

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

AMBASSADOR LEONARD SHURTLEFF

*Interviewed by: Judy Carson
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Shurtleff prior to his death.]

Q: This is Judy Carson, Friday, December 28th, 2012. I am interviewing Ambassador Leonard Shurtleff in Florida. OK. Ambassador, thank you for coming to join me in Florida, in Sebring, Florida. And I understand -- where do you live now?

SHURTLEFF: Gainesville, Florida.

Q: Gainesville, Florida. Fantastic.

SHURTLEFF: Right in the middle of the state.

Q: In the middle of the state, excellent. Thank you for, for deciding to interview, that's fantastic. I'll -- what we'd like to do is start really at the very beginning. Little bit about your family history, where you were born, what your parents did --

SHURTLEFF: OK.

Q: -- and your early life, please.

SHURTLEFF: OK. The Shurtleffs are from Massachusetts. The first Shurtleffs arrived about 1630, so we've been there a long time.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: And I grew up in Haverhill, which is just 25 miles north of Boston on the Merrimack River. Went to Haverhill High School, graduating in 1958.

Q: You were born when, what year?

SHURTLEFF: June 4th, 1940.

Q: That's right.

SHURTLEFF: 1958, 18-years-old.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: In high school, I lettered in track and basketball, was a member of the National Arts Society.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: My father was a self-employed businessman. He sold tires and automotive accessories. Did quite well at it. My mother was sort of -- well, she was a former schoolteacher. But she was -- she also worked as a librarian after I went to college.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: Went to Tufts from '58 to '62. And graduated there cum laude in history. Also majored in political science.

Q: So you were reading a lot about history. Is that --

SHURTLEFF: American history.

Q: American history. And you just became interested in it because --

SHURTLEFF: I was always interested in history. I was interested in history from my maternal grandfather. He used to talk to me about history all the time. I remember once he took me on a daylong tour of the Freedom Trail in Boston.

Q: Oh.

SHURTLEFF: Which was fascinating.

Q: Yes, absolutely.

SHURTLEFF: I also took a lot of other courses, philosophy and French and German and American lit so I could pass the Foreign Service Exam.

Q: So you were interested in the Foreign Service.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yes, I made up my mind I was going to go in the Foreign Service when I was in high school.

Q: And how did you learn about the Foreign Service?

SHURTLEFF: In New England we know about those things, I mean.

Q: (laughs) OK.

SHURTLEFF: Follow foreign affairs.

Q: You did.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I mean starting when I was about this high. I used to pay a lot of attention, for example, to the civil war in China when I was six, seven-years-old. And after that, the Korean War. When I was, you know, 12.

Q: So you knew about the diplomatic history and the military history?

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

Q: Oh, OK. So you knew what you wanted to do.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. And of course we studied a lot of history in high school.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You start out with local history and then you work up to state history and then national history.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I also took world history in high school. So I learned that there was a difference between Russia and Prussia.

Q: (laughs) An important difference.

SHURTLEFF: Which wasn't obvious to me at the beginning.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Sort of disappeared as a country by that time.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, went to Tufts. So I was also head proctor at Tufts, the men's dormitory.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: Undergraduate proctor assistant.

Q: So you learned how to manage.

SHURTLEFF: Well, I guess so. I don't know. And I passed the Foreign Service Exam. I took the orals and I took the written part in December of '61. And the oral exam in June of '62.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: And not knowing how long it would take me to get in the Foreign Service, I accepted a --

Q: Wait, hold on. Where did you take the oral exam?

SHURTLEFF: In Boston.

Q: In Boston, OK. And what was that like?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was an hour and a half. I didn't stay there that long, about 45 minutes actually.

Q: Oh really, and were there three officers?

SHURTLEFF: Three officers, one of them was a retired USIA (United States Information Agency) officer.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: He already knew who I was, because one of his buddies was a retired Foreign Service Officer and was the father of my college roommate.

Q: Oh!

SHURTLEFF: So he knew who I was. Didn't know much more than that. 45 minutes later he said, "OK, thank you, Mr. Shurtleff. Wait outside, we'll be with you in a few minutes." He walked out, kind of went like this, and the secretary started typing madly on her typewriter. And she finished typing and took in a piece of paper to him and about five minutes later he came out. Said, "OK, come on in. You've passed the exam, sign here."

Q: Oh wow! So you must have been excited (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. But not knowing whether or not -- how long it would take to get an appointment, I accepted a full fellowship at Maxwell School, Syracuse University.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: To study for a bachelor's degree in history. Now, I stayed there about six weeks.

Q: Oh, you got called in six weeks later.

SHURTLEFF: Just about, early September.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I worked for the summertime as a utility dairyman and milk truck driver in Haverhill.

Q: Milk truck driver! OK.

SHURTLEFF: Made more money doing that than I did when I first got in the Foreign Service.

Q: (laughs) Now, that's interesting (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: It was a summer job.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I did it every summer from the time I was 16-years-old.

Q: Fantastic.

SHURTLEFF: In fact, I remember when I was a senior in high school I badgered them to get a milk route. They said, "Ah kid, you're too young. You're too young, you can't drive it."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Eighteen. And finally somebody got called up for military service, so they had to have a milkman. They said, "OK, you can drive this truck," so.

Q: Very good.

SHURTLEFF: It was Teamsters Union, you get paid very well. That's how I worked my way through college. That and by being a telephone operator at Tufts.

Q: So you did what you had to do?

SHURTLEFF: -- being head proctor, I had two or three jobs.

Q: And do you think those jobs helped prepare you for what you were going to do in the Foreign Service?

SHURTLEFF: I suppose so in a certain way, at least in terms of getting on with people, but there wasn't much connection directly with the Foreign Service there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Unlike my college roommate who was a, a midshipman, and he got to go on a cruise every year so he got to see the world.

Q: Ah yes.

SHURTLEFF: But of course being a Foreign Service brat, he'd seen the world anyway.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: I mean he'd been at school in Lima, Peru and Barcelona and Switzerland.

Q: Well, that's, yeah. And had you traveled at all overseas at that time?

SHURTLEFF: I'd never left the United States until I went to Caracas for the first time.

Q: Interesting. So --

SHURTLEFF: Never even been to Canada.

Q: And you got called into the Foreign Service.

SHURTLEFF: Right in the middle of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Q: Oh. Wow.

SHURTLEFF: Not that it had anything to do with that, but that's what was going on at the time.

Q: So that was 1963.

SHURTLEFF: '62.

Q: '62.

SHURTLEFF: October '62.

Q: OK, that's right, yes. October '62, those famous days. And you went to a class, do you remember the name of your A-100 entering class?

SHURTLEFF: I think it was 101.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: I raised my right hand October 31st, so November it started. I went 'til just before Christmas.

Q: And was that the first time you'd been to Washington D.C.?

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: I'd been to Annapolis for one trip before that. But that was about it.

Q: And what was your impression of D.C.?

SHURTLEFF: It was a lot smaller town then.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But in those days the Mall where all the monuments are now, that was all office buildings.

Q: Oh gosh.

SHURTLEFF: Left over from World War I.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: They're all Department of the Army and Navy.

Q: Uh-uh.

SHURTLEFF: They were all temporary buildings put up in 1917 and '18 when the military grew.

Q: It's still temporary in '62.

SHURTLEFF: Well, they were very well built.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They knocked 'em down to clean off the Mall. They had built the Pentagon by then.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: The Marine Corps had their own annex over in Arlington.

Q: And you were single at this point.

SHURTLEFF: Yes. In fact, I lived for the first couple weeks I was there with my college roommate's folks who'd just retired from the Foreign Service.

Q: So you really had some inside knowledge of the Foreign Service from your roommate.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, from my college roommate.

Q: And what was his name, if I can ask?

SHURTLEFF: Norman L. Wells, Norman Lee Wells.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: He was the son of Milton K. Wells, who was a Senior Foreign Service Officer, specialist to Latin America. His wife was Mexican. Milton Wells' first job was Tijuana, Mexico. That's where he was. He met his wife there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Marvelous woman. Pretty and bright and great cook.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Choly, everybody called her Choly, Choly Wells. She was completely bilingual.

Q: And did your roommate ever join the Foreign Service?

SHURTLEFF: Nope. He took my fallback position. I was going to join the Navy.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: If I couldn't get into the Foreign Service.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But he did. I found out there was a scholarship available at Tufts, and he took it.

Q: Oh.

SHURTLEFF: So he did four years at Tufts.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They paid for his room, board, tuition, gave him \$250 a month. He had to go on a cruise every summer. He was also a cadet coming down to the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) unit. And he went in the Navy.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And when the Cuban Missile Crisis sprang up -- he was a weapons officer, a gunnery officer on a destroyer that was out there --

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: -- blockading Cuba.

Q: Well, it sounds like you had both good roommates with your interests in history in Foreign Service and, and military as well. Tell me about your entering class.

SHURTLEFF: My entering class was about 30 people. The two notable people in the class Ed Djerejian who was later ambassador oh, about three or four different times --

Q: Yes, absolutely.

SHURTLEFF: -- plus Assistant Secretary for NEA. Ed spoke many different languages when he came in the Foreign Service. He spoke Armenian, for one thing, which nobody speaks.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: He spoke Arabic and French, I don't know what else. And played a mean game of poker.

Q: Did he? Did you play poker with him ever?

SHURTLEFF: Not if I could help it.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Another one was Bill Banks.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: Charles William Maynes, who was later on editor for Foreign Policy Magazine, and Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs during the Carter administration.

Q: Yes. Some very --

SHURTLEFF: Ed is now down at Rice University working for Jim Baker. And Charlie Maynes is dead unfortunately.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: Then, as I say, there were several -- I was not the youngest guy in the class. I was 22. There was one guy there who was actually 21.

Q: Wow, right.

SHURTLEFF: And there were about eight women.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So congenial, congenial group.

Q: Eight women. And how many were in the total class?

SHURTLEFF: About 30.

Q: About 30. OK.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, A-100, when that was over, I took the Consular Course of course. Spanish. I did a couple weeks on Capitol Hill as an intern working for my congressman, Bill Bates. Massachusetts first district.

Q: And how did you get that?

SHURTLEFF: It was something they did with Junior Officers then.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, they set you up on Capitol Hill.

Q: You think that was useful?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, very useful. Got to meet my congressman and did some research for him.

Q: That's a great idea.

SHURTLEFF: And of course -- first district of Massachusetts, you know what that is, that's the gerrymander.

Q: Ah, OK.

SHURTLEFF: You familiar with the gerrymander?

Q: Sure.

SHURTLEFF: It's Essex County, which is where he was -- his father was a congressman before him. Same seat.

Q: But that's interesting. So everyone went and worked with their Congress representative?

SHURTLEFF: Not everybody. Just I happened to have had some spare time.

Q: And did you know where you were going at that stage?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, I was supposed to go to Veracruz. And all of a sudden that got changed. Apparently the post was inspected and they found that the principal officer was sadly deficient in his treatment of his subordinates so they fired him and didn't send junior officers down there for a while.

Q: Oh, interesting.

SHURTLEFF: So they sent me to Caracas instead as a rotational trainee rather than vice consul in Veracruz. And then I had to hurry up and get there after about a week or two of sitting on a desk in ARA learning something about how the department worked.

Q: And then when did you get to Caracas?

SHURTLEFF: July of 1963. The first thing I did was I was assistant regional security officer for about six months without a vacancy. And it was a busy regional security officer post, because we had this messy little guerilla war going on in the backland. See, FALN, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (Armed Forces of National Liberation), backed by Fidel Castro. Thank you, Fidel.

Q: And did anything prepare you for this job?

SHURTLEFF: No, I learned as I went along. I worked for a very good guy, who was the regional security officer. Had been around for ages. But Steve taught me what I needed to know to help him out.

Q: And what did you do?

SHURTLEFF: Well, we had some local investigators. I used to check on them. Go through the security reports that they did. Make sure they were done correctly. Helped out bodyguarding the ambassador. We had a bodyguard from the local secret police, but sometimes wanted more. So I would grab one of our pistols and go out --

Q: And be a bodyguard.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah.

Q: (laughs) And do you think FSO's (Foreign Service Officer) would be asked to do that now? They're asked to do many, many things, but that's --

SHURTLEFF: I don't know, you did what you had to do.

Q: Exactly.

SHURTLEFF: I doubt it. But that wasn't the only time I was armed in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, we'll talk about that too.

SHURTLEFF: An interesting tour because of the FALN. I did consular work for the next year.

Q: But tell me more about what was going on with that.

SHURTLEFF: With the uprising?

Q: Yes.

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was a group of leftist guerilla fighters, the FALN, Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, who were backed by the Cubans. And they were holed up in the backlands. Quite a ways away from Caracas. They also had urban cells.

Q: And what was their goal?

SHURTLEFF: To take over the government, to be a communist government. Backed by the Cubans.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Pretty much what they've got now in Venezuela is what they wanted.

Q: And do you think, you know, having been there now and kind of recruiting people and whatever? Did it lay any kind of base, do you think, or?

SHURTLEFF: Not really. Because these guys frankly didn't have any support at all in the backlands. That's why they did so poorly. The campesinos (farmers) didn't back them.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: Because the government was quite democratic at the time. Rómulo Betancourt was the president.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And he was a prince of a man, and he was succeeded by some other people. But it kind of fell apart because the system got more and more corrupt, and that kind of opened the door to --

Q: Was it corrupt top to bottom, or?

SHURTLEFF: Not, not so much when I was there. It was corrupt, there was a good deal of corruption, but the top was pretty cleaned. And they truly cared for the campesinos.

Q: They did care for the campesinos.

SHURTLEFF: And they'd show it too. But there were always students kicking up their heels all the time in town. There used to be riots all over the place. We had a bi-national center downtown that we had to barricade once in a while to keep people out of it.

Q: And what did the students want?

SHURTLEFF: They wanted a socialist government. But they had a capitalist system there and nobody was about to give them that.

Q: Were the wealthy, the rich very much in control of the country or was it more of a balance?

SHURTLEFF: No, I would say the middle class was about -- by our standards, was about 25% of the population. So it was a *huge* middle class.

Q: That's high, yes.

SHURTLEFF: I belonged to the junior Chamber of Congress there. And those are guys under 30, 30 and under. And they were all professional people, businessmen, couple of doctors and lawyers. Lots of businessmen. And they were doing very well, thank you very much. But they were middle class.

Q: And how about the economy? Was there --

SHURTLEFF: Oil.

Q: -- the wealth they've got now from --

SHURTLEFF: Oil. Oh yes.

Q: There was. OK.

SHURTLEFF: All of that. Except then it was owned by Exxon, ESSO actually and Gulf.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And others, some other companies. Was it -- Alcoa had a --

Q: Aluminum.

SHURTLEFF: Aluminum, Alcoa aluminum smelter. And there was also an iron smelter, iron/steel industry there. Way, way down in the backlines, of course.

Q: So did you get out in the field?

SHURTLEFF: Oh, I traveled all over the country, driving, flying. Even got over to Curacao and Trinidad a couple times.

Q: Oh. And was that for reporting, or who did you travel with?

SHURTLEFF: Curacao went over just to deliver the mail. Every six months a courier had to pass us by so I was given a bag or meet him or back again. Trinidad was vacation, used to go over there for Carnival in the spring.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But I still traveled all over the country with various friends of mine. One guy was Tom Lowe. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had a small office there and he was the junior officer. We used to hang around together. He had a very nice '63 Ford Falcon convertible.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: We used to drive all over the country in that.

Q: Exactly. And so in terms of reporting or --

SHURTLEFF: Well after my consular stint I worked on non-immigrant visas and then for a very short time immigrant visas.

Q: And what was that like in the Visa Section?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was a visa mill, the non-immigrant visas.

Q: Did people just want to come to the States?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: Was it fraud? Was it on the up and up?

SHURTLEFF: Almost no fraud. People would take their passports to the travel agents. The travel agents delivered stacks of passports.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And unless they were born outside of Venezuela we never even bothered to interview them, because they all came back. And why not? They were doing very well. Why would they want to move to the States?

Q: I'm sure they had servants and the wealthy and --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. Yes. I had servants when I was there.

Q: And you were still single at this point too.

SHURTLEFF: Yes. I shared apartments with some of the other officers at the embassy. Either one or two of us, three in some cases would bunk together. In big apartments. And we always had a cook and maid.

Q: Nice life.

SHURTLEFF: Very nice life. Got to travel all over the country. Then I went to the Political Section my last year, worked for a guy named Ted Long who was the political counselor. And I covered the leftist political party, including FALN.

Q: And what was that like? Did you get a chance to ever meet any --

SHURTLEFF: I knew a lot of politicians, but they were the mainline guys who were in the government.

Q: And so did you feel like you had good sources about what was going on?

SHURTLEFF: One of my jobs was to cover the trial of Pérez Jiménez, the former dictator, who was booted out in '58 by a military coup. And the coup was led by a guy named Wolfgang Larrazábal, who was a navy admiral. And he held elections

immediately.

Q: Well, that was different.

SHURTLEFF: And within a year, Rómulo Betancourt, who was a long time exile, was elected president.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: There was another election while I was there. And he was replaced by Rafael Caldera from a different political party.

Q: And that's unusual at that time, wasn't it?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, it was. But it was working rather well. I mean I covered the election.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: From the parties to the left.

Q: And do you believe our embassy knew what was going -- did we have contacts throughout all of the political parties?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, we had great contacts.

Q: Great contacts, that's excellent. Because of the ambassador?

SHURTLEFF: Well, the ambassador was an old friend of Rómulo Betancourt's. The ambassador was a political appointee. He was an AP (Associated Press) correspondent in Latin America for a long time.

Q: What was his name again?

SHURTLEFF: Charles Allan Stuart. He was an AP correspondent, Latin America for a long time. I guess it was Guatemala. Betancourt was exiled in Guatemala. He was there and they got friendly there. So when anything went wrong, which occasionally it did, the ambassador got on the phone and called his buddy, Raul. They settled it on the phone. I've seen him do it.

Q: Well, were there any incidents that you can recall?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, I remember one bad one when some Peace Corps volunteers and Peace Corps staffers decided they weren't going to stop at a police roadblock and two of them were killed.

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: Police -- they ran the roadblock, the police corps shot at 'em.

Q: And what year was that, more or less?

SHURTLEFF: 1964.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: Plus, we also had one incident where there was a big demonstration in front of the embassy and somebody put a bullet round through the front door, glass door. At which point the Guardia Nacional (National Guard) troops we had guarding the place fired their rifles in the air. And the crowd evaporated. We had a two-building embassy, quite a large compound on a corner.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: Well, Avenida Miranda, which is a main drag in Caracas, out back we had a barrack for 40 Guardia Nacional troops under, under, under a three-stripe sergeant.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: And those guys were good. They were very well disciplined. No officers, just the sergeant.

Q: And again, the source of the protests against the United States.

SHURTLEFF: The students.

Q: And the students who wanted more of a socialist type of --

SHURTLEFF: Get rid of the United States, correct. We weren't good for Venezuela. Get rid of our oil companies and -- the usual stuff.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And another time a guy on a motorbike went by and machine-gunned the whole one side of the embassy.

Q: Oh, lovely.

SHURTLEFF: Including my side of the office.

Q: Gosh.

SHURTLEFF: I really hit the ground fast. Rounds coming in the window.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: Nine millimeter, but still, they can hurt you as bad as anything else. So we're a little excited. We also had several kidnappings.

Q: Of?

SHURTLEFF: Well, military people, two of them.

Q: U.S. Military, or?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, because we had a military mission there. Plus, we had all the attachés. We had attachés from every service.

Q: And they were kidnapped.

SHURTLEFF: One of them was kidnapped. Different times.

Q: And what happened?

SHURTLEFF: On one occasion, we got the guy back very quickly because somebody wandered into the embassy and talked to our commercial officer and said he thought he saw something strange going on in the neighborhood and maybe it was this guy was kidnapped.

Q: Ah.

SHURTLEFF: So we got together all the police, and the police start raiding all around the apartment buildings these guys were holed up in. Pretty soon they let him go because they got scared. They could see the police coming in the front door.

Q: And so the police cooperated and there was a --

SHURTLEFF: We had a public safety group there, which was a condominium. It was run by two different agencies: CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and AID (Agency for International Development).

Q: This sounds like quite an exciting post for a junior officer.

SHURTLEFF: I used to ghostwrite their monthly reports. They'd give me all their paperwork. This is what they'd do with it all month and I'd put it into English because they couldn't write worth a damn.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Well, you know, they were police officers.

Q: Right, of course.

SHURTLEFF: And they weren't used to doing Foreign Service type writing.

Q: So you too got to know a lot of the contacts and --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, sure. Did a lot of work with the CIA station and the commercial attachés, the economic attachés. They had very good local police there. A couple of them had PhD's. And of course we were paying 'em 30, \$40,000 a year. Which in those days was --

Q: A lot of money.

SHURTLEFF: -- a good chunk of change. Lot more than I made. I made \$5,800.

Q: Well hey, good for you (laughs)!

SHURTLEFF: There was also a differential.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: There was a 15% differential, because of the violence.

Q: Right, right. But I think a lot of people might be hearing these don't understand though the value of our Foreign Service Nationals or locally staff employees we call now, but they can be a Godsend really because they know what's going on in the country and they've got the contacts.

SHURTLEFF: And you know, a lot of junior officers there. So we were friendly with the FSN's. I used to date a couple.

Q: Ah-ha.

SHURTLEFF: The young ladies. Every year we got together and the FSN's or the younger officers at the embassy we'd get together and go to Trinidad for Carnival. We shared a plane.

Q: (laughs) So it was fun.

SHURTLEFF: Yes. Plus, I got to travel all over the country.

Q: And as you travel, in terms of our foreign policy, what were we trying to do? What was the mission? With all the insurgency going on and the riots and of course American

companies there, the oil companies?

SHURTLEFF: Oil companies and U.S. steel and Alcoa.

Q: So what were we --

SHURTLEFF: We were trying to protect their interests, of course. But mostly to support the democratic government in the various ways that we could. You know, economic assistance.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Technical assistance. Food aid, if they needed it. Although there wasn't too much food problems there when I was -- there is today, but not then.

Q: And were we giving much military assistance?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, quite a bit. We had a military mission, large one. Plus all the attachés, Air Force, Navy, Army attachés. And they have their own airplanes, so they could fly around.

Q: Right. Were they assisting with the anti-insurgency?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, we had training for that. And we had the public safety.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Because a lot of the guys who were having to carry this were actually civilian, civilian police agencies. But their best force, when I was there, was the national guard. In order to get into the national guard, you'd have to serve at least one tour of duty in one of the regular armed services. These guys were all veterans. It wasn't like our National Guard. This was a professional paramilitary force. They did both police and military work.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And in the countryside, they were the ones that ran the dispensaries for the rural areas, the paramedics.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And in the cities they kept the students from getting out of hand. The only time I ever saw them fire in the air even once was at our embassy. What they normally would do is they waited for a crowd of students with their swords, which were not sharpened --

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: Blunt swords. And would just break up the crowds that way.

Q: So it sounds like they were fairly humane in what they were doing.

SHURTLEFF: They were very careful. They didn't want to create any martyrs. And they didn't either. It was an interesting tour, fascinating. Great food in Venezuela.

Q: And were there any particular incidents besides the ones you've mentioned that you think would be of interest to people listening to this oral history?

SHURTLEFF: I think I've about covered it. I was there in July '63 and left in June of '65. The day I left I got a draft notice.

Q: OK, yes.

SHURTLEFF: To show up for a physical. It was a letter. Which came just as I was leaving. And so I stuck it in my pocket and I took a ship home, the Santa Rosa, from Grace Lines. When I get to Miami I got off the ship and went to the payphone at the dock and called up the draft board. And I got the secretary of the draft board who's one of my sister's high school classmates. We knew each other.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: And she said, "Did you get a draft notice?"

I said, "Yeah, I did. What do I do?"

She said, "Forget about it. It got by me. I'm sorry, I apologize. We don't draft Foreign Service Officers. We know what you're doing. Don't worry about it, you're not going to be drafted."

"OK," I said, "That's good, because I'm on assignment to go to Sierra Leone."

She said, "Oh, that sounds interesting."

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: That was my brief encounter with the draft board.

Q: Gosh, that's quite a story. What was it like, I mean for the men of that time and Vietnam was --

SHURTLEFF: It was heating up.

Q: It was heating up. What was the feeling of your contemporaries and yourself about the possibility of being drafted and about what was happening in Vietnam?

SHURTLEFF: Most draft boards were not drafting Foreign Service Officers. So I don't know anybody who got drafted. I know a lot of my colleagues who were sent to Vietnam worked in CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) and other areas. I thought I'd be sent there too because I spoke French. But I never was. They sent me to garden spots like Douala and Nouakchott.

Q: Was there a feeling about what was going on in Vietnam? Did people discuss that when you were in Caracas?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, yeah, a lot of us were not terribly happy with the policy.

Q: And why was that?

SHURTLEFF: Well, because we didn't think it was getting us anywhere. You know, there was no there there. Remember the domino theory?

Q: Right, share it.

SHURTLEFF: If Vietnam falls, the rest of Southeast Asia will go with it.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: Didn't happen. Didn't happen.

Q: But of course you had your own Cuban insurgency --

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, we had our own trouble. Plus, also while I was there, LBJ sent the 82nd Airborne into the Dominican Republic.

Q: Right, yes.

SHURTLEFF: Remember that? There was supposedly a communist insurgency in the Dominican Republic. Wasn't a communist insurgency. This is a good old-fashioned military coup, with a little bit of civilian rolling on the side.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: It had nothing to do with the communists at all (*laughs*). Anyway, as we found out once we got there, having sent a whole division of troops in.

Q: Was there anyone in Caracas who you knew who had been to Vietnam and, and had some inside kind of observations?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. On the missions that came through. They were lecturing on foreign policy to the Venezuelans. They had some insights that I didn't have. But there was nobody there who'd ever served there, no.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: We had one guy in the embassy who was a Russian specialist, Leo Mosier. He worked in the Political Section. And he was there to watch the Russians. They had a pretty large embassy.

Q: Right, yes, I can imagine that's part of it.

SHURTLEFF: In fact, Leo was very useful to me. He truly is the one who taught me how to write good Foreign Service dispatches. They used to call it air grams. Remember air grams?

Q: Air grams, yes.

SHURTLEFF: You used those a lot.

Q: And just before we move on from Caracas, what were the relations with the Soviets and what were they up to? What did you know about what they were trying to do?

SHURTLEFF: I have no idea. It wasn't what I was there for.

Q: OK. And so tell me about the bidding process. You've done all this fascinating work in Caracas. What did you bid on and did you get your first wish?

SHURTLEFF: Well, there was no bidding process.

Q: Oh, well tell me about that (laughs). How'd you get your next assignment?

SHURTLEFF: I simply sent word back to personnel that I wanted to get out of Latin America, I didn't care where I went. Because I'd made up my mind I wasn't going to stick around there. I found the Foreign Service Officers in that particular post who were Latin American specialists to be an extremely stuffy, self-important lot.

Q: Really? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

SHURTLEFF: They took themselves very seriously. And the top tour for them was Portugal or Spain. They spent their whole careers in a replacement for Charles Allan Stuart. There was a guy named Maurice Bernbaum, in his third tour in Venezuela.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: He'd been there as assistant military attaché during World War I, came

back later in the Foreign Service as DCM (deputy chief of mission), and finally as ambassador. Now, he was a good guy, but -- he wasn't stuffy. He had a great secretary whom I came to know him very well. Lita Palatolo.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Grandmotherly Italian type, great cook anyway. She took all the junior officers under her wing. She knew the Foreign Service cold. She was a very good secretary. But she knew everything else well.

Q: So it was good to have a power behind the throne?

SHURTLEFF: We used to have very good Foreign Service secretaries. I don't think we do anymore.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: We don't give them any responsibility now.

The other interesting thing there was the marine security guard detachment.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: One of my jobs as assistant regional security officer was to look after the Marines, of whom we had 15.

Q: That's a lot.

SHURTLEFF: Two 24 a day posts. The gunnery sergeant is what they call the A-slash. The assistant -- the A-slash was an alcoholic and the master sergeant wasn't a very good manager. These guys were always getting in fights in bars. I had to practically live over at the Marine house to make sure they didn't tear that apart.

Q: Oh my gosh, yeah.

SHURTLEFF: This was during the days when marines were having -- they had a tough time.

Q: And why did they have a tough time?

SHURTLEFF: They had to build up their force size because of Vietnam. They'd lowered their recruiting standards.

Q: Ah, OK.

SHURTLEFF: This continued to be a problem for the next 10 or 15 years.

Q: Right. Wow. So you, you'd had enough of being in the Latin America Bureau.

SHURTLEFF: So they sent me to Africa which was fine. They just said, "You're going to go to Sierra Leone."

And I said, "That sounds great to me." So I read about it and said, "Hm, interesting place." And off I went.

Q: And did you get any training first before you went to Sierra Leone to --

SHURTLEFF: No. No. Didn't really need any.

Q: And what year's this?

SHURTLEFF: '65, July of '65. Got there just after 4th of July. Flew in from London via the Canary Islands. Anyway, got in Lungi Airport, which is across the harbor from the city. You take a ferry across the harbor. And I kind of smelled the air, said, "Hm, this smells good, it smells like West Indies." And I get off the ferry, and there it was. And so I said, "This looks like the West Indies," because it was all the same architecture.

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: And of course the same people because guess where all the people in Trinidad came from, they came from West Africa initially.

Q: And I would guess most of that was the slave trade.

SHURTLEFF: Yes. Freetown was the capital. It is called Freetown because that's where the British put the slaves they freed from slave ships. The French, the British, the Americans had anti-slavery patrols along the whole coast in the middle part of the 19th century. And the French put freed slaves in Libreville, now capital of Gabon.

Q: Ah, makes sense, OK.

SHURTLEFF: And the British put them into Freetown.

Q: Freetown, fascinating.

SHURTLEFF: There's an identifiable ethnic group there called Creoles. And they spoke a patois called Krio. And they were the civil servants for the British. Some were businessmen too, lot of doctors, lawyers. They had all the native people to contend with who were much more numerous. They were a very small group.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: I had a lot of friends who were Creoles and a lot of friends who weren't.

Q: Then it seems like the people who were free then would, you know, that made that country better off than a number of the other African countries.

SHURTLEFF: Not really, unfortunately. These Creoles were scattered all up and down the coast, because the British used them as civil servants, middle grade civil service. In fact, there was even a group in Equatorial Guinea that were --

Q: That were Creole.

SHURTLEFF: They had exotic names like Smith and _____.

Q: Oh, interesting.

SHURTLEFF: Because they're all --

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: -- Creoles from Sierra Leone. They were brought in there by the British. British used to govern Equatorial Guinea for the Spanish. The British merchants did. They brought these guys in as their factotums to work there. But they're all up and down the coast.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But the big concentration was in Freetown. Anyway, I like Freetown.

Q: So you went to Freetown and who were you working with? What was your job?

SHURTLEFF: I was the political/consular officer.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I did both. I was the only political officer, the only consular officer. So I had three local employees working for me. One political assistant, one consular assistant, and a secretary.

Q: Was it a relatively small embassy?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, 25 people. Had a fairly large AID mission.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: There was a station of course. We had a CADO, combined administrative office, took care of everybody.

Q: Oh. Kind of like the precursor to ICAS?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, called CADO then I guess. Andrew Vincent Corry was the ambassador, an interesting guy. He was a former minerals attaché in the Foreign Service. He was a Foreign Service Officer. Graduate of Colorado School of Mines.

Q: So was he easy to work with? How did you --

SHURTLEFF: Great guy, great guy to work with. I used to drive him occasionally. He didn't drive. So if he didn't want to take a chauffeur where he was going, I used to drive him. And he always sat in the front seat. Another thing he always insisted upon, anybody who's traveling outside of town here outside of the city, I want you to take an embassy car and drive him, because it's dangerous driving out there. He was right, it was. Not that people were going to try to hurt you, just that the drivers were so bad.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: And the roads weren't much better.

Q: Well, yeah. What were the conditions like in the country, both politically, economically, and physically?

SHURTLEFF: Most of the time politically it was fine when I was there. There was a government party run by a guy named Sir Albert Margai who was the prime minister. They had a parliamentary system. Governor general, Sir Henry Lightfoot Boston, who was appointed by the queen. He was a Creole, a lawyer, judge. Then there was an opposition party, an all people's congress. Our guy ran the Sierra Leone's People's Party, which still exists. Siaka Stevens was Mayor of Freetown, and he ran the opposition party, the All People's Congress.

Q: So there really was an opposition.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. It was all based on tribes. The northern tribes were APC (All People's Congress), southern tribes were SLPP (Sierra Leone's People's Party).

Q: OK. But was it -- it sounds like it was fairly peaceful.

SHURTLEFF: It was. They had an election while I was there towards the end of my tour. The election was peaceful, but it came out a dead heat. And the governor general appointed Siaka Stevens as new prime minister. At that point, the commander of the Sierra Leone Military Force, Brigadier David Lansana, staged his own military coup in favor of Albert Margai.

Q: Oh. Now, was that a surprise to you all?

SHURTLEFF: No. We were tipped off about it at the time.

Q: And without divulging anything that you can't divulge --

SHURTLEFF: Well, all my good contacts were all in the military. And they told me a lot of stuff they never should have told me. We had five governments in a week at one point.

Q: And when we kind of knew that situation was probably going to happen, what did we do?

SHURTLEFF: Nothing, because we didn't have a dog in that fight really.

