thought of it that way. Perhaps we live too close to him. Thank you for that happy thought."

I said, "He fails every time he goes abroad. In Chad he's failing. He didn't for a while, but he ultimately did."

They drove him out of Chad with the exception of the Aozou strip that he's occupied since I was there. We knew that when it happened, like the next day.

Tunisia's done well for itself on the whole. At the moment, they're spending an awful lot of money on weapons, mostly with us. They're completely over on American weaponry in the country. Their terms aren't as soft as they used to be. They have oil. They export 2/3 of their oil, not much, but it became their biggest money-maker until the price of oil went down a couple of years ago. Tourism, which was at one time the biggest money-earner, has fallen off to second place and has fallen steadily because, among other things, the PLO, at our request, are now hosted by the Tunisians.

*Q: When you were there, did our policy vis à vis Israel and the PLO play much of a role or was this important?*

MULCAHY: To this extent, I would often be sent in to try to persuade the Tunisians to come out and applaud the Camp David Accords which took place while I was there. I dutifully did all that, but no Arab country. . . .

*Q: It was just that you did your duty?*

MULCAHY: That's right. They said to me exactly what I could have predicted they would say, yes.

*Q: Is there anything else we should talk about concerning that?*

MULCAHY: I don't know. I think that's pretty much the way we go. I stay in touch with the Tunisians, needless to say, through the embassy here and have correspondents there. I get filled in on things that are going on. I regretted to see the end of the Bourguiba era, but I think the Tunisians did it extremely well. They do most things well.

*Q: They essentially just had a very quiet -- coup isn't even really the right term -- but a*

*displacement.*

MULCAHY: That's right. They had a half-dozen doctors talk to the president for an hour or so and had him go out into an anteroom while they concluded that the man was no longer capable of exercising his office. Young General Ben Ali became the president. He's been a civilian, actually, for a long time. When I knew him last he was deputy minister for internal affairs. They've got a new era now. They've managed their patrimony very well considering the fact that they got left out on a lot of natural resources. They have the best population control programs in the Arab or the African world. They have about the smallest growth rate in population of any African or Arab state. They have a magnificent university with about 30,000 in various branches, of whom something like one-third are women.

Q: *Was fundamentalism a problem when you were there?*

MULCAHY: Never at all. You were beginning to see, when I left there, women wearing these tight veils. They wouldn't cover up entirely, but they'd wear longish dresses and they'd have a veil, like a snood, that went around their faces. Prime Minister Nouria called them, "Les Saintes Moniques." They looked like St. Monica in the Christian paintings and mosaics found in Tunisia.

The young males would be hard to identify because a lot of the Tunisians, however Westernized, wear the jebba, the very Tunisian robe and the little low-crowned sheshia, a soft red hat with a black tassel. It's very cool. They wear the big white pantaloons underneath the jebba. They wear a burnoose in the winter time as an overcoat. I wore a burnoose for an overcoat out there, too. When Kathie and I would go out to a dinner party or something, I'd put the burnoose on me as I ran to the door -- winters got cold there -- and you'd just slip it off your shoulders. I started a fad in the diplomatic community.

**HERMAN REBHAN**  
**General Secretary, International Metalworkers Federation**  
**Washington, DC (1977-1981)**

*Herman Rebham was born in Poland and raised in Germany. He came with his family to the United States in 1938 and settled in Cleveland, Ohio. After working in auto manufacturing plants in the Midwest, he became Administrative Assistant to United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther, and dealt with domestic and international labor matters throughout his career. In 1972 he became the United Auto Workers Director of International Affairs in Washington, D.C. Mr. Rebham died in 2006. Mr. Rebham was interviewed by James F. Shea and Don R. Kienzle in 1995.*

REBHAN: The other case [that I want to mention]. . . -- and these are the things that gave me the greatest satisfaction, because I saw something achieved. -- was a similar case in Tunisia. In Tunisia Ismael Sahani was the head of the Metal Workers Union. Bourguiba declared marshall law and the government arrested all the trade unionists including Sahbani, and they really



tortured him. We started a campaign. We got a lawyer from Paris, France, to go down there as an observer, and we got people from our office to go down there. I wrote a letter to [President] Carter asking that he stop military assistance to Tunisia. I remember that Daniel Horowitz came to Geneva to give me the message that [the United States Government] was going to do something about this. Sahbani told me later when he got out that he had somehow gotten wind of this letter. He said, "Herman, when I heard that you wrote to Carter, I knew that I was going to come out." We supported his family during that whole period when he was in jail.

*Shea: I think Jesse Clear was there a Labor Attaché.*

REBHAN: Yes, maybe. Later there was a woman Labor Attaché there.

*Shea: Mary Ann Casey.*

REBHAN: Yes, she spoke Arabic.

*Shea: She became an ambassador.*

**EDWARD G. ABINGTON**  
**FSI, Arabic Language Training**  
**Tunis (1978-1979)**

*Mr. Abington was born in Texas into a US military family and was raised in military posts in the US and abroad. An Arabic language officer and specialist in Near East Affairs, he describes his experience dealing with Israel-Arab hostilities and general regional problems while serving as Political Officer at Embassies Tel Aviv and Damascus. In his postings at the State Department in Washington, he also dealt with Near East matters. Mr. Abington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

ABINGTON: To a degree. In 1977, there were very few FS officers who signed up to take Arabic. After the breaking of relations with the United States by a number of Arab countries in '67, and it was only in the mid-'70s that relations were restored, so the assignment opportunities for people who spoke Arabic were pretty limited. As a result, not very many people of my generation signed up to take Arabic. When I started taking Arabic, there were maybe six people, but only three of us had signed up for the two-year program. There was concern about the viability of the language school in Tunis because there were so few people signed up for Arabic that FSI was considering closing down the school. They got around it because they took a number of military students who after doing one year of language at the Defense Language School in Monterey went for their second year in Tunis. They also picked up some people in the field who wanted to learn Arabic and had them do their first and second year of language training in Tunis. That's how they kept the school going. But at that point, hardly anybody was signing up for long-term Arabic language. People felt there was not a good career future as an Arabist.

*Q: Who were some of the students who were with you?*

ABINGTON: There was a guy named Steve Engleton, who served in Jordan and one or two other Arab countries but basically dropped out of NEA and focused on Europe and never went back. Then there was Dick McKee, a brilliant linguist. Dick was a South Asian specialist. I think he spoke Urdu and he learned Hindi and he knew Arabic and French and two or three other languages. But Dick had a couple of assignments in the Near East area but then he went back to South Asia and also to Turkey. I think I was the only one who really stuck with the Middle East.

*Q: How did you find Tunis as a spot to put the language school? It had been moved by force majeure from Beirut, a delightful spot in the pre-trouble time.*

ABINGTON: I thought Tunis was not a very good place for the language school. Shortly after I got there, I asked directions from a Tunisian policeman in Arabic. First he answered me in German. Then he answered me in French. Then he figured out I was an American so he answered me in English. I spoke to him in Arabic, which he seemed to understand. And he spoke to me in English. It was just not a very good environment for learning Arabic. Most Tunisians spoke French. The North African dialect I found hard to understand. The school would have been much better located in someplace like Jordan or Syria, where you have an Arabic dialect that is more widely understood than the North African dialect.

**RICHARD McKEE**  
**FSI, Arabic Language Training**  
**Tunis (1978-1979)**

*Richard McKee was born in Pennsylvania in 1941. He attended Cornell University for a BA, the University of Virginia for a MA and then joined the Foreign Service in 1965. McKee served overseas in Bolivia, India, Pakistan, Tunis, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. McKee also served as the Office Director for the Arab Peninsula and on the Board of Examiners. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.*

*Q: How did you find, you were taking Arabic from when to when, '76?*

MCKEE: '77 to '78 at FSI, and then '78 to '79 in Tunis.

*Q: How did you find it?*

MCKEE: Oh, it's a bitch. Now I, because I had had Urdu I had some familiarity with the script, but it's an extremely difficult language. There's a piece in the Post this morning.

*Q: Yes, I saw that.*

MCKEE: And you know, cognates are almost nil. In the written script, long vowels are indicated but short vowels are not. You basically have to know what they are before you read the piece. And some of the sounds are quite different. It's a language that takes a lot of time to learn.

*Q: How old were you when you did this?*

MCKEE: Well, let's see, '76, I was thirty-five.

*Q: Gets harder.*

MCKEE: It does indeed.

*Q: Were you one of the first to go to school in Tunis?*

MCKEE: Pretty much, because the FSI school had been moved from Beirut when, in '73 or something like that? So yes, we were in the old Italian cultural center downtown.

*Q: Is Tunisia a good place to do this?*

MCKEE: Among Arabists there was this huge argument about the relocation of the school. Ambassador Herman Eilts did not want the school in Cairo, because our relations with Egypt were just getting re-established, and the Egyptians' big complaint against the Russians in Cairo had been that there had been too damn many of them. He was aware of that. There were also all kinds of questions as to what is the best accent. A lot of people think that the East Bank Palestinian is one of the clearest and best, but anyway, yes, there was an argument. Certainly what we learned in Tunis was not Tunisian Arabic. It was what I called radio Arabic or semi-classical Arabic, it was a sort of a denatured generic kind of Arabic. The native Tunisian Arabic is pretty hard to understand. And in fact at one point FSI taught Maghrebi Arabic as a distinct dialect.

*Q: They were teaching that...*

MCKEE: In Tangier.

*Q: In Tangiers, yes. Where'd you take your trip, or could you still take a trip in those days?*

MCKEE: Ah, I didn't know, or didn't take a trip. Now why didn't I take a trip? Maybe, I think family concerns and money concerns. You're right, there was a trip that one could have taken, but I remember very distinctly that I did not take a trip.

*Q: How big a group was taking it with you?*

MCKEE: I don't know, counting military guys and whatever I suppose it must have been about twenty or something.

**JOHN O. GRIMES**  
**Counselor for Labor Affairs**  
**Tunis (1978-1980)**

*Mr. Grimes was born and raised in Alabama and educated at Notre Dame University. After service in the United States Marine Corp he joined the State Department and served as Diplomatic Courier until being commissioned as a Foreign Service Officer in 1962. A specialist in Labor Affairs, Mr. Grimes served in Glasgow, Valetta, Port of Spain, Kinshasa, Brussels, Tunis and Paris (twice). He had several tours of duty in Washington, DC and a year of Labor Studies at Harvard University Mr. Grimes was interviewed by James F. Shea and Don Kienzle in 1996.*

*Kienzle: So after Brussels, you went to Tunis in 1978.*

GRIMES: That's right, and when I got down there, I found the trade union movement was dormant. There had been an insurrection, I guess you would call it, by the labor movement. A man named Habib Assur. Jesse Clear was my predecessor down there. He had been involved with Assur and his ambassador had leaned on him. He didn't want him having contact with the left which was stupid, but that's the way it went. When I got there, all that had been crushed. The group \_\_\_\_\_ was back on top. The prime minister had a very firm hand on the labor movements. A lot of them were in jail.

*Kienzle: Where was Assur at this stage?*

GRIMES: Assur was in jail. He got out later, and he didn't make any waves. So, there wasn't much to do on the labor front because just nothing was happening.

*Shea: Was Mary Ann Casey there at that time?*

GRIMES: She succeeded me. In Tunisia our ambassador was Steve Bosworth. The political side of things was sort of interesting. Everybody was looking for a successor to Bourguiba but he was still hanging on. His wife was sort of propping him up and running things herself, really, they say. I can't quite remember what was happening down there. That's really about all I remember.

*Shea: Did you have any representatives from the ICFTU show up?*

GRIMES: Yes they did, and I think they used to lean on Tunisia in the ILO, places like that, to release, sure, they finally succeeded. I think they influenced enough to get him released from prison. There was nothing much else going on in labor there though.

*Kienzle: How about Irving Brown and his contacts with North African labor leaders.*

GRIMES: Irving Brown visited. That is where I first met him, down in Tunis. He came down for a visit, and for them he was God you know, because he had been instrumental in the liberation of

a lot of those countries, including Tunisia. I remember going out with him to sort-of-a ... the unions had kind of a resort hotel they used to use. People could take leave there and go and have a little holiday at a very reasonable price -- which was sort of unusual in Tunisia -- because mostly it was luxury or utter poverty. The Tunisians seemed like a happy and fairly content people, except the trade unions, of course. They weren't happy because they were suppressed.

*Kienzle: Were they actually integrated into the ruling party, or how did that happen?*

GRIMES: The union that succeeded Assur's union, that was really a party apparatus. But these men who I say met with Irving Brown, they were the old timers who remembered the old movement and they were very friendly with Irving.

*Kienzle: Which group were they with?*

GRIMES: They had been with UGGT back in the days of the liberation struggle, and labor had been a factor in that, and Brown had been a factor in Tunisian labor. He was kind of a local hero.

*Shea: Liberation meaning independence.*

GRIMES: Independence, yeah.

*Kienzle: Not the end of W.W.II, the independence.*

GRIMES: I understand he had the same kind of contact all through North Africa, Algeria and places like that.

*Kienzle: Certainly Morocco.*

GRIMES: Well, you know, one time I was talking to him about Zaire. He said, "You know, I have the order of the leopard."

*Kienzle: What is the order of the leopard?*

GRIMES: Oh some kind of a you-get-a-little-hat-made-out-of-leopard-skin-or-something, but it is an honor accorded by Mobutu. I said, "Are you proud of that?" He said, "Not very."

*Kienzle: He was probably not allowed to take the order into the United States as it's an endangered species.*

*Shea: What about the position of the Embassy people there?*

GRIMES: In Tunis, they were very nice. The staff employees lived in an Embassy-maintained apartment building which was kind of nice.

*Shea: We had a legal attaché conference there at one time. I think it was after.*

GRIMES: I remember that.

*Kienzle: When was that?*

GRIMES: Robert Hair, I think he was the labor attaché down there at that time. I remember coming down from Paris. John Condon and I flew in from Paris to attend that conference.

*Shea: We had one later, and Mary Ann Casey was there. Did you learn any Arabic?*

GRIMES: I learned a few words when I was assigned down in Cairo as a courier, but just insults.

*Kienzle: Not the kind you can use.*

GRIMES: You better not use, you'll get killed!

*Kienzle: Any final comments you want to make about Tunis or Tunisia before we turn to your assignment in Paris?*

GRIMES: No, it was a fairly brief time there. It seemed like only 18 months.

*Kienzle: '78-'80.*

GRIMES: Something like that.

**WILLIAM PIERCE**  
**FSI, Arabic Language Training**  
**Tunis (1979-1980)**

*Mr. Pierce was born and raised in Georgia and educated at Davidson College and the University of Georgia Law School. Entering the Foreign Service in 1973, he was first posted to Surabaya, Indonesia, followed by a tour at Damascus, Syria. After completing Arabic language studies in Washington and Tunis, Mr. Pierce was assigned as Political Officer to a number of Arabic speaking posts, including Khartoum, Jeddah and Riyadh. In Washington, Mr. Pierce dealt primarily with Middle East Affairs. His final post was Surabaya, where he was Consul General. Mr. Pierce was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: You were in Tunisia from '79 to '80?*

PIERCE: To '80, yes. The language school there was in my impression a much better example of how to teach a language and I learned a lot more. I felt that my time was much more usefully spent.

*Q: While you were getting Area Studies at FSI, this was the post Camp David time and all. Did*

*you find that there was a pretty good look on the Area Studies at the Islamic world, Arab world, or not? How did you feel?*

PIERCE: I thought the Area Studies at the time – and this was in '78 – gave a pretty good critique of Camp David; pointing out its advantages and its disadvantages, its defects. Iran obviously had just come into the news and at the time our Area Studies was less aware and was scrapping around to find good academic expertise on Shia Islam. Iran we had to handle historically or as an economic issue. It was very ample expertise, but particularly with respect to the religion there was little and it wasn't particularly good at the time. But by and large I was very impressed by the caliber, which as far as I can tell, is maintained by what FSI Area Studies has been doing in terms of the Middle East.

*Q: Well when you got to Tunisia...in the first place you were with a class, I take it.*

PIERCE: Yes.

*Q: What was your class; I mean sort of the background? The Arabists have always been pointed to as – there's been a certain amount of, I would say, really basically disinformation trying to make the Arabists into a class of people apart or something like that. How would you describe your class?*

PIERCE: I'm trying to remember how many we had. The State Department people at FSI in Tunisia, there were not a lot of us. It was a mish-mash. Most of the State Department people were there because they just wanted the language. And I think any sort of bent towards great interest in the Arab world was probably not a major factor in the selection process that put these people at FSI in Tunisia. I'd say by far we were a minority although we probably were more than anyone else. But we had other agencies, most particularly the military that were interested in using FSI.

*Q: I had a series of interviews with Hume Horan who is one of our top Arabists and he was saying, you know, this idea that somehow everyone fell in love with the Arab world and all of this, he said, "After all, when you think about it, if you're working in an Arab world these people, for the most part, are insulting you most of the time and they're trying to kill you." It's not the friendliest area to go to. It's a challenge. It's unlike some of the romance...some of the Brits at least in the olden time, you know, got out there with the Bedouin out in the desert in the starry sky and all that. That's not an American trait.*

PIERCE: There are a few people I know to do that, but not by virtue of, or because of, their experience at FSI.

*Q: (laughs) You were in Tunis at a difficult time, particularly in the Islamic world because we're talking about the period of the takeover of our embassy in Tehran. How did you find Tunis?*

PIERCE: To me, again whatever happened at the political level, government to government, I'm not aware of. This was the waning – I presume it's the waning, I forgot – while Bourguiba certainly was in the waning period of his career.

*Q: Yes, yes. He was almost senile.*

PIERCE: “Almost?” He was senile at the time. Still he had a very tight control over what was put in the press and over dissent. He didn’t care an awful lot. Certainly you could see a very large number of unemployed youth. I didn’t notice any great political preoccupation by them, or any great amount of religious fervor coming out from any real direction in the city of Tunis. It just did not seem to be very consequential. Consistently, over and over again, in Tunisia, it was made clear to us that they did not consider themselves in any great form to be part of the Arab world. The language there is different from standard Arabic and when we would speak to them quite often they would not understand. We certainly couldn’t understand their Arabic. Sometimes they would ask us to speak French. On one occasion, one Tunisian shopkeeper said, “What is this tongue? We do not speak this tongue here.” The food was different. Couscous pervades North Africa; it’s a far cry from Arabic cuisine. I had a real sense that their Arabness was really not of seminal import to them.

*Q: Were there demonstrations or were there any problems during the time you were doing this, particularly after Tehran and the burning of our embassy in Islamabad? You know, general unrest in the Islamic world.*

PIERCE: I do not recall any tension coming out of those events in Tunisia. The Tehran incident occurred just as I was leaving, I think. I don’t remember the exact month it occurred in. It had no effect in Tunisia that I’m aware of.

*Q: Qadhafi, was he a presence at all there?*

PIERCE: No, he was not. When I first got there FSI was basically taking tours to Ghadames; I unfortunately did not take the one tour that went there early in my tour in Tunisia, but I was going to take the second one. Well, between the first and the second one our embassy was sacked and our relations went through a low ebb. We no longer had a presence there. I seem to recall that tension between the two countries geared up at that time and the border was closed anyway.

*Q: What about Egypt? Was Egypt the place you went to to get a different view or not?*

PIERCE: I’m sorry, your meaning?

*Q: Well I was just wondering whether if you were going to go try your Arabic out you’d go to Egypt or where. Where did you go on your trips?*

PIERCE: Well, the year before I was there each student was given a stipend and told you had to travel in the Arab world to acclimatize. The year I was there we went through a budget exercise at State and all of that was withdrawn, so therefore I had no area training. I was considering going through Egypt, probably into Yemen – this was before Tehran –and perhaps over trying to get into Iran, but all of that became academic. There were no official trips; I took no trips in the Arab world. I went around Tunisia quite a lot and also to Malta. That’s the extent of the Middle East that I visited during my stay in Tunisia.



*Q: Were you getting much advantage then? I mean if the Tunisians said, you know, “Your Arabic is not our Arabic,” and you couldn’t get out and around, was there much advantage to being trained in Tunisia?*

PIERCE: Tunisia, as I recall, was selected because there was no alternate elsewhere in the Arab world. Once Beirut fell a decision was made to transfer the institute somewhere else in the Arab world. The best candidate at the time was Cairo, but Ambassador Eilts did not want to see an expanded presence there anymore than it was, because it had ballooned at the time in Cairo, and there were no other options. Tunisia was better than Washington. That’s really about it.

**STEPHEN BOSWORTH**  
**Ambassador**  
**Tunisia (1979-1981)**

*Ambassador Bosworth was born and raised in Michigan and educated at Dartmouth College and George Washington University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1961 he served abroad in Panama, Madrid and Paris before becoming Ambassador to Tunisia, where he served from 1979 to 1981, to the Philippines (1984-1987) and to the Republic of Korea (1997-2000). The Ambassador also was a member of the Department’s Policy Planning Staff, and he played a major role in the US-Japan Foundation and the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization. In 2009 Ambassador Bosworth was named the President’s Special Representative for North Korean Policy. He was interviewed by Michael Mahoney in 2003.*

*Q: Well, let’s go on then to Tunisia. You went to Tunisia in 1979.*

BOSWORTH: In March of ‘79.

*Q: March of ‘79. What were the major issues that you were confronting then?*

BOSWORTH: Well, the major issues were then basically Tunisia’s concern over Libya and our concern about Libya and Qadhafi.

*Q: Why was Tunisia concerned about Libya?*

BOSWORTH: Because they viewed him as aggressive, as interested in consolidating a position in North Africa. He would periodically issue declarations calling for sort of a pan Arab unity in North Africa various federations and federal schemes that would sort of knit the countries together. He never really had any basis in fact, but it was almost all hortatory, but it made the Tunisians very nervous. At one point soon after I arrived, there was a gang of Libyan commandos, I don’t think they were very organized, but they came across the border and attacked a police post in a small southern town in Tunisia. The Tunisian government called for

U.S. support, U.S. assistance. In a largely symbolic move we brought in two big C5 aircraft with various pieces of military equipment onboard and unloaded them visibly and tried to calm the Tunisians down and it basically worked.