Q: But you report back to --

SHURTLEFF: Report back to Washington and watched it happen. We had five governments in a week and each one I was tipped off about, every change.

Q: And was there any guidance from Washington about anything?

SHURTLEFF: Nope, not really. Communication was shut off for a couple of days. That worried them a little bit. But we got word out by radio to the neighboring posts, probably Liberia.

Q: And did you feel any security threat?

SHURTLEFF: No. No. In fact, we wandered all over town while this was going on. There was one person killed in this whole series of coups, and he was a looter. The police shot him, not the military.

Q: Oh, OK. Right.

SHURTLEFF: Interesting. It wasn't very nasty. Not in those days. It got nastier later. Very nasty.

Q: I want to hear about that. First --

SHURTLEFF: I was gone by then.

Q: Oh, thank -- that's right, because you were involved in nasty things otherwise that were going around you. But this is nice, at least was later, I suppose. On the scheme of things. But at that time there, what again was the United States foreign policy mission?

SHURTLEFF: The DCM most of the time I was there was Bill Bradford. Bill became my rabbi in a sense.

Q: Yeah, he was very well known.

SHURTLEFF: In fact, towards the end of my tour -- this was in '67, we had a lot of travel money leftover. He called me aside one day, said, "Why don't you use that travel money to go visit Christine?" He said, "You can travel up and down the coast. Give her a little orientation." I said OK. So I met up with Christine in Conakry. We went on to Liberia. And I think after that, Ivory Coast.

Q: Well, you're going to have to bring in Christine now.

SHURTLEFF: Before, before we married. Well, that's when I met Christine.

Q: Oh, and you met her in?

SHURTLEFF: Late '66 in Freetown. She was the rolling information center office. She covered 17 posts in West Africa.

Q: And her name at that time was?

SHURTLEFF: Was Christine Morrissette. No middle name. And she covered these 17 posts. She filled in vacations, but her actual job was to train local employees at the Library of Science, run the library.

Q: And she was a Foreign Service Officer.

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

Q: And she -- can you tell us a little bit about how she got in the Foreign Service.

SHURTLEFF: She's from a French Canadian family. So she's third generation. Her grandparents came down from Quebec when they were about this high. And of course grew up speaking French at home and English at school. So they were completely bilingual. In fact, they had no idea which language they were speaking.

Q: (laughs) Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: Chris and I had a great deal of difficulty understanding. We both spoke French, but they were flipping back and forth. In the middle of the sentence, they changed the language.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, so she went to parochial school for her first eight grades. And they did half a day in French and half a day in English. Then she went to high school in Springfield, Mass, where they were from, Springfield Technical High School. And took some French. Then she went to Cornell and majored in French. And took the Foreign Service Exam in '63 having just come off a summer in Paris or in France an au pair. So

her French was at its peak at that point.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Came back and passed the Foreign Service Exam. Actually she got a 66 percentile, which isn't passing. Except she got five points for passing French.

Q: Ah, so that --

SHURTLEFF: Which made it 71.

Q: -- put her over the top.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, and I got a 71 when I took it the year before. In fact, I took it with the five of us in my graduating class at Tufts that took the exam, and we all passed it. One of the guys got an 86 percentile.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: I was the lowest one, but I was the only one who went in the Foreign Service. All you had to do was get a 70.

Q: So Christine got in very early.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, she was 20. Anyway, Christine was running around West Africa. We met in Freetown. And one thing led to another, you know.

Q: And did you get engaged there, or?

SHURTLEFF: No, I was engaged to somebody else actually.

Q: Well, you have to tell us about that.

SHURTLEFF: Well, I was engaged to Elena Shoup at the time, who was an Argentinean lady from Caracas. Her father was a local businessman. He was German, but they were Argentinean. And we got engaged in '66. I took a vacation with her to Portugal and Spain and got engaged there. I remember I got her an engagement ring in Barcelona. And I had to go in to the consulate general there to cash a check to get pesetas to buy a ring. And I remember it was something like \$1,500 or something like that.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: And the Budget & Fiscal officer was an American. I kind of turned ghastly white. I said, "Ah, I guess I'll have to," -- because the check was bad.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: He was liable for it. But he gave me the money. And I got the ring. But that didn't work anyway. She broke the engagement after I got back to the States a couple of years later. By then I'd met Christine and that was fine. So when I got back to the States in '67 she was in Accra in September and so I called her up and said, "Hey, let's get married." OK! Came right home. And we were married in December.

Q: And she was still working.

SHURTLEFF: No, she resigned when she left Accra. You had to resign in those days. You were no longer available for worldwide service. So women understood that and they resigned. But she was offered her job back a couple years later after -- in 1971 when they changed the rules.

Q: Well, we're going to talk about that, because that's very interesting. But right now I guess we'll go back to Sierra Leone. And talk about what the U.S. concerns were there at the time.

SHURTLEFF: OK. We had some. They produced iron/ore. That was a British operation. So we kind of watched that. They also were starting up a rutile production plant there, a rutile mining production. Rutile is titanium oxide. It's used in armor plates and paint.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: So this was Pittsburgh Plate Glass, which they produced, believe it or not, PPG.

Q: PPG, right.

SHURTLEFF: They wanted it for paint. And so that was being constructed while I was there. Plus, we had usual humanitarian interests, a small AID program. Peace Corps was pretty big there.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: It was also big in Venezuela too.

Q: Do you think -- and because you saw both Sierra Leone and Venezuela, did Peace Corps -- what kind of impact did they have in those countries as you kind of look back on it?

SHURTLEFF: I've always thought that Peace Corps actually did us a lot more good than it did the host country. Because it's given us a whole generation of young Americans, two generations now that understand foreign policy when it's a little overseas. And that's very valuable. These people have gone on to do all sorts of foreign activities.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Business, international business, congress. Civil service. I mean they're just full of former Peace Corps volunteers. I think it's a great benefit to us. It didn't do any harm locally, but once a Peace Corps volunteer leaves...

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: The effect can leave too. Although there was one program in my next post, I'll talk about that later --

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: The Peace Corps did a very good job there. Sort of lasted, but I'm not sure it did in Freetown.

Q: How about the --

SHURTLEFF: I knew a lot of Peace Corps volunteers. I traveled around our countries to stay with them.

Q: Then -- because they knew so much what was going on --

SHURTLEFF: Well, they also had places to live. Stay in the local hotels.

Q: Right. And in Sierra Leone then, what kinds of programs did we have, what were you involved in, and what do you think worked, didn't work?

SHURTLEFF: We had a health program, an education program. They had a whole team of AID contract people working up at one of the big secondary schools in Kenema up in the northern province. They were doing a pretty good job. We had a professor or two at Fourah Bay College, which was a lovely university.

Q: What kind of impact do you think these programs had?

SHURTLEFF: I'm sure that Fourah Bay College, it's a freebie for them.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They had trouble hiring somebody to do the job the professor was doing. They didn't have the money. And I'm sure that the school in Kenema was doing a good job too. But you know, given what's happened lately in Sierra Leone you wonder if anything we did there was lasting at all.

Q: One wonders. Tell me --

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, I talked about Sir Albert Margai, Siaka Stevens, I also belonged the Junior Dinner Club there.

Q: And what was that like?

SHURTLEFF: Once a month we all put on our dinner jackets, white dinner jackets, tuxedo trousers.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: Bowties, white shirts. And went over and had dinner. And they had one rule. You couldn't throw food.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: We had a speaker, God bless him. Every, every meeting -- this was once a month -- we used to heckle the speakers unmercifully.

Q: Oh, lovely.

SHURTLEFF: They had three or four white members, I was one of the three or four. The rest were all Sierra Leonean. Some of them very senior in the government.

Q: Were they all men?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, all men. In fact, one of the guys that was in the Junior Club was second person of the presidency, or the prime minister's office actually.

Q: And how did you get invited?

SHURTLEFF: I was invited to join. The ambassador was invited to join the Senior Dinner Club and the political officer was invited to join the Junior Dinner Club. It had been going on for a long time. Well, a long time, several years. We opened the post in '61 when they became independent, so I was only there what, four years later.

Q: And sounds like it was a good source of contacts and --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, it was, excellent source of contacts. Plus, I had some very good contacts inherited from my predecessor. Some guys I'm still in contact with there. One of them, one of them, my best contact basically was a young captain in the army called Sheiku Tarawali, who was from the northern province. He was Muslim. Married to a Mende lady who was Christian.

Q: Was that unusual back then?

SHURTLEFF: No. Not really. They're still married. It was a good solid marriage. But he

was the DAA in Cuba and -- the deputy assistant administrator, of the force, the staff officer. He'd been to Camberley. Bright young guy, played tennis. I used to play tennis with him. Played tennis all the time. He's one of those who kept tipping me off on these coups coming around the corner. There was one Saturday night I was sitting reading, knock on the door, late at night, like about 10:00 or 11:00 at night. And there's Sheiku standing outside. He just lived around the corner from me. Said, "Can I come in?"

I said, "Sure, come on in. Have a beer." He'd have a beer or two, he didn't drink much.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But he'd have a beer or two. We sat on the porch. And he kind of poured his heart out to me. He said, "Now, we're planning to overthrow the government. We want your support."

I said, "Sheiku, I can't -- we can't do that." And I said, "Not, not what the U.S. embassy is here for." I said, "I'd love to back you up because you're a dear friend, but we can't get involved in that." I said, "And you don't want us involved either. You don't want to be beholden to the United States and the," -- so forth and so on. Anyway, we stayed friends. He was arrested the next week. In fact, I probably caused him to be arrested because Andy Corry wanted me to go over and tell the British about it. So I told the British, the defense advisor, their attaché, about this plot. And I think he told the government. And they were all arrested.

Q: Oh. And what happened to --

SHURTLEFF: There was a real coup about a month later. First the Lansana coup and then the real coup.

Q: Yeah. Right.

SHURTLEFF: And then one day I'm home at lunch after the real coup. And knock on the door again and here's Sheiku again saying, "I just got out of jail, I want you to know. Haven't even been home yet."

Q: And what was your reaction? I mean, because did you think that perhaps -- I mean because of course you had to report it. Did you --

SHURTLEFF: He never knew that.

Q: He never knew.

SHURTLEFF: No. Because I've been in touch with him ever since. In fact, we still exchange Christmas cards. He rose to be force commander. He's a major general.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: I used to visit every year. When I was in Monrovia I used to fly with the attachés, I also had dinner with him every year.

Q: And don't you think, or do you think, that he knew that you had to report it?

SHURTLEFF: Well, he wasn't really naive, but nothing happened. In those days they didn't run you out and shoot you. That wasn't the way the game was played.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Not that way anymore.

Q: Exactly. Exactly.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, Sheiku Tarawali was a very good contact. So was Colonel Bangura, who was the deputy force commander. He was Temne, he was from the north, whereas Lansana was a southerner, Lansana was a Mende. And I was pretty tight with him.

And Fred and Sylvie Savage. Freddie was the _____ at the Foreign Ministry, senior civil servant. And his wife, Sylvie, they both were active in the Episcopal church. So they were people I stayed in touch with. They're dead now, but I stayed in touch with them over the years. And one guy, one interesting guy was Ken Ferguson who was a chief fisheries officer.

Q: Chief fisheries officer.

SHURTLEFF: Department of Interior. We used to travel across the country together once in a while. He took me down to Bonthe, which is a town on an island, Sherbro Island. Only way to get in there was by plane.

Q: Oh, that must have been fascinating.

SHURTLEFF: Or pirogue or canoe, but we flew in. Whole week, spent a whole weekend down there. Was where he was from. He was Creole, but he was from Sherbro, Bonthe was the name of the town.

Q: But it sounds like you were really good at keeping and developing contacts.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: And I just want to explain to people listening how important that, that is.

SHURTLEFF: Well, that language is where it's all happening. It wasn't much of a problem in Sierra Leone, everybody spoke English.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I even learned to speak a little Creole while I was there. The governor general, by the way, was Sir Henry Lightfoot-Boston. He was a Creole too, obviously. And David Lansana, the brigadier of course, was not. He was, he was, he was a Mende.

Q: So what happened with all these coups going on?

SHURTLEFF: Well, we had five governments in a week. I don't remember all the ins and outs of this anymore.

Q: But they weren't bloody.

SHURTLEFF: No. Lansana was knocked over by an officers' revolt in his own ranks. The officers called back a major by the name of Sandi Jumu, who was a very good contact of mine too. He was up in the United Kingdom on a course along with another officer named Andrew T. Juxon-Smith, a guy I used to play tennis with as well. And they came back together. But apparently, in the Canary Islands, Juxon-Smith talked Sandi Jumu out of being the head of government. Jumu never, never showed up. The only guy who got off the plane when he got into Freetown was Juxon-Smith. So he became the head of government.

Q: So they kind of worked it all amongst themselves and kind of musical chairs for a while, or?

SHURTLEFF: No, once they settled on Juxon-Smith he stayed around for a little over a year. That's the next assignment. I'll talk about that.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: And the number two guy at that time was a guy named Bill Lee, who was a police commissioner who was one of my contacts as well. Actually, I inherited him too. And he was very good. Good relationship with him. He was not a Creole, despite the name.

Q: Were they all just trying to find a workable government?

SHURTLEFF: Well, the Margai government was very corrupt. Albert was way too imperial for everybody. He rode around town in his big car waving at people like this. Had people writing songs about him. He really wasn't that popular. He inherited the job from his brother. His brother was a guy who led Sierra Leone to independence.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Dr. Margai who's a real MD. And everybody loved him. Except Siaka

Stevens. But that's all right, that's a different story.

Q: Did you get a sense that in the American companies or just all companies --

SHURTLEFF: Well, really only one American company there.

Q: Oh, OK. But did you get a sense that the foreign companies had to bribe -- I mean, you know, what kind of corruption was it? Where was it coming from or were they just taking from revenues, or did it matter?

SHURTLEFF: Diamonds.

Q: Diamonds.

SHURTLEFF: Real diamonds. There was a very big diamond industry. All from what's called the Kono district. Which is the eastern province. Place I only visited once, because it was hard to get into. Had to have a special permit to get in there.

Q: And who was kind of guarding the gate?

SHURTLEFF: SLST, Sierra Leone Selection Trust.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: Sell to De Beers. De Beers was doing it. But the local diamond trade was thrown in by the Lebanese.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: They were smuggling diamonds out. Ever read a book by Graham Greene called The Heart of the Matter?

Q: Sure.

SHURTLEFF: Diamond smugglers there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: That's what happened.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: In fact, Graham Greene wrote a book on that called The Diamond Smugglers, nonfiction.

Q: That one I don't remember. I thought I'd read everything from him, but that's

interesting. I'll have to read that.

SHURTLEFF: There were about 14,000 Lebanese in Sierra Leone at the time I was there.

Q: Wow, that's a lot.

SHURTLEFF: They came in starting in the late 1890's and just got bigger and bigger and bigger. In fact, my buddy Ken Ferguson married an Afro-Lebanese woman.

Q: Afro-Lebanese.

SHURTLEFF: Devorjac was her name, Antoinette Devorjac. She was a nurse, big tall woman. Her father was Lebanese, her mother African.

Q: And how did the other groups in Sierra Leone take to the Lebanese? Was there any jealousy?

SHURTLEFF: Well, they weren't widely admired, but they get along because they were the ones that control --

Q: With the money.

SHURTLEFF: -- with the money. They could borrow money from them and they controlled the retail trade by and large.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Although there are Indians there too, Chellarams, they were there too. That's an Indian chain. King's Way stores, which was all -- Lehman Brothers, all the way up and down the coast. They were there too. Closed down.

When the elections were coming we wanted to make sure we really knew what was going on by getting deeply into the APC (All People's Congress) Youth League.

Q: OK, the --

SHURTLEFF: This is the junior politicians, all of whom were now ambassadors and ministers. And on election day, we set up shop in Jim Bishop's house, which was two houses down the street from Siaka Stevens' house.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So these young APC guys with poll watchers all over the country, we'd go to -- we'd go to Siaka Stevens' house, drop off account numbers, and then they'd come to our house for a drink and tell us what the account numbers were.

Q: Oh, interesting.

SHURTLEFF: So we had a complete count -- I think we were two votes -- we had a complete accurate count two days before it was issued.

Q: Wow. And so you think that the count itself was on the up and up, or?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, it was. But it ended up a dead heat. And that's what happened.

Q: -- happened with the different coups.

SHURTLEFF: These guys were -- let me tell you, the first time I took Christine out we were -- first time she came to Freetown while I was there, we were at an embassy get together. Junior officers. Actually it was in the apartment of a communicator who lived one floor down from me, my apartment. And Christine was there. And it got to be 11:00 and I looked at my watch. Said, "Well, got to go to work." And she looked at me. Said, "Well, I've got to work." Said, "I've got to go down the hill to the city. But first I've got to go up and change." So I went up and changed and came back down. Said, "OK. Want a ride back down?"

She said, "Yeah, I'll take a ride back down the hill." So we rode back down the hill. She said, "What the hell are you going to do? What are you up to?"

I said, "Well, it's Friday night." And I said, "All my political contacts, the youthful league guys are all out drinking at their favorite watering holes."

Q: Oh-ho.

SHURTLEFF: And I said, "And I want to be with them. Want to come along?"

She said, "Yeah."

Q: Was she the only woman?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. So the first place we went to was a place called the Yellow Diamond.

Q: Good name.

SHURTLEFF: It's on the side of the hill overlooking the harbor. You had to walk up a flight of stairs, had a long causeway, wooden bridge actually to get in there. And we went, of course the place is pitch dark. Loud music, but pitch dark. We sat down all alone at a table, big table, and the table started to fill up. Christine is just, "Who are these guys?"

"That's all right, they're all APC. That's fine, they're friends of mine."

And then they wanted to dance with Christine. “Should I dance with them?”

“Yeah, go ahead. They’re good guys. Don’t worry about it,” *(laughs)*.

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: We went to two or three different places after that.

Q: That must have been incredible.

SHURTLEFF: I think it kind of impressed her.

Q: Yes.

SHURTLEFF: Well, I had good contacts. That was part of it. They didn’t tell me anything directly. But it paid off later on when I got all the accounts of the election. Paid off big time.

Q: And you have to do the job. And the job overseas can be working 24/7.

SHURTLEFF: Of course, yeah. That’s the way it is. It’s even worse when you’re ambassador because you’re out in public view all the time. There I was anonymous, I didn’t create much of a stir.

Q: Well, did you have contacts with the other embassy representatives from other countries?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, the British in particular. Yeah, we were good friends with the British embassy, including the defense attaché. And one of their junior officers, political officer I had good contacts with. I once in a while talked to the ambassador, but you get a lot of responsibility in Africa with no rank whatsoever. I was doing business with ministers. And senior guys in the force, the military force.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: When the attachés came over from Liberia, I was the one who threw them the party. That’s how I got to keep up my contacts with the military.

Q: Sure. Let me ask. Did you see any similarities between now that you served in Sierra Leone versus Venezuela?

SHURTLEFF: Well, an entirely different culture. Venezuela was a Latin American culture, very Spanish. Not that there weren’t some very cultured people in Sierra Leone, there were. Well-educated people in the arts and the law. There were some very distinguished lawyers and some very distinguished artists. In fact, I’ve got one picture

from one of their artists hanging on my wall in my bedroom. It's a wedding present.

Q: How about in development of the economy and in the political --

SHURTLEFF: Well, entirely different economies. Venezuela was a middle country then. It was not underdeveloped. It was developing. It was sort of a middle group. Colombia, Venezuela.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Brazil, in those days, Argentina. Sort of in the middle. But Sierra Leone was underdeveloped, no doubt about it. Had an extractive economy. Had to import a lot of food.

Q: Did our food AID help?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, we used to sell them rice. Saved them a lot of money. Rice is expensive, they couldn't grow enough of their own. They were bringing it in from Thailand. Actually Sierra Leonean didn't like Thai rice. I wouldn't either. They did like the U.S. rice, so we got pretty good mileage out of that. Of course it was PL-480. So it was a long-term loan. But you asked what did our development do. Not much of anything unfortunately. Government to government development doesn't work very well.

Q: And I mean why not and what does work in your opinion?

SHURTLEFF: Well, what works is local entrepreneurs building the economy by themselves and using their own resources. There were resources they could borrow from us. That's the way Korea grew. That's the way Ghana's grown. Because Ghana has oil, but they haven't had oil for very long. But they've done quite well because they're very self-sufficient.

Q: So why do we keep thinking that our AID does good?

SHURTLEFF: Political reasons. In those days we thought we were competing against the Russians and secondarily the Chinese. The Chinese were building things like the TAN-ZAM Railway. Which now hardly functions, but they built it.

Q: And where was that going from again?

SHURTLEFF: Tanzania to Zambia. From Dar es Salaam all the way up to Lusaka. Hardly runs now.

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: They were also building cultural centers and stadiums all over the place.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Some big show projects. And the Soviets, of course, were in there meddling in everything. They were sending snow plows to --

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: *(laughs)* Remember that?

Q: And were they in Sierra Leone, or?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, they were there. They weren't doing a hell of a lot. They had a pretty big embassy. They used to watch us. We used to watch them. In fact, I remember when I was there, we were living in a building, they moved in behind us with about this much space between the two buildings in the back. And next thing I know we've got a group of guys there from a certain agency will go unnamed, figuring out how to *(laughing)*, how to listen in to what they were doing.

Q: Right, I'm sure everyone was trying to listen in on everybody else.

SHURTLEFF: It turned out it didn't work very well to set anything up. But they tried. The Chinese -- the Israelis were doing quite a bit there.

Q: And why were they there? Any particular reason?

SHURTLEFF: They wanted friends in Africa. Because of the UN they wanted people who'd vote for them in the UN. They had a military mission, which really didn't come into its own until after the coup. Then they started [selling] the Uzis all over the place in the military force.

Q: Ohh.

SHURTLEFF: And then the advisors in the army and --

Q: Well, and then --

SHURTLEFF: I could talk to actually them too, by the way. Another one of my jobs.

Q: Well then, that's interesting. And so then after this kind of succession of coups, who was on top and was that good for all of you, whether it was the Americans, the Israelis, the Brits, the folks in Sierra Leone?

SHURTLEFF: Didn't make a lot of difference to us. But unfortunately, Andrew T. Juxon-Smith, the guy who became the chairman of the government, was a real wild card. He was unstable. So we were never quite sure what he was going to do. And he became very imperial. Very imperial. You saw that happening while I was still there. He was

overthrown in the first couple of months I was back in Washington. Because his own army rose up. The enlisted men rose up and kicked him out. They didn't kill him. They just sent him in exile.

Q: They sent him in exile.

SHURTLEFF: Freed Siaka Stevens from jail and Siaka became the new prime minister. So he finally won the election.

Q: Ah, OK.

SHURTLEFF: Thanks in part to my buddy Colonel _____.

Q: Who supported him?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. He went back for the uprising. He was part of it. The enlisted man liked him. He was good to them. Very popular. But that's my next job. That's when I was in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research). The other guy I met in Freetown was Bill Ullman, who worked for Maurice Tempelman. Leon Tempelman & Son?

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: Diamond dealers.

Q: Right, sure.

SHURTLEFF: They had the rights to 25% of the gemstones produced in Sierra Leone. So we had a fulltime guy there named Bill Ullman, who was the son of James Ramsey Ullman. Used to write books on climbing mountains.

Q: OK, yeah. I thought I recalled the name.

SHURTLEFF: And of course he was setting up a diamond polishing operation. Training Sierra Leonean in diamond polishing. That was part of the deal to keep the gemstones flowing.

Q: Sure.

SHURTLEFF: The other guy I met while I was there was Bob Houdek who was a political officer in Conakry, my counterpart in Conakry. Who wandered over -- I forget, it was late '65, early '66. But he came over in a truck with a local driver to pick up supplies. In Conakry you couldn't buy anything. It was the People's Republic was not the people's paradise.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Imported goods were very short. They'd bring a truck every so often just to buy stuff in our supermarkets and truck it back.

Q: I'm sure he was happy to have you around.

SHURTLEFF: Well, I took him around and introduced me to all my contacts. He was amazed. God, you know, all these contacts, "I can't do that in Conakry."

"Well, of course you can. You've got a Marxist-Leninist government. This is, this is capitalism here."

Q: Well, I mean, what did other countries think about Sierra Leone?

SHURTLEFF: Didn't think much -- didn't think much about it at all. It was a very small, very quiet place.

Q: And yet, you had goods in the stores.

SHURTLEFF: Yes. We were still importing stuff. The government was stealing everything they could anyway, but there was enough money around to keep a few people comfortable. And they needed the goods there to stay comfortable.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, I talked about Christine, I talked about Houdek, who by the way became a very close friend. I'm still in touch with him all the time. And his wife both.

Q: How much of our AID do you think --

SHURTLEFF: Oh, Soapy Williams came there once too. The Secretary for Africa. He was the first Kennedy appointee -- Kennedy appointed Soapy Williams, Mennen K -- what was it -- G. Mennen Williams. He appointed him before he appointed Dean Rusk Secretary of State. It was his first secretary appointment. And Soapy was a pretty active Assistant Secretary, he'd travel a lot. He'd spend a couple days in Sierra Leone on one of his, one of his swings.

Q: Did we have a large AID program, I mean given the size of the country?

SHURTLEFF: Five or six million a year. Not huge. That was a lot of money then. We had a small AID mission there. Peace Corps had, I don't know, 50, 60 volunteers, Peace Corps director. Anyway, want to go to next post?

Q: Sure.

SHURTLEFF: INR, June of 1967.

Q: And how did you decide to go back to Washington and INR?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was my third tour.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: One of your first three tours is going to be in Washington and it was my turn in the barrel.

Q: Mm-hmm. And did you choose INR or did that kind of --

SHURTLEFF: It chose me.

Q: Well, let me ask, before we talk about your going to the Intelligence and Research area. Again, what was the feeling about Vietnam when you were in Sierra Leone? Was there --

SHURTLEFF: We were much more worried about things like Rhodesia. Ian Smith declared Rhodesia independence in '66.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: The other thing we concentrated on was what else was going on in West Africa. Ghana had coups in '66, Kwame Nkrumah was on the throne. Which made me spend even more time with the military, because I could see the same thing happening in Sierra Leone. Given that the political situations were similar.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And I was right, for once.

Q: (laughs) I don't know. So in June of '67, you went back to the state.

SHURTLEFF: Back to the state via a trip to Nigeria. That was to be my principle responsibility to INR, the Africa section of INR, INR-RAF.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: INR-RAF it's called. Research and Analysis for Africa, RAF. And on the way I stopped to see Christine in Abidjan.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: And went to Nigeria. And on the way back I stopped in Ghana a coup -- for a day, I guess, just laid over. So I went all over Nigeria. I went to Kano, I went to Kaduna. This was just before the civil war started, but I did have to go across the Niger

River into Biafra because I was tasked with a job with the company communicator. Had about a thousand pounds -- maybe I'm exaggerating, 500 pounds of baggage used to upgrade the communications system in Enugu. Because I was supposed to drop 'em off at the river. We got there late and the ferries had stopped running.

Q: So what did you do?

SHURTLEFF: He was scared to death because he'd heard about Africa. So said, "OK, I'm told I'm not supposed to do this, but I will. I'll take you across the river." We got a pirogue across the river. We had to unload about two boats out from the shore, they're all stacked up. So I found some bearers and they were busily hauling the stuff up out of the two canoes we had. And up on the top of the gangway there appears this drunken Biafran soldier with a Czech copy of a Springfield 1903 rifle.

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: About a two-foot bayonet on it.

Q: And you're bringing in all of this communications equipment.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. And he starts beating up on the bearers. He didn't dare touch us because we were white, but I was trying to protect the bearers and keep them working to get that stuff at the top of the gangplanks so I could go find a taxi. Well, about that time this resplendent figure appears.

Q: This sounds like a Graham Greene novel.

SHURTLEFF: -- in a uniform, it's about this color. Heavily starched. Swagger stick under his arm. Who yells, "Ten hut!" It was the sergeant major of the local Biafran Army. And he talked to me, and said, "You're Mr. Shurtleff."

Said, "Yes, I am."

Said, "By -- you know, your friends are at the hotel. I'm here to accompany you there. I have a car. I have a Land Rover up at the top."

Q: Oh, you're lucky.

SHURTLEFF: No, no, he was sent after me. They sent him down to make sure I -- so I spent the night in the local hotel with the people from the consulate, and went back the next day to pick up my vehicle on the other side. Because I left the communicator there. But he was scared to death. I don't blame him.

Q: And the communicator was setting this up there?

SHURTLEFF: In Enugu, which was a consulate we had in what had become Biafra. We

had consulates in several regions in Nigeria.

Q: And what was going on in that section?

SHURTLEFF: A civil war was starting. About a year beforehand there was a severe dust-up in the north.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Same thing is going on now. The northern Muslims are attacking Christians. And most of the Christians up there were from the eastern region or Igbos. And they had to flee. And they fled back to Igbo land. The military government there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu led his region out of the Nigerian Federation.

Q: So this was the prelude to the great starvations that occurred in the area.

SHURTLEFF: That's right. Well, I don't know how great the starvation was. But they were very skillful in playing that card.

Q: Now, that's interesting.

SHURTLEFF: After the war was over, somebody did some research. They decided they'd trace police officers, junior police officers, some inspectors. And they got a list of the names of all the Igbo inspectors and sub-inspectors of the police force and tried to find out if they're still alive. Six were missing out of about 150, 200. So we figured either these guys are very lucky or there's more food than we thought. Probably a little bit of each. So how many people actually died of starvation? Nobody knows.

Q: And you just remember all the photos of the babies with the extended bellies.

SHURTLEFF: I know. Well, we have that even in the best of times.

Q: And that's what's very important, I think, is people listen to these to, to find out really what conditions were like all over the continent.

SHURTLEFF: I'd never been there after the war started. This was about 10 days before the war started.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I never really got in there once the -- the border would have been closed, but you can still -- you couldn't go across the bridge.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: There was a bridge, but it was closed. You had to take a ferry or pirogue, which was what I did.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Never got in there after that. I did visit the whole country while I was there, including the Midwest region.

Anyway, Nigerian Civil War, I spent the whole next year covering the Nigerian Civil War. And writing like mad. I mean in the morning I would write the open source stuff, you know, drawing on CIA and everybody else, military attachés, our own reporting. And then -- afternoon I wrote up all what we call black cover stuff.

Q: And could you explain --

SHURTLEFF: All the intercepts. So I had to keep two different sides of my brain for different --

Q: The classified and the unclassified.

SHURTLEFF: Well, no, top secret code word and just plain confidential. Plus, I also had Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, the Gambia, and Lord bless us, Equatorial Guinea.

Q: Ah yes, yes.

SHURTLEFF: And the reason for that was that it became independent in October of '68.

Q: And before that it had had --

SHURTLEFF: It was a Spanish colonial holding.

Q: Spanish colonial.

SHURTLEFF: Became independent. We immediately opened an embassy with a chargé.

Q: In '68.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, October '68. Columbus Day, October '68. We immediately opened up. That was the airport that was taking the relief supplies in to Biafra. So we wanted somebody there to talk with the pilots for the people who were traveling back and forth.

Q: And why was that chosen, the airport there?

SHURTLEFF: It's the closest one.

Q: The closest.

SHURTLEFF: So the closest neutral place to --

Q: And who was getting goods into there in order to get a --

SHURTLEFF: IDRC (International Development Research Centre) and other, Red Cross, IDRC.

Q: Red Cross.

SHURTLEFF: They were using it to ferry the goods in -- food in. They had an airport that was sort of deep in the bush they could use. So that was the start of a very long engagement for us with Equatorial Guinea. A post I was offered the ambassadorship twice.

Q: And?

SHURTLEFF: I turned it down.

Q: And you turned it down why?

SHURTLEFF: Well, too many bad memories because of the murder. And because of --

Q: Oh, so it was after the murder, and this is the --

SHURTLEFF: The murder was my next tour.

Q: OK, and we'll talk about that and we'll talk about that in just a little bit.

SHURTLEFF: And I got married in December.

Q: And you got married where?

SHURTLEFF: In Washington, Bob Houdek's house, on Van Ness Street.

Q: And at this time your wife, she had to leave the Foreign Service once you got married.

SHURTLEFF: Yes. Right. We took a honeymoon cruise in the Caribbean on the French line, the S.S. Flandre. We came back and lived in our apartment in the Golden Triangle -- Colorado Road.

Q: Oh, beautiful. Beautiful. And how was working at INR? Did you feel like you all had good contacts in these countries? Because you knew Africa.

SHURTLEFF: We had a problem with the embassy's reporting out of Lagos.

Q: And why was that?

SHURTLEFF: Entirely too pro-federal government. Federal government could do no wrong. We knew darn well they could do wrong, because they weren't winning the war.

Q: Why do you think the embassy was --

SHURTLEFF: I don't know, localitis.

Q: Could you talk about localities, others call it clientitis, and what effect that had in this case or any other case you saw.

SHURTLEFF: This is about the only time I really saw it in any identifiable way that mattered. You always develop friendships with various people in these countries. You've got to avoid crawling into bed with them. It's not our job. You have to really be able to remove from what's going on.

Q: Right. And was it just from the ambassador on down or was it --

SHURTLEFF: Was basically the ambassador.

SHURTLEFF: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: His name was Elbrick, Burke Elbrick. And anyway, he didn't get another embassy after that.

Q: And did you try to get them to bring in more reporting or --

SHURTLEFF: Yeah.

Q: -- observations?

SHURTLEFF: But they were not about to do it. But we had other sources. We used all sources including the military attachés who were, who were doing a better job.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Right. Plus until the last year of the war we still had the consulate in Enugu.

Q: Ah, OK.

SHURTLEFF: We had to close that when the fighting got too bad.

Q: Sure. And what were we doing? Or what were we trying to do? Or what was, again, our goal in all of this?

SHURTLEFF: Our foreign policy there was two-fold. One, to really want to keep Nigeria together, to avoid break up -- the French wanted to break it up.

Q: They did?

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

Q: And why was that?

SHURTLEFF: Too big. They felt it threatened their former colonies in the area. Which it did. By their likes, quite right. It was big and rich, powerful by comparison. Little bitty colonies. Our other interest was basically humanitarian. We had a special envoy for humanitarian affairs who had his own office in the State Department. Worked with him very closely. He was there trying to find out what was going on, make sure that people were getting food in where necessary.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Kind of fending off Congress and other interested parties too. Because we really didn't want to go in there. In fact, we refused to sell the government munitions.

Q: We did. Now, who was president of Nigeria at this time?

SHURTLEFF: Guy named Yakubu Gowon, called "Jack" Gowon.

Q: OK, and what year was this?

SHURTLEFF: He was president 1966-1975. He was eventually overthrown in a coup after the war.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: He was a middle belter. He was neither a northerner nor a southerner. And he was a Christian.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: And very good officer. And he sought to model himself on Abraham Lincoln.

Q: Oh wow.

SHURTLEFF: Because at the end of the war, when they finally won, he refused to have war crimes trials. He pardoned everybody. One country again. Ojukwu went in exile for a while, but came back. He got into politics a few years later.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And you know, all was forgiven. But Gowon made it stick. He made it stick. He did a very good job. There was no retribution whatsoever.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: That I could ever discover.

Q: Now, this is interesting. Because, so the U.S. concerns are humanitarian, and also wanting to keep the country together. And the French didn't.

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: Did the French support --

SHURTLEFF: Indirectly. They were running stuff through their African friends like [inaudible] and the Ivory Coast.

Q: How did we deal with that with the French? What was going on between our mission and the French mission?

SHURTLEFF: Well, in Africa, the French and the Americans weren't friends. It's as simple as that. Well, they saw us as a threat. I mean I drove them nuts in the Congo.

Q: It's interesting because to see how it played out in country and also in Washington and in Europe. I mean could you give us a sense of what was going on? Because again, we're in Vietnam which the French had just left.

SHURTLEFF: Right. We were in bed with the British on this one, because they were very interested in keeping Nigeria together too. This was their former colony, after all. This didn't make sense to any of us to have Nigeria to break up. It still doesn't. But they are having the same old problems.

Q: Right. And were there demarches --

SHURTLEFF: Corruption -- corruption --

Q: -- with the French, or I mean whether it was from Washington -- or I mean in Europe what was going on to kind of ameliorate the situation with the French? Was there anything going on?

SHURTLEFF: Not really. Got to remember, when the French left Africa, they never really left. They left their own people in charge. They basically picked the president in almost every case. Not in Guinea, in the case of Guinea, but every other case. They left behind all sorts of advisors, French advisors. And they kept him there for years and years and years, every minister in African government, French African government had a French helper. They had a good sized base in Libreville. Another in Djibouti.

Q: And how long did this --

SHURTLEFF: That was their claim to being a great power. They had clients.

Q: And how long did this last to where they had that strength? I know they're still there to some extent.

SHURTLEFF: Up until Chirac was elected. He started to pull away.

Q: And do you remember what year that was?

SHURTLEFF: It was in the early '90s. Just after I retired.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: They set up the CFA (Central African) franc, which was pegged to the French franc. Very artificial currency. Which actually strangled local initiative. Because they were with the franc it allowed them to import all the food they needed from France instead of growing it. All their manufacturers were brought in instead of manufacturing locally. Once the CFA franc was devalued, something Hank Cohen had a lot to do with, by the way. When he was Assistant Secretary he worked on that, all the time he was there for four years.

Q: Oh, it took four years.

SHURTLEFF: Finally the French set the CFA franc free. And all sorts of new industries popped up. Now, didn't make them rich overnight. But it did help things a little bit. And the French were able to do that because Chirac saw it was expensive for him to support this artificial currency.

Q: What was the feeling about de Gaulle?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it depends on where you were. He was in France. He was basically considered to be a hero, because he was the one who first promised during World War II that he was going to devolve political power from France to the Africans. Let me go back a little bit here.

Q: Please.

SHURTLEFF: The first French administrator of any importance at all, any political important to recognize de Gaulle was Felix Éboué. More on Felix later. He was the Governor of Chad. Very senior French colonial official. Was actually black. He was from Cayenne. French Guyana in South America. But he'd gone to school in France and he worked his way up in the civil service and had risen all the way to the top. In June of 1940, he recognized de Gaulle. You know, we're Gaullists. We're not going to have anything to do with Vichy French. And de Gaulle immediately made him Governor General of Central Africa in Brazzaville. And Brazzaville after that time became very important to the Gaullists, because de Gaulle visited there several times.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And Felix Éboué died, of course, his health was very poor. He died during the war. But all the stuff about independence evolved from de Gaulle's affinity with Africa. And of course in 1958, they had plebiscites in every African colony. Do you want to become independent, do you want to stay affiliated with France? And everybody said we want to stay affiliated with France, understanding they would become independent anyway. Except for Guinea. The French got a no-vote. And of course Guinea became immediately independent in '58 and the French left, taking the phone systems, and everything else with them.

Q: Right. Whoops (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: Quite nasty. The Soviets moved in big time. Didn't do any good either because it was something like sending them snowplows. What the hell are they going to do with snowplows?

Q: They did. They sent snowplows.

SHURTLEFF: Yes, they literally did. I used to see them parked out at the airport there. Sitting there rusting in the sun, or the rain is what it usually was. It's very rainy up there.

Q: Oh. Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, de Gaulle is a real hero in Africa. They had a lot of respect for him. But he needed, for the glory of France, to have clients. They had lots of clients, they're all in Africa. He had his own voting block in the UN. That was France's claim to big power status.

Q: And --

SHURTLEFF: Although they weren't really a big power.

Q: Exactly. But they at least had something.

SHURTLEFF: They got to act like it anyway.

Q: And so now you're in INR. You're dealing with a lot of these countries and the war going on in Nigeria.

SHURTLEFF: Civil war, nasty. Although not as nasty as it could have been, but it was still nasty.

Q: And what can you tell us again about, you know -- I mean basically you were an analyst, you were reporting.

SHURTLEFF: Right.

Q: Did you go back to Africa to visit?

SHURTLEFF: No. I did it before I got back to the job when they sent me to Nigeria. Of course I'd already visited several countries anyway. And I had one of my former countries, Sierra Leone. I guess it was in October of '67, there was another coup, or rather an army mutiny in Sierra Leone. And the enlisted men rose up one day. I was home asleep about 5:00 in the morning. I got a call from the INR Watch Office saying there's been some sort of an uprising in Sierra Leone. He read me what he picked up off the AP wire. I said, "Oh gosh, OK, I'll be in at the usual time. I'll write this all up." So I came in and read the traffic. It wasn't very much.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And I said, "OK, let me write this up." Three or four paragraphs. So I wrote it up saying these are the three things that these enlisted men can do. One two, three.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And they did them all. One, two, three.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Which is how Siaka Stevens wound up being president. So I said first thing they can do they can set up their own government. Second thing is let Colonel Bangura head the government for a while. They did that for a little while. And then they can call Siaka Stevens back and make him prime minister. So they did all three at once. Brilliant.

Q: And did that help the country, I mean given the alternatives.

SHURTLEFF: No, not really. Stevens became just as corrupt as Margai ever was. My buddy Sheiku Tarawali was one of the most corrupt ones around.

Q: Well, what would it have taken, in Sierra Leone for example, to not be corrupt? Is there any way that can change? Do you have any thoughts on that?

SHURTLEFF: Well, as long as they have diamonds. As long as the Lebanese were there willing to pay for the privilege of smuggling them out of the country, it's difficult. Remember that in Africa, your loyalties aren't to the government. You know, we're all loyal Americans. You feel very strongly about that. We're patriots.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Well, Africans are loyal to their family. It's the family that comes first. That's your primary allegiance. It's not to some artificial national entity.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Some nation state. Because nation states really don't exist in Africa. And a country like Nigeria, you have several different nations. You've got the Yoruba nation, you've got the middle belt, you've got the Muslims in the north, you've got the Igbos in the east. These are all nations. They speak a common language, they have common religions. Although the Yorubas are half Christian, half Muslim.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But they don't let that bother them.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They're all Yorubas, that's what counts. And their family. But it's a pretty damn big family of 45, 50 million people (*laughs*).

The other thing with African governments: they really aren't governments like we think of. They don't have any span of control. You got one big man who runs everything. And everything else and everything flows from him up and down. So I look at an African government as a Hollywood movie set, like a Western movie set, buildings with the big false front.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You open up the swinging doors into the saloon and you step into the room. There's nothing inside there. It's just a false front. No delegation of authority whatsoever. I mean the ministers run the -- they don't tell their minions what they're doing.

Q: Is there any taxing authority?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, there's basically import duties. Nobody really pays income taxes.

They all avoid those. Import duties.

Q: And what --

SHURTLEFF: And mineral sales.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: It's rubber in some cases.

Q: And, and were people parking their money?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: In Europe or in the States?-

SHURTLEFF: Buying property in Europe and the States. I don't know how many African leaders like Bongo of Gabon had a huge estate in Hollywood. Big house.

Q: And yet we knew what was going on in terms of corruption?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. But what do you do about it? We weren't running the country.

Q: And we still let people have visas of course and --

SHURTLEFF: Yes, of course. Most of the time. Not all the time. It all depended on how nasty they got. At one point with a lot of Nigerians, we weren't giving them visas because things got so nasty. This was in the early '90s.

Q: And how about all the money going in?

SHURTLEFF: Well, money was basically for two things, health and food.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: A little bit for education. Those were humanitarian basically. It wasn't a whole lot of development aid.

Q: Right. OK. So tell me a little bit more about INR.

SHURTLEFF: Assistant Secretary's name was Hughes. I worked for a guy named Oliver Troxel, who was later Ambassador to Zambia, Senior Foreign Service Officer. It was a very good tour for just about two years.

Q: Well, that's my next question. You had worked in the field and now you're in Washington.

SHURTLEFF: It's completely different. I had changed my writing style around completely. Because we were only allowed something, it was called an information memo, an IM, four paragraphs. Introduction and three others.

Q: So you had to be succinct and hit the high notes.

SHURTLEFF: Well, the typical one was communist boy scouts this morning overthrew the president of Upper Volta. Then they'd want three paragraphs to explain who these guys were and why they did it. Actually the first -- a little longer than that, but that's basically what it was, communist boy scouts.

Q: And can you give some sense of, did we work well with our other agencies?

SHURTLEFF: We worked particularly well with the African Bureau, because the African Bureau had us ghostwrite a lot of their interagency memoranda.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I remember we used to have NSIM's, National Security Intelligence Memoranda. And the bureau was tasked by Kissinger, when he was over at the White House, to write one of these things on Nigeria, what would Nigeria look like after the civil war? What would our relations look like? What would our relations be with Nigeria after the civil war was over and the federals had won? So OK, I wrote that up. And I took it down to the, to the Nigeria Desk. And they ripped it apart. They changed everything.

Q: And why did they?

SHURTLEFF: They had different opinions than I did. And the next thing I know, I'm calling my boss saying, "I just got a call from the Assistant Secretary saying that memo you wrote is a bunch of crap."

And I said, "No, it isn't. He never got the memo I wrote."

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: So they changed it down AFW. He said, "Where's the one you wrote?"

"Here it is, I can get it for ya. There it is."

He said, "I'm going to take this up to the Assistant Secretary." He came back an hour later and said, "That's exactly what he wanted. He's going to publish that just the way it is." Thank you (*laughs*).

Q: Well, that's, that's fantastic, because not every Assistant Secretary would do that.

SHURTLEFF: I know. Joseph Palmer was the Assistant Secretary.

Q: Do you think that was courageous?

SHURTLEFF: He wanted a decent job and he didn't get a decent one from the Nigeria desk.

Q: From the bureau. And why do you think the bureau was so off base?

SHURTLEFF: The Nigerian desk officer was George Sherry, who was the last consul general in Enugu. He was very pro-Biafran. And I wasn't. Wasn't very pro-federalist either, but going down the middle.

Q: It's a whole matter of perspective and experience, but how do you think Foreign Service Officers can avoid the clientitis or the, you know, narrow points of view? Is there a hint that you learned through your years?

SHURTLEFF: Well, as I said, don't get too close to the situation. Don't fall in love with the country you're in. That's not your job. Your job is to represent the United States and to interpret what's going on there to people back in Washington and to interpret to the people there in the country what's going on in Washington. So you face both ways. And in order to do that, you got to be pretty neutral in your feelings about the country you're working on. I never had a whole lot of trouble with that. I got so I just didn't trust much of anything.

Q: Trust much of anybody where?

SHURTLEFF: In the host government.

I did business with a lot of really nasty characters. They weren't nice guys. In fact, that's one of the reasons I've never done much in Africa after I left the Foreign Service. I mean I've had opportunities, but I just don't want to go back and do business with these guys. I had to do business with them when I was an ambassador and a DCM, all that sort of thing. But I don't have to do it when I'm a private citizen. You're known by the company you keep. And you don't want to keep company with some of these guys.

Case in point. A friend of mine has his own investment banking firm, calls me up one day about four years ago and he said, "I've got a person you know," whose name I can't use because he's still alive, "Came to me the other day and asked me to take on the investment account for this unnamed African chief of state. What do you think of that?"

And I said, "Don't think much of it at all." I said, "You don't want anything to do with that guy. Like all other African leaders, he doesn't know the difference between his own pocketbook and the national treasury." Said, "You're going to be assisting him in stealing from the government." Said, "You don't want to do that. You value your reputation too much to do that."

He said, "OK, I'll take this all on your word. I'll call you," -- he called me back a week later, said, "I turned him down."

I said, "Good, you did the right thing."

He said, "By the way, my mother told me that too."

I said, "Well, why'd you ask me then?"

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: His mother was my PAO.

Q: Your public affairs officer.

SHURTLEFF: In Brazzaville, and a very bright lady.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Boy, she was good.

Q: How about our USAID. How much of that do you think was kind of, you know, monetized by people used --

SHURTLEFF: The only one involved in that particularly was in Liberia. I'll go into that when we go into Liberia.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: But there we had budgetary subventions there, and we had a lot of military assistance. Not for arms, but for building barracks, believe it or not. Soldiers housing. Weren't really barracks, but family housing for soldiers. And I can go into that too.

Q: So you've done your stint in Intelligence and Research in Washington D.C. at State Department headquarters. You're married.

SHURTLEFF: Yep. Happily married. Still married, same woman.

Q: That's a good deal. You're a lucky man and she's a lucky woman.

SHURTLEFF: Smartest thing I ever did was marry Christine.

Q: Well, let me ask just real quickly. You know, it seems as if Foreign Service spouses are just a major help. And again, your wife was a Foreign Service Officer.

SHURTLEFF: Well, that's, you know, a different world.

Q: And, what was like the division of labor you had with your wife? I mean do you think you were able to be a --

SHURTLEFF: Oh, I was much more effective with her.

Q: Much more effective.

SHURTLEFF: Well, particularly my first post after we were married overseas was Douala, Cameroon. And I had 13 weeks of French before I went there. That was it, that's all I had time for was half the course. Now, fortunately the last five weeks was one-on-one with the instructor. That's the best they can do for -- they had to get me out there. There'd been a vacancy for four, five months.

Q: And she knew French.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, she was bilingual, practically bilingual. She was four plus.

Q: So she could help you a lot.

SHURTLEFF: I never did any better than three plus.

Q: How about support in terms of your social life and packing enough.

SHURTLEFF: In terms of running a house, I'm a pretty good manager. Christine was even better. I mean you always had at least three servants.

Q: And do you think that having --

SHURTLEFF: It requires a lot of management.

Q: And having a spouse to manage a social life, a house, a pack-out --

SHURTLEFF: Plus contacts.

Q: -- how did that help your career?

SHURTLEFF: Plus she had contacts with all the ladies too. In Liberia, she hung around with the market mammies, for example. Market women in West Africa have real political clout. They control the money. The men are all sitting back, you know, picking their toes and smoking weed at home somewhere, and the ladies are out doing the business and making the money. Why do you think they're called mammy wagons? The buses in West Africa are called mammy wagons because they're all owned by women! All the cloth imports are handled by women. The market produce jobs are held by women. They do all

the farming.

Q: So do you feel as if your wife had a better --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: -- entrée to that?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, she did. I didn't have an entrée at all there. When we were in Brazzaville she worked with another American woman who was married to a UN officer, in fact a public affairs officer, at the UN mission there. And they set up a craft shop called We Women so that ladies could bring their craft work to sell and make a little bit of money. She also worked with a bunch of deaf carpenters, woodworkers in another part of town, who were very really skilled and got them a big grant from the African Development Foundation to set up so they could mechanize themselves. They were all working by hand. They were going to get some power tools. They have electricity, there was plenty of electricity. And they did very well.

Q: So in effect, this really was a partnership --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: -- which helped you understand what was going on in the country, as well as helped what was going on in the country.

SHURTLEFF: Also, she knew the president's wife and the prime minister's wife. I dealt with the prime minister in Douala, for example, the state prime minister.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: She dealt with his wife. OK, simple as that. Same with the governors. She knew all the governors' wives. She knew the DO's wife, the district officer's. Cameroon was a funny place. You had a mix of French and British.

Q: Right. OK, so your next tour.

SHURTLEFF: August 1969.

Q: August 1969, and?

SHURTLEFF: Went to the University of Chicago.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: For a year of African studies, which I was offered. In those days, the Africa Bureau used to train lots of people in various universities all around the country,

BC (Boston College), Indiana, Northwestern, Stanford, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), any place that had an African studies program we'd send guys out. The year I was there, '69/'70, we sent six.

Q: Six officers.

SHURTLEFF: From Africa. To different places. I went to the University of Chicago. Not because they had an African studies program, they didn't. They had a lot of good Africanists there though. I knew exactly what I wanted to look at, and they had people I wanted. And Christine had a job there. Because while we were first married she worked in Washington for the Bank Marketing Association. And she was their assistant librarian in a big banking library. And the lady she worked for, who was a nationalized American from Poland named Teresa Tausend, took another job with a bank marketing association, similar thing.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: In Chicago. And she wanted to take Christine with her. So I said fine. We'll do that because I can go to the University of Chicago, and I did. We already had somebody there the year before anyway.

Q: Who nominated you to go?

SHURTLEFF: The African Bureau did.

Q: And how long was that for?

SHURTLEFF: One year, one academic year. From August 'til June.

Q: And was that useful?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, great year. We drove along Skyline Drive, the Blue Ridge Parkway, all the way down to almost Mobile, Alabama, and then up to Mississippi, stopping at all the Civil War battlefields we could find.

Q: (laughs) So you got to learn about the United States again.

SHURTLEFF: Well, yeah. Yeah. I mean great, great trip. After Cape Girardeau there's not much left in terms of Civil War battlefields. That's pretty far north of Missouri, but there sure is a lot between Chickamauga and Shiloh you can go to. And anyway, we got a nice apartment on the South Side, 69th Street, about one block from the IRT and about two blocks from the South Shore Club. So Christine could walk a block and take the IRT down the loop where she worked, because the Bank Market Associates were starting a library, that's why they hired this lady and Christine, to help them set up the library. And I went to University of Chicago.

Q: And how was it?

SHURTLEFF: I took courses in politics and sociology. Lloyd Fowlers was there, who was very famous for work on the Dinka and the Nuer in Sudan. He used to say, "I'm really a political scientist. I just study small groups rather than big groups."

Q: Did people know that you were Foreign Service --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: -- and you'd had this experience. Did you get involved in a lot of discussions with people? Did they learn as much from you as you learned from them?

SHURTLEFF: Well, I think some of the students did. But a lot of the courses I took were individual courses. I took reading courses. And I did a paper for a guy, a professor named Atanda, who was a Nigerian -- it was comparing the French, British, Portuguese, and Belgian, the four colonial systems. I found out they're all about the same (*laughs*).

Q: Being the same and you're laughing, so elaborate on that.

SHURTLEFF: Well, they look different, but they really weren't. I mean they were all very repressive and they were all very shy about giving Africans any responsibility at all. Even the French promoted very few, a handful. And the British had a lot of people at midlevel or low level, but not very many with high level responsibilities. Portuguese didn't train anybody at all. And neither did the Belgians; the Belgians had one of the bloodiest colonial regimes.

Q: And why do you think that? Was it a racism? Was it they just didn't think they had the capacity, they didn't have the education?

SHURTLEFF: They were trying to make the colonies pay, which they never did, of course. But they're supposed to be money makers and they never were. They were desperate to get money out of them. And they never did. But in trying to do that, they were very, very repressive. I mean things like the Congo-Ocean Railway, which is in the Congo, it goes from Pointe-Noire, which is at the ocean, to the Congo River. In Brazzaville. Twenty or 25,000 people died building that. People from Chad and the Central African Republic and the Northern Congo just plain died building it. It's very rough country. Corvée labor. They were forced to work for practically nothing. They starved them and they beat them and it was terrible. This was in the 1920's after World War I.

Q: You have this collective memory, or direct memory of colonialists, and then you've had your own dictators that were extraordinarily repressive --

SHURTLEFF: Like Mobutu. I spent a lot of time working in Zaire.

Q: So your contacts and the people in the street, I mean what kind of choices did they have?

SHURTLEFF: They didn't.

Q: And in terms of future, was it just day-to-day?

SHURTLEFF: Well, they hoped they had a relative in government that would keep them going. Or they could get a job in the American embassy that paid well (*laughs*). That's why these local employees are terribly loyal, because we paid them well.

Q: Because we paid them well.

SHURTLEFF: And we treated them right. And we called them Mister and Miss and Missus and didn't swear at them or shout at them. And we paid top dollar. In Brazzaville we had some employees they were paying 30 and \$40,000 a year to, because they were bilingual and they had graduate degrees. We had one guy who was a graduate of Thunderbird. You know what Thunderbird is.

Q: Sure. The international --

SHURTLEFF: He now works for the UN.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Surprise, surprise. He loved us. So we paid him \$30,000. He's a commercial assistant. Wow, come, come translator, interpreter, people met him, they thought he was American. He had an American accent. And his English, completely unaccented English and beautiful French.

Q: Because of your experience in Africa, and later on you were in a number of other countries and INR where you covered a number of countries, what would you say about American policy to people who are listening to this? Because a lot of people say oh, you know, we were just trying to do things. And of course we're always trying to do things for the United States interest. That's our job. But in terms of what we're trying to accomplish.

SHURTLEFF: Originally we got involved in Africa, particularly during the Kennedy administration and actually in the end of the Eisenhower administration, because we looked upon Africa as fertile ground for spreading democracy around the world. This was the new frontier of creating new ways to govern. And of course disillusion rapidly set in for all the usual reasons, corruption and coups. I mean the coups started almost immediately. Ghana was the first big one, but it wasn't the first one. The first one was the army mutiny in East Africa in '63. I mean that was a pretty bloody affair. The British had to come in to finally settle that one. And then of course there were the Soviets. The Soviets and the Chinese were moving in there and we felt we had to counter them. The

Cold War wasn't fought on the plains of Central Europe, it was fought in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We were at war with the Soviets and the Chinese. Mostly the Soviets. And that was where the Cold War was fought. And that's how we justified afterwards everything we were doing. That's how we got our AID money and everything else. We had to keep the Soviets up. We played this card unabashedly because it was the only way we were going to get any money to do any of the other stuff we wanted to do.

Q: But to do so, when we're talking about AID we're trying to make the economy work better. We're trying to get governments who were pro-western.

SHURTLEFF: Health, education, food.

Q: Which is a nice thing to do regardless of your intention.

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was more humanitarian.

Q: It was more humanitarian. But it wasn't exclusively humanitarian.

SHURTLEFF: No, but mostly it was. It wasn't that much military assistance.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: Nothing in Nigeria, for example. Liberia was a big recipient of military assistance. Mostly that was housing for soldiers and their families.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: We called it barracks. It wasn't barracks at all. It was family housing. Because those guys used to live in grass shacks.

Q: Well, I mention this because people ask about it now too, they say, how much of U.S. foreign policy is just help turn big American company interests so that they'll help your campaign here in the United States? And how much of it really was to --

SHURTLEFF: Not much. Not much.

Q: -- promote democracy?

SHURTLEFF: Oh. Well, who are we kidding -- yes, of course, promote democracy.

Q: And the humanitarian aid.

SHURTLEFF: Humanitarian side. Well, what big American companies are in Africa? Damn few.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I mean Guinea had, had Alcoa, Alocam. Bauxite. Cameroon was French, that was Alocam. Aluminum and Cameroon.

Q: But as I talk with people too, just the --

SHURTLEFF: It wasn't much -- there's not much there --

Q: The idea of public service is pretty amazing because I felt for me, and I hear from you too, that we go in because it's a good thing to do. We're trying to do good in the world.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. No, right, exactly. But that's not the only reason. You have to remember the Soviets were heavily --

Q: Exactly.

SHURTLEFF: That was a big motivating factor. Anyway, back to the University of Chicago. I did the thing on colonialism, bout the coup in Ghana, and sociology with Lloyd Fowlers. Lot of my work on sociology. Great professor. He studied bits and pieces of countries, not the whole country. And my faculty advisor was Aristide Zolberg, who wrote books on things like the Ivory Coast. He's a francophone. He now I guess has gone back to Belgium, his first love. He left African affairs I guess because he left the University of Chicago. I didn't get along with him that well. It was all right, but he was kind of an academic snob unfortunately.

Q: Just tell me a little bit about the thesis that you wrote. What was the --

SHURTLEFF: Oh, the paper on the Ghana coup. I did the academic research for it. It's like a master's degree thesis. I didn't get a degree, but I tried to look at the various causes of the coup. I came to the conclusion it's basically bread and butter. The army was scared to death that they were going to go to the Congo and have to fight there. They thought Nkrumah was at the Congo. And plus, he was cutting their pay and basically not doing much for the military. So they overthrew him.

Q: So it's good to take care of your military.

SHURTLEFF: Bread and butter issues. Look at how good we are to our military. We think they're worth it. What do they think the Foreign Service is doing besides defending their country?

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, Christine was very happy at the Bank Marketing Association with her friend. She made more money in those days than I did. Considerably more than I did.

Q: Considerably more. And yet you were going to go back into the Foreign Service and not, not stay in Chicago and --

SHURTLEFF: Well, because our next post was Douala.

Q: And how did you get to Douala and what was --

SHURTLEFF: I went to Bill Bradford on my way out the door of University of Chicago. I said, "Bill, my assignment's coming after this thing. I want to be either an admin officer at a small post or at my own post to be principal officer."

He said, "OK, I hear ya. I'll arrange it, I'll let you know."

Well, a couple months later he calls, "OK, Douala. I'm going to send you to Douala."

I said, "Great." So I start reading up everything I can find on Cameroon. There's considerable to read about Cameroon. All the way back to German times. So I was pretty well prepared when I got there. After 13 weeks of French back in Washington in September of '70 Christine and I shipped out to Douala.

Q: And what did Christine think about that? I mean she had had this great job in Chicago.

SHURTLEFF: She did her job in Chicago.

Q: OK. So she was ready to go.

SHURTLEFF: She was there to set up their library, which she did.

Q: So you went to Douala, Cameroon.

SHURTLEFF: Which is a port city. It was almost a million people. It's about double the size of Yaoundé, which is the capital. The commercial capital, the international airport, and the major port of the country were all in Douala.

Q: All in Douala, not in Yaoundé.

SHURTLEFF: It's a port on the coast.

Q: And what year was this.

SHURTLEFF: I was there from September '70 to July of '72.

Q: OK, and you were principal officer in Douala?

SHURTLEFF: Right. There were three Americans there. I had a vice consul. Lots of

local employees. And there was another guy who was also a consul but who was the branch PAO, John Garner and his wife. Christine and John came in to the Foreign Service in the same class. So they already knew each other. We became very close friends.

Q: And was Christine working then? Did she get a job there?

SHURTLEFF: Managing the house. We were running sort of a bed, breakfast boarding house there. Because everybody that came to visit Yaoundé had to come through Douala. No international airport in Yaoundé. So they came to Douala, changed planes to go to Yaoundé. Sometimes changing planes can take a day or two. And so we were putting them up and feeding them and spent a lot of time in that airport back and forth.

Q: And who was the ambassador in Yaoundé?

SHURTLEFF: Lew Hoffacker.

Q: Lew Hoffacker.

SHURTLEFF: And Jim Parker was my first DCM and then Lannon Walker, from January of '71.

Q: Well, let's talk about Douala and what you were doing then.

SHURTLEFF: OK. The basic reason our Douala post was there was because it was a supply point for all of the neighboring posts. Still is. Although it's no longer a consulate. It's an embassy. For reasons I can talk about later. That's my last tour, we did that. So we were taking care of the Central African Republic, Chad, and Equatorial Guinea basically.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: They wanted ice cream, we got them ice cream. They wanted a truck, we got them a truck. They wanted paper, we got them paper. Wanted cheese, we got them cheese. Whatever it was. We used to drive this stuff up, I put it on the railway. Yaoundé, we got them supplies too.

Q: Well, you all were pretty important.

SHURTLEFF: There was a good German-built railway between Douala and Yaoundé. But the other places we had to either fly it in or truck it in. That was the reason the post was there. But also, of course, we did a lot of reporting because in those days Cameroon was two states. It was federated. It was a West Cameroon state and an East Cameroon state. The East Cameroon was former French Cameroon, French speaking. And the West Cameroons was the former British Cameroons, English speaking. And they each had their own cabinet and their own prime minister. But the only one that really counted was the prime minister of the parliament in West Cameroon that really worked. They were doing

things. Not a lot, but they were doing enough.

One of my major contacts was the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, Salomon Tandeng Muna. I used to go up to Buea, which was the capital, about an hour and a half drive from Douala, up the side of Mount Cameroon, and see him. We'd go to his house. And he lived in an old classic Bavarian country home, built for the German governor way back before World War I. We used to go have lunch once in a while. He had a son who was a lawyer, involved in politics.

Q: So you had good contacts there too.

SHURTLEFF: Better contacts there than I actually had in Douala. I had pretty good contacts in Douala too.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: But I spent a lot of time traveling. So most of my really good contacts were outside Douala because I was on the road one week of the month.

Q: And what language was -- I mean I guess it depends where you were.

SHURTLEFF: Pidgin English. The only way the president or the vice president could communicate was pidgin English. The pidgin was brought in by the European administrators that first got to Nigeria in the 1870's and 1880's because most of them came in from China and India. And they brought pidgin English with them. Pidgin means business. The British Colonial Civil Service were brought in from China and India. They brought the language with them and it spread.

Q: And how is your pidgin English?

SHURTLEFF: Not that good, but my driver spoke perfect pidgin English. I had two drivers. I had one for Douala, city driver, and one for upcountry, who spoke five dialects.

Q: That's fantastic.

SHURTLEFF: Plus pidgin English, French, and English. He had a high school education. He was actually from francophone Cameroon. But he went to school in West Cameroon. So he learned English in school. His wife was francophone, but he was Anglophone really.

Q: And how about the other countries? Did you get a chance to travel?

SHURTLEFF: Once every three months I went to Equatorial Guinea. One of the reasons I was sent there, besides to give me some training in running my own post was because I spoke Spanish. We needed a backup for the chargé in Equatorial Guinea, in case he got sick or wanted to go on leave.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So I went over just to make sure I knew everybody there. They knew me and that I spoke Spanish a little bit. Which later on became crucial. Anyway, that was one of the main reasons I was in Douala.

Q: How many people at that time were in Equatorial Guinea?

SHURTLEFF: Two.

Q: Just a two-person post there as well.

SHURTLEFF: They had a chargé and they had a officer. And they were married. Well, at least one of them was.

Q: Right. And then you also traveled to Chad.

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: But the vice consul went up to Chad a couple of times. He used to go up in the truck, with a driver.

Q: Got it.

SHURTLEFF: Now, I didn't do that. Used to fly around some. Hank Cohen came through once, and we flew him around. Drove part of the way and flew part of the way. He was an office director for Central Africa. We had the International Parliamentary Union, an IPU meeting there.

Q: Oh wow.

SHURTLEFF: Had about 30 congressmen, senators, and their wives. Flew in an Air Force 707.

Q: To Douala?

SHURTLEFF: Well, they had to. They couldn't fly to Yaoundé.

Q: And what was that like?

SHURTLEFF: That was a circus. We had to transfer them all from that plane to a DC-6 to fly up to Yaoundé. And once they went off, I had to take care of the Air Force crew. The commander of the airplane, an Air Force colonel, said, "OK, where's the nearest PX

(postal exchange)?”

And I said, “The nearest PX is in Frankfurt (*laughs*). But that’s all right, there’s good markets here.”

Q: What did you think of this congressional delegation? I mean 30 representatives is quite a lot.

SHURTLEFF: Oh, we had a lot of fun. We had a good time. We put them to work.