The other big thing that happened when I was there and this was very interesting to me, that was the time when the Iranian hostages were taken in our embassy. The president was Bourguiba who by this time was in his '80s and was failing. He would have good days and bad days, good hours and bad hours, but he was a determined friend of the United States. He gave us credit for basically having kept the French from arresting him during World War II and giving him the opportunity to become the George Washington of Tunisia. This is a man with a very expanded vision of himself in a historical role, but his historical role was indeed quite important. He had one story about this experience of how the American Consul in Tunis during the war smuggled him out of Tunis before the French could get him. He told that over and over and over to American visitors. When the Iranian hostages were taken there was of course that vote in the UN Security Council in which we needed a majority to condemn Iran for having seized our diplomats. Tunisia happened to be on the security council and of course as an Islamic country, an Arab country, this was a very tough issue for them and had Bourguiba taken a straw vote within his cabinet it would have been unanimous against joining the U.S. in this. Yet he himself made the determination, I had gone to see him, made a strong demarche on instruction from Washington and he made the decision himself to support the U.S. and cast the Tunisian vote in favor of the U.S. position on the resolution. It was something that earned great appreciation in Washington. This was a time when we were very tough force. So, about a week later the sixth fleet came through and the commander of the fleet, a vice admiral, when the sixth fleet came in the commander would always come and call on the president. I accompanied him to this meeting with the president as I accompanied all and I'll never forget this. He thanked him for the support on the hostage issue and presented Bourguiba with his midshipman's sword, which of course naval officers only have one of and he gave it to Bourguiba. Bourguiba who at that point was as I say he had good days and bad days, he was rather frail and rather uncertain. He took the sword out of its scabbard and started waving it around. The palace chief of protocol was a young Foreign Service guy and myself were trying to back up and stay out of the reach of this saber he waved around. Finally the protocol guy took it away from him and in effect went up and took his wrist, so it all worked out fine. But Bourguiba, it was quite an experience dealing with this guy. He had this great affection for the United States, a great sense of appreciation and would do almost anything that we wanted.

There was another time when he was giving a reception on a national day or on a feast day which was basically an Islamic feast day and it was a national holiday in Tunis. About 10:00 in the morning the protocol chief called me and said the president has asked why you are not attending this reception. I said for many reasons. First of all because I'm not Muslim and my country is not Muslim. He said, no, I know that, but the president would like to see you, he wants you to attend. I got dressed and my official car wasn't around so I drove our personal car down the hill to the palace. In Tunis the embassy residence is up on a hill overlooking the palace. A great place. I went through the receiving line and of course all of my Islamic colleagues in the diplomatic corps were befuddled as to why I was there. It was just one of those kinds of things that happened frequently when Bourguiba was around. I don't know what it's like now. I've not been back to Tunis, but I'd like to go back at some point. It's a lovely little country.

*Q: So, you were there three years?*

BOSWORTH: I was actually only there two years and about four months.

*Q: So one issue was the one as you said about the American hostages in Iran. How did our relations there play in the broader questions that we had with the Arab world would you say?*

BOSWORTH: I arrived about two weeks after Camp David and Tunisia under great pressure had broken relations with Egypt so I had a brief meeting with the Egyptian ambassador before he was packing his bags and leaving. That period there was a PLO mission in Tunis. It was a difficult period for the Tunisians, Mid-East diplomacy and for American Mid-East diplomacy. There was a strong Palestinian presence in Tunisia. Palestinians were very much engaged in Tunisia in very constructive ways. I mean they were basically running the country in some respects as they were running many countries in the Arab world. They provided the brain power.

*Q: About his experiences in Tunisia and he was talking about the influences of Palestinians there. You were saying that they ran a lot of stuff?*

BOSWORTH: They ran a lot of stuff. They were very capable people. Many of them had been there for two or even three generations, but they still felt very Palestinian. They were not assimilated into the Tunisian population. We had a couple of Palestinians working for us in the U.S. embassy who were among our more capable non-American employees. In fact I wouldn't qualify among our more capable employees.

*Q: How do you account for that culturally?*

BOSWORTH: I think there is a high premium, there was and I hope still is, I don't know, on education.

*Q: Why for them and not maybe for others in the area?*

BOSWORTH: They were I think by and large more urbanized, more cosmopolitan. They were not Bedouins, they were not nomads, they were staked to the ground, this in the former Palestine. For whatever reason they were in many ways standing stood out in terms of their capability.

*Q: So, they would have an influence on countries as it reacted to things like the Camp David process in other words?*

BOSWORTH: Yes.

*Q: Now the PLO had its mission there although I think Arafat did not come out of Lebanon until '82 I think, but the PLO had its mission, its office there.*

BOSWORTH: Right. They had a mission there as they did in almost all Arab countries.

*Q: Now we couldn't talk to them formally, right?*

BOSWORTH: We weren't supposed to. I mean I would run into them a lot and we had receptions and national days. I would always be civil to them. I really didn't have anything to say to them of any substance. There was nothing I engaged them on that had any real meaning.

*Q: Right. Did you have the sense that they tried in any way to work against or undermine Bourguiba's regime in any general way or they just focused on their particular issue internationally?*

BOSWORTH: I think they just focused on their issue. Bourguiba was quite pro-Palestine of course in his dealings on the Middle Eastern process. He had been more accepting of the existence of Israel than most other Arab leaders, but he was nonetheless fairly pro-Palestinian. I think he personally favored the Camp David accord, but he was simply not able to stand against the wave of the rest of the Arab countries.

*Q: In the wake of the Camp David thing, did the Tunisians themselves attempt to play having barely broken diplomatic relations, a minimum of public relations purposes, did they attempt to play a significant role in the Palestinian Israeli issue?*

BOSWORTH: Not really. I mean a Tunisian whose name escapes me at the moment became head of the Islamic conference about that time and through him they were trying to play some sort of a role. They also within the Arab councils were able to play a role, but they were very conscious of their relatively small size. The other Arab countries were somewhat suspicious of Tunisia because of its European ties, the fact that French was widely spoken there, their strong attachment with the U.S. So, they were not real major players in any way on the Middle Eastern issues. I followed those issues a lot and would have conversations with Tunisian officials about them when we were making demarches around the Arab capitals on various points. I would go in and make them, but this was not sort of a centerpiece of my work where it would have been for example if I had been in Jordan or had I been in Syria.

*Q: Now, you were not an NEA hand or an Arabist either way. Do you want to talk, one of the issues that always comes up about NEA and somebody wrote a book about this, too, but it was a little negative toward the Foreign Service Officers in NEA, one side seemed to say that NEA was really a real Arabist entity that was very anti-Israel. The working level officers, the other side would tend to say no, that in fact they sort of looked down on Arabs and were much more impressed on the technological democratic achievements of Israel and really didn't care much for the Arabs in general. I wonder if you had any sense either way on that issue?*

BOSWORTH: I think probably. First of all if you were going to be an NEA type, if you're going to spend most of your career in NEA or out in the field or in Washington, the reality is that there's only one Israel and there are a lot of Arab countries. So, just by the function of the numbers you would spend much more time in an Arab capital than you would in an Israeli capital. I think that probably if there was a tilt in either direction it was modestly pro-Arab, certainly anti-Israel in terms of some of the things that Israel had done, the incursion into Lebanon and now of course what's going on with the Palestinians. With that being said I was

always impressed by the professionalism of people in NEA. I think that they viewed themselves as they were as representatives of the United States and it was U.S. interest that they were trying to promote. The problem of course was that as a country we've never been able to really articulate very clearly our interest in this very complicated part of the world other than to say we're for peace. There are times when peace is disrupted from the Arab side, times when it's disrupted from the Israeli side. Usually its disrupted from both sides, so its not surprising that it seems to me that America's representatives in the region tend to be identified with whatever fashion is on the rise at the moment. We don't really have a coherent national policy on the Middle East, so it's not surprising that individual NEA officers have difficulty defining themselves.

*Q: What would you say the American interests were in a small country like Tunisia?*

BOSWORTH: Basically to, well, at the time, they were basically to have a sympathetic ear for some of our concerns about broader issues in the Middle East, to have basically a pro-Western orientation. This was an important country for the U.S., for the U.S. in that region surrounded by Algeria on the one side and Libya on the other, so it was really Tunisia and Morocco as voices that we could more or less count on to be reasonable with regard to their attitudes toward us. The issue of Islamic fundamentalism had just begun to emerge in Tunisia when I was there and it was not yet an acute concern. It wasn't I think until several years later when we began to view Islamic fundamentalism as basically an anti-Western threat. Those were primarily the U.S. interests. Well, you didn't have the feeling when you were there they were sort of on the front line of the Cold War. We knew the Soviets were trying to do things there, but there was no real disposition on the part of any Tunisians to welcome back the Soviet Union in any fashion.

*Q: Did you find that you could operate pretty well in French without having to know Arabic there?*

BOSWORTH: Yes, I could. All of the people that I dealt with in the government and in the private community spoke French. I made a couple of television appearances in French and gave a number of speeches in French to business groups. Now, whether that's still true or not I don't know. I mean that was 20 years ago. My sense then was that the country was losing its capabilities in French. English was on the rise, but French was on the decline. Tunisia had a problem, because the Arabic spoken in Tunisia was not Middle Eastern Egyptian standard Arabic and people from the Middle East had trouble understand Tunisians.

*Q: Interesting. Did the U.S. have much of an economic stake in the country?*

BOSWORTH: Not great. I mean there were a few American oil companies there. We had some interest in a pipeline that was being built to transport Algerian natural gas into Europe that was being built across Tunisia. As I said some American oil companies were doing some exploration work there, nothing very significant. We sold a few things there, but the two things that I concentrated internally while I was there was 1) our aid program which was fairly significant.

*Q: Talk a little bit about that.*

BOSWORTH: Well, we had a big rural development project down in central Tunisia. We were trying to promote greater self-sufficiency, greater ability on the part of Tunisians to grow basic commodities, particularly wheat and produce that they sold into the European Union. We had a number of cooperative and other projects going down there and I got quite engaged in those items. I found them interesting.

*Q: Did you feel that they worked?*

BOSWORTH: I think they were working by and large, whether they're still working, I don't know. I'd be interested in going back and seeing what happened to them. The other program that I got quite involved in was in the basically the renovation of the Tunisian military. It was a very run down institution. So, I managed to get some additional more military sales money and we managed to begin the process of rebuilding their military. This was done primarily with the eye on the Libyans who of course had become very much engaged with the Soviets.

*Q: Did the Libyans make serious effort to undermine the government of Tunisia do you think, or was it more rhetorical?*

BOSWORTH: It was somewhat rhetorical, but we were getting intelligence reports of Tunisians or of Libyans rather dealing with Tunisian dissidents.

*Q: Funding people?*

BOSWORTH: Funding people.

*Q: Did the U.S. have a military mission there then?*

BOSWORTH: Yes, we had a military assistance mission and we also had a defense attaché.

*Q: how did you find your working relations with those people?*

BOSWORTH: Very good, by and large, very good with both of them.

*Q: Was there a Peace Corps program there?*

BOSWORTH: There was a very big Peace Corps program, run by a young guy French by birth, French American who was very energetic and I enjoyed very much. I would travel around with him visiting Peace Corps people out in the field and that was great fun.

*Q: Did you think that was a useful program?*

BOSWORTH: I thought it was very useful for the American Peace Corps volunteers. I think over the years that's probably been its greatest value. It has produced a large number of people in this country who have had the experience, which is for Americans unique, of living abroad and living in very basic conditions. So, I think it has been a great program for us. I wouldn't cite it as having really materially advanced the process of economic development although they make

contributions, no question about it.

*Q: Good point. Did the Department pay much attention to Tunisia when you were there would you say?*

BOSWORTH: Not a lot. We were in the Bureau of North African Affairs. Libya and Algeria demanded more attention. Morocco of course was larger. The Libyan incursion in I think it was '79 or '80 brought some attention. I was quite content not being under Washington's scrutiny all the time. They would sort of let me run my own show.

*Q: I was just curious, why when the PLO came out of Lebanon in 1982 or '83 why did they go to Tunisia as opposed to anyplace that they might have gone to?*

BOSWORTH: I'm not sure, I think probably because the Tunisians were willing to take them and it was a long way from Lebanon, a long way from Israel. As it turned out it wasn't far enough from Israel. It didn't stop the Israelis from. Well, remember they put their air force in there and destroyed a lot of PLO housing.

*Q: In part as you said because the PLO had had offices there already that presumably could act as a base to receive them.*

BOSWORTH: Yes. Tunisia was a very pleasant place to be. If you could choose between Tunisia and Libya, you'd choose Tunisia.

*Q: Exactly. Do you think that there is a thing called a Tunisian nationality?*

BOSWORTH: Yes. I think Tunisians feel Tunisian. I think they also feel Arab and I think increasingly some of them feel Arabic, Muslim. It was always quite a secular place. Bourguiba did a number of things such as the role of women, family planning, which were just not done in other Islamic countries.

*Q: Do you think that stuff has stuck?*

BOSWORTH: I think it has by and large stuck. The fellow who is now president was then the chief of military intelligence when I was there. He is very secular in his orientation. Now he like other Arab leaders may have trimmed his sails sufficiently to avoid major conflicts with the Islamic establishment in Tunisia, but by and large it was a secular country, much more so than any other country in the Middle East.

*Q: Women could go about?*

BOSWORTH: Women did go about unveiled at most times.

*Q: Drive automobiles?*

BOSWORTH: Drive automobiles. In those years though you were beginning to see women,

younger women particularly who were going in covering wearing heavy scarves, etc. Down in the small villages, you would still see women in burqas, not many, but it was not unheard of.

*Q: So, you were there until, you went there in the spring of '79 and you were there until the late summer of '81?*

BOSWORTH: No, June of '81.

**DAVID L. MACK**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1979-1982)**

*Ambassador Mack was born and raised in Oregon and educated at Harvard University. Joining the Foreign State Department in 1965, he studied Arabic and devoted his career dealing with Arab and Middle East issues. His foreign posts include Baghdad, Amman, Jerusalem, Beirut, Tripoli, Benghazi and Tunis. From 1986 to 1989 he served as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. In Washington from 1990 to 1993, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs. During this period, the major issue was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the military actions that followed. Ambassador Mack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.*

MACK: I was assigned to Tunis as DCM. Something like 21 people bid that job. It was one of the more desirable jobs that came up that year at my grade, and I didn't think I'd have much chance. I got the job partly because of my reporting from Baghdad, but also because I had volunteered to take the trip to Beirut in 1976. That was remembered by a staff assistant in NEA who mentioned it to the senior Deputy who was considering the DCM possibilities. They remembered that I had been there when they needed me. This is the kind of thing that built loyalty between the NEA bureau and the people who worked there.

*Q: Okay, we'll stop at that point.*

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*Today is the 22nd of February 1996. David, so we're going to Tunisia where you're going to be DCM. You were DCM there from when to when?*

MACK: I was DCM in Tunisia from 1979 to 1982. That time did include a very substantial period between ambassadors when I was chargé d'affaires for a little over six months.

*Q: You were saying part of your going out there was because you had been around and done something when needed. Who was the ambassador, because often it's still the ambassador's choice.*



MACK: The ambassador was Stephen Bosworth. It was his first ambassadorial assignment. Steve was primarily an economic specialist and approached his assignment as ambassador to Tunisia with an understanding that he brought some very important strengths to the job which I think people have recognized in him. But he also recognized that he was new to the area. Steve told the Assistant Secretary for NEA that he would like to have an Arabist as his DCM, and he would look to the bureau to help find a person who was qualified both in area understanding and knowledge, but also had managerial ability to take on that job.

*Q: And you were it.*

MACK: I got the nod and found my association, first with Steve Bosworth and later with his successor Walter Cutler to be a very successful one. I had the good luck as a first time DCM of working for two ambassadors who were both superb chiefs of mission. They were quite different in their particular approaches, but both of them were very skillful at running a mission and making use of their DCM.

*Q: When you went out there in '79. '79 was sort of a critical year in the Near East context.*

MACK: I'm just a little bit uncertain as to when I arrived but I believe it was around the middle of August, it could have been earlier.

*Q: The real critical date is November '79. You were well in place.*

MACK: I was well in place before the seizure of our embassy in Tehran. From the point of view of U.S. interests and concerns in the area at large, Tunisia was only beginning to be a key post for regional purposes. There was a very strong bilateral relationship, as had always been the case. This was a great change for me coming from assignments in two countries, Libya and Iraq, where we had a very tenuous and almost adversarial relationship, to come to a post where we not only had very good relations and close relations, but also quite wide relations. Our mission in Tunisia included a large AID mission, Peace Corps, very extensive cultural exchange activities, military assistance group as well as an attaché's office. We were involved in relationships with Tunisia across the board in a wide variety of ways, and it was for me also the largest diplomatic mission to which I'd been assigned. So that was a major change for me. Tunisia had kind of been out of the center of things regionally, partly because of its location, but also because President Bourguiba had followed a policy that had tended to lead to estrangement between Tunisia and the Arab League, which was dominated by Egypt at the time. This had changed greatly after the Baghdad summit in 1978 with the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League and the switch of the Arab League headquarters from Cairo to Tunis.

*Q: We're talking of course about the fall-out from the Camp David Accords and Egypt making peace with Israel.*

MACK: That's right. The move of the Arab League headquarters to Tunisia led to a much larger Arab diplomatic corps. Tunisia was trying to take advantage of this change in Cairo's fortunes to build up its own relationship with the rest of the Arab world, moving a bit eastward in its political orientation. I wouldn't want to overstate that, but to a degree it was seeing an

opportunity and moving in that direction. In addition, the organization of the Islamic conference had elected a Tunisian, Habib Chatty, as its secretary general. The organization of the Islamic conference had its headquarters in Jeddah, but Habib Chatty was often in Tunis. There was another dimension, therefore, in which Tunisia had a certain weight in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

*Q: What was the difference between the Islamic conference and the Arab League?*

MACK: The organization of Islamic conference is an organization for the governments of Muslim countries, all the way from Nigeria to Indonesia. It's a much broader organization than the Arab League. It included Iran among its members and was only beginning to get on the U.S. scope in terms of its potential importance. Tunisia had been rather isolated from the Arab world, and because of its very secular government was not very much involved in Islamic politics. It's fair to say that the Tunisians were enjoying the somewhat greater weight that this seemed to give them internationally.

*Q: In the first place could you tell me how Stephen Bosworth operated? You say he was an economist, and Tunisia doesn't seem to be particularly an economist playground. Maybe I'm wrong.*

MACK: Steve took a very broad approach toward the U.S. government relationship with Tunisia and his own personal role as ambassador. We were heavily engaged with the Tunisian economy. While it was not one of the important economies of the world, it was pretty obvious that the future progress in Tunisia was dependent upon improving its economic situation. As a friendly government, the United States would reap a great deal of credit in its overall relationships with Tunisia if it could really help Tunisia take off economically. We had an economic relationship, particularly with AID and to some extent with the Peace Corps. Bosworth, who saw that there was a great need for economic restructuring in Tunisia, set about using our leverage as a major provider of aid and our good political relationship to engage the Tunisians in a fairly systematic and highly sophisticated economic dialogue. He would have small meetings at his residence, including our AID director, our economic counselor and key economic figures in the Tunisian government. It was really sort of a post doctoral seminar in economics among these guys. Without wanting to impose ourselves in some kind of neo-colonialist role, it seemed desirable to nudge the Tunisians along to the kind of economic restructuring which, painful though it might be for internal political reasons, would enable them to achieve greater economic success. In fact, Tunisia has done that. I like to think part of it was the result of these seeds that were planted in the time that Steve Bosworth was there. It was his idea that the U.S. not simply hand out aid but make sure that it accomplished some permanent development.

I wouldn't want to suggest that Steve was focused totally on that. He was aware also of the security relationship between the two countries and U.S. political support for Tunisia. These two elements were keys to our welcome in the country. We didn't have the advantages the French did with their cultural entrée to the country, where the elite tended to be Francophone and had been educated in French universities. We were never going to be the kind of economic partner with Tunisia that the European community could be, for example. And, obviously, we didn't have the automatic community of sentiment that the Arabs enjoyed with Tunisia. But there were these

political and security dimensions. Without wanting to oversimplify, basically as long as U.S. relationships with Libya were bad, and as long as Tunisia felt threatened by Libya, we were bound to have a fairly close relationship with Tunisia. Moreover, Tunisia was on the southern littoral of the Mediterranean, which counted for something during the cold war. We had more U.S. Navy ship visits into Tunisian ports than any other country on the southern Mediterranean littoral. We also had a fairly brisk military assistance program underway for training and supply. Generally speaking, U.S. military equipment was offered to Tunisia on concessional terms. And it became clear that the Tunisians very much relied upon the presence of the Sixth Fleet as an ultimate security guarantee if things were to go bad with either Libya or Algeria. Tunisia tended to feel threatened by states that had fairly radical politics and military forces more substantial than those of Tunisia.

There was also the legacy of a couple of decades of high level contacts between Tunisian leaders and their U.S. counterparts. This was very much due to the historical role of President Bourguiba, a hero of Tunisian independence, and Tunisia's first and only president at that point. Bourguiba was a fascinating figure, very much in decline physically, in a manner that affected his mental stability. His doctors said he suffered from hardening of the arteries, and this seemed to be affecting some of his mental and emotional stability. That in turn had some serious deleterious and negative effects on the Tunisian political system. In effect, you had a sort of arterial sclerosis of Tunisian politics. The political system became increasingly rigid, increasingly centered around the cult of personality of Bourguiba, who was no longer able to manage the political situation and Tunisia's foreign policy on a consistent and regular basis as he used to do. As a result you had great rigidity in the system. It made it hard to have meaningful political change. Anybody who seemed to emerge as a possible successor to Bourguiba would eventually excite Bourguiba's suspicions. He would then remove such people from power.