Q: Did you? I’m interested in that. What --

SHURTLEFF: Well, Lannon Walker did most of it up in Douala. We arranged this all weeks ahead of time because we’d been in Washington so many times with the Erdos proceedings, the trial and the investigation.

Q: Right, that we’ll get to, right.

SHURTLEFF: We’d go up to Capitol Hill to find out exactly what they wanted and we gave it to them. We had some very high-powered senators there. Birch Bayh was one of them, for example.

Q: Birch Bayh was Indiana.

SHURTLEFF: We wanted to fly into Cameroon, because it was English speaking, there was a lot of good things to see there. We had a big fishponds program, a Peace Corps effort. I wanted to see a guy I wanted to meet, who was one of the major political leaders. He was in the West Cameroon legislature. He was elected to it. As a chief he could have sat in the house of chiefs, but he sat in their elected party. I got him to put on a show for - - lasted practically all day with a lunch and dancing and singing and all sorts of other stuff. He wanted a small bulldozer so he could dig fishponds. So the big Peace Corps program there was digging fishponds. He needed a bulldozer; they really couldn’t dig them by hand.

Q: He wanted to dig his own fishpond.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. And for his constituents. He was, after all, a member of parliament. And I told him, “I can’t -- that’s \$10,000 we’re talking about. Because I’m not only going to buy the bulldozer, I’m going to buy a truck and trailer to haul it. And Mercedes trucks are expensive. You want a Mercedes, you don’t want an American truck.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: So I said, “Look, we’ve got these senators and congressmen coming. I’ll tell you which ones to corner and you get ‘em at lunch, sit ‘em down, tell ‘em what you’re going to do with that thing. I bet you they’ll get the money.” Well, we did. And

one of the senators get a hold of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and it was a limit of something like \$2,000 per project. I got \$12,000 out of it because the senator would *(laughs)* --

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: Now, I never saw the bulldozer. It arrived after I left. But he got it. I know that.

Q: And so why were these congressional represen -- I mean --

SHURTLEFF: IPU. International Parliamentary Union.

Q: That's right.

SHURTLEFF: Had a meeting there that year.

Q: And so do you think that was helpful. They got good --

SHURTLEFF: Birch Bayh showed up late. He came in commercially about a day after everybody else. And he went to the my house first. We had him picked up at the airport. He went to the house for a layover between planes. And my wife answered the door when he got there. And he says, "Oh, Mrs. Shurtleff, I'm looking forward to meeting your father."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: And Christine said, "That's my husband."

"Well, nice house you have here, Mister," -- Christine was very young, obviously. And I did -- he'd met me -- I'd met him at the airport.

Q: So it must have made a big impression on them to be in Cameroon.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, we treated them right. They met the President of Cameroon. We ran them around Yaoundé. I didn't do much of that. Lannon did most of that, but I took care of the original meet and greet and sending them off. Took care of the Air Force crew.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Which was fairly large, about eight or nine people.

Q: Sure.

SHURTLEFF: We gave them their own car, their own driver. We rented them a van.

Took them all the places they wanted to go -- all the markets. And it was a good place to buy African art, Douala. And lots of other stuff to see. Nothing spectacular, but interesting things. We took 'em up to Buea. They had a lunch at the Buea Mountain Hotel.

Q: So they had a sense of the place.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, brought them around. And that was the idea. Used to do a lot of that. I remember one day we got a telegram in from the department saying, "The flying grandmother is coming your way. Please take care of her." Well, I did a little research on that too and found this 85-year-old lady from the States had her own Beechcraft Bonanza. The backseat was all gas tanks. And she flew all over the world.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: So she came to Douala Airport and landed. I had primed the customs and immigration.

Q: To know that she was coming.

SHURTLEFF: There's a lady coming, I don't want you to come through here --

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You know, so a little old lady walks in and they say, "OK, where's the pilot?"

Says, "This is the pilot."

(gasps) "This lady flew that plane all the way from America?"

"Oh yeah."

Q: Wow, American Citizen Services. That's why you're there too, right?

SHURTLEFF: I remember one Christmas -- I guess it was first or second Christmas I was there, probably the second, Christine's folks were visiting. They used to visit us. Every post we went to, except one, they came to visit. For a month, they'd stay for a month to six weeks. This was Christmas day so I was sleeping late. I get downstairs and Ray is sitting in the living room entertaining this very worried couple of missionaries, husband and wife. They'd lost their son. "He was supposed to be on the airplane last night, he never showed up." Coming in from Jos, Nigeria. There was a missionary school there.

Q: Oh. Right.

SHURTLEFF: "What am I -- what are we going to do?"

And I said, "Well, what you're going to do is you're going to sit there and relax, have a little breakfast. I'm going to call up Lagos." Fortunately, the phones worked.

Q: Luckily.

SHURTLEFF: So I got Lagos. I got the duty officer. And I said, "OK, what's the problem with the flight?"

He said, "Oh God, I should have called you. I'm sorry." He said, "Engine trouble." He said, "They're telling us they're going to be in Douala tonight, probably about 6:00."

I said, "OK. Very worried parents here, want to tell 'em." I said, "Go ahead, looks good. I'll call ya if anything changes." Well, it didn't. They, you know, 6:00 right on time. So *pheeww*. But that's why you're there.

Q: That's why you're there.

SHURTLEFF: Do little things like that.

Q: So you arrive in 1970. You help with this congressional visit.

SHURTLEFF: Yep. Travel all over the place meeting all the hoi polloi outside the capital.

Q: Making lots of contacts.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yes.

Q: With your wife helping you out.

SHURTLEFF: Ah yes, she was good at that. I made some contacts. And one of the most valuable contacts I made in Douala was the local dean of the legal corps, a French lawyer. He had lived there for years. His mistress was Cameroonian. He stayed there. His real wife was there too. During the murder, he was very helpful.

Q: Well, should we get to the murder? I mean, I don't want to limit to that. But I know a lot of people would be interested in that.

SHURTLEFF: OK. The murder took place on the 30th of August, 1971 in Equatorial Guinea.

Q: So you had been in Douala for a while. How many times had you been to Equatorial Guinea before that?

SHURTLEFF: Oh, just over the two weeks before that.

Q: Had you been before also?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, went every three months.

Q: And could you explain about Equatorial Guinea and the president and --

SHURTLEFF: Well, Equatorial Guinea was a former Spanish colony. The island where the capital is was then called Santa Isabel, now called Malabo. There was a mainland part, Rio Muni, a little square area sandwiched between Gabon and Cameroon, and four or five other islands. They're all spread all over the place. And it became independent in October of '68 under Francisco Macías Nguema, who was elected in a more or less fair election. He was a Fang. The Fang were the mainland tribe and the Bubis were on the island, along with the Creoles who were these Sierra Leonean ancestors I was talking about. And he ran against somebody, somebody who, who was a Bubi. And that guy ended up being foreign minister. But not for very long. Just long enough come to the States and calm the Secretary of State and then he was defenestrated, literally. He was tossed out the second story window of the presidential palace. And of course died in a pool of blood.

Q: And I think that was just the beginning of a reign of terror.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, yes, exactly. This guy was certifiable. He just absolutely terrible.

Q: How did he rise? Did other people understand he was paranoid?

SHURTLEFF: Apparently not, not until he got to be president. They were murdering people right and left. They used to take 'em to the stadium and shoot 'em in the local stadium. The chargé's house was right across the street from the main police station. You could listen to screams all night long coming out of there. Torturing people. It was a mess.

Q: And, and why were we there?

SHURTLEFF: Originally we were there to take a look at Biafran airlift. Now we're there because of the oil. But I'll tell you the whole story here. Anyway, so August 30th, I get a phone call from Lannon Walker up in Yaoundé. He was chargé. Ambassador was gone in the States. Lannon said, "We have a problem in Equatorial Guinea. Turn your radio on and see what you can hear." Well, I turned the radio on. We had single side band communications. Now, I'd already talked to Equatorial Guinea once that day and nothing was wrong.

Q: Wait. Now before we go on, you were just there two weeks beforehand.

SHURTLEFF: I'd been there just two weeks beforehand. Everything was fine. And the

post had been inspected a little bit before that too. Turned also an inspection team was in there.

Q: And the people who were working there were -- why don't we go over who the personalities were.

SHURTLEFF: Al Erdos was the chargé; the second chargé we had there, who arrived in I think January of '71.

Q: Just -- yeah, so many months before.

SHURTLEFF: Hadn't been there that long, yeah.

Q: With his wife and child, a young son.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, well infant.

Q: Infant.

SHURTLEFF: And the admin officer was Don Leahy. And his wife, who was Ecuadorian. So the two of them there.

Q: And when you were there -- or you just went there as routine matter.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. We stayed there. We also went to a couple of parties, talked to government officials. Met the dip-corps (diplomatic corps), so I knew all them.

Q: And was it scary there? It must have been -- I mean because you have this torturing going on. Were you fearful for your life?

SHURTLEFF: No. No, they wouldn't dare touch a European. But they used to follow us around. The local youth group used to follow us all around. The second city on the island was San Carlos. I remember going out there with the previous chargé and we were tailed all the way by these, by these youthful thugs, all the way out and back. We went out there for lunch.

Q: Now, how about the reporting from there? I mean --

SHURTLEFF: As you can imagine it was hair-raising. But from both Erdos and from his predecessor, Carmen Williams.

Q: And the Soviets were there too and big presence, or?

SHURTLEFF: Not really, but they were there. The French were there. Of course the Spanish were all over the place. And the UNDP (United Nations Development Program),

mainly Latin Americans, Uruguayans, Argentineans. They were the big expatriate community, and I knew most of them too. The French Ambassador was very friendly, we didn't have any competition there. The Soviets were there for fishing.

Q: Fishing.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: Remember they fished all up and down the west coast of Africa. Poaching mostly, but nonethe --

Q: Right. And did Erdos and Leahy get along? You have a two-person post, that's pretty small.

SHURTLEFF: No, they didn't. Leahy was incompetent unfortunately, which I think I mentioned in the article. He couldn't even close a pouch bag right. He was just incompetent.

Q: And why didn't he get removed?

SHURTLEFF: Erdos asked for him to be removed, and Bill Bradford turned him down saying, "Hey, I couldn't get you anybody any better, in fact I probably couldn't get anybody at all to go there." It was difficult to get people to go there. People ran screaming from the room. I told you I turned the post down twice.

Q: Right. But you turned it down afterwards.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. Several years later.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: But anyway.

Q: But it sounds like it was a very stressful environment.

SHURTLEFF: It was. But you know, that's what we're paid to cope with.

Q: Exactly.

SHURTLEFF: I mean we weren't in any direct danger. Little unpleasantness once in a while, but it wasn't really dangerous. But Erdos and Leahy did not get along. So I turned the radio on. And what I hear is Erdos -- I recognized his voice, I talked to him all the time. Visiting in on the radio.

Q: Lannon Walker had said,

SHURTLEFF: "Turn on the radio, turn on the signal side band and see what you hear."

Q: And Lannon was chargé, he was in Yaoundé.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, the ambassador's gone. I could hear Erdos -- I couldn't hear Erdos, but I could hear the guy he was talking to in Accra who I later found out was Joe _____. And saying, "Yes, I've got to walk -- I've got it tied up and involved. Communist plot, crowd forming around the embassy." All a sudden -- he was repeating back so people would hear what Erdos was telling him. So I shut the radio off. Went back to the phone line. I said to Lannon, "What do you want me to do?"

He said, "Want you to go over there and take care of this."

I said, "What am I supposed to do?"

He said, "Take any way you want. Just take care of it. Settle it."

I said, "OK, I hear ya." I call Christine quickly and said, "Pack a bag, I'm going to Equatorial Guinea." Had my vice consul call up the local Ardique, the local charter airline, get me a plane. They can do that there, we knew all these guys.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So, off I go. I didn't have a visa because I'd already used my visa, but I knew everybody at the airport, thank God. I got off the plane, hey, how's it going, so on and so forth. Got to go into town, can you get me a taxi? They didn't have taxis for a non-regular flight. Well, they finally found me a taxi. Took them about an hour. I get into town, it was starting to get dark; gets dark at 6:00. I went immediately to the embassy. And Erdos wouldn't let me in. He said, "I want to talk to the ambassador."

I said, "You can't talk to the ambassador. The ambassador's in Washington on vacation." He said, "Go away."

And I'm like, OK, so I went to the residence. Had to walk now.

Q: And at this stage -- I mean because you'd known Erdos, or you'd visited him.

SHURTLEFF: I didn't know what the hell was going on.

Q: You had no clue.

SHURTLEFF: Except I knew the two guys didn't get along.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So I went back to the residence. Mrs. Erdos was not there. Where is Mrs. Erdos? Turns out she's at the Cameroonian ambassador's residence. So I hoof it over there. I'm walking. This is a very small town, thank God.

Q: Ah yeah.

SHURTLEFF: So I walk over there, and there she was. I said, "What is going on?"

She said, "I don't know."

I said, "I've got to talk to Al." I said, "I've got to talk to the chancery. Do you think you could walk in and talk him out?"

She said, "Yes, I think I can."

I said, "OK."

So the Cameroonian ambassador lent us his car. So over we went. She knocks on the door.

Q: Why was she at the Cameroon embassy, do you know?

SHURTLEFF: Well, she heard all this stuff going on, she didn't know what to do. They were good friends. The Cameroonians -- they were the next door neighbors, they swung a big stick in that town.

Q: And they heard just because they were people --

SHURTLEFF: She talked to Al I guess on the phone and wasn't quite sure what was going on. Maybe Al told her to go there. I don't know that.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I wasn't in the rest of that --

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I just wanted to get him out of there, so I could get in the embassy and make contact by radio with Yaoundé. So she goes in and I go next door to the bar. There's a bar right next-door. Get on the phone, called up the Nigerian ambassador. Said, "I think I've got a pack of trouble over here, somehow or another. You get over here with your car and driver. I may need you later." So over he came.

Q: Did you know the Nigerian ambassador?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, of course I did. He was one of the contacts. You know, that's why I went over every three months.

Q: Of course, yes.

SHURTLEFF: Damn good thing. Brigadier Bossi. He was from the Rivers region. He's one of the eastern region senior military officers, stayed loyal to the federal government. And as a reward he made ambassador to Equatorial Guinea. A lot of indentured farm workers, coco, were brought in from Nigeria. So they were there to protect their citizens. That kind of tailed off because the coca production had tailed off too.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But they were still there. And he shows up. So stand by.

Q: And you're at --

SHURTLEFF: And I'm on the phone. I finally get Erdos on the phone. He says, "OK, I'm going to come out."

Said, "All right, I have the Nigerian ambassador here. We'll put you in his car, you can go to his embassy. You'll be safe. OK."

Q: And you just had him on the phone.

SHURTLEFF: I had him on the phone from the bar next door.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I went to the front door of the chancery from there. And by this time there was a big crowd out there outside. People heard something was going on.

Q: And Mrs. Erdos was in the chancery?

SHURTLEFF: Yes. Al had been on the phone calling everybody in town saying that Don Leahy was a communist spy and so on and so forth. Stirring things up. Trying to cover his tracks I guess. Anyway, he finally came out with Mrs. Erdos and going down the walk to the street he grabbed me by the shoulder and said, "Len, I lost my cool, I killed Don Leahy."

Q: Wow. I lost my cool, I killed Don Leahy.

SHURTLEFF: So I go in to the chancery and I look around. Where is Leahy? Couldn't find Leahy. Couldn't find Leahy. So didn't look up stairs. I missed one office too, which was unused. But I looked everywhere else. Wasn't that big a chancery. So I opened the vault. They had just changed the combination. Mrs. Erdos knew it. She gave it to us. I

had the old combination in my pocket, but they changed it, but she gave me the new one. So I went into the vault --

Q: And Erdos went with the Nigerian ambassador.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, he'd left. I go in the vault and I get Lannon Walker on the radio up in Yaoundé. By then it was after sunset and we could use the radio again. We couldn't use the radio in the afternoon because of the sun spots and what's called the West Africa anomaly. I don't have to explain that, it's just a propagation problem.

So I got Lannon on the phone. I said, "Lannon, I'm in the embassy, but I haven't found Leahy." At that point, all hell broke loose. I couldn't lock the front door when I came in because the key was jammed. You know these double cylinder locks? Key on both sides. Well, the key was jammed on the inside. I couldn't lock the door. Mrs. Leahy had followed me in and she discovered Don's body in an unused office. Screams. So I said, "Lannon, I got to go. *(sighs)* Something's going on." So I went out and I pried her off the body. I got a doctor we had standing by. I'd gotten a Spanish doctor who had come over. He came in and looked at Leahy and said, "Yeah, he's dead." I tried to get everybody out of the chancery and to get Lannon back on the radio. I said, "We found the body. Leahy's dead." I said, "You'd better get your tail over here. This is more than I can handle."

He said, "I'll be over tomorrow morning."

I said, "Good. Get the plane."

Q: So at this stage within the --

SHURTLEFF: Then somebody pounds on the front door. It's the Minister of Interior pounding on the front door. Wants to know what's going on. I said, "Well, there's been a murder. I can't really explain it, but there's been a murder," and he kicked me out of the chancery. I couldn't even lock the door. I left Leahy laying there.

Q: The Interior Minister kicked you out of the chancery.

SHURTLEFF: He basically put me on a house arrest at the residence. I wasn't going to give him too much of a hard time because he could have literally thrown me in jail and probably would have if I'd pushed him too hard. I got a ride back to the residence.

Q: And about Mrs. Leahy at this time and the body?

SHURTLEFF: She had been taken at hand by her Latino friends. They were trying to comfort her, they'd brought her back to their house.

Q: So she was out of the chancery too.

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

Q: And how about Leahy's body.

SHURTLEFF: He stayed there overnight.

Q: And the doctor?

SHURTLEFF: Doctor declared him dead. So he wrote a death certificate up. Causes unknown, that sort of thing. I go back to the residence. And called up Dick Mathy, who was the Ghanaian second secretary, a guy I'd been cultivating obviously. Very knowledgeable, very, very good. Ghana has a very good diplomatic service. There was a small embassy of three or four people. I called him up, saying, "Get over here, I've got some problems."

Q: And meanwhile, the Interior Minister is in the chancery.

SHURTLEFF: I don't know what he's doing. No, he didn't stay in the chancery. He left. He told the police to guard the door. They didn't touch anything.

Q: They didn't touch anything.

SHURTLEFF: No. I didn't think they would, though I would have liked to lock the door.

I left the air conditioners on so Leahy's body wouldn't deteriorate too much. I talked to Mathy about this and said I want you to know about this because Lord knows what's going to happen, I've got to tell somebody else. Write it down or memorize it or whatever. This is what I have here, this is what I found. Well, he leaves. And of course he gets arrested. Gets hassled by the police because they didn't want me having contact with anybody. But he gets out of that all right. He knew how to get out of that stuff like that.

I spent a sleepless night in the residence. And Lannon got there pretty early the next morning. With Lannon came John Graves, the PAO. Lannon and John were very tight.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: Didn't speak Spanish, but they spoke good French. French was useful over there too. And Mary-Anne Dumkowski, the embassy nurse, because they were worried about me, what's Shurtleff look like. She wanted to give me a sedative. And I said, "Not in your -- I got to keep my wits about me here." We went to the embassy and Lannon looked at the body. We finally got the front door locked.

Q: And it didn't appear as if anyone had entered.

SHURTLEFF: No. We found traces of electrical wire on the chair. Apparently Leahy had been tied up in the chair -- in the office chair in the vault, it's a walk-in vault. The embassy was just a mess. There was blood all over the walls. Blood all over the front

door. Blood all over the floor in the room we found him. I mean he bled to death. Erdos stabbed him with a pair of government issued sheers about this long and nicked the jugular vein.

Q: Was it -- I mean from what you saw --

SHURTLEFF: Leahy was trying to escape from the front door and didn't make it.

Q: Well, I was wondering. If Leahy had been tied up --

SHURTLEFF: Well, apparently he was untied or he untied himself, and he got to the front door. That's as far as he ever got. Remember, I called Mrs. Leahy to asked if Don was there. This was after I'd been to the chancery and found Mrs. Erdos, but I called Mrs. Leahy too. Probably shouldn't have done that. But anyway, I had to find out. So she's screaming and crying. Latina women really take on -- they're very voluble in situations like this. It's a cultural thing. Neither good nor bad. It's just cultural.

Q: That must have been I mean shocking. I mean here you are too, and you're seeing this colleague with blood everywhere.

SHURTLEFF: Well, also I thought he'd been strangled because his tie -- apparently Erdos had grabbed him by the tie and dragged him away from the front door into the side office by his tie. So it looked like he'd been hung by the tie. It wasn't. It was the jugular vein we discovered later.

Q: And did you find the scissors?

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

OK. Well, first of all, we've got to straighten all this out. We finally got permission to put his body in the local cooler. So we had a casket built. It was painted bright blue, lined with zinc, and we put him in the cooler at the local morgue.

Q: Wait. Now, who was there to help you in terms of --

SHURTLEFF: The Spanish. There's still some Spanish -- the guy that run the morgue was Spanish.

Q: And was the doctor there or just --

SHURTLEFF: Well, doctor had written a death certificate.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: My job, of course, was make sure we kept physical possession of the body. Because the only thing, defense could claim it was tampered with later on once it

was --

Q: Well, I would think that --

SHURTLEFF: And they did.

Q: -- that the evidence too that you were very careful in.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, we kept *chain of custody*.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: We had to bring the ambassador back; couldn't get him out of the country until the ambassador had talked to the president.

Q: Because the ambassador was on leave on the States.

SHURTLEFF: He was on leave. And he got back on a Friday. He talked to the president on Saturday morning. We were able to get Leahy's body out. We had to bring in a plane from Lagos, which had been sitting on the ground for a couple of days. We had to get a big Cessna; couldn't fit a casket in the Pipers. We had to get one in from Air Afrique. We got Leahy out on Friday night. He went to Douala with Lannon.

Q: And in getting him out, was there any problem in removing the body from the country or did they want to do their own investigation?

SHURTLEFF: Wanted nothing to do with it.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: But anyway, he let the body out. He let Erdos go and his wife. So we took him to Douala on Friday and he stayed overnight in the residence, he and his wife and the baby. Which made Christine rather nervous, but nonetheless. He wasn't violent or anything.

Q: So they let him out with you all.

SHURTLEFF: Well, I stayed out there.

Q: I mean he was first with the Nigerian ambassador.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, about a day and a half, two days. Finally got out on Friday and then went to Douala. We got him on a UTA flight.

Q: Was anyone speaking to him at this point? Did --

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. We brought in the regional medical officer from Lagos and the regional security officer from Lagos. We didn't have a security officer in Cameroon. Fortunately, the regional security officer, Art Clambak, was a graduate of the University of Argentina and spoke beautiful French -- Spanish. So he was good.

I got the body out late Saturday morning and flew it to Cameroon. And then we backed up our truck and put it on the truck and sent it to the local morgue to keep it cold.

Q: And had the body decomposed a great deal during this time?

SHURTLEFF: No. It was sealed up in the zinc-lined casket. I mean sealed, welded shut, hadn't deteriorated at all. And it was cold in the hospital morgue in Douala. And then of course the department wanted us to do an autopsy. Well, the only U.S. official doctor we had was a guy named Gree, a Peace Corps doctor. Very good doctor. But he said, "Hey, I haven't done an autopsy since I was at med school. You don't want me doing it. I'll destroy all sorts of evidence." He said, "Besides, the law around here says you got to get the mayor's permission to do the autopsy. The mayor wouldn't have anything to do with the autopsy. Oh no."

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: No autopsy. He wouldn't even talk to me. So, finally, we called Washington and said, "You got to do an autopsy. You got to do it in the States." I said, "You got to get an airplane in here to do it." They diverted a C141 from an Ascension Island run into Douala the next morning, Sunday. They said, "Can you get clearance." I said, "Oh sure, I can get clearance. No problem." Of course I didn't have any clearance at all. I called up the local Air Force commander and said, "Old buddy, I need a favor."

He said, "What do you need?"

I said, "I need clearance for 02:53:30?"

"What kind? What time is he getting here? Don't worry about it. I can send you the paperwork next week."

I said, "OK, thank you."

Well, no problem. It landed. We loaded the body on, drove the truck right up into the aircraft, unloaded the body, the plane took off, Lannon Walker on board and the widow.

Q: Now, had Erdos and the widow --

SHURTLEFF: He'd already left.

Q: Has anyone -- but did you get a chance to talk to him --

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: -- during this period?

SHURTLEFF: I didn't. He left on the Monday night. Walking down the driveway I put him in the car and that was the last I saw of him.

Q: So did you have any conversations with him?

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: Except for when he said that --

SHURTLEFF: Never again.

Q: -- he --

SHURTLEFF: Never again.

Q: -- killed Leahy.

SHURTLEFF: That was the last -- that was the only conversation --

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: By the time we got the body out, he was on his way back to the States. And they went I guess to Paris and they had to land in Boston because of some mix-up with the airline. It was supposed to land in Dulles. He was going to be arrested in Dulles. Well, they had to stop in Boston and clear customs and then they went to Dulles. He was arrested there. The defense tried to make a big thing out of that too, it didn't work.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So there I am, back in Equatorial Guinea, we're trying to clean up the mess. By the way, during this period our Foreign Service National employees were disappearing. They were picked up by the government and murdered is what was happening.

Q: Did that happen before Erdos killed Leahy?

SHURTLEFF: Yes. It was going on all during that whole period.

Q: That must have been --

SHURTLEFF: Was a mess. Anyway, so I went back -- Christine and I went back there.

Q: Were you scared again --

SHURTLEFF: Packing up --

Q: I mean was --

SHURTLEFF: No, I wasn't scared to be there, and neither was Christine. We knew we weren't in any danger. But we had to pack up all Erdos' personal effects. They of course didn't have time to pack anything. We spent about a week doing that.

Q: And I guess Mrs. Leahy had left as well.

SHURTLEFF: She'd already gone, so we had to pack her stuff too. Sent that back. Plus, we were trying to collect evidence. John Graves and I were collecting evidence, taking pictures, found the murder weapon. This is all the aftermath. Lannon comes back a few days later. We're right in the middle of all this packing up. Iberia flight. He gets off the plane, we meet him at the airport. He pulls Christine and me aside. Then he said, "You're not going to believe this." He said, "Remember all this talk about the Latino community were saying these guys were in a homosexual relationship? Guess what happened when they did the autopsy? They found semen in Don Leahy's trachea. Which means he swallowed it. He was still alive." Oh boy.

Q: So it was known that there were rumors that --

SHURTLEFF: The Latino community was convinced they had a homosexual relationship going on.

Q: And how did people know? Was it just rumored that kind of got back to people or was there anything --

SHURTLEFF: They saw or noticed something was awry. Now, if you check back on both guys' medical files, there's indications all through them they're both homosexuals. And he mentioned one thing that was rather telling. He was in Egypt at one point for about three years with an ambassador there was known, a known homosexual. Always kept a coterie of likeminded boys around him. And one of Christine's former bosses was homosexual. Just too much physical circumstantial evidence to believe anything else. Jefferson Caffery was the name of the ambassador, by the way. He's been around for a while. He was ambassador to Paris, ambassador in Cairo. And then it was Christine's former boss and PAO in Tunis who was an acknowledged homosexual. He never made any bones about it, nobody can blackmail him.

Q: Right, right. Because this was an era where if you were known to be homosexual, you could get kicked out of the Foreign Service.

SHURTLEFF: Right, but he got away with it because he was open about it.

Q: Right. But in the Latin community, again, were these just --

SHURTLEFF: The Latins were a lot more uptight about homosexuals than we were, even then.

Q: So again, was this just talk within the community or was it cable traffic?

SHURTLEFF: No, it was talk within the community. And they spread the talk to us.

Q: And that they were consensual, not consensual?

SHURTLEFF: Well, no, it was consensual is what they were figuring. They had a homosexual relationship. Though both of them were married. Erdos was married very late in life. But nonetheless. I mean he was about 50, only been married about five years.

Q: Now, as I recall, and I guess through the cable traffic too, maybe you saw or not, that Erdos didn't want Leahy there.

SHURTLEFF: No, he'd asked Bill Bradford -- Bill told me this --

Q: Because he was incompetent, I would --

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, he was incompetent.

Q: Was my understanding.

SHURTLEFF: And Bradford said, "No, I can't, you know, I can't do it because I can't replace him," which is quite true. We'd already lost one admin officer, guy quit in the middle of his tour, leaving Al Williams all alone for quite a while. In fact, he was all alone up until Erdos and Leahy arrived. They arrived within a couple weeks of each other.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And of course Al Williams left. Al and Carmen. They were a sketch.

Q: Oh really?

SHURTLEFF: They didn't take the place seriously at all. They shouldn't. I mean it's not a serious country. It still isn't a serious country. It's got oil, that's all.

Q: Well, sounds like the conditions in the country were pretty awful.

SHURTLEFF: Oh, it was pretty well documented because of the political reporting. Political documents, yeah. For years and years.

Q: And their reporting, I mean from what I read about the articles, the reporting had become quite I guess was the word irrational or something?

SHURTLEFF: No, not really.

Q: From Erdos? Or was it -- is that not true?

SHURTLEFF: It's all really quite straightforward. The only irrational stuff started happening the day of the murder.

Q: OK, because I thought -- maybe I read something from the ambassador where there was an indication that some of the reporting with a communist plot angle.

SHURTLEFF: No, that's what he was saying on the telephone on the radio. That was the day of the murder.

Q: So it wasn't beforehand to your knowledge.

SHURTLEFF: No. No. Because we went through the reporting with a fine tooth comb. We had to because the defense wanted to see it. So Lannon and I and Hank Cohen sat in Hank's office for hours and hours going over every single piece of traffic with the two defense lawyers. More on them later. And redacting names and addresses. Because you see if this had gotten to court with the name of Erdos' informant, the guy would be dead if Equatorial Guinea picked up on it. We had to assume they'd pick up on it, it was open court. So we took all the names of the guilty parties out. And they brought some of this in as evidence.

Q: Sure.

SHURTLEFF: That we did.

Q: Did Erdos report on what, like these communist plots that he thought were all against them?

SHURTLEFF: No, no, no. No. No. This was the day of the, the day of the murder.

Q: Just the -- OK.

SHURTLEFF: And this was all verbal. It wasn't written. It was on the radio, on the phone. Really, really weird. Anyway.

Q: So it's like kind of out of the blue.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. The post was inspected. He was also on the inspection team.

Q: And what did they come out with?

SHURTLEFF: Nothing. Post looked fine as far as they were concerned. Clint was very embarrassed afterwards. I said, "Clint, hey, relax old buddy. You know, I was there after you left and everything looked fine to me too." I said, "You're not clairvoyant here, you know."

Q: Did Erdos repeat that he wanted Leahy out of there?

SHURTLEFF: No, he did it once and it got turned down.

Q: Did he ever say that hey, the condition in this country is awful, we'd like to get out?

SHURTLEFF: He and his wife, no, they never asked to be released.

Q: Really?

SHURTLEFF: Not that I know of. And I would have known.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Erdos was not a very nice guy.

Q: In what a way?

SHURTLEFF: He had a terrible reputation for treating his subordinates like dirt. Previous post was Niger. They hated him there. Forget what he did, he was DCM I think. But anyway, not well respected. He tried it on me once. Christine used to do all the shopping for him. And we'd bundle this up in a bag and send it over by air every so often. And one day he started to complain to her about she didn't get the cheese he wanted. And I had to get up in his face literally about this far away and say, "Al, Christine is not your GSO. She's a wife of the consul in Douala. She helps you out when she can, but she's not to be abused when she can't perform according to your," -- well, he backed right away. This guy ranked me by two grades, but you know, I'm not going to put up with that from anybody. I would have done the same thing to the ambassador if he tried to. Erdos wasn't a nice guy. But he'd learned not to try to mess with me and Christine.

Q: Sure. And yet he was given this post. Was it again because it was a tough post to go to to find anyone to go to?

SHURTLEFF: He was asked, he wasn't forced to go. He came in and scouted the place out before he took the job. He visited me in Douala, talked to Lew Hoffacker, and he went to the post to talk with Al and Carmen Williams. And accepted it. We later found out that Hoffacker was a homosexual too.

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: That I didn't put in the story because Hoffacker's still alive and I don't have any hard evidence for that, but Lannon Walker and I at least are convinced he was also a homosexual because of what happened later. He used to treat his wife like dirt and his daughter like dirt, I remember. So we didn't have much respect for him. He also tried to treat me like dirt once to, but it didn't sink in.

Q: Because perhaps -- and I'll have to look back too. He wrote something up in the oral history, and that's worthwhile for you to read if you haven't.

SHURTLEFF: Perhaps he did. I didn't see it. He sent me a copy of something once.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: But I was still so mad at him at the time I refused to read it. Christine read it. She read it, I didn't. He wanted her comments and I said I'm not giving you any of the right time of day, never mind comments.

Q: And --

SHURTLEFF: After the whole thing was over I was back in Douala having shut down the embassy. We literally shut the embassy, shipping everything out, fired all the local employees, closed the door, locked it, gave the key to the French, I think. And I was back in Douala and he was through there one day. He had his own apartment in the residence. And he pulled me aside and he said, "Leonard, you really screwed that up in Equatorial Guinea. We'll never be able to repair relations with those guys."

And I said, "Oh really? Well, tell me, what'd I do wrong?"

He said, "I don't want to talk about it."

Q: What was your relationship before this incident?

SHURTLEFF: Fine. As distant as possible. I didn't care much for the guy, but.