It was a fairly humane government by regional terms, but it was not a progressive government at all politically. I say that despite the fact that culturally, economically, and in their foreign policy, there was much to be admired in what Bourguiba had accomplished and in what the rest of the Tunisian political establishment had absorbed by way of lessons. It was clear that with every passing year the tensions were building up internally and that there needed to be political change to accommodate them. Of course, Tunisian developments did not always happen on the schedule that Washington envisaged. When I was getting ready to go out to post as DCM, a political officer from the embassy was leaving Tunisia for another assignment. His name was Charles Brayshaw. When Charles had gone out to the post years earlier, I was the desk officer for Tunisia. I had told him at that time that he would have a very interesting assignment and while he was there certainly Bourguiba would die. That was something I believed was definitely going to happen during the two years I was the desk officer. It didn't happen then, it hasn't happened since. [Bourguiba died in April 6, 2000 at the age of 96, after the date of this oral history]. I remember Brayshaw passing through Washington between assignments, looking me in the eye and saying David, while you're in Tunisia it's going to be a very interesting assignment because certainly while you are there Bourguiba is going to die. He had found a very clever way to remind me of the difficulty of making these kinds of predictions.

*Q: How did the arrival of the Arab League in Tunisia play? One, did we have relations with it? How did we deal with the Arab League?*

MACK: We were just beginning to have discussions with them. We did not want to have a close relationship with the Arab League, given the fact that we took exception to expelling Egypt over the Camp David Accords. As a result, our contacts with the Arab League tended to be at my level and below, rather than at the ambassador's level. Arab League politics were of interest to me. Not only had it moved to Tunis, but a Tunisian secretary general replaced the long time Egyptian leadership. Chedi Klibi, the secretary general of the Arab League, had been Minister of Information in the government of Tunisia and remained part of the Tunisian political establishment. Like most of that establishment, he was basically Francophone in his education and quite secular, even rather European in his outlook. He was a curious, unlikely person to be the head of the Arab League. Moreover, Klibi had hired on a number of Tunisians as his immediate staff. Tunis was hosting a plethora of Arab ambassadors, because many Arab governments sent both an ambassador to Tunisia and, at the same time, an ambassador to the Arab League. One of the Arab ambassadors told me that he had felt insulted when he telephoned to speak to Chedi Klibi as the secretary general of the Arab League, and the phone was answered by a Tunisian secretary who spoke to him in French. This Arab ambassador, who like many of his colleagues did not speak French, found this symbolized the anomalous character of Tunisia as the center for multilateral Arab diplomacy.

After our embassy was taken in Iran, the U.S. stopped being quite so persnickety about contacts with the Arab League. We realized they could be potentially useful. As a result, the contacts that I had built up there shortly after my arrival became more frequent, and we certainly tried to maintain a good entrée to Klibi. When an Assistant Secretary of State came through Tunis, the embassy suggested he call on Klibi. From that time on, Klibi became much friendlier and more open to us. He also began trying to find a role for himself and the Arab League in brokering a solution that would lead to the release of our hostages. This never came to be, but we had quite an active series of exchanges with the Arab League all through the hostage crisis to try to generate some solution. As a diplomatic establishment, the Arab League was extremely sympathetic with us because of the question of diplomatic privileges. Arab League officials were consumed with their diplomatic status in Tunisia and wanting to make sure they got full privileges and amenities, and they obviously could see that there were some important international principles at stake.

*Q: You're talking about the takeover of our embassy in Iran that lasted from November 1979 until January of 1981. Let's talk a bit about that crisis. I imagine you must have been pretty well consumed by this, weren't you?*

MACK: I wouldn't want to suggest that it took up most of our time in Tunisia, but it certainly was the most exhausting preoccupation during the time I was there. It was the sort of thing that made you lose sleep and that ate away at you on a day-to-day basis. Not just in Tunisia, but probably U.S. diplomats all over the world tried to figure out ways in which they might somehow make a contribution to resolving this situation. It was an issue that we focused on with our intelligence assets, since from time to time Iranian officials would pass through Tunis. It was a major subject of our diplomatic conversations with the government of Tunisia, as well as with the Arab League. With the Arab League, it was the primary subject of our discussions, but it was also a major subject in our conversations with President Bourguiba and other officials in the

Tunisian government. It was a great relief for us when the hostage crisis was resolved. One of the things we did at the embassy was to organize a non-denominational, but religious, thanksgiving service at a nearby church.

The bulk of our concerns in the embassy were with bilateral matters. I was personally very interested in the Arab League part, which was one of my special assignments. The ambassador said I could take care of all the Arab ambassadors, as far as he was concerned, and of the Arab League. Most of the rest of the embassy was concerned with bilateral matters involving our economic relationship, AID, security relationships, and our various military activities.

We had many high level U.S. government visitors coming through during that period, ranging from secretaries of State to former President Nixon and General Vernon Walters of the CIA. Philip Habib visited at one point as a special emissary. U.S. visitors always got fairly good access to the government, very often including meetings with President Bourguiba. Meetings with Bourguiba were always subject to real uncertainty. He would tend to be very lucid for a few minutes, and then go off on a tangent of some kind of his choosing. Sometimes he would even become very angry at his subordinates. One time, he angrily lectured his son, former foreign Minister Bourguiba Junior, who at that point was not in a formal position, just acting as a presidential adviser. While it could be embarrassing, especially for the Tunisians, it was always interesting to us to see how the old man was doing.

We were very sympathetic to some of the ministers who were gingerly trying to steer Tunisia to a little bit of political reform, and to economic reform. One of them was Prime Minister Mzali, who was very open to the idea of moving Tunisia in a new direction. This included bringing Tunisia a little closer to the Arab world, softening a bit the rather harsh secularism of official policy in order to make a few minor concessions to Islamist sentiment in the country. Mzali and a few others seemed to be trying to open up the political situation cautiously. Tunisia was very much a one-party state, and a very successful example of political control on the part the Destour party, which Bourguiba had founded. But increasingly that party was bureaucratic, rigid and wasn't able to adapt to change. Mzali was trying to change this, and for his pains he was eventually removed by Bourguiba as he became too popular.

It was instructive to watch this ebb and flow of personalities around Bourguiba. To our dismay it was very often the more sycophantic and unimaginative politicians who seemed to get along best with Bourguiba. But Bourguiba had done a number of great things for the country, and certainly it was very much to his credit that he had helped liberate Tunisian women to a very great degree. He had moved the country on to a course of family planning which was very remarkable then in the Muslim world, and I think is still quite creditable. They have managed to reduce the birth rate significantly. A lot of that is due to Bourguiba's influence. He also had done a lot to encourage modern education. He pressed very hard for that. We tried to be as helpful as we could through our cultural exchange program and the Peace Corps to buttress these efforts.

As I mentioned earlier, the security relationship was always strongest when the Libyans were the most threatening. At times the Libyans engaged in a certain amount of subversion, as well as propaganda against the country. Although Tunisia had a larger population, it did not have Libya's wealth. Moreover, Tunisia didn't have the same kind of modern arms that Libya had obtained

from both the Soviets and the French. Tunisia often felt quite threatened during this period by Libya and Qadhafi's periodic threats that he was going to unify the two countries, if necessary by force. It was during one of these periods that Qadhafi became very exercised by the presence of the U.S. fleet in the Mediterranean, particularly as U.S. warships would periodically cruise into the Gulf of Sidra, entering the Libyan heartland. Qadhafi had warned that there was a line of death, that if our aircraft crossed over it they would be shot down. That led to a confrontation between one of our aircraft carriers and a squadron of Libyan fighters in which the Libyan fighters were like fish in a barrel for our carrier based fighter aircraft. Not too long after that, the aircraft carrier Nimitz entered the Bay of Tunis for a port call. I was in charge at the time, and although I continued to live in my house, I would use the ambassador's residence for official functions. We had a reception there for some of the officers from the Nimitz, and we weren't at all certain what kind of attendance we would get from the Tunisian officialdom. We thought they might be very cautious and careful about coming to a reception at that particular time. In fact, they showed up in droves. I remember the rapt attention of the Tunisian military officers when I introduced them to one of the fighter pilots who had shot down a Libyan fighter, and how they listened to his description of that military engagement.

Good relations prevailed through for most of our time there. It enabled us, for example, to be competitive with the French for influence in the country. The French were very much supporters of the status quo, which meant they really wanted to see a continuation of Bourguibaism with its strong pro-French bias. We tried to be more nuanced in our approach. We were all for various kinds of political and economic reforms, but also we had a particularly different approach in the language area. Part of our mission was the field school for the Foreign Service Institute Arabic program. The Foreign Service Institute Arabic Field School had been moved from Beirut after the troubles there. After a brief period in Cairo, it moved to Tunis. At the time I arrived, I was the only Arabic speaker in this very large mission. The Foreign Service Institute was very much of a step-child, not really welcomed by a lot of the people in the mission, in particular not by the previous DCM, who thought it was really a nuisance. Bosworth told me to look after the Foreign Service Institute, which as a graduate of the Arabic School in Beirut, I was keen to do. Plus, the director of the field school was Margaret Omar, nee Klefner. She later married the regional medical officer in Tunis and has published under the name Margaret Nydell. Margaret and I had studied Arabic together in Cairo when I was a Fulbright scholar and she was on a grant as well. It pleased me to take the Foreign Service Institute under my wing, help integrate them into the mission and see that they didn't feel isolated. I became a godfather to that part of the mission, as well as U.S. Information Agency Arabic language publication called "Al Majal," which was published in Tunis.

As it happened, while I was in Tunis we replaced the head of the political section with an Arabist. I also recruited a graduate of the Foreign Service Institute Arabic School to become the number two in the political section. We picked up an officer in the economic section who was an Arabist. So suddenly from no Arabists we had come to have a fair number. The French embassy took notice of that. At one point, we learned of a staff meeting at the French embassy in which the French ambassador warned that we were trying to undermine the French position in Tunisia. He reportedly said that we were engaged in a form of cultural warfare by encouraging the idea that Arabic was the proper official and first language of the Tunisians, and that English, not French, would be the second language. I felt, in fact, that we had succeeded in improving our

level of contacts with younger Tunisians, since the younger generation of Tunisians tended to be better trained in classical Arabic, and more attuned to both Arabic and English.

At one point we had a meeting at my residence, coffee with some visiting American Arabist scholars, and we brought them together with some Tunisian students and intellectuals. One of the students angrily started talking about the Tunisian political establishment. He said that they all prefer to speak French and are married to French women. I said, they are not all married to French women, what are you talking about? He said, yes, yes, it's true they're all married to French women. Well, that was a perception of a younger generation of politically disenchanted Tunisians. The people I dealt with on a regular basis, cabinet ministers and under secretaries, automatically used French in their official work. They still do, I think to some degree. They were very proud of having a "formation française," [French educational foundation] as they would say. When I arrived, speaking Arabic very well but speaking French very badly, I tried to speak Arabic at the outset. I recall one of the ministers saying to me, "Monsieur Mack, l'Arabe n'est pas une langue serieuse." [Arabic is not a serious language.] He made sure I knew that he preferred to deal in French. I quickly learned that I was going to have to improve my French. I took a tutor, one of the embassy spouses who was a native French speaker, and she helped me get up to a level where at least I could manage my ordinary business with these people, and also effectively accompany visitors.

*Q: It's sort of ironic, isn't it, to be in an Arab country...*

MACK: Well, particularly in an Arab country that has become the seat of the Arab League. I could joke with younger Tunisians that this was the imperialist language, but it was no joking matter with the senior people in the establishment. They would insist upon speaking French, and would feel more comfortable in it when discussing official business.

*Q: In one of my interviews with Dick Parker, who was one of our first ambassadors to Algeria, he appeared at a meeting where the entire cabinet was there, and Boumedienne said, now why is it that the American ambassador speaks Arabic, and most of you don't?*

MACK: I had a similar experience actually. There was an Arabic language radio service, of course, in the country, as well as a French service. The Arabic broadcasts included a very popular talk show. The Embassy Public Affairs Officer got me once to take a call from the Tunisian host of this talk show, who interviewed me in Arabic. It happened that President Bourguiba was listening at that time, and he never forgot that. Bourguiba could forget a lot of things, but every time he would see me he would say, "Ah, c'est vous, Monsieur Mack, qui parle l'arabe." [Oh, it's you, Mr. Mack, who speaks Arabic.]

We may also have made people like Bourguiba a little bit suspicious in a matter related to Tunisia's Muslim identity. After what had happened in Iran under the Shah, who prevented U.S. contacts with the Islamist groups, we were determined to avoid that trap. Both Ambassador Bosworth and later Ambassador Cutler supported the idea that we should have a regular liaison with the leading Islamist political group, At-tayar al-Islami, which I would translate as the Islamic Current while francophone Tunisians called it, often derisively, Le Tendance Islamique. This was a moderate and rather tame organization, so far as we could see in our contacts with

them. We conducted the dialogue for a while at the second secretary level, later at the first secretary level in our political section. It was a modest dialogue at a fairly modest level, but we kept in contact with them asking them about their concerns. This group, which at that time was headed by Abdul Fatah Morru, was basically reformist in character. They wanted to end things like the flouting of the Ramadan restrictions on eating, drinking, and smoking in public. They wanted more Islamic studies in the educational system. They basically felt, as I think a lot of ordinary Tunisians did, disgusted by the blatant sexual and other moral excesses that were associated with the tourism industry. The tourism industry is a very important part of the Tunisian economy.

*Q: Well, there were nude beaches, weren't there, and all that sort of thing?*

MACK: There no official nude beaches, but many European tourists would simply remove their tops at the beach. More seriously, many young Tunisians were being drawn into prostitution associated with foreign tourism. There was material there for the Islamists to exploit without necessarily wanting a violent overthrow of the system. Unfortunately, the system had very rigid and addicted to the pure form of Bourguibism. This implied turning their back on Islam in a cultural way, and treating it as something with a purely limited religious role. For some Tunisians, it meant they weren't really able to bring these Islamists into their political system. They did very much resent the fact that we had this contact, even though it was on a modest level, and they tried to get us to break it. When the matter was raised with the new ambassador, Walter Cutler, he turned it aside very nicely. Cutler had real savvy and finesse. He was a political pro, and particularly after what had happened in Iran we simply felt it was prudent to keep this kind of watching brief. I believe it was raised with Cutler by the Foreign Minister, probably speaking for Bourguiba. After Cutler turned the issue aside, it came up again through the Tunisian embassy in Washington to the State Department. So we had to turn it aside again. And then I remember it was brought up with the station.

*Q: You're talking about the CIA.*

MACK: The CIA had a close liaison relationship with the security people there. They didn't like it. They argued that the Islamic Current would amount to nothing if we didn't give them a sense of importance by talking to them. We didn't think that they amounted to a lot, but we thought they did represent a potential problem for the government, as they were exploiting some genuine grievances that were felt by a much larger part of the population. That kind of thing annoyed the Tunisian government, as did U.S. human rights reports that were, let's say nuanced, and not enthusiastic about human rights progress in the country. Human rights reports were just coming into vogue at the time. During the Carter administration you couldn't duck these things the way they had been swept under the rug earlier.

*Q: Congress had mandated them, too.*

MACK: That's right. So there were these kinds of little tensions on the side, but in view of the fact that we were overall very supportive politically and in security terms, they were minor irritations in the relationship without becoming disruptive.



*Q: You left there when?*

MACK: I left in the summer of 1982. Not too many months after Ambassador Cutler had arrived. Walt, of course, had his own take on Iran. He had been named to be the ambassador to Tehran shortly before the hostage crisis, and to his good fortune the Iranians refused agrément. He felt pretty lucky that he ended up in Tunisia after that. Cutler was a really smooth political officer. Walt was not at all interested in the kind of probing economic discourse that Bosworth had had, but he was a very shrewd and skillful political operator. He was inclined to leave a lot of the day-to-day management of the post to me. I had, of course, by the time he got there, been in charge for six months, and was trying to overcome this chargé syndrome. He was very sensitive to it.

During my three years in Tunis I had done some things which made the post much more oriented toward the Arab and Islamic nature of Tunisia. For example, many of the employees wanted to have a break in the middle of the day and go to prayers. There was no mosque anywhere in the vicinity, so in order to cut down on absenteeism from work we set aside a little room over by the motor pool where people could say their prayers. I judged that was no violation of separation of church and state, and it was certainly appreciated by the employees. It was a gesture that perhaps got around in the community, indicating that we were sensitive to the Islamic side of things.

*Q: I would think that Tunisia being the playground of the Europeans particularly, would have attracted embassies where the ambassador and the whole staff spoke French, and they were very happy with this. In a way it was a sort of a Mediterranean holiday for them, and these Americans were too bloody serious about it.*

MACK: Oh, absolutely. We were one of the few posts, aside from the Arab embassies, that took this kind of interest. And most of our personnel were personnel who were French speakers rather than Arabic speakers. There is a very Mediterranean, Frenchified part of Tunisia, where you could spend your entire tour without ever going down to the souk or visiting Islamic cultural sites. If you got outside of Tunis and some of the other cities, however, you got much more of a feel for the Arab and Islamic side of the country. For those of us who felt comfortable in both, it was wonderful to be able to move back and forth between the two worlds. This was certainly true of my family coming from the Middle East. For most of us who came from Arab or other Muslim posts, particularly for the Peace Corps people and AID folks, it was a wonderful and refreshing change to be in an Arab atmosphere part of the day, and then maybe go to a nice French restaurant on the Mediterranean in the evening. That was a great pleasure.

In this connection one and relating to this funny little rivalry with the French, I remember when both the Fourth of July and the Quatorze Juillet (Fourteenth of July) fell during the month of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan, few Tunisians wanted to come to a reception at the normal time a National Day reception would take place, from 6:00 to 8:00 o'clock. That was the hour when they wanted to be at their house, the moment the sun went down so they could have their iftar, breaking of the fast. If they went out in the evening, it would be around 10:00-11:00 o'clock. They would have their final meal in the evening and then go to bed at around midnight or 1:00 o'clock in the morning. I was in charge at this time, so I came up with the idea of having the Fourth of July reception from 9:00 to 11:00 pm. As usual we invited many more than we

expected to show up. Virtually every Tunisian we invited came, they loved it and felt comfortable coming out at that time. Shortly afterwards, we got our invitations to the Quatorze Juillet, the French National Day. The cards had been printed up for 6:00 to 8:00, and then before sending them out they had struck out the time, and put in 9:00 to 11:00. I felt that, by golly, even the French had learned something from the U.S. example. We were a little bit ahead of the curve.

*Q: In a way, this is one of the accusations that has been made about us so much that we don't really understand the culture, and every revolution we seem to be on the wrong side. Was it because of the shock of Iran, or was this just fortuitous? The shock of Iran and this Islamic thing was making everybody think hard.*

MACK: My inclination would have been to do this anyway, but it was the shock of Iran that enabled me to do it, and get away with it. I had two non-Arabist ambassadors in Tunis who went along with such ideas and thought it made good sense. The sad U.S. experience in Iran probably made the difference.

From a family point of view, Tunis was a refreshing change. After having been in a real hardship post in Baghdad, we were at a very comfortable post. This is where my wife, who has a Harvard doctorate in art history, was able to get into classical archaeology, providing tours for visitors. Our residence in fact was in Carthage, built over the ruins like so many residences in that very fashionable suburb of Tunis. My daughter started her first school, a French pre-school. She has many good memories about Tunis. It was one of the few posts we were at where we liked to have members of our family visit. It was a nice place to be.

*Q: You left there a little before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, didn't you?*

MACK: Actually I left after the invasion had started. The invasion started in June of 1982. I already knew at that point that I was going to be the office director for Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. In fact, I had wanted another DCM-ship overseas for my next assignment, but the Department insisted on bringing me back to head up this office. I made a trip out to the area from Tunis with the departing office director, so I had a chance to meet some of the officials in those governments, including in Lebanon. The invasion took place not too long before the Fourth of July, which was Walt Cutler's first National Day reception. A year earlier, I had had the incredible success of the Ramadan Fourth of July reception, something like 900 guests including virtually all the Tunisians that we invited. The invasion of Lebanon cast a real pall on U.S. relations with all the Arab countries. The Tunisians had become far more conscious of their Arab personality, especially because of the presence of the Arab League. A lot of our regular contacts, boycotted for the 1982 National Day reception. There had been a Council of Ministers meeting that afternoon, and exactly one Minister attended our reception. It was clear he had been assigned to be the representative of the Tunisian government, but few others among our regular contacts attended. The Tunisians let us know in unmistakable fashion that they were in solidarity with their Arab brothers and with the Lebanese over that issue. In a sense, it was an indication of the way things were to evolve. Our bilateral relationship with Tunisia was to become very important as a link to some of the Arab radicals with whom the Tunisians could easily deal and we couldn't. Eventually PLO headquarters joined that of the Arab League, and the Tunisians were very helpful in bridging between us and some of the other Arabs during the upcoming

period

**WALTER L. CUTLER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Tunisia (1981-1984)**

*Ambassador Walter L. Cutler was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He served in Cameroon, Washington, DC, Algeria, Iran, Korea, Vietnam, Zaire, and Saudi Arabia. He was interviewed in 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: What was our interest in Tunisia at that time in '82?*

CUTLER: The interests at that time were not critical. It was a small, but friendly and well-oriented country. It was a country about which we had some anxiety with respect to designs that Qadhafi might have had on it.

*Q: He was in charge of Libya.*

CUTLER: He was in charge of Libya next door and had designs on his neighbors. Then we had an aging Bourguiba, the only President that that country had known since its independence, and nothing had really been set up for a transition to new leadership. So everybody expected that Bourguiba might disappear and that, with a predatory Qadhafi next door, this might be a problem.

*Q: As far as a preponderant Western power there, was that still France, would you say, and were we playing somewhat of a secondary role?*

CUTLER: No, not really. France's influence had diminished quite a bit. In the private sector they certainly had a substantial representation, but, politically, with the leadership, I think our influence was probably even greater.

*Q: Were there any major problems while you were there?*

CUTLER: Well, I guess the major problem was something that was extraneous to our bilateral relationship, and that was that the whole problem of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon occurred. And, as you know, Tunisia, with our encouragement, took in Arafat.

*Q: Did you have a role in this encouragement?*

CUTLER: No, not really on that. I'm not sure that it really took much encouragement, but that was not done through me. But I was there when he arrived. And, therefore, there was a new focus put on Tunisia, with respect to the Middle East question.

The other thing that made Tunis of more than passing interest was that that's where the Arab

League was located. The headquarters had been moved out of Cairo. And I was the interlocutor, if you will, with the Arab League, which was not easy, because in those days the general feeling back home in the State Department and the White House was that the Arab League had done us no favors. In effect, they needed us more than we needed them, that was the perception. So we sort of kept them at a distance.

The longer I stayed there, the less I agreed with that posture. I felt that there were things that one could do with the Arab League. And I think, over the course of time, Washington came around to take a somewhat more mellow view of the institution.

*Q: Did you have problems, say, trying to duck Arafat at receptions and things like this, because we were under strict injunctions not to do anything with the PLO?*

CUTLER: Well, no. He didn't really circulate that much, probably for security reasons. And the Tunisians kept the Palestinians who arrived with Arafat under very tight control. They had them mostly in an old military camp way down in the center of the country. My understanding is that they were not very happy down there. As a matter of fact, eventually, most of them moved out.

*Q: After the flesh pots of Lebanon, it must have been pretty tough.*

CUTLER: Yes, pretty tough to take. Arafat himself kept a low profile, I think, again, for security reasons. We knew where his headquarters was and so on, but it was down on the other side of the city. And he really didn't circulate much in any kind of group activities.

I do recall one function at the palace. Bourguiba gave a luncheon, and I can't remember who the guest of honor was, but Arafat came in. It was a large luncheon, so I was nowhere near him. But, ironically, they had seated my wife and me next to the Libyan, which made for kind of an interesting situation.

*Q: We didn't have relations with the Libyans.*

CUTLER: We weren't talking to the Libyans at that point. But, basically, it wasn't a problem.

*Q: How about the Libyans? How did you see the Libyan actions, as far as we were concerned, from the vantage of Tunis?*

CUTLER: At the time I arrived, there was some reason to be concerned about what Qadhafi's intentions were toward Tunisia.

Interestingly, I presented my credentials on the 50th anniversary of Bourguiba's establishment of the Neo-Destourian Party, which shows you how long he had been around.

But Qadhafi had just made his first visit to Tunis in many, many years. Relations had been cool, to the point of being frigid, between the two countries, and there were some good reasons to try to improve them. So Qadhafi came to Tunis (I think it was right after I got there), and this was a big deal, because it was so unprecedented.

When I called on Bourguiba, oh, let's say a couple of weeks later, to present my credentials, we went in for a private conversation, and in the middle of the conversation, Bourguiba stopped and motioned to somebody to go get something.

A person appeared with a long cardboard cylinder, the kind that you keep maps in, and he reached in and pulled out a little piece of paper. It was a little piece of notebook paper, and there was a message written on it. And Bourguiba said, "Eh, voilà, c'est le mien maintenant." And what this was, was the infamous Djerba Agreement (of 1974, I think). And, mind you, this was now 1982. What had happened was, at the last meeting between Bourguiba and Qadhafi, on the island of Djerba, when Bourguiba's Prime Minister was not present, Bourguiba had, much to everybody's astonishment, signed an agreement with Qadhafi that would form a union between the two countries.

*Q: One of those unions...*

CUTLER: One of those unions; one of the originals. And Bourguiba recognized the error of his way only a day or two later and renounced the agreement. But Qadhafi kept it. And when Qadhafi finally came to Tunis all those years later (he had wanted to do so for a long time), Bourguiba said, "Ok, but you've got to bring that agreement with you and give it back to me." That piece of paper, symbolically, was terribly important to Bourguiba, because he regarded that as the one major mistake that he had made, the one serious gaffe. Qadhafi arrived without the paper. Bourguiba refused to see him until he had sent somebody back and gotten that scrap of paper and had given it to him.

I think I was probably the first one to see it. And so that's what was in this cylinder on the silver tray. And he said he was going to put it in a museum that he wanted to build in his hometown.

*Q: What was the situation, as far as your dealing with Bourguiba during the time you were there? You were there from '82...*

CUTLER: I was there two years, early '82 to early '84.

*Q: How did you find him, because this was sort of in the twilight of his career.*

CUTLER: Yes. I would say I had limited dealings with him on substantive issues. His Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were the primary interlocutors on most issues. I saw Bourguiba, however, fairly frequently. And, more often than not, it was to pay my respects to him along with some American visitor. One could do business with him, but usually it was inadvisable to try to take up more than one subject at a time.

Bourguiba had a very, very special feeling about the United States. And, I think this was not only because he and we shared ideals about what the world should look like. He was certainly anti-Communist. He understood what we were trying to do in that part of the world and supported it. And he shared our concern for such things as education for the common man.

But he also had a special feeling toward the United States which stemmed from his own personal experience. And this goes way back to when he was in and out of French jails. And it goes back, particularly, to one American Consul, who, at least in Tunisia, is still very well known, and that's Hooker Doolittle.

Before I went to Tunisia, I remember having lunch with one of my predecessors here in Washington, and he said, "Well, of course, you know all about Hooker Doolittle." Well, I didn't at the time, but I soon found out that one has to know the name Hooker Doolittle, particularly if you are to meet with Bourguiba.

Hooker Doolittle was the American Consul in Tunis during the war years, '42-'43. He was among that small group of Foreign Service officers and a few others who had the foresight to look beyond the war and to see that American interests could and should be served by not necessarily toadying to the French for our immediate military needs, but by getting to know some of the Arabs who later on would be pushing for independence.

And he got to know Bourguiba, who, at that point, was a young, idealistic, but very charismatic nationalist leader -- not exactly a favorite of the French. At one point, Hooker Doolittle was instrumental in getting Bourguiba sprung from a French jail. And Bourguiba has never forgotten this. He regarded Hooker Doolittle as one of his closest friends.

When Hooker Doolittle was later transferred from Tunisia to Egypt, Bourguiba had to flee from the French again. It's the famous time when he disguised himself and found his way across Libya. There, lo and behold, was Hooker Doolittle, his old friend.

And so when I went to call on Bourguiba, there was a certain scenario for the visits. I would go to the palace and be ushered in, usually by the Foreign Minister, to Bourguiba's rather small office, an office half the size of this. But the walls were bedecked with photographs, and there were many mementos, lots of memorabilia around this great leader's long struggle for independence for his country.

So I might have an item of business to discuss, but it would usually be dealt with fairly quickly, with the Foreign Minister sort of helping Bourguiba, and then I would have our stroll through history. Bourguiba loved to take people around and show them this and that. There was a moon rock, brought back by one of our astronauts. Have you ever gone to Bourguiba's office?

*Q: No, I haven't.*

CUTLER: There were what I called the mug shots, and these were the photographs, taken by the French police and security officials, of the Tunisian nationalists; and one of them is Bourguiba -- you know, it's a line-up.

*Q: With a name plate and all that sort of thing?*

CUTLER: Yes, all that, all that. And there was this and that, many photographs. And then he would come to a photograph of Hooker Doolittle and Bourguiba shaking hands beneath the wing

of some old C- 47, back in 1943. And he'd say, "Eh, voilà, mon ami." And, quite frankly, more often than not he would shed a tear. He became very emotional. And this is where it really all started. There's a street near the embassy named Rue Hooker Doolittle.

It's a little-known story, it's a fascinating one, and I always liked the story, because it shows that there are places and times in history where a diplomat -- not even a high-ranking one -- can actually influence the course of history. And this is exactly what Hooker Doolittle did. There are some people who remember him, David Newsom, for example. I think David's first boss in the Foreign Service was Hooker Doolittle, in Karachi, I believe. Hooker Doolittle's dead and gone now, but he had a tremendous impact.

*Q: He's mentioned in Archibald Roosevelt's book Lust for Knowing, talking about going out with Hooker Doolittle and meeting Bourguiba.*

CUTLER: That's right, he's mentioned several times there. As a matter of fact, when I was over at Georgetown, I started to get together material to do a piece on Hooker Doolittle (he still has a daughter who is alive), because I thought it was a fascinating story. Hooker Doolittle was among those, Archie Roosevelt was another one, who had the foresight to look ahead.

Unfortunately, what they were doing, that is, messing around with Arab nationalists, didn't go down well with the French at all. And, at the time, we were courting French favor. We wanted their full cooperation as we tried to end the war. So the French complained (I think this is in Archie Roosevelt's book) about the activities of Hooker Doolittle and others, and they got into trouble for it. And I think Hooker Doolittle eventually was removed. He had a fascinating time when the Germans occupied, he had to leave, and he lost a lot of his household effects and so on.

But, anyway, my dealings with Bourguiba often were of that nature, where the conversation would be friendly, close, focused perhaps more on the past than on the present, and not always very substantive. Bourguiba would know the major issues of the day; he would be concerned about what he had heard on the news. We did talk about such things as the Palestinian problem and all the rest, but conversations were never long and never terribly profound.

*Q: What was the view of Israel from Tunisia? Here's an Arab country, but it's always seemed to be somewhat removed, somewhat like Morocco, not as virulent towards Israel. Was that correct?*

CUTLER: I think the Tunisians felt very genuinely and sometimes passionately sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. They felt that a great injustice was being done to the Palestinians. They blamed us for supporting Israel and not putting more pressure on Israel to be reasonable, etc. In other words, what I call the normal Arab perception.

They were somewhat removed, but when Bourguiba took in Arafat, that brought the whole issue into much closer focus. There are some who claim, and I think with some reason, that the major reason Bourguiba agreed to take Arafat in -- there were real liabilities involved in doing so, and we saw years later what happened: the attack on Arafat's headquarters with some Tunisians killed -- was that his wife, Wasila Bourguiba, had long-standing connections with the Palestinians. In fact, she had known Arafat years before, and she felt that Tunisia should get

more involved in the problem. I think it was largely due to her influence that, in fact, the President decided he would take this step. That's the common perception, and I think there is some good evidence supporting it. Of course, it was also generally perceived as well that the US government wanted Tunisia to provide a safe haven for Arafat.

*Q: Was it difficult, because we were certainly going through a change at that time? Were you there at the time the Israelis went into Lebanon?*

CUTLER: Yes.

*Q: Because first there was strong indication that Alexander Haig said: Well, you know, go ahead and do this. And Sharon had taken the bit in his teeth. But then you had the complicity of the Israeli Army and the Sabra and Shatila massacres of Palestinians in Lebanon. And it was the beginning of a change in American attitude towards Israel. Were you having problems being in the Arab world? First you have this invasion, then it went really sour, the Israelis didn't do as well and the outcome wasn't as good, the Marines were being killed, and a lot of stuff. How did this play in a friendly Arab world, somewhat removed, but still getting involved, for you?*

CUTLER: The Tunisians were terribly upset by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. A little bit like Saudi Arabia, Tunisia was viewed in the area as having a very close, even special, relationship with the United States. Therefore, they felt doubly uncomfortable because of this perception that Tunisia and the United States were very close friends. And, therefore, what we did was particularly embarrassing and upsetting to them, because of their association with us.

This was reflected in our Fourth of July reception, which traditionally was given at the Ambassador's residence in Tunis. This was the reception of 1982, and the Israelis went into Lebanon just a few weeks before that. Normally, anywhere from 400 to 600 people came to the Ambassador's reception. We issued the standard number of invitations. Very, very few Tunisians came. And I mean a handful. It was very noticeable. Everybody commented on it: What on earth has happened to the Tunisians? This was a reaction to what was perceived as our support of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It was a genuine reaction.

I never discovered any government instruction that went to the lower-downs saying: Do not go to the American national day reception. It was an individual and widespread decision that, as much as they liked the Americans, as much as they may have liked the American Ambassador and his wife and all the rest, they just couldn't bring themselves to go and to hear the national anthem or whatever.

I had very frank talks with the few Tunisians who did come, and they said, "Look, this is the way it is. This is how deeply we feel about this issue." And, boy, I'll tell you, that experience just said a lot.

The Tunisians, somewhat removed from the Arab-Israeli problem, at least geographically, and known for their friendliness and moderation, on this occasion had great, great trouble not expressing themselves in some way -- and that's the way they did it. Now, as I recall, a year later, it was all sort of back to normal, but at that time, the impact was deep and genuine.



*Q: Before we complete this, I would like to talk just a bit more about the Arab League. There's something in the paper today (we're talking about March 29, 1990) castigating the Arab League for its seeming endorsement of the execution of a British journalist, and supporting Iraq in some of its nastier manifestations. How did you feel about the Arab League there? You say you thought that there was more room to play. What was the Arab League at the time you were there?*

CUTLER: The Arab League has never lived up to its potential as a political force, primarily because the major Arab players have never seen fit to work through it. It's a collection of everybody from very radical to very moderate, and, therefore, it's very difficult to do much business with it. It was, of course, without the Egyptians, and that further weakened the organization. I think the feeling in Washington was that, really, this organization doesn't count for much. And, in fact, that was right. It didn't count for much, certainly in those days.

But it was there. And, periodically, yes, it would come out with resolutions, which often weren't compatible with our interests. You know, it's typical: a handful of the more zealous or radical elements would push things through, and nobody would dare stand up to them because that was being un-Arab. So they'd come out with something that would irritate us: support of the PLO doing this or that, or failure, for example, to even mildly rebuke Qadhafi, failure to come to grips with the issue of terrorism. And, because of all this, I think Washington decided it's just not worth bothering with. As a matter of fact, we'll show them that we're not very happy about this organization and we'll keep them at arm's length.

I remember some high-level visitor from Washington. I was setting up a schedule, and I scheduled a meeting with the Arab League Secretary General, who was a Tunisian. And there was resistance to this: My gosh, this is a bilateral visit, there are enough Tunisians we want to see and so on, why do we have to bother with this Arab League?

I thought that we were gaining very little, and perhaps losing some, by stiff-arming the Arab League. It didn't take much to at least keep in touch with them and carry on a civil and, once in a while maybe, a useful dialogue. There were areas where perhaps they could be helpful: terrorism was one, hostages and so on. So, in those days, anyway, it was a matter of trying to convince Washington that we should give them some kind of nod.

Now I remember when Vice President Bush came, he did meet with the Arab League Secretary General. But his staff thought, and I thought, too, that it wasn't right for the Vice President of the United States to be going over to the Arab League headquarters (which, incidentally, was just a temporary headquarters removed from Cairo) and calling on the Secretary General. So the Secretary General came and called on the Vice President at our residence. That's the way we worked it out.

My impression since leaving Tunisia is that, over the course of time, we have found it more useful to deal with the Arab League than back in those days, recognizing all the while that the Arabs themselves really prefer to deal bilaterally both with each other and with us, and not go through this organization. They may give a lot of public support to it and its occasional

resolutions, but basically it has not been used as a major vehicle for foreign policy.

**G. NORMAN ANDERSON**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1982-1986)**

*Ambassador G. Norman Anderson began studying Russian while in the Navy. He attended graduate school at the Russian Institute at Columbia. He has served in the Beirut, Germany, the Soviet Union, Morocco, Bulgaria, Sudan and Macedonia. In addition, he served as Liaison with the Jewish community at the State Department in 1978. He was interviewed by J.P. Moffat on June 18, 1996.*

*Q: Well now a counterpoint in your career reappears and you're off to the Arab world again as DCM in Tunis. Can you set the stage for us on your time in Tunis from 1982 to 1986?*

ANDERSON: Tunisia was similar to Morocco in that it was a friend to the United States, a rare friend in the Arab world. In fact, President Bourguiba had been very pro-American ever since Tunisian independence in 1956. He'd been granted a visa to the United States even before that at one point when he was under pressure from the French authorities. So he remembered it with great fondness. He was probably the most pro-American leader in the Arab world. We rewarded Tunisia with a great deal of economic and military assistance. So the United States had a very close relationship with Tunisia.

What stands out in my mind were some of crises that took place while I was there. For example, the Israeli Air Force bombed PLO headquarters in Tunisia. Usually when that kind of thing occurred, the mobs formed up downtown and marched on the American Embassy because they held the Americans responsible for such activities.

Just to backtrack, when I first arrived in Tunis in 1982, the embassy was surrounded by a cordon of buses, military personnel with dogs on guard all around the embassy, because at that time, Israel had invaded Lebanon and was crushing the PLO in Beirut. Finally the PLO leader, Arafat escaped to Tunisia and was saved. But in any case, every time tension arose between Israel and the Arab world, the United States was blamed. Another crisis was the raid by the United States against Libya. That was also held against us, of course. Mobs again formed up and marched on the embassy; fortunately, the police were effective enough to keep these mobs at some distance.

Another crisis was the bread riots. Bourguiba, who was becoming quite elderly at the time, decided suddenly to double the price of bread. This set people off into the streets and over a hundred people were killed in this rampage. Law and order completely broke down and it was a very tense situation. I happened to be Chargé d'Affaires at the time. Bourguiba called me to his palace in Carthage to try to explain what was going on. I remember the trip out there quite well. It was around six in the evening. Everywhere smoke was billowing from fires and burning tires in the streets. We drove out the long distance to Carthage with a driver and a security man and on the way there was a group of people throwing rocks. They hit our windshield, which was

shattered immediately. We sped away. We finally got to the palace and Bourguiba explained that everything was under control. He had just instituted military law. After he explained the situation, I got on the telephone to the embassy and we relayed the gist of the conversation back to Washington. Meanwhile, our security officers had been very busy trying to protect the American school and get the children back into the hands of their parents. The embassy of course was right downtown and various mobs were marching back and forth being shot at by the police before our eyes. We had to spend the night in the embassy because of a curfew. This was one of the more harrowing experiences I've had in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Did you have to deal with Arafat or his assistants?*

ANDERSON: No we didn't have any contacts with the PLO during the time I was there. Later, however, the embassy was authorized to carry on a dialog with Arafat.

**STEPHEN EISENBRAUN**  
**Tunisia Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1983-1985)**

*Mr. Eisenbraun was born in central Iowa in 1947 and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa and SAIS. He served in Dhaka, Lahore, Freetown and Mombasa. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: And then in '83 whither?*

EISENBRAUN: In the summer of '83, I decided I wanted to stay in Washington another assignment, and I was looking around at several prospects to do something new. I had been involved in South Asia for 10 years if you include my student years, from '73 until '83, and I just wanted to do something different. I had a choice, the Philippines desk or the Tunisia desk? I had no background in either area, but I chose the Tunisia desk because I would be the only officer working on the country.

I moved across the hall in the State Department and I took up residence on the Tunisia desk. I was there '83 to '85. I had to learn a whole new set of issues, of course, from scratch. I didn't know any Arabic, and my French was not so great. I immediately started taking early morning French at the Foreign Service Institute, and did it for two years. That was quite enjoyable and important because there were a lot of Tunisians who came through the office and didn't know much English.

*Q: What was of interest to the Americans in Tunisia in this '83 to '85 period?*

EISENBRAUN: There were a number of matters of mutual interest. Tunisia had been ruled by a relatively benevolent president named Habib Bourguiba, who had been the first president of Tunisia after its independence in 1956, and still was president in '83. There was no democracy in Tunisia, but Bourguiba was relatively benign as long as one didn't cross him. He had been very

friendly to Americans in the post-war years because the Americans had shown interest in him years earlier. Throughout his time as the leader of Tunisia, he maintained a staunch and close relationship with the United States, and at the same time, he had stature in the Arab world from the days of his struggles for independence from the French. America had lavished a great deal of attention on Habib Bourguiba in the post-war years, and he had become something of a quiet spokesman for American interests in the Arab world.

In 1983, Bourguiba was elderly and frail. I met him briefly because in 1985 he was invited to Washington for a working lunch with the president, and my last day on the job I flew up with a few others from State on a plane provided by President Reagan to meet Bourguiba at JFK. I was shocked at how feeble he was; he could barely walk. He was supported by his wife and an aide or two. By the way, Peter Sebastian, our Ambassador in Tunis, attended the White House lunch the next day, and he told me later that any semblance of serious discussion melted away when Bourguiba early on began to flirt outrageously with the French-English interpreter. If my memory of Peter's story is accurate, this lady, the interpreter, was familiar to Bourguiba from other visits, so he started talking directly to her, complimenting her on her good looks, suggesting that they get together later, and generally acting silly. President Reagan reported roared with laughter and everyone had a good time thereafter.

Bourguiba's friendship with the United States remained steadfast from the 1940s until his death in the 1980s. I'm happy to tell the story of how that friendship developed, if you would like. After I unearthed it at the National Archives in 1984, I discovered also that the story had been lost to the State Department.

*Q: This is Hooker Doolittle?*

EISENBRAUN: Yes. Hooker T. Doolittle was the American representative in Tunis in the early '40s and into the period of Operation Torch and Eisenhower's invasion of North Africa in November 1942, starting in Algeria. Doolittle and Bourguiba, then an Arab radical fighting for Tunisian independence from the French, became good friends. Here's how I learned the story.

In '84, the office director, Peter Sebastian, was named to be Ambassador to Tunisia. Sebastian was the ranking American working on North African affairs, with 30 years of service in and around the area. When he was preparing to present his credentials to Bourguiba in the fall of '84, he asked me to do some research on Doolittle to find something from the archives, some unpublished letter or memo that Doolittle might have written praising Bourguiba that Sebastian could present as a gift. He knew that would please Bourguiba because Bourguiba made no secret to any American how much he thought of Doolittle.

My search in the archives was instrumental in my learning more about North Africa and the American relationship. I went to the National Archives building on Constitution Avenue and obtained access to Doolittle's original dispatches from Tunis in the early '40s. He was unusual as an American representative because he had made an effort to get to know the Arab radicals. These were bomb-throwing insurgents, and they weren't the people American representatives tried to befriend in those days, or thereafter, for that matter. In those days, the Arabs were willing to talk to Doolittle, who would meet them in the bazaars and coffee shops. He and Bourguiba hit

it off, and Bourguiba was flattered that an American wanted to know him.

I read Doolittle's original hand-typed dispatches at the Archives. These were produced in some cases while the Nazis were coming, being pushed from Egypt by the British, and pushed from Algeria by the Americans and the free French. I found that Doolittle had reported on his talks with the Arabs, Bourguiba among them, but there was very little that I could use because, although Doolittle might say some kind words in a sentence, the tone of the reports was not very complimentary. Maybe that was the only way he could get the reports to be read in Washington, perhaps because he couldn't be seen as having been co-opted by these people. I remember he wrote one letter to Robert Murphy, who was a major figure in the Department...