Q: So, but why do you think he felt that?

SHURTLEFF: He was concentrating on the diplomatic niceties of the whole thing, the tragedy that occurred over there. And I also think he was blaming himself for hiring Erdos. Made a mistake on that one. Not that he really hired Erdos, but was one of the ones that talked him in to going there. The minute he was out the front door, I called Lannon Walker on the phone and said, "Lannon, I want to transfer. Here's what happened." I said, "I can't work for this guy. You know very well I did not screw out over there. Did everything right, it worked out fine."

Lannon said, "Leonard, of course you didn't. Don't do anything rash. Don't ask for a transfer yet. Let me see what's going on here." He called me back the next day, he said,

“Look. From now on, stay away from the ambassador. You report to me, not to him.” He said, “He won’t give you any more trouble. Believe me. I won’t let him.”

And I said, “OK.” Well, he never did. That’s one of the reasons why Lannon and I are such close friends. We’ve been covering each other’s backs. You can’t buy friends like that.

Q: Yeah. No, I understand.

SHURTLEFF: Hoffacker and his wife were later divorced. Not a happy marriage. But anyway. There were a couple other minor incidents too. But nothing to write home about.

Q: Well, it sounds like it was a very difficult situation on a number of levels, lots of different people.

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was a mess. It took us until March to get us through the trial. Lannon and I were commuting. We must have made six round trips across the Atlantic between the time of the murder and the time of the trial, which was the first week of March of ’72 in the federal district court in Alexandria, Virginia. Judge Oren Lewis presiding. The reason it was held there was because Lewis had presided over a trial a few years earlier, a murder on ice flow, a U.S. weather station on an ice flow. Not U.S. territory. But a U.S. weather station. And the defense had tried to claim that the incumbent had no jurisdiction there because it wasn’t U.S. territory. And he ruled that it was a U.S. government installation. That’s U.S. territory. And he quoted a passage of the law. We were dating back to the 17 -- like 1812 to back it up. And the appeals court backed him. They agreed with him. So that’s why he was assigned the case.

Q: Right, because the whole issue was jurisdiction.

SHURTLEFF: That’s right.

Q: Boston or Washington or anywhere.

SHURTLEFF: Erdos’ attorney’s said, why do you land in Boston first? Well, we didn’t arrest him in Boston. Well, why didn’t you arrest him in Boston? Because we didn’t know he was there, it was a change in airline schedule. OK. Then of course they claimed all this bad stuff going on in Equatorial Guinea drove him crazy.

It didn’t drive his wife crazy too. But anyway, it didn’t stick. They tried the temporary insanity, lack of jurisdiction, temporary insanity, lord knows what else.

Q: And from your perspective, having read the cables, having been to Equatorial Guinea, having talked with Erdos and Leahy, I mean is there something that you can say that sheds light on what you think the circumstances may have been?

SHURTLEFF: I think the circumstances was it was a falling out between homosexual

lovers. I can sort of picture it out. Erdos loses his temper one day. Leahy did something stupid. He's doing this all the time, screwing things up.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And he said, "You cocksucker, I'm going to, you know," Leahy said to him, "You cocksucker, you try to fool with me, I'm going to go to the department about your strange sexual proclivities." And of course that would have cost Erdos his job and he knew it. So he killed him. I think something like that must have happened.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: Real bad falling out.

Q: How about the scissors? I mean if you're going to kill someone -- scissors?

SHURTLEFF: Well, there weren't any knives hanging around. These scissors are very sharp. And there were a lot of puncture wounds on his body, none of which would have killed him. But he nicked the jugular vein in one of the thrusts, and he bled to death. Just by that nick. And there was semen in the trachea. I mean this is a crime of passion. He was convicted, by the way. The trial ended at noon, roughly noontime, on a Friday, first week of March. Lannon and I were out to lunch and by the time we got back the verdict was in. Jury met for about an hour, maybe two hours. And they came up with the lowest common denominator. Under federal law there's a thing called voluntary manslaughter, fight in a bar. They convicted him to voluntary manslaughter. The judge sentenced him to 10 years in prison, which is the maximum sentence for voluntary manslaughter. He spent a few weeks under psychiatric observation in a federal prison hospital in Pennsylvania.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And served the rest of his sentence in the Amarillo Federal prison in Texas. He served three years, was released for good behavior, moved to California, and died in 1983. His obituary in The Foreign Service Journal made no mention of the Leahy murder at all. None. And, of course, after he retired, which was immediately after the trial was over, he was given a full disability retirement, which means no taxes. Somebody was taking care of him. The only reason I know about the retirement is because Bill Bradford told me that.

Q: Right. Right. Did he ever try to contact you again?

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: Or his wife?

SHURTLEFF: No. His wife never tried to contact -- I ran into his wife after that. She became a Foreign Service Officer herself, and I ran into her in the State Department

Federal Credit Union one day. We said hello, talked for a few minutes. She wasn't mad at me as far as I could tell. Then when I got to Monrovia we needed a new consular officer. H.R. Malpass, who was the assignments guy in PER, an old buddy of mine, called me up and said, "Oh, have I got a great consular officer for you."

And he gave me the name. And I said, "H.R., you better ask her if she wants to come out here." I said, "That's Al Erdos' former wife." Her name was Jean Branford. She'd gone back to using her maiden name. "You better ask her if she wants to come." I said, "I don't think she'll want to come." Well, she didn't. So H.R. scratched around to get someone else. She went to Accra instead. It would have been uncomfortable for her, I'm sure. I said, "I'll, I'll take her gladly, you know, no problem. Nice lady, I mean good, good officer, I'm sure. But I don't think she'll want to come."

Q: Did she ever write up everything?

SHURTLEFF: No. But she divorced him right after the trial was over?

Q: And how about --

SHURTLEFF: She kept the son.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Of course, she got a pretty good settlement for death benefits and all this sort of stuff. I'm sure, 55% was the usual.

Q: Did you ever hear from Leahy's wife?

SHURTLEFF: No. I heard about her indirectly. She went back to Quito. She was a widow when Leahy married her.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: Widow of an Ecuadorian army colonel. And I understand she used to haunt the local supermarket that was used by the diplomatic community, bemoaning her fate of being widowed twice. So she didn't come out of it too well, I guess.

Q: They didn't have any children.

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: And Erdos had a son who wrote an article in The Foreign Service Journal.

SHURTLEFF: Right. Just that one son. And Erdos was about 50-years-old, 48 I guess when all this happened. So he married late in life. They'd been married only about three or four years. Jean was a legal secretary in L (Office of the Legal Department).

Q: I mean what was your reaction about the entire incident?

SHURTLEFF: Well, there's a West African saying that covers it, "What to do." There's no question mark on that, it's just, what to do.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Because things like that happen.

Q: What was the reaction from the Foreign Service Nationals disappearing?

SHURTLEFF: We tried to find out what happened to them and never could find out anything, of course. The government wasn't talking. They'd arrested them. They couldn't arrest the Americans, so they arrested the Foreign Service Nationals.

Q: And there was a story I guess from Erdos' son that the cook was put on, you know, outside the residence and basically flayed?

SHURTLEFF: I don't know how he'd know that. The kid was what, 18-months-old when this happened.

My account, believe me, was not second hand. I went to the national archives and spent a whole day going back through those and looking for all the documents I could find. The only one I couldn't find: I did a long reporting cable the week after the event. It was while we were cleaning up the mess. I did a long reporting cable, about five pages. I reported, this is what happened from the time I got the phone call from Lannon until we got the body out of Douala on the C141.

Q: Yes.

SHURTLEFF: I couldn't find that cable. Somebody had taken it out of the files.

Q: The reporting cable that you wrote?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. That was not in the national archives. Nobody could find it for me either.

Q: So you don't even know if it exists anymore (laughs)?

SHURTLEFF: As far as I know it doesn't exist anymore. But that's all right, I checked with Christine, I checked with Lannon.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: On what I wrote in that article. So pretty sure that was correct.

Q: OK. And --

SHURTLEFF: I waited 30 years on purpose. Wanted to make sure all the bodies were really buried.

Q: I can imagine, yes. Absolutely.

SHURTLEFF: The reason I wore the article is it'd become such a Foreign Service legend.

Q: It had, even when I joined the Foreign Service.

SHURTLEFF: And they got it all wrong though. So I figured I'd better do it right. And I was pleased to see that they didn't edit a single word in The Foreign Service Journal. Of course let's face it, all the writing I've done in the Foreign Service, you learn to be a pretty good draft man. I'm sure you are too.

Q: Sure, absolutely.

SHURTLEFF: It may not be pretty, but it's accurate.

Q: I have a couple questions from what I read about that. Maybe you can fill in some of the blanks. There was talk about a cable that Erdos had written about his, you know, communist plot thinking that apparently Leahy coded and there was in the burn bag and -

SHURTLEFF: I don't remember that. We found a lot of stuff. We bailed it up and sent back to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigations).

I did talk to the FBI, the agent who was in charge of the case at that point. The government wouldn't let the FBI in, which is why John Graves and I did the investigation. I mentioned that in the article. And I said to the FBI man, "How was the stuff we sent back?"

He said, "You did as good a job as the local police department would have done." I thought gee, is that a compliment or not? But anyway, it's not a criticism.

Q: And how was it? Because there are times when Foreign Service Officers need to testify.

SHURTLEFF: Well, I did. I testified twice at the trial.

Q: And what was that like? And how did the department get involved and could you just give me some perspective on that?

SHURTLEFF: We told the prosecution and the defense, "We'll give you whatever you need. We want to see a fair trial here." We gave the defense all the reporting cables.

We at least took out the names of the Equatorial Guinean informants. We cooperated with everybody. In fact, I testified for both the defense and the prosecution. So did Lannon. The prosecutor wanted to make sure I wasn't anti- Leahy because of his homosexual stuff. They were very worried about that. They didn't put it that way to me, but I knew what they were doing. And it didn't bother me. I thought OK, I don't care what his sexual proclivities are. They're not mine, but that's his private business. Who cares?

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I still feel the same way. I mean it just is not something I get excited about.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Anyway, so we testified from both sides. So did Lannon. Which means we missed a lot of the trial. All these little snippets of the trial here and there. The rest of it I had to get from other people who were there.

Q: And does the department brief you or L or how does that work?

SHURTLEFF: Well, we had a guy from L in the room when we were going through the cables. He was the AF lawyer. We were all trying to do the same thing, all of us in the department make sure that we don't give up the identities of the informants and the cables.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Otherwise you can actually do whatever you want.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: These things, they were only, they were only classified confidential.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: -- they weren't code word or anything like that.

Q: Right, right. And I would guess at some point a lot would be declassified, the ones that aren't now, so.

SHURTLEFF: There were other interesting things that happened there. I was between vice consuls at the time. We had TDY (temporary duty) Rover GSO (general services officer) officer. Never been to Africa before.

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: And he was good though. You couldn't really leave him in charge. He didn't know how to run a consulate. But Christine did. So Christine's signing cables going out of Douala, Shurtleff. And I'm signing cables going out of Equatorial Guinea, Shurtleff.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Then the Associated Press (AP) shows up about the time I got back to Douala on a Saturday. And Christine says this AP reporter is chasing you around, should I talk to him on the phone once. And she told him she was (in French accent), "The Shurtleff's French secretary. Only work during the summer, you know."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: And he believed her.

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: She put the best fake French accent on. We led him on a chase around town, he never caught up with me.

Q: Oh my gosh.

SHURTLEFF: We didn't want to talk to him at the time.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: We got a couple of articles in The New York Times, but Foreign Service Officers really don't like getting their names in the paper. It is not a good thing.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: The guy later showed up in Mauritania when I was there doing a story on the drought. And Christine and I decided we'd tell him what happened.

Q: And what did he say.

SHURTLEFF: He laughed the same as we did. I said, "Were sorry, it's not a very nice thing. We really couldn't talk to you." One of those things.

He said, "It's OK, I got the story anyway without talking to you."

Q: Right, right. Just --

SHURTLEFF: Guy was a reporter. I mean, you know, not a nice thing to do to him, but do what you got to do.

Q: Right. So well, that was -- yeah, so just came out of the blue, I guess.

SHURTLEFF: Yep, it sure did.

Q: And --

SHURTLEFF: I stayed at post after that from March until July. Had one more 4th of July party and left the 5th of July for Nouakchott.

Q: Let me asked, what happened to Equatorial Guinea then. So it was closed after that?

SHURTLEFF: We kept the accreditation of the ambassador. I was replaced by Bill Mithoefer I think. He was accredited over there too. But then they PNG-ed him. So at that point we said screw it, we're not going to have anybody go in there anymore. So not only was the embassy closed, nobody ever visited there for about five or six years. So in 1979 I'm fat, dumb, and happy, cruising around on Christine's folks' boat up in the Nantucket Sound. We were on Cuttyhunk Island.

Q: Nice.

SHURTLEFF: And I happened to buy a New York Times. And back on about page 15, coup in Equatorial Guinea. Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema takes over government. I called Lannon up. I said, "Lannon, is this true?"

He said, "Oh yeah."

I said, "What are we doing about it?"

He said, "Nothing, until you get back."

And I said, "Oh no."

He said, "Oh yes, you got to go out there, find out what's going on. You're the only one who speaks Spanish around here."

That was my first offer. Lannon offered me the post. He said, "I want to send you out there as ambassador."

I said, "No, you don't. I won't go."

He said, "OK, wise guy, then you find somebody who will go." I went to five or six people who literally ran screaming from the room when I mentioned it.

Q: (laughs) I bet.

SHURTLEFF: Finally found a guy though. He did a tour there, spent three years there as an 01. He never got promoted.

Q: Never got promoted out of Equatorial Guinea?

SHURTLEFF: His next tour was number two in the Political Section in Mexico. And he retired out of there.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: And he was selected out as an 01.

Q: Why did --

SHURTLEFF: Which is what I think would have happened to me if I went there as ambassador, not that I wanted to go there.

Q: What happened to Bill Mithoefer, was that his name? How did he get PNG-ed?

SHURTLEFF: I don't know. He was over on the island once, they didn't like something he was doing, so they kicked him out, PNG-ed. I was PNG-ed too. I thought it was a badge of honor.

Q: Was that after this?

SHURTLEFF: It was after this whole thing was over, they wouldn't let me back in the country. I didn't care. I didn't want to go back there anyway.

Q: Well, that was a interesting case and it did become a legend in the Foreign Service.

SHURTLEFF: I've had to give the little talk to a couple of A-100 courses. They had it all wrong too. But that's why I wrote the article, because that's what really happened. There was no murder in the code room.

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: I didn't talk about the consulate district in Douala. I wanted to mention Father Jan Jansen of the Mill Hill Fathers?

Q: Don't know about that.

SHURTLEFF: If you ever go to Nso, you want to stay overnight with the Mill Hill Fathers. The hotels are terrible and those fathers have a very nice guesthouse. So one day I'm going up there for a weekend. I call them up on the phone. And I got Father Jan Jansen. And I said, "Father, can I prevail upon you to put my wife and I up? We're coming up Saturday, a week?"

"Yeah, fine, what time are you going to be here?"

And I said, "About noon."

He said, "Oh wonderful, you'll be here in time for prayers." Oh boy.

I said, "OK, I'll see you in time for prayers." I said, oh my God, I've got a holy roller here. Well, it turns out that noontime on Saturday was the end of their workweek. They took their cassocks off and put their feet up and drank whisky and had a good lunch.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: We had a great time. They were all Dutch. Great sense of humor. Spoke beautiful English. These guys were getting pretty old. I found out Jan Jansen and a couple of his colleagues were in seminary in Holland in 1940 and the church got them out and sent them to England. They finished their studies in Mill Hill, which is a British house. And went out to Africa as a missionary order. Jan Jansen was really something else. I always bring whisky along to give to people. So I said to Father Jansen, "Could I make a small offering to the church?"

He said, "Well, of course, my son, we could always use something." I gave him a crate of whisky. He said, "Ah, bless you, my son, bless you. We'll think of you on every Saturday."

Q: I bet. I bet. Could you talk a little bit about missionary presence in Africa?

SHURTLEFF: In Cameroon the government recognized three missionary organizations. Catholic Church, which Mill House Fathers are a part of; the North American Baptist Federation; and the Swiss Episcopal Church. The North American Baptist Federation took over from the German Baptists after World War I. Took over all their missionary stations, lock, stock, and barrel.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They ran a bunch of schools. All these guys ran schools. They all had schools for mainly primary, but also couple secondaries. And the Baptists had a hospital as well. So I spent a lot of time with the Baptists, because they were Americans and with the Mill House Fathers, because they were fun. We set up all kinds of projects. There were also some American nuns up there.

Q: And were they proselytizing, were they just helping the people?

SHURTLEFF: Well, the Baptists were doing a lot of proselytizing. Because they not only had this hospital. They also had a college for pastors. But that was a strange thing too. I used to scandalize them, because I drank and smoked, which they didn't. I was not their favorite person.

We weren't unfriendly or anything, but they didn't approve of my lifestyle. But one time Lannon Walker and I took a trip around the Ring Road, all the way around. We have that loop in northern west Cameroon, runs all along the Nigerian border, coming back. Remember that lake that exploded?

Q: Oh yeah.

SHURTLEFF: Right by there. There was a whole bunch of lakes up there. Soda lakes that they have up there. Not soda, but the volcanic lakes.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And we stopped on the way up outside of Ndu, the Tia states. And right off the Tia state was this college, this college where they train the local pastors. We were there on a Sunday, so we had fellowship with all the pastors and the Americans. And then dinner with just the Americans. They didn't invite a single black person to the dinner.

Q: Huh. That's surprising.

SHURTLEFF: No. It wasn't. That's the way they operated. Whereas the Mill Hill Fathers, the three priests in Bansa -- or Nso, I should say -- two of them were Dutch and one was African. And they chummed around together. The African church was being rapidly Africanized.

Q: Oh OK.

SHURTLEFF: Both Africans. And the archbishop was soon African too. The senior bishop, not the archbishop, the senior bishop in Buea was actually British but he was Mill Hill too. The Catholics were very ecumenical that way. They were turning the whole thing over, Africanizing the whole thing.

Q: And was that being helpful in terms of the politics of the country, the economy?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yes. In terms of church politics it was very helpful. Because they didn't pick just anybody. They picked some good people. I mean these were well-respected priests, or respected by the Africans. I mean one of them was named Verinkoff. There was a German colony and Africans used to adopt the names of colonizers that they liked. Well, this guy was named Verinkoff, obviously named after a Prussian.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: He obviously had a great investiture. God, there was singing and dancing and he was out there dancing with everybody. Really quite a, quite a show.

Q: And in the country itself, I mean, were people at all ostracized for joining these groups?

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: Or -- not at all.

SHURTLEFF: Those were the three groups that were recognized. There were some others there too.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: One, one day I got a call from Lannon. He said, "Len, I've got a problem. I've got a guy up here working for me who's a Baha'i, and the want to enforce this thing about there wanting to be three religious groups allowed -- they were going to boot him out of the country. They're also going to boot an independent missionary lady up in Mamfe." Gave me her name and address. He said, "Come up and see what you can do." So the way up I stopped by one of the Baptist groups. Told him what was going on.

He said, "Look, tell the lady, if she wants, she can come under our umbrella. She doesn't have to work with us. We'll just put her name under our list and she'll be safe, they won't kick her out."

I said, "That's a dandy idea."

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: She wouldn't do it.

Q: Hm.

SHURTLEFF: She said, "No, I couldn't, I couldn't."

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: "I'm compromised by the lease."

OK, I said, "Then you better start packing."

I used to go into Victoria too, which is now called Limbe. It's the port in West Cameroon. It's a lighterage port. The big, big export company of West Cameroon was CDC, Cameroon development cooperation. They grew some rubber, some rice, palm kernels, and coco too.

Q: It sounds like your relationship with Lannon Walker was very good.

SHURTLEFF: Well, that's what started it. Later found out he and my buddy Bob Houdek were very good friends too, because they'd worked together up in SS. And they were both on the board of the American Foreign Service Association.

Q: Now, at this time was -- I mean your wife was kind of working informally.

SHURTLEFF: She worked a little bit overseas here and there, once as my secretary just for a few weeks and once as GSO for the last year for AID in Nouakchott. And when we came back she picked up a job with the Garvey, Schubert, Adams, and Barer Law Firm, Seattle law firm. They were lobbyists in Washington. The Adams being Brock Adams, the former U.S. Senator.

Q: Oh sure.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, he was one of the partners. Scumbag, by the way.

Q: Oh really?

SHURTLEFF: Roman hands and Russian fingers. He was just into ladies and couldn't keep his hands off.

Q: Now, here's a question. In terms of congressional visits. You've mentioned one --

SHURTLEFF: Very seldom, very seldom got them in Africa.

Q: Right, because you're in Africa.

SHURTLEFF: I can think of two, maybe three. They had a small group, three congressmen that the Kennedys brought in when I was in Congo. And one of them was John Kasich, who's now Governor of Ohio. We took him over to talk with the president. I'm doing the interpreting, which is hard work. And he says, "Mr. President, you know, this is probably none of my business but I couldn't help noticing when I came into the airport here that there's a picture of Che Guevara on the wall. You know, that guy really sets our teeth on edge in the United States. We have a bad view of Castro and Guevara and all those guys." The next week it disappeared. It was gone.

Q: I bet.

SHURTLEFF: So I wrote to the congressman. "I can't say that A led to B, but it's pretty obvious somebody listened to you." He published it in his newsletter.

Q: (laughs) I bet.

SHURTLEFF: Oh, I had one -- Charlie Diggs. You remember Charlie Diggs?

Q: Uh-huh, sure.

SHURTLEFF: He came to Douala once when I was there. He came from Congo-Brazzaville. He was trying to reestablish relations. We'd closed our embassy. We'd closed it for 13 years.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: He had this long cable he wanted to send out classified. I'm using this brand new HL-17 Cupid system. And I haven't learned how to use it. I was very good on a one-time pad. But they stopped one-time pads. So I got about the first page, they couldn't break anything else. So I simply gave the cable to my vice consul, "Take this up to Yaoundé, have them send it out."

And next morning, the vice consul's already on the plane, Diggs wants to know, "Is the cable on the way?"

"Oh yeah, it's on the plane, should be there any minute."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: It was on the plane, by a courier.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: He had Jenna Diggs with him I remember.

Q: Oh yeah?

SHURTLEFF: Foreign Service Officer, mistress at the time. He later married her. Jenna was a good officer. She and Charlie had a thing going on.

Q: Yeah, yeah. A lot of the congressional -- yeah, it's always interesting.

SHURTLEFF: Charlie, you know, was an undertaker from Detroit. Not a bad guy. He was all right, he was good to us. But he was about the only one who paid attention to Africa.

Q: So as Douala -- I mean were you happy to leave?

SHURTLEFF: No, I liked Douala. It was a great post. I was 30-years-old when I got there. Been in the Foreign Service for all of eight years. I had my own car and chauffeur, had two chauffeurs, had a big house, had a nice little office, lots of good Foreign Service National employees, branch PAO, had our own library.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Another branch PAO, the guy who lived -- actually who lived up in Buea, but he ran a cultural center in Buea ran one in Douala, commuted back in forth, John Garner, you know. That was fun. John and I used to travel through the backlands, he and Christine, his wife and I. We had a great time there, that was a great post. It's a real ego trip. You know, my own post, fly the flag.

Q: And, and certainly at this time it was towards the end of Vietnam.

SHURTLEFF: Yes, it was pretty much over.

Q: -- War. And my guess is -- or tell me, in terms of the attention being put on Africa versus Vietnam --

SHURTLEFF: Africa is very seldom paid much attention. They had other worries. They had South Africa, they had Rhodesia, all sorts of other stuff. The Portuguese were still in control in three different colonies. No, no, they had enough on their plates. They weren't interested in Vietnam. Not their thing.

Q: And it also sounds as if you all weren't in Washington's sights as much as other things. Is that true, or not?

SHURTLEFF: Well, let's put it this way. The Secretary of State did not get up in the morning and say, "I wonder what Shurtleff is doing in Congo today?"

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But that's really a blessing because you pretty much do anything you damn well please. Usually you do it and tell the department about it later.

Q: Right. Which is different from now with electronic communications the way they are now compared to back then.

SHURTLEFF: We had online communications and record communications in Congo. God, using a Telex machine in Douala. I used to sit and talk to John Blane. He had the Telex machine in his office in Chad and I had one in my office in Douala, we could type back and forth.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Of course those had French keyboards, which made for a lot of typos, but.

Q: Oh, I bet.

SHURTLEFF: Christine could use them rather well, but I, I never -- I could get along. And we had, we had, we had Thermo, Thermofax. Remember Thermofax?

Q: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

SHURTLEFF: Didn't have IBM machines.

Q: Right. Yeah, when the IBM machines -- the Videks and then everything else?

SHURTLEFF: Everything was air-grams.

Q: Big improvement, right?

SHURTLEFF: Wow, hey. Get back to Washington second time around '77, they had Videks. Secretaries loved them. Of course the computerization department was scaring the secretaries to death, as it well might. It really put 'em out of jobs. I mean, we weren't recruiting good secretaries anymore.

Q: So what else would you like to tell people who are listening about your time in Cameroon?

SHURTLEFF: I had a great time. All the politicians in the English speaking part were feeling left out because it was really run by the Francophones. So they were anxious to talk to people who were more sympathetic. So I had a lot of good friends among politicians and former politicians in West Cameroon.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: And the Francophones weren't unfriendly, you know. Once I met Lannon in Bafoussam and I was invited to lunch by the local governor, not the district officer, right above that. He had lots of DO's working for him. I was placed on the governor's right hand. Lannon's put in the back row. I said, "Wait a second, that's my boss. You can't do that."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Lannon says, "Don't worry about it. I'll be perfectly happy back there." So he and his wife went back in the back row, had lunch there. They sat next to a light colonel in the army, an Anglophone who was stationed there. He turned out to be the guy who captured Ouandié. Guy with the UPC (Union des Populations du Cameroun (Union of the Peoples of Cameroon)). Ouandié was a rebel. He'd been fighting the government

for years and years and it finally caught up with him. And this was the guy who caught him.

Q: So were you able to talk with him?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, we had dinner with him that next night. He was later Cameroon attaché to the United States.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Basically along the lines of conquest of 1950/'60. British Cameroon was the southern Cameroon, which was Buea area and the northern Cameroon, which is now part of Nigeria. They voted to stay with Nigeria. And Southern Cameroonians voted to go in '61, to go with Cameroon. And I guess they're glad they did because they missed the civil war. Otherwise they would have been part of the eastern state, they would have been rebels.

Q: So after Cameroon then, what happens next in what years?

SHURTLEFF: 1972, July, I'm transferred to Nouakchott, Mauritania as DCM. I was an FO-3 time, or FO-5. I was the only FSO-5 in the whole world who was a DCM.

Q: And how did that come about?

SHURTLEFF: Well, they didn't have a DCM before and they sent Dick Murphy there as ambassador. Great guy. He wanted a DCM, so he got one. And there were two candidates, me and John Stempel. And John didn't really want to go, and he told Dick that. And I never said I didn't want to go, so I went.

Q: OK. So you go to --

SHURTLEFF: We had a great time there. You know, it's not much of a country. Sandy and sandstorms. But we had a tennis court, we had a swimming pool. Dick and his wife are great to work for, good sense of humor.

Q: And how was it being --

SHURTLEFF: Traveled all over the country, driving mainly, flying sometimes.

Q: How was it being a DCM? Did you enjoy that?

SHURTLEFF: Dick and I used to laugh about this. We'd go in Friday afternoon. We'd go put our feet up on his desk and drink a whisky before the close of business. And he'd look at me and say, "Len, how's it feel to be DCM at this high powered post?"

I'd say, "Dick, how does it feel to be ambassador at this high powered post?"

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: We would burst out laughing because, you know, there really wasn't much to do there. But we did what was necessary. We had good contacts around town. Couple of interesting things happened while I was there. We had a major failure. Kellogg, the engineering company, wanted to build a sugar plant there. Produce cone sugar?

Q: Oh. And what's that used for? Cone sugar?

SHURTLEFF: It's what you put in your tea. It's easy to transport cones by camel.

Q: Oh, right, right. Ah yes.

SHURTLEFF: Because they stack them. They fit very nicely that way. Now, they worked for almost two years trying to get the government to approve this whole factory. And they came to me one day and said, "We got to hire a local representative here to get this thing through here."

And I said, "Who is it?" and they gave me the name. I said, "Don't hire him. Please don't hire him. You can't trust him." They hired him anyway and of course they never got the contract, so big failure.

Next thing that comes along is I've been cultivating a guy named Ishmael Uldabar for a long time. He was a big investments guy in government. He was supposed to be in national development, industrial development. And one day he calls me up and said, "Len, I'm in a lot of trouble."

I said, "I know you are." I said, "You just got named president of the national airline, didn't you?"

He said, "How did you know that?"

I said, "Hey, I know all."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: He said, "I need new aircraft." He said, "The French are trying to sell me Fokker 28's -- 27's, 27's." And he says, "All outdoors."

I said, "Hm." I said, "I think I can help you."

A couple weeks beforehand I'd received a preposition from Hughes Airwest, a circular, saying, "We want to sell our whole fleet of Fairchild F27's," same as a Fokker.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: "And we'll zero time, brand new engines, we'll paint them any color they want, we'll completely redo the interior, and we'll give the buyer a contractor for mechanics to come in and service them." And they had a price, good price.

I took this over to Uldabar and he said, "That's what I want, have them come down."

Q: Wow, that's huge.

SHURTLEFF: So I sent them a cable and said, "Hey, come on down." Well, they did and they sold them two F-27's and they had two mechanics too.

Q: And they were flying around with DC-4's and DC-3's.

SHURTLEFF: This is a big change then, yeah.

Q: Oh yeah. Jeez.

SHURTLEFF: So I was very proud of that.

Q: Yeah, that's a lot of contracts for --

SHURTLEFF: Well, it wasn't a big deal.

Q: -- the U.S. But, but for Mauritania, that is. And for entrée into Africa.

SHURTLEFF: Didn't have much luck creating U.S. investment and for sales.

Q: What was the problem with the company that wanted the sugar?

SHURTLEFF: I wasn't privy to all the negotiations.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: They just couldn't agree on a price, I think.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: It probably wasn't a very good idea to have processed sugar there. Because sugar was all imported anyway.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I mean their big, their big agricultural export was gum Arabic.

Q: Was --

SHURTLEFF: There's not very much of that.

Q: I mean this is a very poor country. How about in terms of corruption?

SHURTLEFF: Oh, wasn't much to steal.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: I mean they had iron in the far north. They had some bauxite, and that was kind of rapidly wasting. I don't know if the iron mines are still open or not. Fishing out of Nouadhibou, when the Russians were stealing them blind by fishing off the coast. And the gum Arabic. Not much of a market for that, but they sold all they had. But they're basically a bunch of pastoralists, that was their, their culture. They were transhumance. They weren't really nomads. They did the same route every year following the rains, following the grass around. And then when the drought came, they all moved into Nouakchott. Because there was no grass left. The drought went on for years and years and years. And they had locusts.

I remember I was doing a trip. I was way out in the western part of the country in Néma. And the day I left, there were locusts all over the place. And I got home and I reported this to USAID within a couple of days. And they said, "Oh poo, poo, poo, there's no locust out there."

And I said, "Oh yeah, what's eating their way across our lawn now?" Because by that time they'd flown to Nouakchott. Were eating our grass. Said, "Hey, I know locust when I see it."

Q: You were at the vanguard of environmental reporting.

SHURTLEFF: Because we didn't have any AID mission there I was in charge of AID food program and whatever else they had. Plus I was in charge of Peace Corps. It took them a long time to get a Peace Corps director.

We only had a couple of Peace Corps volunteers at the time, maybe four. Finally we got a director in. First guy didn't stay; he ran screaming from the room before he'd been there six months. Finally got another guy in, who didn't speak much French, but he's a good guy anyway, he could get along. He was very worried that I would have his lunch. I said, "Hey, I don't want to run the Peace Corps. That's your job. I withdraw (*laughs*). Don't worry about me."

That place really grew. It was five people when I arrived; it was about 10 when I left. It grew to be 25 or 30 after that because USIA came aboard, the agency came aboard. We had to expand that agency twice.

Q: And whose idea was that or why was that done?

SHURTLEFF: It was an Arab country. Remember, this is a member of the Arab League. They weren't Arabs at all.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They were loosely related to the Berbers and the Moors, the people who used to live in Spain. But they were Muslim. They needed food. We shipped them a lot of sorghum during the drought.

Q: And was that helpful to their economy?

SHURTLEFF: It didn't really help their economy. It helped them from starving to death.

Q: But long term? I mean --

SHURTLEFF: Nothing much long term there.

Q: So it was just a stop gap measure?

SHURTLEFF: AID didn't really set up until after I left. They had one officer there while I was there. They expanded later on. They were doing some health programs, some transportation programs. Nothing very much. Food aid. But it got to be fairly large at post. I noticed the other day, I was reading a list of countries where we're going to beef up security. Nouakchott was on the list. Never would have been done while I was there.

They'd broken relations with us in '67. And unlike the other Arab countries, where the ambassadors went home and everybody else stayed, they booted everybody out. And then about six months later they looked around and said, "Hey, what's this guy doing here -- you told us we had to break relations with the Americans, you still have someone in this country."

The other Arabs said, "Don't be stupid. You don't kick them all out -- you just kicked out the ambassadors. You don't want to break relations with the United States."