*Q: Well, he was in charge of a whole series of consular officers, both in Algiers, Morocco and Tunis before and under Vichy. Later, Murphy helped get our troops ashore.*

EISENBRAUN: I didn't know that.

*Q: He was consul general in Algiers. Murphy met Mark Clark and all on the beach-*

EISENBRAUN: I guess Doolittle was writing to him in Algiers. The gist of what Doolittle was saying to Murphy was, come over and visit and I'll take you down into the bazaar at night to meet these people. Doolittle said you'll be surprised how bright they are, they really have something to say. Well, this condescension wasn't going to serve Sebastian's purposes in '84. Nevertheless, I learned that Doolittle was doing things that no other American representative probably considered. To this day, I remember vividly that in one of his dispatches or letters, he said we're going to be successful in this war, and afterwards, we're going to have a remarkable position in Middle Eastern politics because all these lands are going to become independent. Doolittle said that the British and the French had so poisoned the well that they would have no influence, but the U.S. would because we are seen as the only honest brokers in the Arab world. The whole area's going to fall into our sphere of influence. His predictions could have been right, but it didn't turn out that way because he didn't anticipate the creation of Israel. It's haunted me ever since, this opportunity that he saw for American foreign policy in the post-war years that could have been ours to take.

So, Doolittle. What happened to him? Even Peter Sebastian didn't know despite his 30 years working on North Africa. It had been lost to the State Department. In the Archives, I found the original paperwork reporting that no less than General Eisenhower got angry over what he saw as this renegade American representative in Tunis running around meeting Arab nationalists when he should have been cultivating the French, in Eisenhower's eyes. There was a dispatch from Eisenhower ordering Doolittle removed, because, as Eisenhower declared, he doesn't seem to understand what we're doing. He said the reason Doolittle is in Tunis is to talk to the French and to create the closest bond possible with them; he has no business antagonizing the French by meeting Arabs, so let's get him out of there. Doolittle was relieved of his duties as the American representative. I can understand the needs of that time were to smooth the way with the French.

In the long run, however, Doolittle's personal diplomacy paid big returns for Eisenhower while he was President, because we saw Bourguiba as an important friend in the region. I wonder if

Eisenhower ever made the connection to Doolittle. As it turned out, ironically, I had to work with the Eisenhower Presidential Library to find a flattering reference by Eisenhower to Bourguiba, which I got released and which Sebastian used to good effect with Bourguiba.

During my orientation trip to Tunisia in 1983, my uncle Pete came with me. He had served in the 109<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers Battalion of the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during Operation Torch (and afterwards in Italy.) Pete told me that while the 109<sup>th</sup> laid mines very responsibly with their location recorded as map overlays later forwarded to the 34<sup>th</sup> Division and II Corps, he had always been bothered by the fact that landmines likely had not been entirely cleared. He also wondered what had happened to all the Nazi tanks and other equipment abandoned on the side of the road in the German Army's haste to evacuate to Italy. Pete and I asked about this in 1983, and we learned that occasionally, someone in the countryside was still killed by these land mines. I also learned from the Tunisian army that a fair amount of the Nazi equipment was still in Tunisian warehouses, and in many cases, tanks and trucks were still in good working condition. The Tunisians rented them out to film companies making movies of World War II. During my travel into the Sahara in the southern portion of Tunisia, I even saw a Nazi tank parked in an oasis. It was being used in the filming of a French war movie starring Jean Paul Belmondo.

Let's jump to the 1983-85 period in US-Tunisian relations. The relationship was a pretty close one in political, commercial and military terms. The driving force was that Colonel Qaddafi was next door in Libya. In those days Qaddafi was creating a good deal of tension within North Africa because it looked as though he had aspirations to undermine and take over the rest of North Africa. Tunisia crafted its whole foreign policy on the threat from Qaddafi.

Tunisian Ambassador Habib Ben Yahya's job in Washington was to remind us daily how terrible Qaddafi was and how dangerous he was to the sovereignty of Tunisia. Ben Yahya left Washington eventually to become Foreign Minister. He was acknowledged to be one of the more skillful of the foreign Ambassadors in Washington because he had a simple message Qaddafi was a dangerous man. Ben Yahya spread that message all over town, not just at State. He knew everybody and had the same message over and over; that is, you may think Qaddafi's bad, but we know he's even worse than you suspect. Ben Yahya reminded us that we needed to provide Tunisia with ever-larger amounts of military assistance, and this fit with Washington's concerns at the time.

In my first weeks on the desk in the late summer of 1983, our office was invited to the White House to give Vice President Bush a personal briefing on U.S.-North African relations, as Bush was preparing to visit Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. There were about eight of us in Bush's office, while Bush sat in an easy chair with his legs crossed and listened to our presentations, occasionally asking perceptive questions. I had some brief remarks prepared about Bourguiba and his life-long friendship with Americans, and that, luckily, seemed to satisfy Bush. Peter Sebastian took care of the details, not only because he was office director, but because he was the only one of us who was thoroughly knowledgeable about the region. At the last moment, Sebastian was asked to travel with Bush on the trip, and I learned later that Bush was instrumental in getting Peter his posting as Ambassador in Tunis.

*Q: Well, did the French play much of a role in Tunisia during this '83 to '85 period?*

EISENBRAUN: I would imagine they played an important commercial role. I expect that French investment and trade probably was the largest foreign investment in North Africa and in Tunisia. They followed events very closely because Tunisia was within their sphere of influence, and there were many Tunisians in France. I cannot remember whether the French provided the Tunisians a great deal of military assistance, but they must have provided some. We didn't coordinate much with them. When I was in Paris in 1983, I went by the French Foreign Ministry to share views after having spent two weeks in Tunisia and Morocco on my orientation trip, but that meeting seemed rather perfunctory. Surely they had important interests in North Africa, but their interests, I think, were more commercial than they were military or political. I'll leave it to the North African scholars to correct me on this.

One matter that stays with me from my trip to Tunisia in 1983 was something my Uncle Pete and I noticed everywhere, and that was the large number of young Tunisian men lounging around all day long on the streets and in the coffee shops. I'm talking literally thousands of them, and not just in Tunis. I saw huge numbers of young men, apparently unemployed, in every town around the country. I had read of the major unemployment problem in Tunisia (and in Morocco too at that time), and the potential these unemployed had to cause political trouble if antagonized. That problem erupted in January, 1984, in food riots around Tunisia. The authorities put that civil unrest down, but unemployment I think remains a major problem today in Tunisia.

**CHARLES L. DARIS**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Tunis (1984-1987)**

*Charles L. Daris was born in 1938 in Massachusetts. He served in the US Navy before graduating from the San Francisco State College in 1963. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. His overseas posts include Afghanistan, Vietnam, Western Africa, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Daris was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.*

*Q: After South Africa you went where and this would have been 1984?*

DARIS: I went to Tunis as political counselor. It was a very satisfying assignment. It was really the end of the Bourguiba reign so there was an end-of-regime atmosphere about the place and not always a rational decision making process, but it was basically a very amicable one where we knew we were dealing with a very old friend. I dealt with both the government and the political opposition, which was fairly well developed. Because it was really my last political officer job I guess I enjoyed dealing most with the opposition, the government being quite tentative in the environment that Bourguiba's failing health created. We had lots of Tunisian friends and we have retained them. Many of them are in the government now or have been brought into the government from the opposition. Tunisians are very sophisticated, engaging, with a distinct European content to their education, culture and government mechanisms. I found it easy to

relate to them, as a friend and as a substantive officer. I had a really wonderful three years there. And our son Patrick was born in Tunisia.

Peter Sebastian was our Ambassador. He arrived the same day we did, and our tours coincided almost perfectly. He became a friend and trusted colleague, and remains so to this day.

*Q: The United States has a good relationship with Tunisia historically and traditionally but we don't seem perhaps to have as many economic or energy or perhaps military interests as we do in Morocco or have on occasion in Algeria, is that right?*

DARIS: Yes. When I was there the economy was largely oriented toward Europe, although they were interested in diversifying. But they didn't have a great deal to offer U.S. firms on big ticket items. There was not a lot of oil, and phosphate production was modest and to some extent in competition with ours. We maintained a presence with our old personal ties and a moderate AID program. We were grateful for Tunisia's moderation in the Arab world and in international affairs in general. Bourguiba was enlightened about the realities of the Arab-Israeli equation and his views were more than often pro-U.S., more so than most Arab leaders. We found ways to show our gratitude for his willingness to be actively supportive in international fora. We had a modest military assistance program and a joint military commission in which I actively participated. We had cooperation in the anti-terrorism area. I might recall for you that the Arab League was seated in Tunis at the time I was there. It has subsequently moved back to Cairo. That gave the capital another dimension. It wasn't a terribly active one but it generated some activity for us.

The PLO had also relocated to Tunis from Beirut in the early '80s. We had at the time no contact with them but they were in town and we were aware of that and that added still another diplomatic dimension to Tunis. As a matter of fact the PLO presence led to one of the lowest periods of my stay, after the Israelis bombed and almost killed Arafat at one of his houses on the bay south of the city of Tunis. I remember sending my Foreign Service National assistant and a junior officer assigned to the Political Section to the bombing scene to try to help us sort out the confused situation. They came back shaken; a wild-eyed PLO fighter had come out of the bombed compound waving an AK-47 that had been shattered in the bombing, with its stock broken loose and hanging by the shoulder strap. The Tunisian police told them to get out of there immediately. The reaction of the Tunisians was that we had to have been aware of and probably in collusion with the Israelis. Nothing we could do could disabuse them of that and we had a tough few months of dried-up contacts and access, which was a little frustrating but which time eventually overcame.

*Q: We had not yet started to have any direct contact with the PLO in Tunis?*

DARIS: No. Washington decided to authorize that not long after I left. It was just the way things developed but we had our marching orders. I regret that events had not evolved to the point where we could have handled that contact while I was there.

*Q: You mentioned that you particularly enjoyed your contacts with some of the opposition people some of whom are now in government in prominent positions. Was that difficult? Was there*



*sensitivity about having a lot of contact with the opposition on the part of the government or was it fairly open and easy to do that? Secondly related to that, you mentioned the health of Bourguiba. I don't remember the dates of the death or when he gave up his position, did that happen while you were there?*

DARIS: On the first question the government was aware of our contacts. Our embassy had insisted on maintaining those contacts over the years. It was part of the game. We policed ourselves I think pretty well making sure we were even-handed. We never received any serious indications that this was a primordial matter for the government. I felt no particular pressure and did my work quite openly with the one exception being the Islamists. I had contacts with the budding Islamist movement at the time and one particularly good contact that I maintained with the discretion that I think was indicated, but it wasn't a covert relationship.

As to Bourguiba, he was removed from power by Ben Ali in the early autumn of 1987, just two or three months after I left so I was not there to see that transition.

*Q: So you weren't there when that happened?*

DARIS: No, I wasn't there.

*Q: But was it a little like the death of Tito, that anticipation that there would be a transition coming?*

DARIS: Yes, well Bourguiba didn't die. He was gently removed. There was no bloodshed, and while it occurred against his will it went as well as those extra-constitutional events go. There was unspoken consensus that he should relinquish power. Ben Ali has maintained stability in the country. He has a background in intelligence and security issues and that is something that tends to show in many things he does. It has not produced an active democratic society but the Tunisians I think seem reasonably comfortable with a paternalistic executive and the country is doing quite well in terms of its economy.

So little Tunisia was and remains a friend. I'm proud I contributed to the relationship. It certainly was a satisfying assignment for us.

*Q: It is also the site of the FSI Arabic language school and I don't know if there are other regional U.S. government activities there. That perhaps is the only one that has an impact wider than Tunisia by quite a bit.*

DARIS: Yes, the school was and is there, and they were largely independent. I didn't see a great deal of them but the environment was pretty good for Arabic study. Perhaps not the best that could be imagined but it was a tolerant, safe society in which our students could study Arabic, and the school operation there has worked out well.

*Q: Anything else we should say about your assignment to Tunis as political counselor? You were the acting deputy chief of mission on occasion I guess?*

DARIS: Yes, I was acting DCM for my last three months there.

Q: *Who was the ambassador there?*

DARIS: Peter Sebastian had left in early '87. Gordon Brown was DCM and became chargé.

**CHARLES O. CECIL**  
**Director, Arabic Language Studies, Foreign Service Institute**  
**Tunis (1986-1988)**

*Ambassador Cecil was born in Kentucky into a US military family and was raised at several military bases in the US and abroad. He was educated at the University of California, Berkeley and the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. A trained Arabic Language speaker, the Ambassador served abroad in Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, Beirut, Jeddah, Bamako, Muscat, Tunis and Abidjan. He was US Ambassador to Niger from 1996 to 1999. He also had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. Ambassador Cecil was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006*

*Note: Subsequently, Ambassador Cecil served as Chargé d'affaires of the US Interest Section of the Belgian Embassy in Tripoli, Libya from 2006 to 2009.*

Q: *In '86 you left.*

CECIL: That's right. I was considering a number of jobs here and there. We had come from Washington in 1980 to Bamako. It was six years abroad. We could have gone home, but I found an opportunity to go to Tunis. The Department was looking for a Foreign Service Officer to take over the job of being director of the FSI branch for Arabic language training in Tunis. I had always been interested in language studies, and I thought this was a great opportunity. Not only would I be given the opportunity to get a lot of management experience, which sometimes political officers don't get enough of before they become DCMs, but also, it would be a tour in North Africa, so it exposed me to that part of the Arab world. I thought also maybe in the course my Arabic might actually improve if I'm surrounded by all these teachers and all this material. When I heard of the opening, I volunteered for it, and I was very quickly paneled for it.

The question I guess that automatically comes to mind is why doesn't a political officer with a series of good assignments already behind him including two DCM-ships after all and a PAO-ship, why would I want to go to a language school? It's sort of stepping out of the main stream, but I had never been afraid to do that. Going to Bamako as PAO—Public Affairs Officer—was one example of wanting to step out of the mainstream, and so I saw Tunis as just another opportunity to broaden myself. I knew it would be a stimulating intellectual experience, and in retrospect I think I would have to say the two years in Tunis could well be the most stimulating experience of my 35 year career—though there were many.

Q: *'86 to '88.*

CECIL: '86 to '88, right. The reason the job interested me was that I wanted to be sure that what was being taught was what we really needed in the field. I had talked occasionally to officers who had come through the school, and I had somehow gotten the idea that maybe it was a little bit off-target, maybe it could be more properly focused on what we needed to do our job in the embassies. That was one reason that it caught my interest.

I also wanted to meet a new generation of officers coming up behind me. These would mostly be officers probably in their early 30s. By that time I was 46, so I wanted to meet the new generation. I wanted that North African experience, and I like the idea of being in a language teaching environment.

What I found when I got to Tunis was very interesting. Three of the instructors had come from Beirut when the school was in Beirut. They were instructors I had had in 1971 and '72. Sari Ansari and his wife Khaldia, and Ziyad Kayyal. They were three of the real pillars of the program. What I found was they were still using the methods they had learned in the '60s and applied in the '70s, and here we were in the late '80s and they really hadn't really kept up to date with modern language teaching methodology. There was not a single book in the school on language teaching methodology, which amazed me. There wasn't much communication with Washington on such questions as how to teach the language, and a lot had been learned in the '70s and '80s. None of the Tunis instructors, whether they were the originals from Lebanon or whether they were the three Tunisians that had been hired, had ever been sent to Washington to be qualified as language testers.

FSI had a very rigorous program. The chief of language testing, Thea Bruhn, did great things in standardizing and assuring quality control on testing levels. The Tunisians had never been sent to Washington to become qualified examiners. That was a point of professional sensitivity. They felt like second class teachers because they were not qualified to test and award grades. The Ansaris and Ziad Kayyal were allowed to test.

There were other aspects of the methodology that I thought were old fashioned. They were still using a book that used transliteration where the Arabic was written in the Roman alphabet instead of in the Arabic alphabet. It was a terrible practice that should never have been used. We had a huge collection of selections from Arabic newspapers that had been printed and put into a book. The standard way to treat them in the classroom was to read them and translate them into English.

I thought that was missing an opportunity. I knew that you could test comprehension in Arabic by asking a student questions in Arabic and seeing if the student can reply in Arabic. You don't need to translate every word, and you're missing all that opportunity to be speaking Arabic in the classroom if you're translating into English. Things like that.

There were no video materials being used. It was pretty much a new idea. I started getting us several kinds of video materials. I turned to FBIS, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service which was monitoring television news broadcasts throughout the Middle East. I found that they were quite happy to provide us with video tapes of Arabic news broadcasts. We started getting news broadcasts from several countries: Yemen, Jordan, Egypt. I'm not sure we got news from

Kuwait, but I found that the Kuwaitis had produced an Arabic version of Sesame Street.

*Q: Which is the children's program highly... Most children of a certain age have been introduced to that in the United States and Europe, too.*

CECIL: It was such a rich treasure trove of programs. If you look at Sesame Street you see that not only is it teaching young children to read and adding to their vocabulary, but it also consists of cultural features, little educational snippets that are usually only two minutes or three minutes long, but they're conveying something about Arabic culture.

My favorite one that I still remember was a little film of a father telling his 10 year old son the importance of all the steps that they were going through together on the pilgrimage in Mecca. "This is why we do this. This is why we throw the stones. This is why we drink the water." It was a wonderful cultural feature for a 10 year old. Okay, not all of the students thought they were 10 year olds or should be treated like 10 year olds, but nevertheless we made a lot of use of these programs in the classroom, both the news and the Sesame Street. I think it helped bring us forward.

Also during my time I got two of the Tunisians brought to Washington. They did go through the testing, training, and certification program. Later I went to a language teaching conference in England with the Lebanese, Ziad Kayyal, and what I'll call the most gifted Tunisian, Hashmi as-Saghir. We went to probably a three day conference of teachers of Arabic all there to discuss methodology. It was a wonderful intellectual stimulation.

I did other things to try to make the instruction more targeted. I asked all the embassies—our embassies—in the Arab world if they would please send us old invitation cards that they had received to whatever kind of functions they were invited to just so the students could see not only the style because the calligraphy varies a lot but simply what are the normal words and phrases used in an invitation? I asked the same embassies to send us examples of diplomatic notes in Arabic so we could get used to the very flowery and formal openings and closings. Then there's the substance in the middle, so we were dealing with the real diplomatic notes in the classroom and real invitations, calling cards. Sometimes Arabs use really flowery script on their calling cards and on their invitations. That's an art-form in itself. Nevertheless there are certain things you can learn that make it a little bit easier, that will increase your chances of being able to read what they're trying to tell you.

We had when I arrived probably about 18 students of whom six were U.S. military and 12 were Foreign Service. This I should say: Tunis was the second year of instruction. For the State Department the first year took place in Washington right here at FSI, and then you would come to Tunis for your second year. Eleven months, really. Eleven months in Washington, 11 months in Tunis.

For the military they started at the defense language school in Monterey, California. They were all army officers. We didn't have any other service. Most of them had spent 18 months at DLI in Monterey before coming to Tunis. The Defense Department paid us tuition to take these officers in. They were almost all, maybe not everyone, but almost all were destined to become FAOs,

Foreign Area Officers, with a specialty in Middle Eastern or North African affairs. They would usually in the course of that program also have a year at a university somewhere to concentrate on the academic side, but they came to Tunis for language.

One of the problems we had was that the Foreign Service Officers would arrive more advanced after their 11 months at FSI than the military officers would be after their 18 months at DLI.. There was always a gap.

*Q: What was the problem?*

CECIL: I don't know enough about DLI teaching techniques to explain it, but they didn't learn as much at DLI as they did here.

*Q: I'm a graduate of the program. I took Russian back in 1951 at Monterey, but life moves on.*

CECIL: I can't explain it. I would just have to say that FSI is more rigorous and more demanding. We spent six hours a day in class here, and you go home with at least two hours of homework a night. Maybe the DLI has other things that they're doing. That was a problem; we always had to deal with trying to place people together. Our classes, of course, never had more than four students per instructor, and making the periodic class assignments was one of the most challenging parts of the director's work because every student wants to be in a class with someone else who's just slightly better than he is.

*Q: Absolutely! Did you find that the Monterey people were looking at what was happening, or was this something that was sort of not pointed out to them or what?*

CECIL: Of course, I didn't talk to Monterey. I talked to FSI Washington. I noted the problem, but I think it was more up to the dean of the language school to take up the issue. I don't know to what extent they tried to do that.

I learned also at one point that we gave the Defense Department a special break on price, on tuition. I remember writing a note. I think it was Ray Ewing at the time was the dean. He was followed by Ambassador Thayer, so I'm not sure which one of my bosses it was at the time. I said there's no reason to give the Defense Department a discount on tuition! They can pay it fully, but I don't know if anything happened on that, either.

I remember another thing I tried to do to make the instruction more targeted to our needs. When I arrived there was no practicing telephone conversations. That's a very difficult skill to learn, When you have no visible clues, you're not looking at the speaker, it's sometimes harder to follow what's being said to you.

*Q: Very, very hard.*

CECIL: After a few months in Tunis I was able to come back to Washington for consultations at FSI. During that visit I talked to whatever we called the communications bureau in the State Department about what it would cost to set up an internal closed circuit telephone line inside our

school. The school was located in the little suburb of Tunis called Sidi Bou Said, in a traditional-style three-story building of which the first and second floors were used for classrooms.

I said, “We just need an internal telephone system not connected to the outside world just so somebody in one room can call somebody in another room, and they can have a phone conversation.” The State Department tech did some back-of-the-envelope calculations, and he said, “You could probably get all the equipment you need, and it could be set up for maybe just a little under a thousand dollars.” That doesn’t sound like much, but our budget was quite modest. I talked to a private company. I forget now which one, but I know in my notes that their estimate was \$700 to do the same thing.

I don’t know why, but I just had a hunch. I went to Radio Shack, and I discussed my need at Radio Shack. I said, “You know, this is what I need to do. Do you have anything here that I could do that with?” The guy sold me a two-speaker office intercom made in China for \$8.95 and then as a backup I went to Toys R Us, and I found a child’s toy called Phone Friend. It ran on batteries, and cost me \$16.00.

I went back to Tunis with the Radio Shack equipment and Phone Friend as a backup, and we strung these wires from Radio Shack from one room to another, and that system served us the rest of my time there! We would have a teacher go into one room, and he would call a student in the other room, and they would have a conversation. That was the sort of practical thing that was missing when I arrived and I thought we really needed to bring into the program. I don’t know how long it continued. I’m sure the equipment eventually broke, and I doubt that anybody else went to Toys R Us for replacements, but anyway...

That’s one of the benefits that I think someone in the State Department realized a long time ago of alternating between Foreign Service Officers and scientific linguists as directors of the overseas language schools. The position title, and I tried throughout my time to get this changed, and I never succeeded. Bureaucracy is very slow to move. The title of that position is Scientific Linguist. I said to Ray Ewing and Mr. Thayer after him, “You know, on my record it would look a little bit better if we could call this position something like FSI School Director. That would apply to both FSOs and the scientific linguists that you sometimes send out.”

It never happened during my time. I was always called the Scientific Linguistic in my personnel records even though I had never taken a course in the science of linguistics.

*Q: I was just looking at the time, and I was wondering. This might be a good place to stop, Chuck, but I’d like to ask if there’s anything else about the language program that you’d like to talk about and then also talk about the students being able to get out and around and that sort of thing. Then let’s talk about Tunis and what you were getting out of Tunis and all that the next time.*

CECIL: I think actually we can probably... If you have five minutes, we can probably wrap it up. There wouldn’t be that much more to talk about next time, and we can probably move ahead.

I wanted to make the point that the scientific linguist’s role in overseeing language instruction in

my view is always to ensure that we are applying our latest and best understanding of language teaching methodology. To that extent I was trying to become a scientific linguist without benefit of the academic training. I did buy a lot of books and read a lot of books about methodology in my time.

But the role of the Foreign Service Office was to ensure that what the school is teaching is practical and is what the officers really need when they get out into their embassies or out into the field. That's why I think there's such great benefit by alternating back and forth the kind of person we send to direct the school. It hasn't been a one-for-one alternation, but I know there have been quite a few. April Glaspie I think was the first FSO to direct FSI Tunis and then Cameron Hume and then I was the third. There have been some after me. That's really important, I think, that we continue to ensure that from time to time we have a Foreign Service Officer there. That would apply to the schools in Yokohama for Japanese and in Seoul for Korean, and in Taipei for Chinese as well. I think they have probably had some FSO directors there.

We pretty much followed the FSI format as far as class time and effort was concerned—six hours a day in the classroom and then a lot of homework at night. Being in an Arab country did allow opportunities obviously to get into the culture. The Tunisian dialect is a little bit unusual, but we didn't teach Tunisian dialect in Tunis; we taught what we call “modern literary Arabic” or “modern standard Arabic,” the Arabic of the radio news broadcasts, basically or the TV news broadcasts. The practice of adjusting your ear and your understanding to a local dialect was just a skill that we would need no matter where we went because every country is different. They speak a different kind of Arabic.

We had some opportunities to travel, not as much travel money available as had been when I went to Beirut but nevertheless the students were able to get out of the school. Every student was encouraged and given the money to make a trip to Israel during our time. I remember one year we were so strapped that all we could do was pay for the airfare, and students had to pay for their food and lodging, but they were willing to do that. I think everyone was willing to do that. That's too bad that a student has to subsidize the U.S. government in that way, but nevertheless we did give people opportunities to travel to other countries and use their language outside the classroom.

Our situation was, as I said, out in the suburb of Sidi Bou Said, so I was not particularly involved in embassy policy discussions. I did attend the weekly country team meeting of the ambassador who was Peter Sebastian when I arrived and Bob Pelletreau for my second year. They were both very supportive of the school and my efforts, but I didn't get much into discussions of Tunisian politics. I was there during the time when Habib Bourguiba was overthrown by Bin Ali. Bin Ali got a bunch of doctors to sign statements saying that Bourguiba was no longer capable of carrying out the duties of the office. He was in fact senile. That happened very quietly and very peacefully. It didn't really affect us. I was also there the time the Israelis went a team into Sidi Bou Said and assassinated one of the Palestinian leaders who lived only about four blocks from our school. They came in at night, went into the house, killed him, and escaped. That certainly was cause for concern. I don't know what else to say about it. It didn't really affect our teaching. We went on without interruption.

At the American School my youngest son... My two oldest kids by that that time, by Tunis, were both in the States at Northfield-Mount Hermon Boarding School, but my youngest son went to the American School in Tunis. He had friends from the PLO because Tunis was the PLO headquarters at the time. I remember one time one of the PLO kids invited my son to a birthday party. We knew that the father was basically an arms procurer for the PLO. My wife wondered briefly about what to do about this invitation, then she just decided, "I'm not going to worry about politics. This little boy is my son's friend. He's invited him to a birthday party. I'm not even going to tell the embassy." She took him, and dropped him off, and picked him up, was invited in for tea by the mother and all that sort of thing.

The one discussion I remember most poignantly was the time in the country team meeting in Tunis where we actually discussed quite seriously, "If you are the elementary school principal and you're our security officer in our embassy and if suddenly one day none of the Palestinian children show up at school, what do you do?" That was a kind of difficult issue we had to think about. What do you do if suddenly the Palestinians stayed home? There are quite a few Palestinian children in the American school. Fortunately, that never happened.

After Tunis... I can't put this on the recording, but I want to show you. This came in the paper one day, and I clipped it out. This was I think from the Washington Post, and my little note here that I put on our bulletin board is dated April 23, 1988. Subject: Second Careers. I addressed it to all Arabists. The attached appeared in the Washington Post classified ad section March 25, 1988: "Car sale person. Sell new and used cars and trucks. Advise clients of availability to meet needs, write contracts, etc. Must speak Arabic, have six months experience. Call such-and-such a number." [laughter] Anybody who loses interest in the Foreign Service has a promising career as a used car salesman in the Washington, D.C. area.

After Tunis in the summer of '88, I did come back to Washington, and we can talk next time about my four years in Washington '88 to '92.

**GORDON S. BROWN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tunis (1986-1989)**

*Gordon S. Brown was born in Italy in 1936. He graduated from Stanford University in 1957 and served in the U.S. Army from 1957 to 1960. Mr. Brown entered the Foreign Service in 1960 and served in numerous countries including Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Tunisia, and Mauritania. He was interviewed December 11, 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

Q: Well, Gordon, in 1986 you left NEA, whither?

BROWN: To be DCM at the embassy in Tunis: a very nice job, and a very nice country, an interesting time. We were there for three years...



Q: *...from '86 to '89.*

BROWN: The first year was relatively quiet. I was chargé part of the year because the previous ambassador left a bit early. It was interesting to be chargé -- the first time I'd had that kind of responsibility in a post overseas. In fact, it was rather odd. If you'll remember, my previous posting overseas had been as a junior member of the economic section in Jeddah, and I had left that post angry at the lack of responsibilities that I had. I went from that position several years later to number two in an embassy without ever having been a chief of section, without ever having written an efficiency report on anybody other than a secretary, without ever having had any management experience whatsoever -- as I thought, a little bit of a bad mark for the career promotion system in the Department that this kind of thing had happened. I happen to like management issues and I felt that running the day to day activities of an embassy like Tunis was just about what I wanted. Several different agencies were involved, lots of coordination, and the DCM, as you know, is important to the extent that he keeps things off the ambassador's desk. I enjoyed that.

Q: *What was the situation in '86 when you arrived in Tunisia?*

BROWN: The Tunisians were still smarting over the Israeli raid on the Palestinians -- the PLO had quarters across the bay from Tunis -- and that colored our relations, because no matter how much we objected, the Tunisians still felt that we had somehow or other had a hand in that raid. Our relations otherwise were pretty good. We had a defense relationship with Tunisia which was maintained by certain sponsors or benefactors of Tunisia in the Congress who always earmarked aid to Tunisia military programs. We had a decent relationship with the government, as the Prime Minister who had created a lot of troubles in our bilateral relationship, Mr. Mzali, had gone. My first year there, Bourguiba was still around, the relationship was pretty good. Sometime in the second year Bourguiba was replaced by Ben Ali, his Minister of Interior and then Prime Minister, and that brought in a new and rather interesting phase as we tried to figure out whether Ben Ali was going to make changes in the political line, and whether or not he was going to open up the country to a more democratic form of...

Q: *It's a one party state?*

BROWN: It is a one party state. Though it was an interesting second year, nothing much changed in the end, although the head of state had changed. But all the Tunisian tendencies towards centralism and conformity came into play, and eventually the one party state survived -- just under a slightly different format: nominally pluralist, but not many votes for the other parties. Our relationship with Ben Ali continued (to be good), since he was obviously a national security and defense type. He maintained the defense relationship, and our political relationship was still pretty strong. And, of course, the third year I was there was interesting because that was the year in which we opened the dialogue with the PLO in Tunisia. And although I was not the negotiator -- that was the ambassador -- I was the guy who kind of helped bring it together on the administrative side. I was the guy who had to negotiate with the PLO about the form of the conference, and arrangements, and where the flags were, and all those things that only make news when they are screwed up. It was an interesting time. Bob Pelletreau, my ambassador, was

getting his instructions straight from Washington on the phone, and he shared them with me to the degree he could, but he and our political counselor, Edmund Hull, were really doing the substance of that negotiation while I was running the embassy.

*Q: How did Pelletreau operate as an ambassador?*

BROWN: He's a very private person, and he does not communicate very well, which is a shame because he always has a lot to say when you can drag it out of him. He's extraordinarily competent. He knows his material and has a retentive mind, and can bring up anything he wants to in the way of information. But as the DCM it was a little awkward at times because I didn't really know where he was on certain things unless I walked into his room and demanded that he tell me. But he let me run the embassy. I mean I was very happy, in fact, that the PLO dialogue came up -- because he had let me run the embassy during our first year together, but he was beginning to get a bit antsy in that situation. Tunis is not a very busy place, and Pelletreau is a very competent fellow, and I could get the impression that he was beginning to pull back some of the cards he had given to me, or dealt to me, in the first year. Then the PLO thing came up, and he had his hands full on that, and I was able to continue as sort of the executive officer of the embassy, which is a role I appreciated and enjoyed.

*Q: What was the feeling, you're a Middle East hand, and all of a sudden we're talking to the PLO which had been forbidden by Congress, I guess, it's almost engraved in stone. What was the feeling about this?*

BROWN: Well, I suppose the feeling was, on a practical level, a certain amount of pleasure because we had always thought that ultimately some dialogue with the PLO was necessary in order to have any kind of a peace settlement in the Middle East -- you couldn't ignore them. The second feeling was one of fear, that you really had to walk on eggs on this one. The ambassador was extremely exposed. One misstep and the whole thing could be off, so it was a very tightly controlled -- as you can imagine -- kind of scenario that we walked. Very, very closely controlled from Washington, and very, very choreographed at every step.

*Q: Did you find as part of this that you were having to make sure that the embassy staff didn't chat away too much with anybody, newspaper people or anybody else like that.*

BROWN: It wasn't that much of a problem. But Pelletreau certainly made it clear that this was his negotiation, nobody else was empowered to speak for the government about it, or on it, and that the other people had better keep their mouths shut at diplomatic receptions, etc. And we did, and there weren't any loose cannons in our embassy, so we didn't have that problem. And then, of course, the information -- as I suggested earlier -- was so tightly controlled that they didn't have much to talk about anyway.

*Q: During this period how were relations, as we saw them, between Tunisia and Egypt?*

BROWN: If I remember, they were strained, and I can't remember about what to be perfectly honest. It wasn't a serious problem. One of the causes of strain was, I think, that the Egyptians were trying to get the Arab League back during that period, and the Tunisians were the seat of

the Arab League, had been since the '67 war, the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League, or the freezing.

*Q: No, this would be Camp David, wasn't it?*

BROWN: Camp David, yes, '79. Right, not the '67 war. '79, whenever Camp David was.

*Q: Camp David is when Sadat went to Israel, we're talking about '76-'77. Camp David was during the Carter administration, relatively early on. Well, anyway, we're talking about '77-'78.*

BROWN: Okay, when I was still in Riyadh. The Egyptians wanted to get the League back in Cairo. The Tunisians were resenting it, and didn't want the Egyptians to get it back. The Egyptians had a very good ambassador in Tunisia and the relationship was okay, but not awfully good.

*Q: Having the Arab League there, was this considered something that meant anything by this time?*

BROWN: It meant enough to make Tunisia a very interesting place because having the Arab League there, of course, was why the PLO was there -- one of the reasons why the PLO was there. It also meant that the other embassies in Tunis had fairly high level, or good, people assigned. So Tunis was much more of a listening post, as a result of having the Arab League there, than it would have been without it. The Arab League, of course, did not really amount to terribly much. We from the embassy would occasionally go around and make a demarche at the Arab League, usually at my level, or at the counselor level. We didn't take it seriously enough to very often engage the ambassador. It was kind of pro forma to go around and scold the League for doing something that they had done wrong -- that kind of stuff.

*Q: What about Algeria?*

BROWN: Ben Jedid was still in power in Algeria, and to be perfectly honest I think in Tunisia we were unaware of the degree to which his attempt at reform was a) corrupt; and b) unlikely to bear fruit. We were sort of cheering him on. He was talking in terms of democratization in Algeria, and bringing the FLN into the modern world. I don't think we in Tunis had a better appreciation than the embassy in Algiers did. The embassy in Algiers was essentially saying, let's see if he can do it. He may succeed. We weren't as pessimistic, or cynical, as perhaps we should have been in that respect.

*Q: Well, Libya, I would imagine would be something looming out there all the time, wasn't it, as far as a problem.*

BROWN: The Tunisians themselves had problems with Libya. There were camps within the Tunisian government as to whether their relationship with Libya should be one that was warmer than it was, or more covert. They danced, to some degree, according to our tune because we were military allies, and Tunisia couldn't afford to cold-cock us on that one. So occasionally Libya came up between us in the bilateral relationship, but most of the time the Tunisians went along

with us and tried to isolate Libya, and keep it as a low level and festering sore, I suppose, on their border. They had their own problems with the Libyans, and there was a very long fight by the people in the south of Tunisia to expand -- particularly economic -- relations with Libya, because their economy in the south of Tunisia actually was traditionally more directed towards Libya than it was towards Europe. So it was an interesting situation, but the government stayed fairly firmly in the anti-Libyan camp, even though Ben Ali himself was rather friendly, I think, to some of the Libyan leaders.

*Q: What was the view of Qadhafi at that time from the embassy?*

BROWN: A man of terrorism, creator of trouble, monster nuisance, had to be isolated, and we tried to enlist the Tunisians to help us on that. And, by and large, they cooperated.

*Q: When did we bomb Qadhafi's headquarters? Was that during your time there?*

BROWN: I believe that was when I was in Washington.

*Q: How about dealing with the Tunisian government? How did you find dealing with them?*

BROWN: I must admit that one of my first experiences in Tunisia colored my feeling about that, though it was probably much more atypical than otherwise. I had been in Tunis for about three or four days, and the ambassador said (sort of towards the end of the day), "Gordon, the Minister of Economy has just called, and he wants to discuss an issue with us. So why don't you come and join me?".. So we jumped in the car and went out to the Minister's house, which was situated on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean, overlooking, in fact, our ambassador's house -- he had even a better location than our ambassador. We sat on his balcony and were served whiskey in large tumblers by his beautiful daughter, wearing something that would not pass muster downtown or in an Islamic setting. The Minister's first statement was, "We have a problem; let's see how we can solve it." After having served most recently in the Gulf where it's always, "We have a problem, what are you going to do about it", or "You have a problem, we're not going to help you with it," I was very struck by this. And that did pervade much of our relationship with the Tunisians -- a cooperative relationship, particularly on the economic and defense side. They tried to discuss things in a relatively good and logical way. The Tunisians, of course, also had an ability to play games with us, and they did that quite regularly on the political side. Some of our relationships on the political side, Arab-Israeli issues, Libya, etc., were much more typical posturing and strained relationships. But you could pick up a phone to a Tunisian and do business over the phone; it was a change from the rest of the Arab world.

*Q: What about the French? How did we see their role at that particular time.*

BROWN: I don't think we had much concern about their role. They were interested in the stability of the southern Mediterranean, and they had the same interests we did. On the commercial and cultural side, they saw us as a very suspicious actor on the stage. I think the French embassy was always looking over our shoulder to see that we weren't trying to turn Tunisia into Anglophone, pro-American place, rather than an ex-French colony. They were very conscious of their cultural, economic and military ties there. They were afraid they were being

undercut by us. So they were much more suspicious of us than we of they.

*Q: When you arrived there was Bourguiba playing any role, or was he out of it?*

BROWN: He would act officially a couple of hours a day, during which sometimes he made very interesting, and very good decisions. But then his health deteriorated so badly, and he was being manipulated by so many people in his palace guard, that you never really knew whether his decisions were good or not. And sometimes they didn't hold up.

*Q: Is that what the political section was trying to do, figure out who was in control at any one particular point?*

BROWN: I don't think we played court politics quite that much. What we tried to figure out was whether...Tunisia policies are fairly predictable, they're not that erratic. The man's behavior was erratic, so we tried to figure out, "Is this in keeping with their traditional policy?" We had good relations with the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior, the key ministers, and so unless there was something on which we really needed to go to Bourguiba, we dealt with the Prime Minister and the others.

*Q: Was oil much of a factor in Tunisia?*

BROWN: Well, American oil companies were coming in. Oil was being discovered. It was an interesting time for the American oil companies. I think Conoco had discovered oil, and yes, it was a factor, -- because oil companies were seen by some Tunisians as potential saviors of the economy, with oil earnings.

*Q: What about commercial work?*

BROWN: We had a pretty serious effort in expanding the American commercial presence in Tunisia, but we ran into a lot of structural problems. Most American companies didn't see the Tunisian market as being sufficiently interesting to set up separate distributorships, or anything like that. They tended to work out of their distributorships in Paris, which always meant a 30% markup on the price. So we weren't always competitive, and we tried to break that down as much as we could. But by and large, in spite of a pretty extensive effort, and I think a good effort, we were only marginally successful commercially. The French were still the commercial kings of the block.

*Q: Then you left there in '89?*

BROWN: Right.

**EDMUND JAMES HULL**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Tunis, Tunisia (1987-1990)**

*Ambassador Hull was born in Iowa and raised in Illinois. He was educated at Princeton and Oxford Universities. After service in the Peace Corps, Mr. Hull joined the Foreign Service in 1974 and had postings in Amman, Beirut, Jerusalem, Tunis and Cairo as well as serving as Ambassador to Yemen from 2001 to 2004. In Washington, the Ambassador served on the National Security Council and as Advisor to the Secretary of State on Counterterrorism. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

*Q: Let's move on to 1987. You're off now to Tunisia.*

HULL: Right. Tunisia at this stage was a very interesting posting for three reasons. One, President Bourguiba, the founding father of the Tunisian Republic, is in his late 80s and faltering and therefore his succession is in the offing. Secondly, the Arab League had moved from Cairo to Tunisia as a result of President Sadat's peace agreement with Israel and therefore Arab politics were very active in Tunis. Number three, the PLO had also moved its headquarters to Tunis after it had been forced out of Lebanon by the Israeli invasion in 1982. So what had been a diplomatic backwater at many times, at this particular moment was a focus of a great deal of American diplomacy.

*Q: Your job was what?*

HULL: I was political counselor.

*Q: Let's talk about the ambassador. Who was it and what was his background? How did he sort of use the embassy?*

HULL: Ambassador Robert Pelletreau was one of our most outstanding diplomats. He had previously been ambassador in the Gulf. He had previously been a deputy assistant secretary in State and in Defense. He was an extremely thoughtful man, a New Englander who chose his words carefully and spoke precisely. He was a man of great integrity and honesty. He was trusted by Washington, and he was a delight to work with because he was also very personable, treated his staff with respect and gave them scope to develop their talents and use their talents. I could not have asked for a better boss.

*Q: As you hit the ground there what was preoccupying you?*

HULL: Tunisia was in a very strange situation. Bourguiba was still functioning as president and yet he was doing so erratically. I had a chance to see this firsthand because when Ambassador Pelletreau presented his credentials he took with him a small group from the embassy which included myself and so we had a chance to meet President Bourguiba and to see his state. Now I had been in Tunisia from 1971 to 1973 in the Peace Corps so I had known Bourguiba of the early '70's when he was one of the leading statesmen in the Arab world. He was very farsighted and his vision for Tunisia was still producing benefits. The man I saw in 1987 was a shadow of his former self. He could barely carry on a conversation. He was very shaky on his feet and it soon became clear that his mental faculties were fading fast because he would dismiss a cabinet one

week, make new appointments and then the following week he forgot who he had appointed to the various ministries. So it was clearly just a matter of time but it was not clear at all how the succession would occur and what damage might occur to Tunisia if President Bourguiba continued to exercise his powers in senility. The minister of interior was a young man named Ben Ali and he was respected. He was a very efficient interior minister. It was therefore of interest to us when he suddenly became promoted to prime minister and began to organize a new government. As I said, these shifts were occurring weekly in some instances. I'm sure that Ben Ali knew that the tenure of prime minister was tenuous.

I got a phone call one evening from Ambassador Pelletreau who asked me to come over to the residence. When I got there Ambassador Pelletreau said he wanted to talk to me about a meeting he had had. He had been called in to see Prime Minister Ben Ali, and Ben Ali had spoken to him about President Bourguiba's condition and also in general terms about the stability of the country.

Ambassador Pelletreau was trying to decide what to make of this conversation. It was clear that he and Ben Ali had agreed that President Bourguiba was no longer functioning adequately. A few days after that we were both given the news that President Bourguiba had been declared incapable of governing and pursuant to the clause of the Constitution he had been moved out and Ben Ali had assumed the presidency. In this, Ben Ali had the support of Hedi Baccouche, a leading politician of the ruling party, as opposed to Ben Ali, who was more of a career official. The Tunisian Army fairly quickly fell in line with Ben Ali. We looked at the technicalities of it. We, of course, knew the conditions Ben Ali had come through. We knew that Ben Ali had the strong support of the security services and the political party. So our judgment to Washington was that the succession was not in effect a coup. It had been done according to the Constitutional requirements, and Ben Ali was in power and likely to stay in power. Our recommendation was that the U.S. government should recognize the new government as legitimate.