Q: They just didn't understand.

SHURTLEFF: They didn't understand how this game works. Well, it took them about another two years before we deigned to go back in there. Dick was the first ambassador. He was there about a year before I got there. And of course he stayed for 10 days after I got there and then took a three-month vacation.

Q: Oh!

SHURTLEFF: Well, that's what you're supposed to do.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I did the same thing when I changed DCM's in Congo. I introduced him to everybody, and then I left for about two months. People have to work with it.

Q: And what was your goal in being there, or the ambassador's goal? I mean was there anything in particular?

SHURTLEFF: Carry on relations. Interests there were very minimal. Remember, we used to have a policy back in those days of being represented, no matter how small, in every single African country. And when Dick Moose was assistant secretary for Africa, we decided no more chargés. We were going to have ambassadors. So instead of having a rolling ambassador in Swaziland, we had three ambassadors in the BLS states. Instead of having one ambassador accredited to both Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau we had two ambassadors.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Seychelles, the same. Comoros was the only place we really had a chargé. It was one of Ed Brynn's jobs. But that was an anomaly because it was such a small country, got away with a chargé. And of course much of the Comoros are still French.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Only a couple of the islands were independent. That's no longer the case.

Q: Yes.

SHURTLEFF: We closed Equatorial Guinea because Bill Mithoefer got booted out. Then the government changed, so we decided we'd send somebody in there. That's when I was offered the job. We got this poor guy from Dakar to go in there. He was an Italian speaker, we had to teach him Spanish. He learned, he learned Spanish very quickly.

Q: That's good.

SHURTLEFF: Trying to think of his name. He and his wife were never heard from again. And we kept it open until about '90 or '91, and then Ed, Ed Brynn and I closed it down. They were threatening the ambassador. He was tasked with trying to improve human rights and he was working at it. And they were threatening him, all sorts of threats. So we said screw it, we're going home. We didn't go back in until the early 21st century when the oil companies insisted on it.

Q: They needed someone there.

SHURTLEFF: We went back the first time, not so much because we wanted to. We were terrifically happy to have the Ambassador to Cameroon cover the place. But King Juan Carlos came to visit Washington and told Jimmy Carter that the only thing Spain really wanted was a U.S. ambassador in Equatorial Guinea. So we got orders from the White House, "Open an embassy."

And that's when I got the word, "You're going out there as ambassador."

I said, "No, I'm not."

Q: And that's because of the oil companies.

SHURTLEFF: No, it's because of King Juan Carlos of Spain, the first --

Q: And why did King Juan Carlos make that one of --

SHURTLEFF: He wanted somebody else there to share the misery.

Q: Interesting.

SHURTLEFF: And the Spanish, they still had a connection there. They were giving the government some -- when I went back after the coup in '79, I flew from -- I went to Madrid to consult with the Spanish Foreign Ministry, and they introduced me to my old friend who was their new ambassador! Who was going out there. He was ambassador to Nouakchott while I was there, and he was quite friendly. Not close, but friendly. And so we went in there together on the same plane. He flew first class, I flew tourist.

He was at the airport, and I was looking around. He had all these armored cars, couple of armored cars pull up to the airport. He said 14 million dollars worth of pesetas. I'm taking him in, that's our little gift to the government. Said, "Nice gift." Said, "I'm sorry, I'm not going to bring that much (*laughs*)."

Q: You're not bringing that much. Not from coach class.

SHURTLEFF: Nope. Well, we gave 'em some food aid after that. And we established relations, because King Juan Carlos wanted us to.

Q: And did that help with anything or what was the effect?

SHURTLEFF: No, it went from bad to worse. Didn't, didn't approve. They're not housebroken yet. The new president is not as blood thirsty as the old one was. He's from the same family. We worked with him on the murder. He was a captain in the National Guard at the time. He was stationed on the island. He was very helpful.

Q: In what ways?

SHURTLEFF: Made sure we got our cars back. They wouldn't let us drive the car. We had no embassy car, wouldn't let us do that. Several other things they wouldn't let us -- he got 'em to do it, he got the government to back off. Because he was related to the president, and listened to him. He was a ranking, he was a ranking National Guard officer on the island. Of course he later becomes a colonel, now he's a president.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: He came, he did a state visit to, to Congo when I was there. I did all the diplomatic interest in -- did not go to the dinner (*laughs*). I didn't want to get into that again.

Q: I'd like to talk a little bit about, about Christine. Because here she had been this officer. She's competent, she's helped you in so many ways.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: It seems like she found a lot to do.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, she did. In every post they had something. They needed a GSO for AID in one case, or my secretary in another because Douala involved lot of entertaining.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Particularly for Americans coming through. And of course a lot of entertaining for a DCM in Monrovia, because ambassador there was a bachelor, Bill Swing, so she was sort of the ranking lady. She was the honorary president of the American's Women Club.

Q: So she took over that function.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: How do you think it would have been being single, if you had to do the entertaining and everything else?

SHURTLEFF: Have to hire somebody to do it. I did in Latin America, my first post, when I was single there. I had a good maid who could put together a dinner or whatever.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Did a lot of entertaining in restaurants, because I did it in Monrovia too. Had a couple of good restaurants there. Quite, quite good. Much better to do it at home when you can. Managing the servants is what Christine was good at. That's a fulltime job. Because you have three or four of them, every place we were.

Q: Well, so back to Mauritania.

SHURTLEFF: Couple more things about Mauritania. The solar eclipse, 1972, early '72. It was a partial eclipse in Nouakchott, but up north, deeper in the desert it was total. So we had the National Science Foundation there and two or 300 American scientists and others observing it. And we were worried about that because they were way up there -- miles and miles from anything up in the desert.

Q: So did you accompany them or did the ambassador --

SHURTLEFF: The ambassador and the rest of the staff did. I stayed home so other people could go. Somebody had to stay and watch the fort.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: The attaché plane came in from Monrovia, so we'd have a medevac plane, they stayed there for the whole period. We did all sorts of scouting around, looking for place to stay up there in the country. Some guys just brought tents and pitched them. But it was a big production because the National Science Foundation was behind it all.

The other thing of course was the drought. We had an airlift there at one point. Trucked the sorghum in from Dakar, piled it up in a warehouse in Nouakchott. And then a C130 came in, and 20 tons at a time, we scattered that around the country.

Q: Oh, from the C130 would throw the boxes out.

SHURTLEFF: No, they would land. And the coolies would unload it there. I remember the first flight, the captain of the plane wanted me to come along with them. He said, "My navigator isn't very good. He's brand new and he's still learning. He almost got us lost."

Q: So you acted as navigator?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. Sat up in the jump seat up front. It was real simple, I knew exactly where we were going.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You go to the Senegal River and turn to port, turn left, and follow the river until you go to the next airport, and that's where you land.

Q: And when you unloaded the sorghum, I mean who took charge of that then?

SHURTLEFF: The district officer.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: They had district officers there too, the French also had them. And they then had a gang of laborers out there. All the airstrips we landed at, and I went on several trips with him, were World War II fighter strips that the French had built.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: The free French had built. And they were built all right, but they were old, they were asphalt. And we landed these heavily overloaded C130's, which barely made it out of Nouakchott. The first time we took off we had 23 tons or more. But the plane landed, left 18-inch ruts in the asphalt.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: So they had to get guys out there filling them in with gravel after we left. Lots of gravel around, thank goodness.

Q: Lots of gravel.

SHURTLEFF: So that was interesting, flew all over the country with that thing. In fact, I flew all over the country anyway, even with the local airline. Our local secretary was a German girl married to a Frenchman who was the chief pilot for the airline. So I used to fly up front with him when he was flying DC-3's, but mainly DC-4's actually.

Q: And again, the sorghum, the food that we brought in that -- did that help divert starvation?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. They were hurting. They were really hurting. They made couscous out of it. That's what they stuff their lamb with. In fact, I couldn't eat lamb for several years after I left, because morning, noon, and night you got nothing but lamb with couscous. Maybe a few green vegetables on the side. And the big entertainment thing was every time the Foreign Ministry had a party or anyone else had a party, you had a mechoui. They got the lamb and put it on a spit and stuffed the stomach with couscous.

Q: And you'd eat and they would --

SHURTLEFF: Use your fingers.

Q: -- turn it and you'd use your fingers.

SHURTLEFF: Put it on a plate, a big plate, we all sat in a circle and grabbed a handful. We did not wear suits and ties to those parties. In fact, both the ambassador and I and damn every person, we wore boubous, which the Mauritians liked. They thought that was a compliment, that we'd wear their national dress, boubous and those baggy pants.

Q: And they were very happy that you did that.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, they liked that. In fact, I've got a picture of the pastor, myself, and the president of the country, party with the ambassador, just the six of us.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Two couples -- three couples. And the ambassador and I are both wearing boubous, and so is the president. And of course all the women are wearing western dress. The president's wife was French.

Q: And were these mostly mixed, you know, with men and women?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. Mauritania, unlike a lot of Muslim countries, one wife, one husband, period. Women don't stand for it any other way. They're not veiled. They're a real independent bunch.

The only thing that doesn't quite fit there, they still have a class of people called Haratin, their slaves. Not chattel slaves, they don't sell them and buy them. They're old family retainers, but they're a slave class, so they're all black. Now, culturally they're Moors. They're all Muslim of course. And culturally they're Moors. They're not African culturally, they're North Africans culturally. But they're still a slave class. And you have the same thing in Mali, the same thing in Niger. Sort of a slave class. They were slaves. Those were the ones the local sheikhs would let go. They sent their slaves off to work for the French.

Q: Did you find in where you were in Africa that there was the discrimination or the different classes based on how dark the skin color was?

SHURTLEFF: No, not that. It has to do more with tribe and social status. Africans are terrible racists, but it's tribal racism.

Q: Tribal racism, right.

SHURTLEFF: And social status. For instance, when the French finally pacified Mauritania, which was about 1934, took a long time, they went around to all the sheikhs and said, "You got to send away your sons to be trained by the French in a French school, put 'em through high school." Now, they sent somebody all right. They sent their slaves. So this is my son, take him. OK. So when independence time came, guess who all the educated people were?

Q: The slaves.

SHURTLEFF: Had all these Haratin who were ministers (*laughs*).

Q: Interesting, huh?

SHURTLEFF: Backfired. Didn't work right (*laughs*).

Q: Wow, yeah. Again, another fascinating post.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, and working for Dick Murphy was worth the price of admission. I mean he and his wife were really good people. They were a lot of fun.

Q: And what makes a good person to work with?

SHURTLEFF: Well, I don't know. Dick and I were both from Boston, we're both New Englanders. He had a puckish New England sense of humor. He's from Harvard. I went to Tufts, which isn't that far away from Harvard.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: He spoke beautiful Arabic, which he couldn't use there because they spoke Hassaniya, which is a dialect of Arabic. They couldn't understand him. Written language is the same, but when you speak it it's different.

Q: Hm.

SHURTLEFF: And his wife spoke good Arabic too. Because their first post in the Foreign Service was Aleppo. Of course he was later ambassador in Syria and Saudi Arabia and Philippines (*laughs*) and he was Assistant Secretary of State for NEA (Bureau for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs). And also, another good friend we made there was HR and Betsy Malpass, he was our admin officer. Hansen Rufus Malpass. Both HR and Betsy were communicators. So it was a tandem couple. She was our communicator and he was the admin officer. This was his first post. He was in the Mustang Program.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: They dropped that program it after a while because the success rate was about 10%.

Q: Really, from the -- and the Mustang Program was if you were admin assistant or a specialist you could turn into a officer?

SHURTLEFF: Staff, staff -- you became an FSO.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Well, HR went through it, became an FSO, did very well, was one of the best admin officers I ever worked with.

Q: But only 10% success.

SHURTLEFF: Only 10% success rate.

Q: Why do you think that --

SHURTLEFF: It just didn't work apparently, or at least not to the satisfaction of personnel. But HR was one of the great successes. Unfortunately, he didn't make the Senior Foreign Service. Part of that was because he never really got a language going.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You're supposed to have two languages when you get in the Senior Foreign Service. The Senior Foreign Service, they'll take one, but you're supposed to have two. At least that's what the rules say, that's usually ignored. But he was a really good admin officer. He barely spoke French, but everything he touched turned to gold.

Q: That's a good person to have.

SHURTLEFF: And Betsy was very good, a very good communicator too.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: In fact, while she was there we got another communicator. Remember the murders in Sudan?

Q: Yes. The ambassador?

SHURTLEFF: The ambassador and the DCM both were killed?

Q: Uh-huh.

SHURTLEFF: We got a cable, an immediate NIACT cable was sent out Friday afternoon on that. We didn't get it until Tuesday morning because it had to go through PTT (Push-to-Transmit) and PTT's closed all weekend and they forgot to deliver it to us. Anyway, whatever. I was chargé at the time. And I sent a rocket back saying -- I said communication at this post is so bad, this is how long it took to get this cable, which I assume was important because it was immediate NIACT. I didn't get it until Tuesday morning, it was sent off Friday night, and here's why." Well, the next thing I know I've got Will Nair on my doorstep, who was the deputy assistant secretary in charge of communications. Only a deputy at the time, but now he's assistant secretary. And they were putting in this new West African WARN, West African Radio Network, it's called. It's all HF radio, big antennas. Blew the first, blew the first tributary post, tributary station (*laughs*). We had online communications.

Q: And so you should have been getting things quick.

SHURTLEFF: Well, we got another communicator. So the post kept going. We had to, we had to, we had to rebuild the com (communications) center.

Q: So sometimes it's good to speak up.

SHURTLEFF: Seabees came in for that. I remember another time when Christine was doing the budget, HR didn't like to do budgets, I don't blame him, I don't like to either. We had Christine do it. And she put the budget in. And then, OK, they accepted it. Then they came back later and said, "You know, we're short of cash, you know, we need some of you guys to give us back some money."

So Christine and I and HR looked at the budget, "We can give them \$100,000, make it 150." So we said, "OK, you know, \$150,000."

And they came back, said, "Well, thank you very much, but we were looking at something -- we were looking at something," -- what they wanted to do was try to get Lagos to give up some of their huge budget. Of course they didn't. But boy, that made our reputation. I was golden ever after at AF/EX after that one. I was trying to do anything, trying to help out.

Q: I can see why AF/EX would want you around.

SHURTLEFF: Well, that was Lannon Walker's idea. He wanted somebody down there to handle personnel. And in those days personnel came to us for assignments officers. And we picked 'em. The first time we did it we picked Marty Chassis, the second time we picked Keith Walker. Keith and I worked together. I was in AF/EX and he was in PR. And another Africanist was Art Tienken who was in charge of the whole assignments process. He was an office director who used to be ambassador in Libreville. So we had a lock on, we had a lock on the system. We got what we wanted.

Q: Well, you know, that brings up another question. I mean how much of who you decide to pick up is based on evaluation reports versus corridor reputation?

SHURTLEFF: Corridor -- mostly corridor reputation. Because you really don't have access to -- you get a list every summer. If you're smart you get one, they're available, of all the vacancies at your bureau. Mainly overseas. But U.S. too.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And they used to circulate this to all the AF offices, particularly deputy directors and directors of the office. Say, "OK, who do you want to fill the jobs in your area? Who do you want for AF/C? Who do you want for AF/W? Give me names. We'll see if we can't do that." So we'd get recommendations for people.

I remember one about Liberia. Monrovia. I was in AF/EX about a year and two key jobs were coming open, political counselor and econ counselor. And I didn't like the bidders,

not very good. The political counselor wanted to extend and he was a disaster. So Lannon Walker went out and recruited two guys to go. And they were good. I mean they were still there when I got there as DCM, and boy was I happy.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Lannon convinced the political counselor. He knew him, I didn't. But I convinced the econ counselor because the econ counselor was saying he wanted to go to Bogotá. I said, "Oh, it'll be fine, you can go there." But I said, "You've got teenage kids, you know how the drug problem is down there?" I said, "The high school's riddled with drug problems." Said, "You don't want to go there." Well, he didn't go there. He decided it'd look much nicer in Liberia. Because Liberia had a good school too.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I mean they had an American school there. He wanted the school.

Q: But you were a good salesman. You knew the areas.

SHURTLEFF: You do what you have to do to get people (*laughs*) -- getting people to go to Africa isn't easy.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Every so often somebody would come to us and say, "Get me out of here." So we'd get him a job in Europe. Or some place else like that. One guy we sent to Paris, OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) admin officer. Within a year he's on the phone saying, "Get me out of here, I'm bored *stiff*."

And I said, "Well sure," I said, "I'll get you out of there. The only thing I've got is Kinshasa."

He said, "Kinshasa, love it. Send me there."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: One guy was one of the hostages in Tehran. We kept South Africa for him for about two years. Finally had to send somebody down there. So he got out about six months later. So we sent him off to Madrid. Not marvelous, but six months later he's on the phone, "Get me out of here, I'm going nuts. The FSN's do all the work, I've got nothing to do!"

And I said, "Only thing we've got open is Lagos."

"Lagos, love it, send me there!"

Q: Amazing, yeah.

SHURTLEFF: That's what used to happen.

Q: Yeah. Know your clients, know the people and what turns them on. It's also interesting, in the Foreign Service you've got people who thrive on different stimuli. Whether it's adventure or a little bit of danger, different culture, it's interesting. I've always thought they should test our DNA to see if it's any different than others (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: Well, Africa used to be a very tight knit group.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I don't think it is anymore.

Q: I recall the bureau had a reputation for that, because you did know each other.

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was a happy bureau. I think principally because we took the job seriously. We didn't take ourselves seriously. We knew we were doing things that nobody else was interested in doing, but it was fun. Europeanists were always bragging about tribalism in Africa. Well, what about the tribalism in Europe? Look how Yugoslavia blew up. Ever talk to the Belgians? The Belgian groups can't stand each other. Plus you've got something like half a million Germans north of the Ardennes in that little corner that used to be Germany? Three different German counties that were given to the Belgians after World War I. And they have their own local government too. And they don't like anybody else.

Q: Right. It's everywhere. So let's get back to your next post, where did you want to go and where did you go?

SHURTLEFF: I asked personnel to send me back to Latin America.

Q: Why did you decide that?

SHURTLEFF: I just wanted to get out of Africa for a while. About this time Henry Kissinger came up with what they called GLOP. Remember GLOP? Global Outlook Policy?

Q: That's right.

SHURTLEFF: He apparently went to an OAS (Organization of American States) meeting in Mexico once and discovered that all the Foreign Service Officers didn't know anything about any other area; all they did was Latin America.

Q: Right, right, right.

SHURTLEFF: I just started bidding on the job as petroleum attaché in Venezuela. But the guy who was there wanted to extend, so I didn't get that. So I was offered the job as narcotics coordinator in Colombia. OK, I'll try anything once.

Q: And what year did you go to Colombia?

SHURTLEFF: '75, winter of '75. I got there in February. After a truncated course of Spanish. I was assigned under sort of a cover job. I was assigned as special assistant to the ambassador, Peter Vaky. He was soon to be assistant secretary for ARA. Great guy. And his wife Lou-Ann, Lou-Ann and Christine got along very well. I did some stuff for him, but I really wasn't his special assistant. I ran the narcotics program, which was USAID, DEA, sometimes customs, sometimes secret service. It all depended. But it was an interagency log role.

Q: Now, what was the kind of drug cartel going on at that time?

SHURTLEFF: All that, simple cartels. Very violent. The whole thing started out with smuggling stuff in. Then the same routes were used to smuggle stuff out.

Kidnapping. I mean not only FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)) and the other guerilla armies were kidnapping, but so were the narcotraficantes, that's how they made money.

Q: And they were trafficking?

SHURTLEFF: Well, cocaine mainly.

Q: From Peru and Bolivia, and some parts of Colombia --

SHURTLEFF: The processing was done in Colombia. Some production there too, but the big production came out of Peru and Bolivia. And of course marijuana. We weren't really that interested in marijuana. The big money was all in cocaine. And all these very violent cartels, my God. While I was there the SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation) for DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) was murdered.

By the time I'd been there almost a year, we decided we'd all move in together. So we hired a whole floor of a high-rise office building across the street from the embassy. And DEA and I moved in there. Five agents, and we had the whole floor. Big office. Once I was in Guatemala and after the conference was over on Friday afternoon I went up to Washington because I was looking for a new job and I wanted to make sure that I got one. Well, while I was there we got word that somebody had walked into our office and shot Octavio Gonzales in the head and then killed himself when the marine guards closed in. We were just across the street. So yeah, what a mess.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: His wife went berserk, blamed the CIA for the whole problem. Had a devil of a time trying to calm her down. Fortunately, I wasn't there. But what a mess.

Q: But that must have gotten a lot of publicity.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, it did.

Q: And it sounds like you all didn't want too much publicity.

SHURTLEFF: No, but got it anyway.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Obviously the Colombians investigated. They didn't come up with much of anything, but they tried.

Q: And I suppose this time that you -- of course this was supported by the Colombian government, or parts of it?

SHURTLEFF: The government was supporting it. I had several contacts there. Besides the chief of customs and what they would call now customs patrol, the law enforcement arm, the two major contacts. One was the National Police Detective Bureau, what they call the FA-Dos (two). They had a young captain who was running their whole narcotics program nationwide. So I did a lot of business with him. I did a lot of business with the army major general who ran the secret police. The Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (Administrative Department of Security), DAS. Guy named Matajana. Was one tough cookie. The deputy station chief and I were the ones who did business with him. Sort of like a tag team. I had a USIA guy working for me, two AID guys, and of course tight relations with the DEA.

Q: Did you feel threatened working this --

SHURTLEFF: Well yeah, after the murder I was authorized to carry a firearm. I didn't. But after the murders of our diplomats in Sudan, the department armed both the ambassador and me. He got a 9-millimeter and I got a Stubnosed .38. Devil of a time hiding those in our boubous, but we used to carry them.

Q: Was that policy across the board?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was in the Arab countries. They wanted us to have something, so at least we weren't walking targets. But yeah, I couldn't hit the bright side of a barn with a Stubnosed .38, let's face it.

Q: Well yeah. It's one thing to have a weapon and another thing to really be able to use it.

SHURTLEFF: We also got a shotguns. We didn't have Marine Guards there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: We had to import a shotgun. I had to bring in all the ammunition myself.

Q: And did you?

SHURTLEFF: I went on home leave, I brought it all in. They sent the arms in wrapped up in lead foil in the pouches. You can't x-ray lead foil.

Q: And it must have been scary in --

SHURTLEFF: Well, I didn't think it was much of a threat there, but the ambassador insisted I arm myself, so I did.

Q: And what was the fallout from the murder in Bogotá?

SHURTLEFF: No, not much. The government investigated for a while and gave up. What happened was that the DEA sent an informant in, but apparently he was a hit man. He walked into the office shooting and he walked out of the office and then killed himself. But he was supposed to be a DEA informant. He wasn't. He was a plant. Somebody wanted to get rid of Octavio. Maybe we were doing better than I thought we were doing -- catching 10% of the dope going out of there. Convinced me, you know, that we were.

Q: What do you think worked in terms of our programs that you saw?

SHURTLEFF: Well, Peace Corps worked pretty well in Africa at least, and I think it did in Venezuela too. We didn't have much in Bogotá?

Q: Well, how about in Bogotá, in terms of the anti-drug?

SHURTLEFF: We weren't catching 10% of what was going on there. It was a complete failure.

Q: We must have been spending --

SHURTLEFF: 14 million dollars a year when I was there, average. We even put a narcotics air wing in. We bought a couple of Huey helicopters and put together a whole bunch of confiscated aircraft and hired a retired captain of the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) whose last job was commander of the airway. He was both the fix wing and the rotary pilot. Hired him to run the whole thing, and that brought us up to 14 million dollars one year.

Q: And why wasn't it effective?

SHURTLEFF: You just can't stop it. Just like why do illegal immigrants still keep coming across the Mexican border?

Q: And so I guess if you couldn't stop it --

SHURTLEFF: As long as there's a huge market in the United States, people are going to find ways to get the cocaine in. It's relatively easy to do it.

Q: I lived in Miami Beach at the time. I was in high school. And you could tell there was a lot of drugs coming in and lots of very wealthy folks coming in from Colombia and other countries.

SHURTLEFF: Occasionally, we'd discover a trafficker was going to the States on vacation or something. And of course he's ineligible for a visa. I used to have to go down and explain to the consular officer, "I know he's ineligible, you've got to give him a visa anyway. We've got to arrest his ass when he gets to Miami."

They sort of gulped, swallowed, "Eh, OK." *(laughs)* Could settle them that way. There's all sorts of mulas, they're called, mules, in jail in Colombia. American citizens trying to smuggle drugs out and have been arrested. There they rot in jail.

Q: Is there anything that you think could have been done to make the program more effective?

SHURTLEFF: No. Not really.

Q: Do you think we could have put in a billion dollars and it would have changed?

SHURTLEFF: We did. The thing went up to about a billion dollars a year back in the early part of the second Bush administration. We were spending about a billion dollars a year.

Q: And then Uribe came to power and things seem to have turned around some.

SHURTLEFF: Well, yeah --

Q: Making things a little safer.

SHURTLEFF: Well, it is a democracy. It is a functioning democracy. They changed parties even. But that doesn't mean they can stop it either.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: They try.

Q: And was that very frustrating for you?

SHURTLEFF: *(sighs)* Not really, because you know, that's the way it is.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: No, I wasn't terribly frustrated by it. I didn't fool myself they were really doing any good. The only way we're going to solve the problem is if we find a way to legalize and control it the way we do alcohol.

Q: That's what a lot of people are talking about now.

SHURTLEFF: Well, we were talking about it back then. It was quite obvious. The only way we were going to get anywhere. You just can't stop it. It's too profitable. It's too big a market in the States. It's like the old Pogo cartoon. We met the enemy, and he is us.

Q: He's us, right.

SHURTLEFF: But it was a great learning process. I really learned how to run an interagency program there. AID was driving me *nuts*. They were running this line a development program. Had all sorts of hurdles trying to jump through to buy a *Jeep* for the local police, although this is a law enforcement program. This isn't development. We don't need all this. They wouldn't get off it. So towards the end of my tour there, I sat down and I wrote a letter -- two pages -- to the assistant DEA director in Washington.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And they changed at that point.

Q: A new one came on board.

SHURTLEFF: Mathea Falco.

Q: Uh-huh.

SHURTLEFF: And I get back to Washington, Mathea wanted to see me. She'd read the letter. And I said, "I meant every word of that." I said, "You want this thing to run right, have any chance of running right, you've got to take over the financing yourself. We had hired AID under PASA." You know what PASA is? Participating Agency Service Agreement. I said, "And they run it like it was a development project. It's *not*."

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: "It's a law enforcement project." Within a month she set up her own shop and she was handling her own money.

Q: Wow, that's pretty impressive.

SHURTLEFF: One thing I made happen. They drove me nuts. They were very suspicious of the State Department, because they saw us as these Foreign Service turkeys.

Q: Yeah, how did you work with them?

SHURTLEFF: I got along with them fine. Because I stayed with him. I didn't get in arguments with them. I just said, "The only way you're going to do your job is if you keep me informed of what you're doing so I can keep the bad guys, the opposition, and the embassy and Washington off of your backs. I can't do that after the fact. I got to do it before the fact." And they finally glommed onto this.

They said, "Yeah, Shurtleff can really, you can help us out here." In fact, before I left I had an artist make up a series of patents awarding each of the five agents, making them honorary turkeys.

Q: Honorary turkeys (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: -- in the grade of golden gobbler. I had the ambassador sign as chief gobbler and I signed as mother hen, and we gave it to these guys.

Q: I like that.

SHURTLEFF: In this little ceremony. Yeah, they got a kick out of that *(laughs)*.

But I got along very well.

Q: How about in terms of --

SHURTLEFF: The problem was I drank far too much liquor because they love to drink, and I wanted to stick with them in off hours, so I developed a relationship. Boy, I drank a lot.

Q: And what did you think about that? Because here, you're going against drugs and here's the people going against drugs who are heavy into drinking?

SHURTLEFF: Well, law enforcement people are in general heavy into drinking. So was the Foreign Service. Although we do a pretty good job of controlling it. I remember we had an ambassador once in Kenya who was a political appointee. Very good ambassador, by the way. Probably an alcoholic. And I remember the DCM was called aside one day, was back on leave by, by Larry Eagleburger. And Larry said, "You know, we're going to have to get rid of that guy. He's drinking far too much."

And Houdek said, “No, don’t want to do that. I know he drinks too much, but he never loses control. He is one fine ambassador, you want to keep him.” Houdek said, “Larry, let’s face it. You and I drink too much too.”

And Larry said, “You know, I suppose you’re right,” (*laughs*) and he let him stay. And he should have. He was a fine ambassador, for a newspaper man. But he drank a lot. OK, so what?

But they did a lot of drinking out of bars and stuff like that. There were favorite bars. But police officers always do. And of course I wanted to stay with them, so I went out drinking with them and I really lived with them as much as I could. But that was my job. Didn’t turn me into an alcoholic, so it was all right.

Q: Let me ask this question because I always heard that some of the guys would go out drinking and carousing and like pretend they were CIA agents just so they could look really big to women.

SHURTLEFF: I never found that in the Foreign Service.

Q: Never found that? OK.

SHURTLEFF: No. Not at all.

Q: Well, that’s good to know.

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: How about in terms of the money we were giving and the programs we were doing? Was most of it do you think used properly? Was there corruption on the Colombian side, our side? Was there?

SHURTLEFF: We had training and commodities, right. By commodities I mean firearms, helicopters, repair services, vehicles, lot of vehicles, lot of training in the U.S. and there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So there wasn’t a whole lot to steal. I mean they didn’t go out and sell the vehicles after we gave them to them. We made it as difficult as possible to do that.

Q: What was your wife doing in Colombia?

SHURTLEFF: She played a lot of tennis. She worked with Lou-Ann Vaky. Lou-Ann and the ambassador were very, very concerned about morale. And it was a big soggy. So the ambassador said, “What am I going to do?”

I said, "What you're going to do is you're going to let me rewrite the post report, the differential report."

I said, "I guarantee I get at least a 15% differential."

Vaky said, "Do it." So I did. And I sat on the desk of the guy in Washington who approved these things until he coughed up his 15%. I went back home to do it.

And Christine at the same time worked with Lou-Ann in setting up what would now be called a CLO (community liaison officer). Wasn't called that back then, but that's what we had. Everybody who came in to post, had a sponsor, so on and so forth.

Q: That's great.

SHURTLEFF: Looked very much like a CLO.

Q: Because you all couldn't really go out on the town that much at that stage, could you?

SHURTLEFF: You could in Bogotá. Had to be careful. The big worry in Bogotá was the ladrones, the thieves.

Of course I traveled around with a bunch of guys who were heavily armed, so I didn't get bothered at all.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: It was either the police or the customs or our own people. They were all armed. I used to throw cocktail parties with these guys all the time. And they'd come walking into my apartment, would shake hands with Christine, shake hands with me, and they'd go to the bedroom.

Q: And take off their guns.

SHURTLEFF: Put 'em on the bed. Put 'em all over the place. I mean everywhere. There were pistols with barrels that long. One guy had a Beretta style machine gun. Another had a sawed-off shotgun. Once in a while one of my DEA guys carried around a sawed off M1 carbine, a 30 caliber carbine about this long. They carried ankle guns and shoulder holsters.

Q: Sounds like Florida (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: This is the Wild West.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: But it was the Wild West. Our poor Captain Ocampo, Teodoro Ocampo was the detective chief of narcotics and almost got killed several times. In fact, it got so bad they had to finally pull him off duty entirely and he became one of the instructors at the National Police Academy.

Q: Ah.

SHURTLEFF: They were gunning for him, to try to kill him. He was hurting them somehow or another.

Q: At this time weren't they sending a lot of the military to train in the States?

SHURTLEFF: No. Not at that time.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: The military contacts were basically General Montiana and the port captain at Cartagena. We spent a lot of time on the coast because that was a big shipment point.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And we had a lot of conferences in Cartagena. So the port captain was a good guy to know.

Q: I bet. And did you go to Medellín also?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, we have a consulate there.

Q: Oh right.

SHURTLEFF: We closed the consulate in Barranquilla.

Only went to Barranquilla.

Q: So can you tell us anything more that we should know -- I mean we should know everything, but given our time, about Colombia and what worked and what didn't?

SHURTLEFF: No. As I say, our enforcement program didn't work.

At the end of my tour I got a telegram from personnel saying, "How about going to Nouakchott as DCM?"

Q: (laughs) And what did you think about that having already been there?

SHURTLEFF: I bought an airplane ticket back to Washington to straighten that one out. It was a post I'd just left.

Q: Right, that's surprising.

SHURTLEFF: I got to Washington, I went to see Bob Houdek.

Q: Who you knew before.

SHURTLEFF: -- my buddy. He was the deputy director at AF/W. I said, "Bob, what's coming up here in the bureau?"

He said, "Hey, Bill Louis up at AF/I (Inter-African Affairs) is looking for a deputy, why don't you go up and talk to him?" So I did go to see Bill, and 20 minutes later I had a job.

Q: So it was smart to take the flight up.

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: You have to go there in person.

SHURTLEFF: So I was alternate director in AF/I. I was also a deputy director.

Q: And how was it being back in Washington?

SHURTLEFF: OK. I mean AF/I wasn't that exciting. We had a lot of regional affairs, pol-mil (political-military), United Nations, the OAU (Organization of African Unity). Anything nobody else wanted to do, we did.

Q: And AF/I stood for?