We had been told, I had been told in training, and Ambassador Pelletreau knew from experience that in these situations what was most important to Washington is clear-eyed analysis of the situation and then a very clear recommendation on what U.S. policy should be. I believe we provided that focus to Washington, and Washington followed our advice.

*Q: Was there a strong opposition hovering over the horizon at that time? Were we looking at say, a radical Islamic thing or something going on of that nature?*

HULL: Political Islam was a significant concern. In Algeria, the storm clouds were gathering. It would take another year for that to explode, but we knew political Islamists in Tunisia had a very strong party and were a factor in North African politics.

We were also concerned frankly with Libya because at that stage Qaddafi was still very rambunctious, doing irresponsible things. Only a few years earlier, he had actually intervened in Tunisia militarily, and we wanted to head off any adventurism on the part of Libya.

*Q: What was the intervention like?*

HULL: It was an intervention in the south across the border that divides Tunisia from Libya and a small military altercation between the two.

*Q: Anything happen?*

HULL: Yes. In those days of course, Libya was a bete noire for Washington. We very strongly supported Tunisia. We increased our military assistance to Tunisia, and we wanted to lay down a clear marker that Tunisia had very strong friends if the Libyans wanted to repeat their adventure. Also the offshore oil fields that the Libyans and Tunisians contested were subsequently determined to be Tunisian by the World Court. So we kept an eye on that situation as well.

*Q: In this we had helped check Libya so what, did you at that time see a real contest of power inside Tunisia?*

HULL: Our judgment was that Ben Ali would hold power because he had the support of the military, the security services and the party. The question was what kind of power it would be and initially Ben Ali and Baccouche adopted a very liberal position, including a declaration that, I think, Thomas Jefferson would have been proud of. There was a hope that under Ben Ali, Tunisia would see a flourishing of democracy. In Bourguiba's old age, he had become more tyrannical and had lashed out at all opposition groups so Ben Ali arrived with the promise of a lighter hand. Unfortunately, as time passed those early promises were not respected, and Ben Ali's strong security bent became dominant and so since '87 we have seen a progressive hardening of the rule in Tunisia and the golden opportunity for an Arab democracy was missed.

*Q: Where stood you know, some of the groups, I'm thinking of students, the general population. How did they stand?*

HULL: I think the general population understood that President Bourguiba's time had passed. There was a joke at the time, I recall. An old man would go down each day to the newsstand and look at the front page. He would never buy a paper, just look at the front page and then he would go home. After he did this on several occasions, the agent at the newsstand said, "Well, why don't you buy a paper?" And the old man said, "Well, you see I'm only interested in the obituaries." And the news agent said, "Well, that's all the more reason to buy the paper because the obituaries are on inside pages." And the old man said, "Not the obituary that I need to see."

Ironically, relieved of the presidency, President Bourguiba returned to his hometown of Monastir and lived many more years. He proved to have a very robust constitution and was treated with respect throughout his very long life.

*Q: After this constitutional move, how stood the situation in Tunisia?*

HULL: The situation was fairly stable and under the economy minister, who was a former World Bank official, the Tunisians had initiated a series of economic reforms in 1986. Those reforms grew out of an economic crisis that proved, in retrospect, an opportunity and the minister of economy helped the government take full advantage of it. The reforms that he enacted put the Tunisian economy on a successful track which it has maintained since 1986.



*Q: Well, in a way they were blessed by not having overwhelming oil. This is often a curse.*

HULL: Exactly. On either side of them in Algeria and in Libya, oil or gas-rich economies that did not develop in a healthy way. So you're right.

*Q: The PLO has relocated to Tunisia. We all remember Black September in 1970 in Jordan. I mean the PLO was certainly a nasty tenant in Lebanon. Had they learned their lesson? How did they stand?*

HULL: This was a different situation. The PLO in Tunisia was not the PLO with armed military might. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the PLO forces had been dispersed around the Arab world. Some had gone to Sudan, some had gone to Yemen. What had come to Tunisia was the PLO leadership, the politicians. Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat), Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir), Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf) those were the ones that were in Tunisia. At that stage, there was a strict prohibition against U.S. contacts with the PLO except the very limited, carefully controlled security contract which had occurred mostly in Beirut. So we were in a situation of being in the same space, but not talking to each other. Often we would be at events where we might turn to our neighbor, ask a few polite questions and learned that it was a PLO official at which stage you had to pretty much terminate the conversation and not be perceived as engaging. The PLO presence did attract attention and sometimes violent attention. The Israelis on one occasion conducted an air strike on PLO headquarters which was just outside Tunis killing many Tunisians which, of course, then strained the U.S.-Tunisian relation. On another occasion, Israeli commandos landed on the beaches and then proceeded to use the house of Abu Jihad and assassinated him. Abu Jihad was perhaps the most popular leader in the Palestinian national movement, more popular than Arafat, The Israelis targeted him almost certainly because they were confronted in the Occupied Territories with the Intifada (the uprising). Although the Intifada was really homegrown, the PLO had to respond to it and Abu Jihad had responsibility for the occupied territories, and therefore the Israelis were sending a message in assassinated him. In a way, it was a futile gesture. It had no practical impact on the Intifada, which was an indigenous phenomenon. However, it did deny the PLO one of their best leaders.

*Q: When you're using the term "Occupied Territories", could you explain if that had a specific meaning.*

HULL: We're talking about the West Bank of Jordan and Gaza Strip which were occupied by Israel in 1967 – i.e. the former being the consular district of Jerusalem where I had worked from 1975-79. So, there was a great deal of tension on and off, and we were following things as closely as we could but at arm's length. In 1986 in the fall, Arafat convened the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in Algiers next door, and I was asked to go over from Tunis to help Algiers in reporting on the meeting. At that time, we had Chris Ross in Algiers I believe, as charge. Chris was one of the most outstanding Arabists of his generation, and a very canny diplomat. I enjoyed working with Chris.

We covered the council meeting. Of course, we did not go directly but we had developed in Tunis very good relations with American media and when they came into interview Arafat, they

stopped by the embassy and got our take and we are would get their take. Therefore, we had some pretty good accounts and assessments of the chairman and the PLO. Then those same correspondents covering the PNC would help us out in understanding what was going on.

It turned out that this was an historic meeting. In the meeting, Yasser Arafat declared the foundation of the Palestinian state but in so doing recognized Israel as a state and this was a significant departure from the Palestinian covenant. It was not enough, however, for Washington to initiate a dialogue. We had our conditions that Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy had endlessly repeated around the Middle East which included recognizing Israel but also renouncing violence and terrorism and accepting Resolution 242. There followed a couple of months of diplomatic back and forth indirectly between the PLO and Washington, including a very memorable visit to New York by Arafat for the General Assembly in which he addressed the assembly with a handgun strapped to his waist. Finally, Arafat made a statement, I believe it was in Geneva at a UN special session on Palestine which had been transferred from New York to Geneva because of visa issues. There Arafat had conceded to the U.S. formula. The Reagan administration acknowledged the change in PLO policy and announced there would be an official dialogue and that that dialogue would take place with the one and only channel that would be the U.S. Embassy in Tunis led by Ambassador Pelletreau. So we found ourselves designated as the official channel for the PLO and this reflected, I think, Washington's esteem and trust in Ambassador Pelletreau as someone who could manage such a sensitive contact well.

So we had then a series of high-profile, formalized meetings between the U.S. Government represented by the U.S. Embassy and the PLO. And in addition to those formal meetings, we had the ability to talk with other members of the PLO informally. Washington was very careful in giving us much leeway in that regard. The formal meetings unfortunately, became very much set pieces. This was 1988, and it was in the last days of the administration, the Reagan administration. We had followed through on our commitment to dialogue with the PLO, but there was no interest in Washington to put substance into that dialogue. Subsequently, when the Bush Administration succeeded the Reagan Administration the status continued. So we in Tunis were frustrated. We were trying to make something of this, and yet we found ourselves being hogtied by Washington. We would get questions from the PLO. To answer them, we would take the substance from our longstanding positions and try to repackage it in a way that met the PLO's expectations. Washington would not even look at the repackaging of the material. It was as if we were dealing with a script. Nor did it matter if the PLO changed its positions. I remember on one occasion that our interlocutors for the first time accepted the idea of an "interim arrangement" for the occupied territories. This was an element in the Camp David Accords which the PLO had always rejected. I knew because I had been political counselor in Jerusalem at the time and charged with convincing the Palestinians that this step was a necessary one. We highlighted the development for Washington, but got no significant recognition of it much less reciprocal flexibility on the U.S. side. So the formal meetings led nowhere.

Our informal meetings were a bit more productive. We saw Hakim Balaoui, the PLO ambassador to Tunis, regularly and then Ambassador Pelletreau got permission to enlarge the effort so we were able to either meet with Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), who eventually succeeded Arafat as President of the Palestinian Authority, and even Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), who was especially controversial because of his leadership of the Black September Organization. I joined the

meetings with Abu Mazen. I remember the first one was over at Balaoui's residence, which was just a block from mine, and he had an enormous spread of Palestinian food, almost everything you could imagine. But he made the mistake of asking me whether there was anything not included and in excess of honesty noted there was no "aqoub."

*Q: Which is what?*

HULL: "Aqoub" is a kind of thistle that grows in Palestine and is unknown elsewhere in the Middle East. Humble, yet appreciated by connoisseurs. Since I spent four years in Jerusalem and I was married to a Palestinian, I was intimately familiar with the Palestinian cookbook. About 10 days after this, someone showed up at my gate with two packages up "aqoub." The Palestinian ambassador had somehow found a way to fulfill my desire. I thought it indicative of how much the Palestinians wanted the dialogue to be productive. After that dinner, we had occasion to meet repeatedly with Abu Mazen, and we were very much impressed by his demeanor, by his language, and by the substance of his what he said. He was a man of who originated in the town of Safed, which had become part of Israel. He was knowledgeable about events in Palestine, knowledgeable about Israeli politics, and very much a proponent of a peaceful solution. I think our initial readings of him has been borne out in all of his activities up to the present day.

Ambassador Pelletreau also stuck his neck out and got Washington's permission to meet with Abu Iyad as I noted above. As the head of Black September, he had quite a bit of blood on his hands. Nevertheless, after Abu Jihad had been assassinated, Abu Iyad ranked second in the PLO, and Ambassador Pelletreau engaged with him. In fact, Abu Iyad atoned somewhat for his past by being helpful to the U.S. in Beirut in protecting Americans in very tenuous situations during the Lebanese civil war.

*Q: I've talked to Bob Dillon and others who talked about the PLO.. (was contact with Abu Iyad primarily for security?)*

HULL: Our concern was not so much security although there were concerns that we involved might become targets for assassinations. Intelligence reports indicated that those involved in the U.S.-PLO dialogue was being targeted by extremist Palestinians who rejected this approach. However, our primary concern was to broaden the support within the PLO for a peaceful approach so that people who were talking to us would not be isolated and weakened politically. Ambassador Pelletreau realized that if Abu Iyad was also involved in the dialogue in some way his involvement would reduce the pressure on people like Abu Mazen.

When the contact with Abu Iyad leaked, there was a firestorm of criticism. Ambassador Pelletreau went back to Washington and was called in to see Secretary Baker who had only recently taken over as secretary of state and who generally took a dim view of professional diplomats who complicated his political situation. According to Ambassador Pelletreau, he was asked to explain who did so and noted that the meeting had been approved by Washington in advance. Margaret Tutwiler, one of the few people who could talk frankly with Jim Baker, supported Ambassador Pelletreau's on this point and, in effect, said, "Mr. Secretary, you did approve this meeting." I think Ambassador Pelletreau was always grateful to Margaret Tutwiler for speaking up.

And so Ambassador Pelletreau came back to Tunis and unlike Ambassador Veliotos from Cairo did not serve as a scapegoat, but rather continued on with the dialogue, his career continued with many more significant responsibilities—e.g. ambassador in Cairo, where I was his DCM, and eventually assistant secretary of state for the Near East. Unfortunately, Washington never got around to putting substance into the dialogue and therefore encounters became more and more ritualistic. Finally, a splinter group of the PLO engaged in a operation in Israel, and we called upon the PLO to condemn that operation “or else.” They did not condemn it in so many words, and the dialogue was suspended.

*Q: What was our evaluation of Yasser Arafat at that point?*

HULL: We saw Arafat repeatedly and on occasion with a visiting congressman. Arafat was a mix. His personal habits were somewhat eccentric. He would not meet until the late hours of the night or the wee hours of the morning. You would never know exactly where and when you would meet. He had several locations in Tunis. You’d get a call announcing a meeting in a very short time at a different place. He was almost invariably gracious and would make an effort to extend hospitality. I remember he insisted on preparing my cup of tea, handing out honey for sweetener, He would speak at some length. His Arabic was quite good. His English was fractured, however, and at times I thought he did himself a disservice by trying to convey very complicated positions in elementary English. It would have been better to use good interpreters for this material. He was a bundle of energy, and he would be having meetings throughout Tunis and then fly off and do circuits of the Arab world or go to Europe. He was in perpetual motion. He was viewed affectionately within the PLO. He was not feared. He was not like Saddam Hussein, for example. His colleagues would disagree with him in meetings and so it was not a dictatorial arrangement. He eventually took a wife who was the daughter of one of my close contacts in my Jerusalem days. It was rather ironic that the chairman who was called “al khitiar” (the old man), in his declining years picked a young Christian girl as his wife.

*Q: Did you get any of the feeling that later became so apparent that Arafat was someone you couldn't make a deal with? You know, when presidents tried to bring off things. When you got him up to the brink of really making a decision that might have even brought peace there, he couldn't make it.*

HULL: This is the conventional wisdom. I do not think it is valid. I think Yasser Arafat could make a deal, and this gets us into a very complicated subject that is what happened with Oslo and the failure at Clinton’s Camp David Summit. But in a nutshell, my impression is on the Oslo Accords neither side performed as it had promised. The United States did not hold them accountable. Arafat’s political position was weakened by nonperformance on the part of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Then he was ignored initially by Prime Minister Barak, who preferred an agreement with Syrian President Assad. Only after we allowed the Syrian track to become a dead end, did President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak belatedly turn to Arafat to address the Palestinian part of the equation. They persuaded him to come to Camp David on the understanding that there would be no forcing of a deal. Arafat actually had said he was not prepared to make a deal, not politically prepared, I believe, given the fact that any concessions on Jerusalem and refugees would be extremely controversial among Palestinians. I think that

history, when it's finally written and understood, will show a much more complex picture than Arafat not stepping up to the plate at a critical moment.

*Q: We are talking about the period just before the end of the Clinton administration in 2000. Back to when you were there, did you feel sort of the hand of both the Israelis and the Israeli lobby breathing down your neck the whole time you were there? I mean, was this sort of just in the air?*

HULL: Well, of course the Israelis had carried out both the airstrike against the PLO headquarters and the assassination of Abu Jihad in Tunis so they made their power felt directly. I didn't personally feel direct pressure from the Israeli lobby until I was working for the National Security Council in Washington. But the hamstringing of the U.S.-PLO dialogue reflected, I believe, a political calculus in Washington that gave great weight to the lobby.

*Q: I'm talking about when you were reporting did you say, okay. If we're making a cable concerning these things we know that it will probably be on the desk of a proponent of Israel in Congress before probably the secretary knows. I mean was that part of the ambience or not?*

HULL: We didn't believe that would be the case. We did our reporting in very restricted channels, "nodis", "exdis" and to my knowledge there was never a leak.

*Q: What about internal politics? In the first place, you were in Tunisia from when to when?*

HULL: From 1987 to 1990.

*Q: What was going on internally?*

HULL: Economic development coupled with gradual political suppression. After a brief period of political liberalization with the passing of Bourguiba, President Ben Ali began to curtail the opposition and particularly the Islamic opposition in the form of the "An Nahda" (Renaissance) party. In 1988, the civil war in Algeria arose because the Algerian military intervened after the first days of the election in which the Islamic Front had taken a lead. Therefore, you had this violent clash going on next door in Algeria and the reaction in Tunisia was a tightening of security and a retrenchment of liberalization.

*Q: Did that sort of move rather quietly into Ben Ali camp or not?*

HULL: It moved fairly quickly into the Ben Ali camp, and I think Ben Ali engineered the crack down, which was natural to a former minister of interior. My impression was that Hedi Baccouche, being a politician, was sincere in the early declarations of political liberalization. His passing from the government and consolidation of power in Ben Ali's hands moved Tunisia away from the goal democratization.

*Q: In Algeria you had these religious fundamentalists. Were they trying to stir things up in Tunisia? You think certainly of Tunisia at that time as being rather free from religious orthodoxy.*

HULL: Yes. Tunisia was probably the most moderate Arab country and Bourguiba had instituted reforms concerning women, for example. The Algerian Islamists were not fishing in troubled waters in Tunisia to any great extent. They had their hands full with the Algerian military. In Tunisia, you had an indigenous Islamic party, “An Nahda”, which in Arabic means Renaissance. It was led by Rachid Ghannouchi, who was in exile. It was on paper a very moderate Islamic party, and we knew of no activities that belied that position.

*Q: Did Qaddafi have a following in Tunisia?*

HULL: Not a significant following. He was behaving quite erratically. He had run down the Libyan economy, and he had intervened militarily in Tunisia. He was not a popular person.

*Q: How about the French? Did the French have any significant ties there?*

HULL: Yes. French language and culture at least in the capital was so strong that it was a challenge to get Tunisians to speak to you in Arabic. Both Ambassador Pelletreau and I spoke Arabic, French and English, and we would be delighted when we would find some politicians, and I found some in the opposition, who were more comfortable in Arabic than in French. The mainstream politicians would divert to French very quickly.

*Q: I was told that Dick Parker who met blank one time chastised his cabinet you know, the American ambassador speaks better Arabic than you do.*

HULL: And with good reason.

*Q: Did the French have any particular interests, you know, other than cultural interests and much influence there or not?*

HULL: They had lots of influence. They had a grand embassy on Avenue Bourguiba. They were there in force. They had assistance programs. Also, the Tunisians often got medical treatment in Paris so they had very considerable influence. That seemed to be an end in itself – i.e. maintaining this special relationship between France and Tunisia that really didn’t serve any particular French interest to any great extent. Nevertheless, it was important to both sides.

*Q: How about the major naval base? Was that?*

HULL: At this point Bizerte was not a significant strategic factor.

*Q: Was there any overlay or involvement in Tunisia during World War II?*

HULL: Yes, of course, one of the decisive battles of World War II, the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

*Q: We got our tail whipped. Our first battle in Europe, I mean in the East. It was called the Atlantic desert.*

HULL: But eventually we did succeed. We used North Africa as a staging ground for our campaign in Italy. There is in Carthage, one of the northern suburbs of Tunisia, a beautiful American military cemetery. It's been maintained impeccably and annually on Veterans Day we would have a ceremony there. I think nowhere in the world have America's fallen been better remembered than in that cemetery.

*Q: Did you ever get to the Kasserine Pass?*

HULL: I did indeed. I walked it.

*Q: Were the Egyptians at all influential at that time?*

HULL: Egypt was represented by Ali Maher, a very intelligent fellow and this reflected Tunisia's importance as the site of the Arab League. The Arab League was an Egyptian invention, and there was great umbrage in Egypt when it was moved from Cairo to Tunis after Sadat made peace with Israel. The Egyptians never really accepted that move. It was always their intent to get it back to Cairo, which eventually they did. Meanwhile, they were well represented at the Arab League.

*Q: I would think they would have been sort of natural ties between Tunisia and Morocco. Did Morocco play any role or not?*

HULL: At the time there was a regional organization. I think it was called the AMU, the Arab Maghreb Union, which comprised Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. It was an attempt by the North Africans to come up with their own club. Other clubs were forming in the Middle East, and they wanted theirs. There were some meetings, but not a lot of significance or interaction. As we pursued peace in the Middle East, both Rabat and Tunis were stops for the secretary of state as he would try to build support for peace. Of course, King Hassan of Morocco was always helpful in that regard. He headed the Jerusalem committee of the Arab League, and he had a great deal of prestige and influence.

*Q: Was there any Jewish community left in Tunisia?*

HULL: Not to speak of. There were historic synagogues in the island of Djerba, but the community had left for Europe or Israel.

**RICHARD E. UNDELAND**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Tunis (1988-1992)**

*Richard E. Undeland was born in 1930 in Omaha, Nebraska. He became deeply interested in Foreign Affairs during World War II. He graduated from Harvard in 1952 with a degree in English Literature and received an MBA from Stanford. One of his professors at Stanford nominated him for a scholarship of unrestricted*

*study in Egypt, which he did from 1955-56. In addition, he has also served in Saigon, Algiers, Beirut, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Tunis. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy between July and September of 1994.*

Q: *You were in Tunis from 1988 to 1992?*

UNDELAND: That's right.

Q: *You had already been at the pinnacle, so this would mean a step down. Why Tunis and how did it work out for you?*

UNDELAND: You've hit the nail on the head, in that it was a question for me. From Cairo to Tunis was in the bureaucratic world a large step down, but there were a number of factors that made Tunis appeal to me. I had spent a career in the Arab world and I really wanted to remain there, if I could, on what was likely to be my last assignment before retiring, certainly my next to last. Secondly, Tunis was open and not much else was. Thirdly, I had been in Tunisia 30 years previously and was intrigued by the idea of discovering the differences I would find. I cannot ignore the fact it's a very pleasant place to be and live. Then, Bob Pelletreau was ambassador, and in my book there is none finer in American diplomacy, professionally and personally. Also, the Bourguiba era had ended and I envisaged stimulating times as Tunisia came to grips with its new reality. Moreover, the headquarters of the Arab League and PLO were there. Having added up all these positive reasons, I still wasn't sure how my ego would react to the smaller program and budget and being assigned to a country of less commanding interest to the U.S. I wondered whether the real me would be ready to welcome Tunis or whether I would come to resent what most would see as a tremendous come-down. However, once there my misgivings immediately vanished. There was more than enough to do, more than enough to stimulate and please, so that after only a few months, I requested the assignment be extended from three to four years.

In addition to the program and to coming to terms with the Tunisia of Ben Ali, we were from the outset involved in a move to new quarters out of the center of the city, so there was a challenge in that sense. We had to move because our security types applied those rigid formulae of which they are so fond, determining we were not safe from terrorist attack, because we had no setback from the street. To move was a decision taken back in 1983, but with an incredible series of expensive missteps, we were still there 5 years later. Anyhow, move we did, and we then had to recast our thinking from a city center operation to one in the suburbs.

It was a fairly typical USIS program in Tunis in its basic elements, working with the media and information side of the Tunisian government, running a center with a library, handling nearly the full range of exchanges, putting on the occasional exhibit and cultural presentation, working with the Ministry of Education on English teaching and the like. Tunis was the location of the office which put out USIA's Arabic magazine, *Al Majal*, and it was the home base of the Regional Librarian. Later, we added the Regional English Teaching Officer position, transferred from Morocco -- (Wisner was not, after all, the only or last ambassador shortsightedly to eliminate this slot.) The *Al Majal* office was later closed with the functions moved back to Washington. We didn't have a branch post or a book translation program. One significant difference with Cairo was no Fulbright commission; we handled that ourselves working closely with



AMIDEAST. Nice place to be PAO.

*Q: Did you get involved at all with the PLO or not? Were you under restrictions?*

UNDELAND: We had no contact with the PLO, in accordance with the long standing dictates of Washington. We did, however, at the PLO's indirect request see that they got copies of our information bulletins, containing policy statements from the White House, State Department, and other parts of the government as relevant to the Middle East. Then during the time of the US-PLO talks conducted by Bob Pelletreau, we arranged things for the visiting press, working with the Tunisian information authorities. I had the lovely job of being American spokesman for those talks, lovely because by instructions I never had anything to say, not even confirming that meetings took place! That and all else had to come from Washington.

Until the direct talks began and after they were suspended, we learned about what the PLO had on its mind largely from diplomats of other countries who were in contact. I personally was not involved in this, although you could not be in Tunis and not pick up tidbits on the PLO from time to time.

*Q: How was America received and perceived there, say at the universities or in the press?*

UNDELAND: We were perceived positively, our ties with Israel apart, based in large measure on the excellent bilateral relations that had existed ever since Tunisian independence. There was widespread admiration for our institutions, culture, products, openness and prosperity. However, there were a few, who felt we had become too beholden to Bourguiba, particularly during his last years in power, but this was very much a minority, not often heard, view. There were also some Ben Ali loyalists, who feared he would not get from the U.S. the regard or respect given to his predecessor. These reservations were of course expressed only privately. In the press, there were the occasional anti-American digs, but not too much that was outlandish, except for the old, almost automatic, issue of our support for Israel. That is, apart from the Gulf war days, which I'll deal with later.

We were well received at the universities and were constantly asked to do more than our means would let us. When we put on a modest book exhibit at the Faculty of Engineering in Tunis, the Dean expressed his appreciation, but said it was not enough. He wanted Fulbright professors, study and research grants for his staff, guest speakers and anything else we could come up with. It was pretty much like that everywhere.

Our small Fulbright Program, which gave us two to five lecturers per academic year during my time there, was minuscule in comparison to what the French provided, but still had high standing and was much sought. Two political scientists and a museologist, all of whom stayed for three years were the high point, but we also had others who did commendable jobs, primarily in American/English literature and language. Competition for Fulbright grants to Tunisians to do research and earn American doctorates was intense, resulting in our getting among the very best Tunisia had to offer; without exception, they did a fine job in their researches and studies. The Tunisian universities and Ministry of Higher Education clamored for more, many more scholarships and grants.

I put a special emphasis on working with the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, or ENA, which was based on the French *grandes ecoles* and turned out the new elite, those to become governors and other senior officials. Again, we could never do enough.

Relations with the press, indeed all the media, were cordial. They welcomed contacts and liked to receive our materials, although they rarely carried them. And what they did run was almost entirely devoid of political content. As I have said elsewhere, that did not bother me; it was a sign of their maturity that they did not want handouts from any government.

A few editors and journalists were among my most stimulating interlocutors, but the media itself was not very interesting. It was carefully controlled, so that it wholly reflected the government view in the case of the state operated radio and television, and the press never got far afield from the government position on anything. Instructions would come out on important matters, but anyway editors and writers knew how far they could go and rarely tried to go beyond these unwritten but well understood boundaries. Educated Tunisian often chafed at their tame media, I should say tamed media, but were accustomed to it, for the controls of the Ben Ali government merely followed in the footsteps of those of the Bourguiba era. Nobody likes to be on the receiving end of criticism, but the Tunisian authorities seemed to me to be particularly touchy. One of the two most important weekly magazines was closed down and its director tried, convicted and given a long prison sentence for ostensibly other reasons, but in fact for going after some ministers. I personally spent less time with the media than the universities and other institutions.

Thirty years had seen the disappearance of that standoffishness and prickly criticism, which had riled us when I was in Tunisia before. It was an amazing change in that it was so total. Now, Tunisians desired social as well as business relations and liked to be invited to our homes. Except for purely business affairs, wives wanted and expected to be included. This was a 180 degree change. For two evening stag events at the Residence, word in no uncertain terms got to me that this exclusion of wives was not appreciated and would I personally please pass the message to the Ambassador. I gladly, perhaps gleefully, did so, for I felt precisely the same way.

*Q: Was Libya seen as a problem? Did you feel somewhat in competition with the Libyans, and what they were doing?*

UNDELAND: Libya never loomed large, as far as our activities and my contacts with Tunisians were concerned. Many of those with whom we dealt thought us rather silly to spend so much time worrying about Qadhafi. He, to their thinking, was not important enough to warrant what they saw as an American obsession. In general, Tunisians looked down on Libyans and saw Qadhafi as perhaps a minor threat, but more a clown. After his occasional visits, stories would make the rounds of stupid things he said and did. Still, Tunisians wanted to get along with him, for he was their neighbor, had money and could make mischief. There were also some 15,000 Tunisians working in Libya to think about and the two countries had mutual oil development interests, particularly in off-shore fields they shared. The Tunisian authorities watched the border carefully and those concerned with security took him more seriously than the population at large. There was a fairly widespread feeling that by having cordial relations with him and the Libyans

in general, the Tunisians were keeping Qadhafi under control, which was to the benefit not only of Libya's neighbors, but also of the U.S. I should add I had often heard this same line from the Egyptians during my previous assignment. One other element was in this picture. During the year of the drought in the south of Tunisia, Libyans in droves came across the border to purchase all sorts of things in Gabes, Sfax and elsewhere. This helped get Tunisia by bad times and was not forgotten.

*Q: Tunisia was seen as lining up with Saddam Hussein on the Gulf war and things leading up to it. It was hard to understand this from a friend of America. Could you sort this out for me?*

UNDELAND: There are many factors at play, and I think I can best tackle your question by approaching it historically. When Ben Ali came to power -- November 7, 1987 -- one of his moves was to have Tunisia take a more pan-Arab stance, which had been such an anathema to his predecessor, while at the same time keeping good relations with France, the U.S. and the West in general. With many in Tunisia, this struck a responsive chord. However, it inevitably brought into question whether more pan-Arabism didn't necessitate a loosening of the Western ties and the special relationship Bourguiba had had with the U.S.

Would Ben Ali be accepted by us the way Bourguiba had been was something I heard a number of times shortly after my arrival. Then came his unofficial visit to Washington in late 1988, with a state visit the following April, on both of which he was warmly received by President Bush and others. Tunisians were delighted; the test had been passed, and their fears dispelled. American-Tunisian relations were taken to be as secure as ever.

The conservative, slow paced, essentially authoritarian ways of the Ben Ali government were being increasingly asserted, with the ruling Party -- RCD (Ressemblement Constitutionnel et Democratique) replacing the Neo-Destour of Bourguiba -- and government becoming its twin vehicle. The enthusiasm, which marked Ben Ali's first year in power diminished greatly, and Islamist groups began to test the waters, to demonstrate and create disturbances on campuses and in the city. At the same time, Islamist candidates running in the nationwide elections as independents, though not elected, had garnered enough votes to frighten the authorities. The crack-down came, with arrests and security forces seen everywhere. That earlier popular glow became a brief interlude in the past.

Only some 4 months after the triumphal state visit to Washington, Saddam invaded Kuwait, and while Tunisia did not support this, it didn't take a strong opposing position, but it did vigorously condemn America for answering Saudi Arabia's call for help and sending of American forces to the Peninsula. Nothing was said officially, but the media coverage and comment and stands taken in international councils showed where the Ben Ali government really stood. How much of it went back to pan-Arabism sentiments remains in question, but the reality was there. Why had this happened? First, there was no love lost between Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, or Kuwait for that matter, and Tunisians saw the invasion of Kuwait as an Arab affair to be dealt with by the Arabs alone. The basis for serious U.S.- Tunisian differences was thus in place, and as events moved inexorably forward, the distance separating the two governments became more pronounced, with Tunisian public opinion lining up solidly with Ben Ali and with Saddam Hussein. The Tunisian media became scurrilous on the U.S. and was getting more extreme and outrageous all the time.

Our protestations were rebuffed on basically two counts. The first was there was considerable popular support for Saddam Hussein, ably promoted by the Iraqis and their friends, for his standing up "fearlessly" to Israel -- how often I heard that line -- and for the dislike of Saudis and Gulf Arabs, whom we were supporting. But there was another side, a local one and undoubtedly more determining, and that was the purported "weakness" of the Government as "proven" by the Islamist challenges that had broken out. Therefore, the line went, the Government had to be out in front to assure it took away pro-Saddam arguments from the Islamists, and the way to do this was to get there first. Our Tunisian interlocutors, including some of our best friends, told us this public stance was needed to disarm their enemies, pointing out they were our enemies as well. I believed, and still do, that this position was both honestly held and at the same time self serving, but in any case, it left little question on where Tunisia, officially and popularly, was lining up.

*Q: What happened during the war? I mean, how did the Tunisians react? Were we in any danger? Tell me how thing evolved.*

UNDELAND: As events ground inexorably toward the war, more and more security was seen in the city and when the air attacks started, streets were closed around the Embassy, APCs with soldiers in battle dress were stationed around it, and we were assured that we need have no fear, for we would be protected unconditionally. The USIS center had concertina wire strung out in front of it and two trucks with 50 caliber machine guns were parked in front of the entrance. At one point there was a pro-Saddam demonstration coming down the street a few blocks away; it was diverted away from our center by the police, who then turned it back before it got anywhere in the vicinity of the Embassy.

We obviously shut down all public parts of the our operation, but we remained quite busy, getting out a flow of information from Washington to the Government, media and a number of Tunisian institutions. Fortunately, we had just bought a big new Xerox copying machine that supposedly could handle any load, but nonetheless it was so constantly breaking down through overuse that for a while the Xerox people actually assigned a repair man full time to our office! For safety's sake, our drivers did the delivering in taxis. It would not have been prudent to have American cars or diplomatic/foreigner plates on the streets. One of the ironies of the situation was that only the playing field of the French school separated the Iraqi Embassy from USIS. Another was the "error" in a weekly news magazine, in fact the one shortly thereafter shut down as I noted, which transposed captions under pictures of visitors to the magazine offices, so that I was turned into an Iraqi diplomat and two Iraqis became Americans. Was it done intentionally? Let me just say I'm from Missouri on this one.

My main tasks were to keep tabs on public and media opinion, writing reports on them for Washington and particularly doing a daily cable on media reaction. With a couple of exceptions, Tunisians were as available to me as ever. I would tell them of my media reporting, adding that what I was sending back was not doing Tunisian standing in Washington any good. In most of my contacts, I encountered a defensive attitude and the hope that once the war was over, things could get back to normal. The sentence, "*il faut tourner la page*" became a veritable refrain. At that point, I could not be very optimistic, and I so told them.

To indicate how emotional the times were, the dean of the Faculty of Law said in a meeting, which was reported in the press, that Saudi Arabia had the legal right under the U.N. charter to seek defensive support from wherever and whomever it wanted, and it was legally justified to have turned to the Americans. For this statement, he received a number of menacing phone calls, including death threats, and decided to take off for France until things cooled down.

The Iraqi versions of what was happening were given wide credence, that went far beyond rational belief. One was the front paged Iraqi claim its army had scored a huge victory, among other things capturing 2,000 French legionnaires. A political scientist contact, who claimed to be a strategic expert, said on television there was a good chance the Iraqis were going to win, or at least so bloody the Americans they would have to leave. I asked him if he really believed this nonsense, adding we would talk again after a couple of months to see if he had been right or not, for the one thing a real expert cannot be is wrong. I did later challenge him as I said I would, and he sheepishly brushed it off as a product of the tenor of the times and not to be taken seriously.

Let me end this by saying that Tunisian friends and some we did not know at all well came to Joan and myself, saying that if we ever felt threatened, we should come to them and stay with them. They would help and protect us. The political and personal were two worlds, wholly apart.

*Q: But here you've got a relatively sophisticated country, at least the people you're reaching. The issue was not really our support of Israel, but rather an outrageous grab by a vicious dictator. I'm surprised that, from what I'm gathering from you, that the Tunisians were really quite solidly behind Iraq.*

UNDELAND: I've touched on some of the reasons, but I'll go into it some more. You're wrong about the Israeli factor as seen through the Tunisian optic, for it played a leading role in determining attitudes. Israel was a central part of the picture to the Tunisians, and Saddam firing off his Scuds against Israeli cities was widely, privately applauded. Though the media did not say so directly, it was clear they agreed. That was the immediate reaction, and it was not modified that much upon reflection.

Another element was the widespread belief that although many Arab governments lined up with us and the Saudis, the vast majority of the people, even in these countries, did not. This was held to be true in Egypt and Syria, for, as they said, the people really felt the same way the Jordanians did, although they did not have the means to express themselves. This view was as true among the elites as with that elusive "man in the street".

One should not underestimate the degree of antipathy and downright contempt felt towards the Saudis and the Kuwaitis, and it didn't take very much to bring it to the surface. They were looked on as arrogant and insulting towards other Arabs, an embarrassment, hopelessly corrupt and self indulging, engaged in all forms of sin, while at the same time using but little of their wealth and power to help their Arab brothers. One Tunisian, who had been an ambassador several times, told me, "we really don't care what happens to these people; they're an insult to Arabs."

Another was the phenomenon of the Tunisian government being expected by Tunisians to take the lead on such issues, with many accustomed and willing to follow blindly. It had happened

under Bourguiba; it happened under Ben Ali. It might have been different were the issue of immediate, personal concern, directly affecting the people, but that didn't come into play.

We also must not discount or underestimate the effectiveness of actions taken by the Iraqi government, the information emanating from Baghdad, and also the efforts of the few in the small Iraqi Embassy in Tunis. On the last, you may not like the work of these diplomats, but you have to give them credit for achieving a lot with very few resources. They knew how to play on existing prejudices and thinking and did so effectively. They got out thousands of color pictures of a smiling, confident Saddam Hussein, which were plastered everywhere, so there was the visual reminder of this popular Arab, in uniform but looking fatherly, at every turn.

*Q: During the war, I mean the war stretches two periods. There was the invasion, the building up of the defenses, and then our offensive. What were you getting from Washington? This was pretty much a black and white thing in the eyes of Washington.*

UNDELAND: We had no shortage of materials, with one exception I'll get to. I've told you of our stepped up distribution of statements, backgrounders, reports and news stories. I should add we were sending quantities of visuals coming over WorldNet to the TV station. There were interviews on the horrors of the Iraqi occupation and then visual reports after our forces entered the city. Supply wasn't the problem. It was the non-usage. The one thing that did get placed were questions by Tunisian journalists to American officials and their replies on WorldNet interactives. We clamored for more, but only got three. It was the one instance of the official American viewpoint appearing in the Tunisian media. This lack of coverage wasn't something that could be affected by views of editors or directors, for the decisions came from the highest levels of government, i.e. the Presidential Palace. My repeated protestations to the Secretary of State for Information, i.e. the Minister of Information, and to media editors and directors were received with a shrug and an unwillingness to argue the case in more than perfunctory terms, because they had no authority on this matter. It wasn't their decision to let the anti-American junk flow, though a lot of it would have, had they been able to have had their say.

CNN coverage contributed mightily to determining, strongly reinforcing, pro-Saddam attitudes, for its coverage of the bombing of Baghdad, particular the bunker full of civilians, was played over and over on Tunisian TV. It had no credibility problems, for this was what was coming from the Americans, wasn't it?

A story on the security aspect, for every effort was made to see nothing physically happened to us and our interests. One of my joys was to tramp over the fields of Carthage, with their crops, wild flowers and ruins. Just after the bombing of Iraq began, I walked past the American North African World War II Cemetery, which is located there, and came upon an encampment of a dozen or so soldiers bivouacked just outside the cemetery wall. They had obviously been stationed there to make sure no hotheads desecrated the graves. In a similar precaution, soldiers were stationed around the American School.

I think it correct to say that the authorities just did not think that what people said and what the media carried was all that important and therefore looked on it as an easy way out. I encountered this train of thinking fairly often and never got a satisfying answer to my query on whether there

might not be unfortunate lasting effects from exposure to this stream of nasty stuff.

A few days after the fighting had ended, I woke up one morning to find a media, which had stopped all criticism of the U.S. and all support for Saddam. It had happened literally overnight. I set up an appointment with the Secretary of State for Information that morning. He could not have been more cordial. I asked him what had happened? He answered, "well, the war is over, and there is no reason for us to continue it, so we told the editors to stop it, and all, except the one who is out of control, did." He went on, "you're happy with this aren't you?" I agreed that having the attacks against the United States come to an end was a good thing, particularly as they had been so absurd and unjustified in the first place. Then I asked him what effect this abrupt change would have on the media's credibility? "How do your readers and listeners and viewers react when they get up one morning and find the spigot abruptly turned off?" The Secretary said it was not a big deal; they'd soon become accustomed to it and forget about what had gone before. He went on, that even if credibility were affected, "it's better that we stop it now than have it drag on." I told him I would of course report his comments back to Washington, adding I expected some of the readers there to be perplexed and perhaps pretty derisive about the campaign which had gone on for months. He looked at me quizzically and said, "well, you don't want us to continue, do you?" I told him certainly not, but that it only proved it never should have occurred in the first place. He said, "don't worry about it. This is the decision that has been taken, and that's the end of it." Later on, I heard from others who were well placed that this stop and desist order had come from the Presidency, not that I needed to be told to be sure this was the case. From no where else could such a decision have come.

Their optic on their media was quite different from the one we have on ours. To add a parochial comment, I had long questioned the value of regular media reporting in countries where the media does not operate independently and freely; I have put together many more of these cables than I would have had I been the one to decide. However ambassadors and Washington liked them.

*Q: How about after the war, when the absolute humiliation of the Iraqi army was plain to see.*

UNDELAND: Maybe to you and me, but that was not the view among most Tunisians. It was widely believed the Iraqis had fought gallantly against overwhelming odds and deserved credit for having bravely taken on the world greatest military power. They had stood up for their rights, for a justified position against Israel, for Arab pride, and the fact they'd been defeated in no way diminished their stature.

As time went on, this faded somewhat into the background, but when I left more than a year later, it was still a fairly widely held view, though by then not a subject often brought up. They had gotten on to other things and much of the emotionalism had dissipated. I have thought more than once on whether the Secretary of State for Information might not have been far more on the mark than I had then given him credit for.

*Q: What happened after the Gulf War?*

UNDELAND: It was very clear the Palace saw it had made a tremendous error, almost as if

Tunisia woke up one morning to find itself strangely in bed with Arafat, Saddam, Qadhafi and Saleh of South Yemen and quizzically asked, "how did we ever end up with these bedfellows?" Fundamental changes were made with a new foreign minister, very favorably disposed towards the U.S., a new ambassador of similar outlook in Washington, and those seen as the major promoters of pan-Arabism and supporters of Saddam gently shoved aside. When I was making my farewell calls, two of ministerial rank told me point blank this had been the case.

We in USIS got back into our normal operations more rapidly than I had expected, and we were accepted everywhere as if nothing had happened, as if an unpleasant interlude were now passed and was to be forgotten. I do not recall one case of resentment expressed to me or others on the staff, even though a fair amount of Saddam's popularity remained. We got past those 6 months of tension more rapidly and completely than I had thought possible.

A few months after the War, Bob Pelletreau left for Cairo, replaced by John McCarthy. In his, the new ambassador's, meeting with President Bush, the President told him that after 40 years of excellent relations with Tunisia, there were the six bad months over Saddam, but the latter cannot be let outweigh the four decades of friendship, cooperation and common interests. He charged McCarthy to get things back on an even keel. McCarthy repeated these instructions over and over to Tunisians; it went down very well. Ben Ali fully shared this view. In his farewell call, Pelletreau was prepared to discuss ways to help restore the former closeness, but Ben Ali cut this short by saying that there was no need to get into this, saying he'd taken care of it, having made arrangements to see it would never happen again. Indeed, he had.

*Q: You've spoken about how much you admired Pelletreau. How did you find working with McCarthy?*

UNDELAND: I had a fairly big run-in with him early on, and he felt at first I was overly prone to question his thinking, but these bumps in the road were soon relegated to the past and we were professionally much in tune. I don't think he was accustomed to persons on his staff being as outspoken as is my style, but I also think it fair to say, he came in relatively short time to expect and welcome my candor and knowledge of Tunisia and Tunisians. We were never personally close, and I found him at times overly mercurial, but it was a satisfying professional relationship. He included me in his deliberations as much as any ambassador with whom I had worked.

Tunisians responded positively with to his flair, to his outgoing ways, to his almost campaign of actively seeking them out, and saw him as a friend. He had going for him that everyone went out of his way to see that no blips arose in the America-Tunisia relationship.

He had a Embassy diminished in stature from Bob's, for the Arab League was gone, as was the PLO, the AID Mission was going out of business, budgets of every section were being cut, including USIS's, and the big time downsizing around the corner was clearly evident.

Returning to Pelletreau for a moment, his wisdom, calm and realistic leadership stood us particularly well during the Gulf war period. His assuring realism at every turn and his understanding of forces and factors at play in Tunisia contributed much to our getting through this time. From all I could tell he had the full confidence of Washington, something McCarthy



never developed to anywhere near the same extent.

*End of reader*