SHURTLEFF: They were African Affairs. Now it's called Regional Affairs, RA. I was director of that shop my last tour in the Foreign Service.

This was when Dick Moose was there. Bill Harrop was the senior deputy. Then about a year later, Bill fulfilled his promise to me, he told me he was leaving. Because I made him promise when I took this job, "If you're going to leave this job, I want to know about it ahead of time so I can make sure they don't put some turkey in to replace you."

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So Lannon and I got Bob Houdek hired as my new boss, my closest friend.

Q: Well, then you were there, yeah.

SHURTLEFF: That's the first time I did that, hired my own boss. Did it several times after that too.

Q: (laughs) That's a good hint for people.

SHURTLEFF: Well, you can do it if you know how to work the system.

I also spent a lot of time down at AF/C. Bill Swing was the deputy director and Don Junior was the director. Bill asked me about a year before I was due for transfer out of AFRA to come and be his deputy. It happened a lot faster than that because Bill Swing got sent to Brazzaville.

Q: Oh, right.

SHURTLEFF: We had a chargé in Brazzaville who was supposed to become ambassador, Jay Katzen.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: And Don Junior went out to visit the post and discovered Katzen basically lost in his office and not talking to the staff and nothing's getting done.

Q: Was that, he was just --

SHURTLEFF: I don't know.

Q: Something was wrong.

SHURTLEFF: Something was wrong. So Don went back and, and talked with the sixth floor. They said, "Get the inspectors out there."

Which they did. The inspector said, "Yeah, this is a mess. Get this guy out of here." So quick, quick, we need someone to go in and Bill Swing went in and I replaced Bill as deputy, immediately.

So anyhow, Don and I spent the latter part of 1978 recruiting people since all the desk officers were due to be replaced in AF/C.

Q: Oh wow, yeah.

SHURTLEFF: We went out and recruited, hand picked our desk officers. Arlene Render and Jim Oberly and Susan Mao and Mary Lee Garrison.

I served on the promotion panel for the first time.

Q: And how was that?

SHURTLEFF: Great. Joan Clark was the chairman. It was the consular admin panel, four to three.

Q: And was there something about the process that you can talk about?

SHURTLEFF: -- I thought the process was quite fair. Some member of the panel goes into the file cabinet and picks out 40 files. At random. And each member of the panel reads all the files, and when they're through you go through them one by one and vote, and it's forced distribution. You can do four 10's, four nines, four eights, so on and so forth. Until you have 40. And you write all that down and you go through the next 40. And the next 40. Until you're done. Which takes a couple of weeks. Then at the, at the end, you re-rate 20 on each side of the cutoff point. They give you a number. So 10 above the cutoff, 10 below the cutoff. Then you re-rank them to make sure you haven't made any mistakes. Is there anybody above the cutoff's going to get promoted?

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You comment on reviewing officers. You study people who should be considered for low ranking and for selection out for cause. Or really bad performance. That doesn't happen very often. All this takes about four or five weeks. But it's very thorough and you have a variety of people on the panel: a public member, somebody admin, somebody consular, somebody political, somebody economic, chairman maybe one of those, but it's five people. And I was very impressed. I thought it was quite a fair way to look at people for promotion. And I did it twice.

Q: And I guess you learned how to write evaluation reports better.

SHURTLEFF: I've been cited for my evaluation reports many times.

Q: Because that always seems to be a mystery for junior officers because --

SHURTLEFF: It takes a lot of practice.

Q: It's an art.

SHURTLEFF: Well I became very good at it.

Q: So do you believe or have you seen where people actually talk to each other to try to mentor them and instead of kind of avoiding the issue?

SHURTLEFF: I tried to do that with all people who work with me.

Q: But in the bureau, I mean --

SHURTLEFF: I did a lot of that. That's the only way we kept people around. I mean we're trying to keep our good people in the bureau. Had to get 'em promoted, had to make sure they got good assignments. Had to keep them happy, otherwise they'd leave. And we had a good retention rate, particularly from people who left and said the grass wasn't as green as they thought on the other side of the fence and wanted to come back.

Q: And what was going on that you were dealing with in terms of foreign policy issues or, or, or was it more administrative and keeping things staffed?

SHURTLEFF: In AF/C, Angola was always a big problem because of the ongoing civil war. In those days we hadn't really gotten in to backing the opposition party, but we were getting close to it. Jim Overly traveled down there occasionally to see people.

Q: What pushed us over the edge?

SHURTLEFF: We really got sick of the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola – Partido do Trabalho (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola - Labor Party)) we wanted to try to get rid of 'em.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: But we had to modify that until later on because Chet Crocker wanted to get the South Africans out of Namibia and the Cubans out of Angola. So we did a deal on that. So we had to cozy up with the MPLA to do that. But it was worth it.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about that, or?

SHURTLEFF: Well, we wanted to keep the Marxists out of there, and the Cubans. The Soviets were backing the Cubans. They had all those troops in there. They were using Pointe-Noire as their resupply point in Congo. So when I got to the Congo there were nine people in the Soviet consulate in Pointe-Noire, nine. But it was because of all the supply flights coming in there. So we had the supply flights carrying the Cubans and other things. So we wanted to stick our finger in the eye of the reds. And more important was getting Namibia independent, getting the South Africans out of there and the Cubans out of Angola. And Chet Crocker, after working for seven years, did that. I watched it happen. I didn't have a whole lot to do with it, but I watched it happen. Most of it happened in Brazzaville.

Q: As much as you can, as you can state, I mean what were the things that finally worked from your observation point?

SHURTLEFF: Well, a couple things. The Soviets were sick of spending the money there, for one thing. And the Cubans -- if the Soviets didn't back 'em, they weren't going to stay there. So when Shevardnadze becomes foreign minister under Gorbachev, they decide it's not worth the candle. And they started working with us. Chet's counterpart, the Russian foreign minister, was working hand in glove with Chet to achieve our aims.

Of course, you had to convince the South Africans, and the carrot for them was, OK, well we'll remove the threat to your northern border. We'll get the Cubans out of Angola. You know, the Angolans can't hurt you, but the Cubans can. They liked that. And so they agreed. It took a lot of time, lots of fits and starts to get them out of Namibia. And the Soviets agreed with us and we got the Cubans out of Angola. We achieved what we wanted to do. We created some peace out there. Because then you know what happened eventually. Eventually De Klerk takes over in South Africa and decided the fight isn't worth a candle anymore. Releases Nelson Mandela and there you have it. South Africa becomes a multi-racial, fairly democratic state. That was something that Chet Crocker pushed. I remember at one point fairly early on in my tour in Congo, a large delegation of South Africans shows up to consult with the Congolese. What they're talking about of course is Angola and Namibia. Got really involved in that. But after they all left I was going over to see the president on something else. The president asked, "How's Chet Crocker doing with his program to get his peace here in Southern Africa?"

I said, "Well, not that well, but he needs all the help you can give him." I said, "You know, he's still working on it and he's serious about it. He wants to succeed, but you know time is short." There was about two years left in the Reagan administration at that point.

And he said, he said, "Tell Chet for me, anything I can do, I'll do it. Just tell me what he wants done. If I have to sup with the devil, I'll use a fork and knife if I have to."

Said, "OK, I'll pass the word along." Next I know, Chet Crocker's out there, wants to talk to him about all this. Well, one thing led to another. They joined the bandwagon. They had very good contacts in Angola. Sassou gave them good contacts. And everybody was comfortable negotiating in the people Republic of the Congo, the Soviets were happy there. The South Africans had some experience with Sassou and knew they'd give him a fair deal.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And so would the Angolans.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And so would the Cubans. The Cubans had a big embassy in terms of the Congo. So that's where most of the negotiations took place.

Q: So it's really where interest converged finally after a lot of work, lot of groundwork.

SHURTLEFF: It took Chet Crocker. So it's really Chet's game, but he had to have a lot of other stuff going on too. The Soviets were sick of paying the bill and the Cubans of course couldn't stay there unless the bills were paid. When I arrived in Congo-Brazzaville, the Russian ambassador was a KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti

(Committee for State Security)), major general on a retirement tour. He was a piece of work. I mean I really had to hang on to my wallet when he was around.

Q: Now, when did you go there? Now, you're in AF and then what comes next then?

SHURTLEFF: Well three different tours in AF. I was there for six and a half years. AF/C. I did the summer of '82 -- '81, I went to AF/EX as deputy director.

Q: So you spent a number of years in D.C. then.

SHURTLEFF: Six and a half. Early '77 to the June '83.

Q: Well, could you discuss -- I mean again, we could spend hours and hours, but some of the highlights from those years then that you haven't yet touched on?

SHURTLEFF: Well, I pretty much covered the AF/C period.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: Did a lot of work with Mobutu, the Angolans.

Q: And of course -- well, let's see.

SHURTLEFF: Reopening Brazzaville. Mobutu had an official visit. Then I went to AF/EX where I spent most of my time on assignments. But I had to do all sorts of other things. I was acting director for much of the time I was there. Went through three directors.

The next thing that happened was towards the very end, the very end of my tour in AF/EX was always had trouble filling jobs, but one of them was AF/W. God, we had trouble filling that.

Q: Yeah?

SHURTLEFF: Bidders were awful for office director. Guys had no experience at all, some of them weren't very good officers. They were sort of mediocre. So Bill Swing had come to me several months before saying, "Look, if Ed Perkins leaves, you come and be my DCM in Liberia."

So I said, "OK, I'm going to make that happen."

So I went up to talk to Jim Bishop, who was the DAS that I worked with and said, "Jim, I can solve our AF/W problem."

He said, "How?"

Said, "Going to bring Ed Perkins back from Monrovia to be the director."

Said, "That's great. But who's going to replace him?"

I said, "Me."

Q: Hm.

SHURTLEFF: And said, "Let me think about that." Jim picked up the phone and called Bill Swing. And so he said, "Yeah, right, yeah, uh-huh. What -- what -- do you have news? This is nothing new there. I asked Len to be my DCM already."

Jim said, "Oh, OK."

So he called me up a matter of minutes later and said, "OK, let's discuss this with Chet." So a week later we go into Chet's office on a Saturday morning.

Q: Oh wow.

SHURTLEFF: Going over personnel stuff, and we got to this. And I said, "OK, plan there to bring Ed Perkins back as director of AF/W." Couldn't do any better than that.

And Chet says the same thing, "Aw smart, sure, well, who's going to replace him?"

I said, "Me."

Said, "Oh, OK, we can live with that. All right."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: So the next thing is of course you've got the personnel to come up with a list.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Of candidates, usually eight or 10 people. Which I had to sign off on as acting director of AF/EX. My name wasn't on the list, of course.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Although I bid on it.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: But I didn't have the rank. And it was an OC job and I was still level one. Not for very long, but I was still level one. And so I signed off on it and sent it away. And

waited 24 hours to pick up the phone to call Bill Swing. Said, "Bill, how'd you like your list?"

Said, "It didn't have your name on it."

I said, "Well, you know what to do about that."

Said, "Yes, I do. I've already done it. Thank you. OK. Bye." He came back with a cable saying, "Nice list, but Shurtleff isn't on it. I want his name on it." And of course he picked me. Set up job.

Q: As lots are, right.

SHURTLEFF: All this was done, all this was done in public.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: There was no under the table stuff. Everybody saw us doing it.

Q: Got it.

SHURTLEFF: But back then that's the way. I don't think they do that anymore. You had -- yeah, we used to say the ambassador could pick two things: his DCM, and his secretary.

Q: Right. Yes. And, and so you made the move.

SHURTLEFF: Yep, left in June, got there just a couple days before the Fourth of July.

Q: What year was this now?

SHURTLEFF: '83.

Q: '83, OK.

SHURTLEFF: The first of three -- actually four Fourth of Julys I had in Monrovia. I stayed there -- I was there about three years.

Q: So you were the DCM in Monrovia.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, as an 01. It's the biggest post in Africa.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: Huge management problem.

Q: And you'd been to Liberia before.

SHURTLEFF: Oh, of course. I hadn't served there, but I'd been there. I knew the history. And it's English speaking. It was a piece of cake.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: What wasn't a piece of cake was managing all the various egos in the embassy with a big station, had military attachés, got a military mission, didn't speak to each other. You had this huge communications --

Q: They didn't speak to each other.

SHURTLEFF: No, they didn't get along at all. They were jealous of each other was what the problem was. You should have one group that does both attaché work and military work.

Q: And there's no way you can --

SHURTLEFF: No, it's two different bureaucracies in Washington. They won't get along there either. The DIA runs the attachés and DOD runs the military mission.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Little State Department in the DoD. And then of course you have this huge communications network. It involved 60 people there in the regional security office. They had NSA (National Security Agency) there. The Peace Corps, and a big AID mission, I mean 30, 40 people in the AID mission. Count everybody up we had about 350 Americans and 1,400 local employees.

Q: Wow.

SHURTLEFF: SNE budget, it's always inexpensive, 12 million dollars a year. Hundred million dollars worth of various kinds of aid, economic aid, food aid.

Q: And was Sammy Doe, was he the head?

SHURTLEFF: Sammy Doe was the head, yeah.

Q: And he was a little murderous.

SHURTLEFF: And plus we had a military assistance plan, and I told you about it. It was mainly housing for Liberian military.

Q: Because we were giving food aid, I remember. And AF wanted 13 million instead of 11 million, we got them 13, they were so happy.

SHURTLEFF: Well, they needed the food unfortunately. But it was pushing the rock uphill, watching it roll down again. You couldn't trust Doe. He was in it for the money. At one point we would send in a whole team of basically auditors to watch the treasury. And they couldn't get anywhere. Liberia just foiled 'em at every turn.

Q: Lot of corruption.

SHURTLEFF: Lots of corruption, yeah. Of course you had LAMCO then, that was a big Liberian-American Mining Company. Iron and ore, had a railroad that ran down by the Port of Buchanan, run by an American, although it was basically run by Swedes. Bethlehem Steel had a little bit of it.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: It was high grade iron ore. What else did we have? That was about it in terms of industry. And we had a big missionary group there. They had a hospital and a radio station, ELWA, Eternal Light Winning Africa. Had a lot of missionaries. Big Peace Corps, about 100, 120 Peace Corps. I mean this was a major program.

Q: And how much of it was the government running themselves, us in the background sometimes or us --

SHURTLEFF: Well, the local joke was that they had a chairman of the board, which was Chairman Doe. Chairman of the National Redemption Council. And they had a general manager, and his name was Master Bill Swing. That was the local joke. But it never really worked that way.

Q: How did it work then? Because so many people believed that, you know, we're in charge and whatever.

SHURTLEFF: No, we weren't.

Q: Why don't we clear that up then?

SHURTLEFF: We knew we weren't. We just kept trying to push Doe in the right direction. He didn't take nudging very well. Plus, we had to deal with a whole lot of corrupt ministers too.

Q: So our role then, for people to explain, to clarify --

SHURTLEFF: Try to keep them on the straight and narrow. Most cases we didn't succeed, unfortunately. But you can but try. We didn't want to cast the place loose because we were scared to death in those days that the Soviets would walk in and eat our lunch. Or Qadhafi.

Q: Why don't you talk about that in kind of the geopolitical --

SHURTLEFF: Well, Qadhafi was making several friendly noises towards Liberia. At one point he was pouring some money into there, but we got that turned around. That was one thing we were able to do was keep him from playing a big role. And then there was Ouédraogo in what was upper Burkina Faso, who was nudging around there too. We managed to ace him out. He didn't cause any trouble. But it didn't get us very much fortunately. I think we saved some lives, but we never really reformed the place. They're doing pretty well now. Doe was of course assassinated. He was just cut into little pieces by one of his political appointed. Just kind of carved him up literally. In West Africa you gained strengths by eating body parts of your enemy. Strong juju.

Q: Strong juju.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. But then there was a civil war of course.

Q: Right. And Charles Taylor.

SHURTLEFF: And Charles Taylor won that. Charles Taylor is about the only politician in Liberia that I don't know. He was director of general services, GSA, when I arrived in June of 1983. That's a pretty important job. I had a call set up to see him and he just disappeared. Well, he disappeared ahead of the sheriff because Doe was going to have him arrested for peculation. And he decamped for the United States. And the Liberians asked for extradition and we agreed because they had to go through the courts. He hired Ramsey Clark as his lawyer, had a lot of money. He stole enough. And when it looked like Ramsey Clark wasn't going to win the case, he crawled out the window of the Plymouth County House of Corrections in Massachusetts and disappeared. And of course I had to get this news from the Minister of Justice whom I was working hand in glove with on this extradition thing and he wanted to know what the hell happened and I had to call Washington. And someone there said to me, "Oh darn, I forgot to tell you."

I said, "You forgot to tell me. You *forgot to tell me?*" Jesus Christ.

Q: and how did that kind of I would think undermine our position?

SHURTLEFF: It just made us look foolish. The embassy should know this stuff. We weren't told. We had to find out about it from Jones, the Minister of Justice.

Q: And how do you think that affected Liberians view of us --

SHURTLEFF: It didn't.

Q: It didn't matter?

SHURTLEFF: We just escaped.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: They forgot about it pretty quick. Which is embarrassing for me and for the ambassador because we were supposed to know this stuff. We should have gone to the Minister of Finance.

Q: right, of course, and told him.

SHURTLEFF: This is what happened. Sorry, but these things do happen. It actually didn't hurt my relations with the minister at all. Those were pretty strong. My job in Liberia, what Bill wanted me to do, he wanted me to be on the inside -- he wanted me to run the embassy for him so that he could move and shake outside in the society.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: For instance, Bill went to church every week. He was not a real bible thumper, although he did go to divinity school at Princeton early on. He decided not to become a priest, but he used to go to a different church every week. Now, eventually he repeated himself, but every week was a different church. He was always traveling around upcountry. I didn't do much of that. I did once in a while. And I stayed there and ran the post, made sure everything was smooth. And I spent a lot of time my first year rewriting, with the help of every section in the embassy, including the Marines, the emergency action plan, which was a mess when I got there. And we wrote it twice while I was there. I vetted it, but they did an incredible job. But then you were supposed to internalize what you're supposed to do. So when the little balloon went up, I didn't have to do anything. When the coup attempt came, I was fast asleep. My political counselor called me at 5:00 in the morning and said there's a coup underway, I've done this, this, this. Consular Section has done that, that, that.

Q: So it's good to have a plan.

SHURTLEFF: The attachés are on the street, so she knew -- that was her job.

Q: When was the coup attempt again? What year?

SHURTLEFF: That was '85, late '85.

Q: And did you all know it was going to happen? Had you heard rumors?

SHURTLEFF: No, no, we had not.

Q: Nothing.

SHURTLEFF: We had not. It was only 12 guys. It was, it was Brigadier-General [Quiwonkpa]. He came in from Sierra Leone with 12 guys. I remember with light infantry weapons, light machine guns, and rifles. And they were brought in on the back of

a dump truck owned by the president of the Chamber of Commerce, Jim Holder, who should have fired for that, but wasn't. They couldn't touch him because his father was a big wheeze in the Methodist Episcopal Zion church.

Q: Was Jim Holder, was he Liberian or American?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, Liberian. He was Liberian-American.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: Descended from the original settlers who came from the States. So he should have been fired for that, but he wasn't. But the coup didn't succeed. I was all set to call it successful at about noontime of the day.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: When the rest of the staff said, "Don't do it, we don't think it," --

Said, "OK, we don't have to rush to judgment here." Well, by 4:00 in the afternoon we knew it had failed.

Q: And why did it fail?

SHURTLEFF: And of course my ambassador was out of the country. I was chargé.

Q: You were chargé. And what happened? Why were they not able to --

SHURTLEFF: There just weren't enough of them.

Q: Oh, OK.

SHURTLEFF: They couldn't get the radio station and they couldn't get the presidential palace. The army closed it on them. I know the guy pretty well, he was one of their best officers who, orchestrated the resistance. He did a very good job.

Q: And why did -- I mean was there any particular reason they did it?

SHURTLEFF: They wanted to get rid of Doe. Quiwonkpa and Doe were rivals. It wasn't that bad in Freetown. There was a little shooting here and there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And the Minister of Justice was badly treated and he was stripped naked and run through the streets. They videotaped the whole thing. Anyway, that's how you shame people in Africa. Very cultural thing there. Anyway, it didn't work. But Quiwonkpa was at large for about a week hiding in the swamps outside of town. They

killed all the other guys. They finally caught up with Quiwonkpa and then cut him up into little pieces and he was eaten.

Q: He was eaten.

SHURTLEFF: Yeah.

Q: And this is also in Liberia they killed him?

SHURTLEFF: He was from a certain tribal group upcountry [Gio], I forget which one now, and of course they were decimated by the army afterwards -- getting Doe's revenge on these innocent people.

Q: Because they were just all associated.

SHURTLEFF: The only thing that didn't work that well was we told the Peace Corps volunteers that if things blew up we were getting ready to evacuate them out of the country, we had a certain radio frequency they should listen to. Now, obviously we didn't broadcast anything because we never came close to evacuating them. But they complained about that, "Why didn't you tell us?" I said because we never felt you were in danger, we never felt it was necessary to talk about evacuations." So of course we didn't light up the radio. They found that hard to accept. Said, "Oh, well, got to accept it". It's the way things were. But everything worked -- I was really proud, everybody knew exactly what they were supposed to do. I came in about 8:00 and had a quick country team meeting. Everybody was there. We looked at things and repartialed the jobs. All of the notification network for U.S. citizens worked great for consular affairs, had it all set up. We had the military attachés and the military mission were on the street. You know, where they're supposed to be, wearing their uniforms. But it was going on. The Political Section were working their contacts. They had a sit-rep (situation report) every hour and everybody contributed to it. In fact, the defense attaché's office got a rocket from DIA saying, "Why aren't you reporting this?"

And they said, "Actually we are! We contribute everything to the political counselor and she consolidates and our reports are in there."

"Well, OK," grump-grump.

Q: How about the --

SHURTLEFF: So everybody did what they were supposed to do.

Q: So having a plan's important, as you say. Were the FSN's in any danger and what was the composition? Were they from different parts of the country?

SHURTLEFF: They were from all over the place. Some were Liberian Americans, some were Ghana, some were --

Q: And was that good to have such a mix, or?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. They had to get along. We wouldn't favor one party or one group of people.

Q: And were they ever in danger during these --

SHURTLEFF: None of our FSN's ever got hurt. If they didn't get involved, they didn't get hurt. Only one set of strange things happened. The morning of the coup, while it was still going on, an armed police officer came over the compound wall and ended up at the ambassador's residence scaring the living daylights out of the ambassador's wife. He wasn't there, but she was. The guards tracked him down, took his weapon away, he wasn't going to use it anyway. And I threw him off the compound. I said, "Take the weapon and get him out of here. We don't want to have any connections -- he's probably been involved in the coup. We don't want any connection with this guy. Get him out of here. Put him on the street. And make sure he walks away." My admin counselor got after me for that (*laughs*).

He says, "The guy's going to be killed!"

I said, "So *what?* He's not my responsibility. My responsibility's the safety of this mission. And he was armed coming on board, he's a menace as far as I'm concerned. We get rid of menaces around here. We don't kill 'em, we just get rid of him. And if he dies some other way, I don't care. Not my worry." Still think I did the right thing.

Q: Yeah, and it was a decision --

SHURTLEFF: Scared the living daylights out of the ambassador's wife, who's Chinese by the way. From Taiwan. Lovely lady and she was a good cook too. Ambassador Ed Perkins was black; former linebacker for UCLA. Big guy.

Q: You know, sometimes when I talk to my African American friends who've been to Africa, I mean there just seems sometimes that, you know, you expect someone being African Americans with being African, and yet there's --

SHURTLEFF: No. Doesn't work that way.

Q: Can you talk about that?

SHURTLEFF: Well, I guess I can talk about it. I wish I were an expert on the subject. A good officer's going to do well in Africa --

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: -- and Africa will take him seriously. But a guy who's a disaster, didn't matter what color his skin his, he'll be ignored.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: There's only a very small minority of Africanists who are actually black Americans.

Q: Well, was there a feeling amongst whether it's Liberians or people in Sierra Leone or anywhere about the black community in the States?

SHURTLEFF: Yes. I remember one thing that happened in Sierra Leone. The assigned station chief, who will go unnamed, was turned down because he was black. So we went on without a station chief or about a year and a half. That's what I get working with -- had to work some of the station chief's contacts. He was also labor officer, so I got involved with labor, got involved with police. Anyway. I later met the guy who was supposed to go there, and he was a fine officer. He did very well. He still stayed in Africa. Some other countries were willing to take him. You have that. They know about the racial problems of the States. But those of us who are white and serve in Africa obviously don't have any racial hang-ups otherwise we wouldn't be there.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And they know this.

Q: So, so we've just had this coup attempt. Then what happens? I mean the guy gets cut up and --

SHURTLEFF: Well, first of all, Ed is out of the country. Getting him back in the country was a real chore. He ended up in Sierra Leone and couldn't get back in because Liberia closed its airport. I finally had to go to see the chief of state, had to go see Doe.

Q: Sammy Doe.

SHURTLEFF: Get him readmitted.

Q: And what was that meeting like?

SHURTLEFF: Not very pleasant.

Q: I mean what was -- I mean could you kind of --

SHURTLEFF: I'd been trying to get an appointment for several days. I finally got it and I was on my way over to the AID compound to talk with the AID people because I hadn't seen them face-to-face since the coup started a couple of days earlier. I wanted to go over and say, OK, things are all right now. The chargé should show his face. Well, halfway over there, Christine's with me in the car, we get a radio message. We had two-way radios we carried in our back pockets as a matter of fact. "The president will see you now, go to the executive mansion," so I did. Left Christine down in the lobby; she's eying these heavily armed guards all over the place, getting very nervous. I go upstairs and there's Doe with his chief of staff.

Q: How's he dressed? Is he --

SHURTLEFF: He's wearing uniform, fatigues. And I gave him my pitch, we got to get the ambassador back in here, and he said, "OK, I'll arrange it."

I said, "I want to send the attaché aircraft to pick him up."

He said, "Go ahead, I'll send word. Do it tomorrow." OK. Well, what he wanted to hear from me was congratulations for his escaping, and I never said that.

Q: And he never asked you for a public statement of support or anything?

SHURTLEFF: No, I would have held him off if he had. We weren't going to give any public statements. I knew that. I didn't have any instructions, but.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Absence of instructions is instruction enough.

Q: So he was cordial.

SHURTLEFF: Well, he was friendly enough. He was obviously uptight. He thought it was a close call. I'm not sure it was that close at all, frankly. And I got what I wanted, got the ambassador back in. Because at that point in time I was just really strung out. I was dictating to two secretaries. I'd get reports from my contacts, go out to see 'em, come back to the embassy, and start dictating. And soon as I'd finish one cable I've got another secretary onto another one. It was back and forth, back and forth.

Q: That must have been an extraordinarily stressful time.-

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was nothing I hadn't been through before.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: I was a little bit more senior now. I was the guy in charge. I had Jim Bishop back there who was a fine officer. As good as Lannon Walker. Jim was the DAS

in charge of West Africa. And he wants to be kept informed. I learned this when I was in AF/EX, because I used to call him up about once a week and say, "This is what's going on down here. Let me bring you up to speed." He liked it.

Q: I bet.

SHURTLEFF: So he stayed out of my business when I would do that. I opened a circuit. Had very informed communications. To Washington. Got Jim on the phone. Said, "Here's where we are. Don't hang up, I'm going to keep this circuit open as long as necessary. Just go to the phone, I'll sit at my desk."

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: "You there?"

And he said, "Yeah, I'm here." OK, you know, he could hear it. Sitting on his desk. That's how we kept that open for about 48 hours. It was faster than telegrams.

Q: Right. Right.

SHURTLEFF: Of course it was completely open.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: We didn't have encrypted phones in those days.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Did shortly thereafter. But it worked and it kept 'em out of my pants. Otherwise he'd be all over me. Ed Perkins gave me a superior honor award for that, running it while he was gone.

Q: Why don't we go ahead and finish up Liberia.

SHURTLEFF: What about Liberia? The foreign minister, Ernest Eastman, his big thing was visas. Liberians all wanted visas and we turned down most of them because we knew they were going to go to the States and stay. That was always a big bone of contention because the foreign ministry was taking money saying, "Oh, we'll get you a visa," and of course we turned the visas down. And they used to come to me and to the ambassador too and say we should issue these visas. Liberians did not have a God given right to go to the United States on one of our visas, so we're not going to do anything about it. So go away.

Q: And do you think that affected your ability to carry out other foreign policy things that we needed?

SHURTLEFF: No, because they couldn't ignore us. We were paying the bills.

Q: Right, OK.

SHURTLEFF: Not that they do what we say either.

Q: Exactly. But you know, they had to listen to us.

SHURTLEFF: Doe's Chief of Staff. First was John Rancy, the first one when I was there. Who was a co-tribal member of Doe.

Q: Were the tribal connections very important in Liberia?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, extremely important. Rancy was the same tribe as Doe. He dated back to the Tubman administration. He married one of Tubman's mistresses and worked his way up that way. One of the first times I went to see him, I'd been trying to get to see him for about a day. He called me up, said come on over, or his secretary did. And I went over. The secretary sent me right in. Well, there's Ernest Eastman sitting there, the foreign minister. I'm chargé at the time. And Rancy said, "Mr. Minister, get out of here. I've got to talk to the American chargé." So Eastman kind of slunk away.

And I said, "Jesus, Tom, did you have to do that?"

He said, "Eh, Eastman," oh boy. Well, it didn't ruin my relationship with Eastman because I didn't do it to him, but it was still kind of embarrassing for me. But that shows you the kind of access you got there.

Q: Right, right.

SHURTLEFF: Then he was replaced by Bala, who was a crook of the first water. But I had to do business with him. In fact, one point with Bala when Ed Perkins got there in the summer of '85 he sent me over to see Bala and he said, "Tell Bala until he lets Ellen Johnson Sirleaf out of jail I will not present credentials."

Q: And tell me a little bit about that background.

SHURTLEFF: Well, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had backed Doe early on. She was one of his economic advisors. She's now president of the country. She'd been picked up for some spurious reasons and was in the Barclay Training Center, which was the military jail downtown. And we wanted to get her out. So we said, "You either release her or I won't present credentials." So I had a glee when I told that to Bala.

And he said, "Are you serious?"

And I said, "I am extremely serious."

"Tell the boss that."

Well, she was let go the next day. And could present his credentials. That's why I like Ed Perkins.

Q: Yeah, that was very convenient timing.

SHURTLEFF: Ed wasn't afraid to make the grand gesture.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: LAMCO was run by a guy named John Pravola, who was one of my close contacts in the business world.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: Don Wahey ran the Firestone plantation. He was another good contact, he and his wife. Spent a long time with both of them. Then there were people like Jim Holder, the President of the Chamber of Commerce who was involved in the coup. The Flemenster brothers, two American businessmen who lived there. They were all over us. They wanted to get rid of Doe, wanted us to get rid of Doe. I said, "Wait a minute. We never hired Doe. How can we fire him?"

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: We got this all the time from the Liberians and from Americans who were --

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: "Got to get rid of Doe."

I said, "We never hired him. You want to get rid of him, you do it yourself. It's your country, it's not ours." Both the ambassador and I we were not very popular sometimes.

Q: I, you know, that happens in a number of countries I've been in. People think we're in charge of everything.

SHURTLEFF: It didn't happen in the Congo. That's one of the reasons I like the Congo so much. I never got that sort of plea.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: From anybody. I like that.

Q: Well, it's a good reminder that it's their country.

SHURTLEFF: The other guy I used to hang around was Archbishop Francis, the Catholic bishop. He was a fraud too, but that's all right. I had to stay close with him. Ed Perkins wanted me to.

Q: Fraud in what way?

SHURTLEFF: He was the local churchman. But in terms of doing something useful politically, he just wasn't there.

Q: He just wasn't good, yeah.

SHURTLEFF: He was frightened to do anything. All these Liberians collaborating with Doe were scared to do anything about it, and they'd come to us and say you got to get rid of him. Well, why?

When Ed got there my role changed. He came in and said basically, "Len, the embassy's running perfectly. Don't need you to run it anymore. It will take care of itself. Take yourself outside and work on your contacts."

Q: Were any of these folks paying taxes or how was that?

SHURTLEFF: I doubt it. They got their money from import duties.

Q: All import duties and AID, I would guess.

SHURTLEFF: Our AID, our 100 million dollars a year.

I mentioned Charles Taylor. Bill Swing left in the summer of '84 to become the senior DAS at personnel. He was very disappointed. He got a call from the director general one day. Said, "Are you coming back to be my deputy?"

Bill said, "No, I don't want to do that."

Of course I told him, "Bill, for Christ's sakes, it's one of the best jobs in the Foreign Service. Of course you want to do it."

"No, I don't want to do it. I don't want to go back to Washington." He didn't like to serve in Washington. But he went back, he did a great job. And Ed Perkins came on board of course. The guy I replaced, he came back and replaced (*laughs*) Bill.

Q: Well, there you go.

SHURTLEFF: I made OC in the fall of '85. That was another surprise because I'd happened to run into Hank Cohen a couple of months before the list came out up in Dakar. Flew up in the attaché plane. And Hank was there. He gave speeches all over Africa, he speaks beautiful French. He has a Bronx accent, but beautiful French. Hank

said, "Len, tell me something. If you get promoted this year would you like to go to the Senior Seminar?"

I said, "Well Hank, now that you mention it, if I'm promoted I'd be happy to go to the Senior Seminar."

He said, "OK, I'll be in touch." Later he apologized and said, I really couldn't tell you.

I said, "You told me everything I needed to know."

Q: (laughs) Yes.

SHURTLEFF: I was number six on the promotion list.

Q: Oh.

SHURTLEFF: Found that out later. And I went to the Senior Seminar, that was fun. Anyway, Bill left. Ed's there. I leave after the Fourth of July of '85.

Q: And what was the state of the political situation in Liberia when you left?

SHURTLEFF: Just as bad as when I arrived, except that Doe was still in power. Took another a couple of years to get rid of him. It all started going to pot well after Ed left. Ed of course was pulled out in '86 to go to South Africa. One of the senior officers of the post was always a black American. We just thought, "Really going to do it this time, going to send a black ambassador and let them take that." It was all a substitute for having a better policy, I think.

And Jesse Jackson comes to Ed and says, "Ed, you can't do this. You're going to be a copout if you go to South Africa."

And Ed looked him in the eye and said, "What do you mean? I'm a Foreign Service Officer. I go where I'm sent. Buzz off." And he went. He did a great job. He really solidified our relations with the black community there.

Q: Yeah, that was an important time.

So, looking back at Liberia, is there something that just from the entire experience --

SHURTLEFF: We had elections in '85 before the coup. And of course the elections were clean. We knew because we had every major voting precinct, we had a poll watcher there. The whole embassy went out.

Q: Yeah.

SHURTLEFF: The ambassador went out. On planes, trades, whatever. I was the only one who didn't. I stayed home again to run the --

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: Someone had to run the -- and I of course had a great time because all day I watched Bob Marley videos on TV. And I love Bob Marley. So I watched Bob Marley all day long on TV and I got a phone call from the guy I'd hired to be executive director of the African Bureau, Jim Rand, saying, "Congratulations Len, you've been promoted." And I had to act surprised. I already knew that, but anyway. At least I didn't know when the list was coming out. So that was a good day, but it was the election count that was bad. It was a fraudulent count.

Q: Engineered by Doe.

SHURTLEFF: Engineered by Doe. He hired a guy to do the count that tipped it in his favor. Emmett Harmon was the guy's name. As payment for doing this, he named Harmon as ambassador to Washington. Harmon was a lawyer. And we refused to give him the agreement. We didn't refuse the agreement, we just never gave it. Harmon used to stop by once a week, say, "Any agreement?"

And we'd say, "No, not a thing, never heard anything. Have you heard anything?"

Q: And how did Doe take that?

SHURTLEFF: He finally named somebody else. He got the point after a while. Harmon was a real sleaze bag. Again, a Liberian-American. He's a lawyer. He represented both the LAMCO labor union and Firestone labor union and Firestone itself. He was lawyer for both of them. Now, if that isn't a conflict of interest I don't know what is.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: That was one big conflict of interest.

Q: I have a question.

SHURTLEFF: Elections mentioned that.

Q: The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. How did that affect given corruption as rampant in these countries?

SHURTLEFF: The two big companies that were there -- one was really Swedish. And they wouldn't pay. The other one was Firestone. How are you going to hold on Firestone? And there weren't any real small American business there. Except for the Flemenster Brothers and a couple other people who were really small. So no. The only time I ran into that was when Sassou Nguesso was invited to the States. The oil people

wanted to do something for him, you know, buy him dinner and that sort of -- they had to be careful what they did. In fact they went to a lawyer to make sure they stayed well within the law. Because they were frightened if they did too much they'd get burned. That's the only time we ran into that. It could have been a problem. It wasn't, but it could have been.

Q: Yes. OK. Judy Carson, with Ambassador Leonard Shurtleff in Gainesville, Florida, April 11th, 2013. We're going to go a little bit through Monrovia and then through the other assignments that you had at State, and then we'll talk a little bit about retirement.

SHURTLEFF: I left Monrovia in July of '86 after I think a little bit over three years there.

Liberia was extremely corrupt, the government was riddled with corruption.

Q: So even though people went to church and --

SHURTLEFF: Yes, it didn't stop at all (*laughs*).

Q: So it was another power structure, or?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, it was another power structure. It was a very corrupt government. They had just about enough money to make it worth keeping very comfortable and everybody else was not doing very well.

Peace Corps operated well most of the time. We had to fire one Peace Corps director. We didn't fire him, we caused him to be fired.

Q: What happened there?

SHURTLEFF: One day I just came down to talk with Bill Swing. I called up the director of Peace Corps, Loret Ruppe, in Washington. "You've got a problem."

And she said, "I know, I'm coming out next week." Well, that was the end of that conversation. She promptly fired the guy, brought a new one in who was excellent, first class. In fact, he's a Foreign Service Officer now.

Q: Do you think Peace Corps were effective? I mean how were they effective?

SHURTLEFF: They were doing a lot of good. By the time I got there a lot of the Peace Corps volunteers were in their forties, fifties, and sixties, older crew. They had a lot of skills. They had a whole lifetime of experience. Which made a big difference.

Q: Made a big difference and they were able to build things, or what were they accomplishing?

SHURTLEFF: Literally, yes. One was a teacher, just outside of Monrovia. And her husband was the local handyman. He could fix anything. He was a retired banker actually. The USAID ran quite well. The attachés, and people at the embassy, I recruited most of them myself.

Q: And does that make a big difference, do you think?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, not because I recruited them, but because we had good people. That was my principal job.

Q: And so do you feel that given with your wife involved in a non-paying job but in a very important job that she did and what you all did and the attachés and Peace Corps, and the other folks at the embassy, that you did get a real sense of the entire country?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yes.

Q: From all levels of society?

SHURTLEFF: We used to travel quite a bit, the ambassador and some other people more than I, but even I traveled a fair amount. We had elections in '85. They were actually pretty well run. We had poll watchers from the embassy out at every district in the country.

Q: And was this at a time when it was a democratically elected government?

SHURTLEFF: Well, yes, moving from a military government to a socially democratic --

Q: Was that -- and who was the military leader?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was a guy named Samuel Kanyon Doe.

Q: Oh right.

SHURTLEFF: He also ran for president, and won.

Q: Mm-hmm. And he was low level at the time, wasn't he? In the military?

SHURTLEFF: Well, he had been a partially functionally illiterate sergeant in the army. Rather a squirrely character to deal with.

Q: Talk more about Sammy Doe.

SHURTLEFF: His English was minimal, first of all. You had to be very careful what you said to him because he would misinterpret all sorts of things. Just a very difficult guy to do business with. He's got to survive and he wasn't going to listen to us. Pressure on him, which I'm sure made him very uncomfortable.

Q: Who supported him?

SHURTLEFF: The army.

Q: Why?

SHURTLEFF: He jumped on top of the heap when the NCO's (non-commissioned officers) went in and murdered President Tolbert in '80.

Q: Was it a tribal dispute or was it they just wanted money or --

SHURTLEFF: It was Americo-Liberians versus everybody else, the Americo-Liberians being the descendents of the first settlers of the country. Liberia dates back to 1847. It was actually founded by these free slaves who were sponsored by the Americans. They had controlled the country, and all its indigenous tribes, since 1847.

Q: That's why I'm surprised that you say Sammy Doe didn't really speak English very well.

SHURTLEFF: The educational system wasn't really geared to give very much to the country people.

Q: So Tolbert, who was the elected president beforehand --

SHURTLEFF: Yes, he succeeded William Tubman, who had ruled from 1944-1971.

Q: Right, he, he was an Americo-Liberian.

SHURTLEFF: Yes.

Q: OK. And Doe was --

SHURTLEFF: An indigenous African, member of the Krahn tribe.

Q: And could you tell us a little bit more about the election and Doe's kind of reign of terror, as I understand it?

SHURTLEFF: Well, it wasn't really a reign of terror. There was violence, but that mainly occurred after the coup. It wasn't so much in Monrovia as it was up-country because Doe and his folks took some revenge that were related to a group of different coup plotters up-country.

Q: So it was his own people or a different tribe up-country?

SHURTLEFF: A different tribe. The coup attempt of the other group was really a papier-mâché affair. Only about 15 guys came in on a dump truck literally from Sierra Leone and moved to Monrovia. But they never captured the radio station, they never captured the palace. And eventually it was just beaten off by army and police.

Q: Was there anyone behind them or were they were -- I mean do you have any --

SHURTLEFF: They were just disgruntled officers. The leader was a former member of the National Redemption Council, Doe's cabinet.

Q: Oh, interesting. Do you know why they were dissatisfied?

SHURTLEFF: Didn't like the way Doe was running the government. He was running the country into the ground. It was a sight. We were shoveling money at them to try and keep them afloat, and finally stopped. But by then Doe was sort of on his last legs anyway. He was finally killed by his opponents. I wasn't there so I don't know all the details of them.

Q: OK. I actually worked on PL-480 when they were asking more money for Liberia at the time. And, and so I was wondering if the embassy had a sense that he was corrupt and stealing. So at what point do we increase our aid, stop our aid, try to monitor it better? I mean how does that work?

SHURTLEFF: That happened after I left. We sent a whole gaggle of people into the Finance Ministry to handle the finances.

Q: Mm-hmm.

SHURTLEFF: Even that didn't work. By then a good friend of mine had replaced me as DCM. He could tell you all about that, but I can't because I wasn't there.

Well, it never really does.

Q: Well, could you talk about that? It never does? Well, what does that mean?

SHURTLEFF: Well, people aren't going to want to change themselves. You can't go in and change. Nation building is something that's going to happen from inside, not outside. The Foreign Service should not be nation building. I was never trained to build a nation. I don't have the first clue as to how it'd start. Well, everyone who used to come used to say, "Well, what should we do here? What should we do there?" We'd tell them sometimes and sometimes we wouldn't. But they never did it anyway, so it didn't make any difference.

Q: So do you think we should be giving aid, and if we do what we should be giving aid for? Or how -- or what's our mission in a country like Liberia then?

SHURTLEFF: Well, one thing there was to make the military more professional. Another idea was to try to stabilize their finances. And a third was to provide a small amount of economic assistance to key sectors, education, health. Road building we did in the 1960's, but not after that. My experience in Liberia goes a long way.

Q: And so all of that, to make a professional military, for what end? What are we trying to accomplish?

SHURTLEFF: To keep them from preying on the population. We spent a lot of money on what we call military housing. We call them barracks, but it wasn't. It was family housing for to give them more pride in their service.

Q: And we do this because -- you know, for what reason?

SHURTLEFF: We had a big investment in Liberia.

Q: And can you talk about that?

SHURTLEFF: Well, we have the relay station there, VoA (Voice of America). Huge 1,400-acre campus.

Q: So that allowed us to communicate at the time throughout --

SHURTLEFF: Africa. It was the relay station for all of Africa and for part of the Middle East. It was the propagation out of 2,000-watt transfer. Not very sophisticated, but it worked. All 1950's tech -- and of course we built the port during World War II, and we built Roberts Field in Liberia.

Q: That's the airfield?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, PanAm actually, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built that. They'd been flying through there anyway. They landed flying boats there at the lake near Roberts Field. Everybody used it during World War II. And we had four flights a week, two going and two coming, you know, out back, Thursdays.

Q: And was that for supplies? Was it to help our investment? Did we have military personnel on the ground?

SHURTLEFF: We had attachés; all the services were there except Marine Corps. Also, we were very worried at one point about Qadhafi getting in there. Same with the Soviets.

Q: And were they trying to? I mean --

SHURTLEFF: Yes, they were. It appeared as though they were.

Q: And why is that?

SHURTLEFF: They were looking for friends, wanted to buy some friends. Troubled water, these guys fish in troubled water.

Q: And how about the domestic constituency? Was there ever a, African American community that -- at that time?

SHURTLEFF: There were probably more Liberians in the United States at the time than there were in Monrovia. Now, does that make a constituency? Not really. They sent a lot of money back, but they didn't have a whole lot of political influence in Washington. The Liberians thought they had a special relationship with the United States.

You've also got to remember, this is in the mid eighties, and the Cold War was still going strong. So we're always worried about negative influences.

Q: Ah yes, tell us a little bit about that.

SHURTLEFF: Well, they didn't really have much in Liberia, thank goodness. We had a lot of friends there of course, the Ghanaians, the French, even the Swedes had a chargé.

Q: And why were they there?

SHURTLEFF: Because of the LAMCO (Liberian-American-Swedish Minerals Company), which was partly owned by the U.S. and partly owned by Swinger of Sweden. Managed by an American. And of course we had Firestone Plantation there. It was then taken over by Bridgestone. Firestone sold out.

Q: And did Doe ever try to take any of these things over?

SHURTLEFF: No.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: He tried to get us to pay more rent for the use of the VoA campus. We had to fend him off on that.

Q: And you --

SHURTLEFF: It's closed now, so this -- all this is gone.

Q: Right. Was VoA useful, do you think?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: The Voice of America.

SHURTLEFF: It is our outlet to the world. Unfortunately, it was never a worldwide system the way BBC is. Had big gaps in its coverage. But while it was functioning, it was very effective. Then we had something later on. We had a TV system set up. We used satellites to transmit that. That's gone by the board now entirely. USIA of course has disappeared.

Q: So then how did VoA help? What did it do, in your opinion?

SHURTLEFF: Well, they employed a lot of people. VoA had dozens of staff.

Q: Well, how did it advance U.S. interests?

SHURTLEFF: Well, just spreading the word. You know, what are U.S. views on various world news, what's going on in the United States. How else would people get the information?

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: You can listen to the French radio, you can get their view of it. But if you listen to any of the broadcasts, TV broadcasts, and read the newspapers, what's going on in the U.S. is filtered through a French filter. To an American ear it always sounds a little bit off. Not quite what we think is going on. You've got to constantly keep explaining -- radio is still a good way to do that. VoA have a new relay station in Africa.

Q: Well, tell me a little bit more about the Doe regime when you were there and how --

SHURTLEFF: Well, he took over. It was a very bloody military coup. They broke into the executive mansion and killed the president, William Tolbert, took over the government. They took it over very easily. They got rid of all the government ministers and everything else that was a threat to their rule. Killed several dozen people.

Q: Just a few more questions about Liberia. Were there families that were in charge of Liberia?

SHURTLEFF: The Tolbert family was until they were all killed.

Q: Were they very corrupt?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: And were the rich ever paying taxes to help their indigent people?

SHURTLEFF: Nope.

Q: And when Doe came in did that change --

SHURTLEFF: Nope. They were just as corrupt as the old crew. And a good deal more venal, their whole attitude toward this life.

Q: Right. I recall in countries I served that the military actually became kind of a middle class.

SHURTLEFF: These guys lived in the middle class, at least after Doe took over.

Q: Can you tell us anything more about the -- running the embassy, getting out -- so I get getting out of into the country is very important to see people.

SHURTLEFF: The ambassador did most of the raveling.

Q: And how about a security situation?

SHURTLEFF: We had a huge Lebanese community there, but it was never really a big problem until about the last year we were there. We got from the CIA an incredible report that the Lebanese were planning to kill the ambassador. We brought an armored car from Washington.

Q: Right. And why do you think they may have been planning to do that?

SHURTLEFF: It's all part of the Middle East syndrome of problems. They want publicity. Same reason they kidnap airplanes. I mean shooting an American ambassador is great.

Q: Because of our Middle East policy?

SHURTLEFF: Well, if it was Lebanon, yeah. Lebanese were the largest expatriate community. And more than that, this is during the Lebanese Civil War. Both sides used Monrovia as an R&R (rest and relaxation) point for tired and worn out fighters. They had a truce locally, so they didn't fight each other locally. The sides used it as an R&R point.

Q: Can you talk about that and who were the sides and where were they?

SHURTLEFF: No, I cannot give you any politics.

Q: OK.

SHURTLEFF: Lebanon is just ridden with political friction, Christians and Muslims. That's just the beginning.

Q: Right. And they would come to Monrovia for R&R?

SHURTLEFF: Yes. There were about 10,000 Lebanese in the country.

Q: And they --

SHURTLEFF: Businessmen, by and large. My barber was a Lebanese.

Q: And did the local population, what did they think of the Lebanese --

SHURTLEFF: They tolerated them because they paid their bills. They weren't terribly popular.

Q: And when you heard about these alleged threats, were your families concerned also?

SHURTLEFF: We didn't really. The department did. We had one security officer at post. They sent in two more and a fully armored car.

Q: One wonders what people are doing inside the embassies if you can't get out.

SHURTLEFF: I don't know. And of course nobody wants to come to a fortress if they don't have to. I can show you a picture of a before and after in Brazzaville. We had a nice embassy there, it looked nice from the outside. Inside it was a nightmare. But outside it looked great. Now they have a place that looks like a prison. Back, you know, 100 feet. And it's not a very pretty building. At least the one I had was pretty, it wasn't very practical.

Q: When you left it, what kind of future did you think --

SHURTLEFF: Well, what happened was about what I thought would happen. Doe was carried out in a box. You know, after a while these dictators become prisoner of the system they've created. So many people depend on them. They can't resign because the people they leave behind know they're dead as soon as the big man goes. That's what happened to Doe. Found somebody strong enough to kill him. And this really did kill him. They dismembered him. It was not a pretty sight. And of course his followers all fled the country immediately. And then they started a civil war.

Q: When, when you or the ambassador spoke with Doe or his cabinet members what was the message?

SHURTLEFF: Well, there were all sorts of different messages on how to clean up their act.

Q: But if you had to do it all over, if you went back to that time, you were in charge of the U.S. relations with aid and everything else. Is there anything that you would have done that would have helped things for the better?

SHURTLEFF: I would have liked to distance ourselves a little bit more from Doe. But Washington didn't want to do that because they were afraid of someone else walking in and taking over, dominated by Qadhafi or the Soviets. We've turned out backs on Liberia

since then. These are problems that aren't going to be solved this generation or even the next generation. Something you work on. Sometimes you have a success here and there.

Q: Well, let's finish up with Monrovia. And when did you leave?

SHURTLEFF: I went right into the State Department Senior Seminar. Our equivalent of the War College.

Q: Where was that held?

SHURTLEFF: In Washington D.C.

Q: Did you think the six weeks of leave was very useful?

SHURTLEFF: I bought a new house. My father-in-law and I used it to fix the house up, because it needed a lot of work inside. It was fine outside, we used it to fix the inside. But yeah, it's a good way to reconnect. I was going to be assigned to Washington for a year anyway. That year where I really reconnected, we traveled all over the United States. Went to New York and sat in on the Nightline program. St. Louis with the Corps of Engineers. Some marine bases including Quantico and Cherry Point, Parris Island. We went to Texas and Northern Mexico one trip.

Q: So what was the Senior Seminar like? Who was in there? And what did you learn?

SHURTLEFF: Senior Seminar of course was our equivalent to the War College. There were about a dozen Senior Foreign Service Officers, counselors mainly, a couple of FO-1's, veterans from all the armed forces including Coast Guard. Couple of guys from CIA and Treasury. About 40 people all told. We spent a year in the seminar just looking at how Washington worked, how U.S. business worked. Broad look at what was going on. And of course this is right in the middle of Iran-Contra. In fact, one of our members was pulled out of the seminar early to go over and replace Ollie North.

Q: Was there talk about what Ollie North did?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yes, all sorts of talk. It was all in the newspapers so we were basically running alongside.

Q: So when you all were thinking about it, I mean what, what were some of the views about what he did?

SHURTLEFF: Most everybody was appalled. How the president could make a mistake like that. Have you ever met Ollie North?

Q: No, never.

SHURTLEFF: I haven't either. But I don't think he was the brightest bulb in the candelabra.

Q: The Senior Seminar, I mean was it worthwhile?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, it was a great year. Great year. Refresh your eyes and wrap your mind around bigger issues.

Q: Do you think that should continue? Because of course they cost a lot of money. Do you think they're worth the money?

SHURTLEFF: Well, the military does it. They still have war colleges, which do the exact same thing. Except they're a little more heavily weighted on the military side.

Q: How about on the State Department side?

SHURTLEFF: Well, the Senior Seminar has been abolished.

Q: Oh.

SHURTLEFF: It doesn't exist anymore. Much to the chagrin of many of us who had participated. The justification for stopping it was a) it was too expensive, you had to train people, b) they said that some people, the officers who took the course didn't stick around to serve long enough afterwards to make it worthwhile. I retired within six years of taking the course. That's what happens when you have an up and out system.

Q: Do you think the up and out system makes sense?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah. Depending on how you apply it. The people who wrote the Foreign Service Act patterned the Foreign Service personnel system on the military, which is an up and out system too. You've got to be promoted regularly over the years. The reason we did that was because like the military, Foreign Service Officers are supposed to be available for worldwide service. They've got to change jobs all the time. With the Civil Service, the rank is in your job. Foreign Service it can't be that way because you change jobs so often. The rank is in the person -- it's a personal rank, pay grade. It's not a job grade, it's a pay grade.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: It's about the only thing that's going to work in a global system like the Foreign Service.

Q: So you spent a year in the Senior Seminar.

SHURTLEFF: Yep. It was a lot of fun.

Q: And then you had the bid. So did you bid on Brazzaville?

SHURTLEFF: No. I went in to see Jim Bishop who was a DAS up in AF to sort of make my number before I went to the Senior Seminar. And he asked me, "Where do you want to go next?"

I knew what he was talking about. I said, "Anywhere but West Africa."

And he said, "OK, I'll be in touch." A month or so later talked to Bill Swing on the phone. One Saturday I was calling him -- he says, "Oh, I forgot to tell you. You're going to Brazzaville. They're going to call you Tuesday, act surprised."

Q: And so you found out you were going to become ambassador to Brazzaville?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: And how did that feel?

SHURTLEFF: Fine. It wasn't West Africa. It was something I was qualified for. I spoke French, knew the area. I had been the deputy director of the Central African Office. I visited there, so I was quite happy about it. It was a pretty good post for me.

Q: So when did you go to Brazzaville as ambassador?

SHURTLEFF: September.

Q: Oh, OK. And you get there and what happens? You present your credentials? How does that happen?

SHURTLEFF: Actually, I presented my credentials within about a week. I thought the first year I was there it was going to be stiff. There wasn't that much going on. By the time you get to be an ambassador you know everybody's job anyway.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: So you can do the job, but that's not, that's not the way the system works. You're just supposed to let people do their own thing.

Q: The name of the country, because --

SHURTLEFF: Congo-Brazzaville.

Q: Versus --

SHURTLEFF: It was called the People's Republic of the Congo. Now it's just called Republic of the Congo.

Q: Exactly. Tell us a little bit about that.

SHURTLEFF: The former French Congo, independent in '60. Very violent history.

Q: Was there much of a French presence?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah, French embassy. There's a big Soviet embassy there too.

Q: Big Sov --

SHURTLEFF: Also had a consulate in Pointe-Noire, Black point. We visited there often. It was a major port. There was a railroad between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire called the Congo-Ocean Railway. Brazzaville's right on the Congo, right across the river from DROC, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Called Zaire when I was there.

Q: Were there Belgian -- were they represented in Brazzaville?

SHURTLEFF: Yeah, an embassy.

Q: And Germans also?

SHURTLEFF: Germans, Belgians, the French, British had a very small embassy, one or two people, East Germans, Czechs, the Bulgarians, Koreans, Chinese, Iranians.

Q: So why were people in Brazzaville and Congo? Why was it strategic?

SHURTLEFF: One of the reasons the Soviet Bloc countries were there, Congo was one of the earliest state solidarity, they all flocked in. Why the Iranians were there, I have no idea. They were a very small embassy. They wouldn't talk to us anyway. The Egyptians were there too. But that was because of OAU (Organisation of African Unity). The Belgians were there obviously because they had interest, the French because of their former colonial power.

Q: What was the strategic mining --

SHURTLEFF: They were small but important oil deposits.

Q: So between that and the Congo River and -- seemed to be the --

SHURTLEFF: Pointe-Noire was the transit point for Cubans. That of course was the major thing that happened while I was there. A whole bunch of South African conversations with President Sassou were about Angola of course. Got Chet Crocker interested.

Q: Chet Crocker at that time was?

SHURTLEFF: The assistant secretary for Africa.

Then of course the Soviet Union was falling apart. Gorbachev was firm in the saddle. Shevardnadze, a liberal as a foreign minister. And the Soviets wanted to get the expense of Angola off their back.

Q: And could you explain just a little bit about Angola?

SHURTLEFF: A long running two and three-sided civil war. The goal was to get the South Africans out of Namibia, the Cubans out of Angola and to help bring the fighting to an end. Namibia bordered Angola.

Q: Right.

SHURTLEFF: And Namibia bordered South Africa.

Q: Well, you must have been very happy that here you had someone who was willing --

SHURTLEFF: Everybody agreed to come and talk. Pretty soon we had the Cubans out of Angola.

Q: And the president in Brazzaville?

SHURTLEFF: He was the host.

Q: He was the host.

SHURTLEFF: Right. Chet was the chief negotiator.

Q: Exactly. And what did the president get from --

SHURTLEFF: Prestige.

Q: Prestige. And did we increase aid?

SHURTLEFF: Not really. We only had a small aid program. We invited the president for a state visit, late 1990. We also signed a military assistance agreement, a Peace Corps deal, very modest aid. Oh, and a treaty of commerce.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Larry Eagleburger grabbed Hank and me. He was in the back seat with Hank, I was in the front seat. "Len, any issues, any problems you want to bring up while you're here?" He says, "If I can be any help, I'll be happy to."

I said, "Yeah, there is one. Glad I said that. USAID is threatening to cut off my measly one million dollar a year AID program in the Congo. I don't want to do that."

Larry said, "Neither do I." And he grabbed his phone back in the car and called his secretary. He said, "Mable, I want to see the AID director in my office. I'll be there in 10 minutes."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: So we go into the department, parked the car, walked to the elevator. Top of the elevator shaft, there stands the acting AID director rubbing his hands together.

"Yes, Mr. Secretary. What is it I can do for you?"

"What's this I hear about you're going to cut off Shurtleff's AID program to the Congo here? I don't want to hear anything more about that."

"No, no," he says, "Won't happen. Won't happen."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: OK, "Make sure it doesn't," Larry says.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: Of course it didn't.

Q: Well, you must have felt pretty good about everything that was happening then.

SHURTLEFF: Well yeah, it was interesting. But it kind of signified nothing. Never did anything with commerce. Would have, but they didn't.

Q: Why not, do you think?

SHURTLEFF: Really wasn't on their list of things. Remember when the foreign minister first said they wanted to sign something. I said, "Just ask for the department." He wanted to negotiate of course. And I said, "Sure, we can negotiate now, later, whenever you want." I said, "But if we do that, the president won't be able to sign it when he's in Washington."

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: I took care of that.

Q: You are a diplomat.

SHURTLEFF: He said, "Forget it, let's sign it."

Q: (laughs) That's a very good story (laughs). So that was quite major.

SHURTLEFF: Well, it was major for the Congolese. It wasn't really major for us.

Q: Well, right.

SHURTLEFF: It was an interesting trip. We got to Washington and did all the stuff there, Larry Eagleburger.

Q: (laughs)

SHURTLEFF: In Washington they had a dinner for him. We went to Houston with the oil companies. We went to Boston.

Q: And what was the connection there?

SHURTLEFF: Citizens Energy. Oil, had some oil interests.

Q: And I mean how does that work? Because people say these countries are still so poor that the oil sometimes is not good for most of the population.

SHURTLEFF: Because the government officials siphoned off all the profits.

Q: And were they doing that in Brazzaville?

SHURTLEFF: Yes, of course they were.

There's certain things you can do. You got to catch it at the right time. Congo was already producing oil.

Q: Did you have any sense of --

SHURTLEFF: _____ break the French law. That wasn't one of their goals, but that's what they were doing. The French were extremely worried about _____ trying to get oil concessions. The French I found out later considered the ultimate gain to be the _____. I got this report one day from an Africa watcher in Paris who was told by one of his contacts.

Q: And did the French care that the income wasn't distributed to --

SHURTLEFF: No, remember there was a symbiotic relationship between French Africa and France. They contributed to each other's political campaign -- Bongo -- into the French political system.

Q: And --

SHURTLEFF: And of course the French were deep into their systems.

Q: I'm just thinking because it's, you know, the general population, a lot of times there's violence and part of that violence seems to be that hey, we don't get any piece of the income.

SHURTLEFF: No, a lot of the violence is ethnic.

Q: Can you talk about that?

SHURTLEFF: It's one of the reasons that the Congolese imposed on themselves a so-called Marxist-Lenin government. Put an end to the tribal bickering. Instead of saying, "I don't like you because you're not from my ethnic group," brought things up to a higher plane. Developed the whole political system, a blanket of ideology. It helped keep the peace, believe it or not. But in the countries that didn't have that sort of thing politicians tended to fight it out, particularly at election time. The same way politicians do here, so their base was ethnic.

Q: So in a way that Marxist-Leninist --

SHURTLEFF: They never nationalized anything worth anything. Never nationalized the oil, never nationalized the banks.

Q: And, and, and how did it become Marxist-Leninist? Why that versus --

SHURTLEFF: Well, because that's what they learned when they studied in France. They learned their Marxist-Leninism and their Communist Party. Of course Stasi helped run the intelligence agency.

Q: Oh, the German --

SHURTLEFF: The Germans. Russians of course were in there. A lot of the guys I worked with were trained in the Soviet Union.

Q: So in a way it sounds like it was kind of good they got sent to Russia, because that way they didn't like it.

SHURTLEFF: They kind of got inoculated, yeah.

Q: Yeah (laughs).

SHURTLEFF: The day we left there was a big article in the newspaper, "We are no longer a Marxist-Leninist Republic of the Congo."

Q: Interesting. And what were some of the other interests or, or some of --

SHURTLEFF: Well oil, obviously. Because we wanted to support Citizens Energy and the other oil companies.

Q: And how did the embassy work? I mean was it a good team?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: Did you like being ambassador versus the DCM?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah. Most of the fun of being an ambassador is getting there. No, I had a good time.

Q: Could you give us a sense of the political climate in Brazzaville?

SHURTLEFF: Well, there wasn't much politics at all. It was all struggles beneath the surface. Who was the favorite? Very seldom the cabinet reshuffled.

Q: Well, then after Brazzaville --

SHURTLEFF: I was offered a job as, as director for management projects with the undersecretary of management.

Q: And that was in Washington?

SHURTLEFF: That was back after three years.

Q: What did you think of Secretary James Baker?

SHURTLEFF: I thought Baker was fine. He got a lot of complaints in the Foreign Service about it because he paid no attention whatsoever to a lot of things. He had these six people he worked with, six issues he was interested in. Everything else he left to Larry Eagleburger.

Q: But what were the issues --

SHURTLEFF: Larry took care of everything else. He did a good job too. No, it didn't work badly at all.

Q: And what were some of the issues that Baker was interested in?

SHURTLEFF: The Middle East, _____.

Q: Well --

SHURTLEFF: There was always something in the UN that grabbed him.

Q: So after that, 1993 --

SHURTLEFF: Back to the AF Bureau.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the job and then --

SHURTLEFF: At the Office of African Affairs you cover everything that the country offices don't cover, United Nations, you cover human rights, political-military, foreign assistance. Not public relations, but everything in the multilateral arena in Africa and Central Africa.

Q: Travel much or were you desk bound mostly, or?

SHURTLEFF: I was pretty much desk.

Q: But what was the NATO group?

SHURTLEFF: You have to remember a lot of NATO countries had interests in Africa. I mean there were former colonies.

Q: And their interests were?

SHURTLEFF: Economic and political. And humanitarian.

Q: As director of Regional Affairs did you have to _____ much or talk about it, or what, what were the main things --

SHURTLEFF: Political-military a lot.

Q: Right. So you have these years and years of experience. Give us just some idea of looking back, your observations and then --

SHURTLEFF: Well, when I got to Africa in 19 -- academic community was -- it's a real, it's a nesting ground for development, economic development. And things were looking very, very positive in all this. Didn't work out that way obviously, for various reasons. First of all, we were right in the middle of a Cold War, largely for the wrong reasons -- although the right reasons for the time. And also, a number of troublemaking -- troublesome African countries. That was always a disappointment.

Q: If we can -- if there hadn't been a Cold War, do you think anything would have been --

SHURTLEFF: Not much. We probably would have put less money into Africa.

Q: If there hadn't been a Cold War.

SHURTLEFF: At one time we had every African country.

Q: We had put in more money.

SHURTLEFF: You need to build up the local business community but it didn't seem to do that. They did it in Korea. When Ghana became independent they had about the same level of economic development, they were on par, including GDP and everything else

Q: And why is that, do you think? Is that cultural? Is it tribal? Is it just known as a role model?

SHURTLEFF: The British and the French were really trying to develop an entrepreneurial -- grew up naturally, but it never.

Q: What is it going to take then for a country -- continent even -- to develop more?

SHURTLEFF: Oh, different things. Aggressive entrepreneurs who invest their money in education. A government that's liberal enough to realize that wouldn't hurt. Oh, guess what's happening in East Asia right now? Thailand. Doing fairly well. They've had the political upsets, but economically they're doing quite well.

Q: And how about the U.S.? If you had to do it all over again -- given the cards that Africa was dealt -- tribal competition, what would you have done? Is there anything you would have done and what would you --

SHURTLEFF: Today I think we're doing more of the right things.

Q: Were you - I guess you were satisfied with your career?

SHURTLEFF: Oh yeah.

Q: I mean you decided to, to retire.

SHURTLEFF: I'm not smug about it, but I'm satisfied to have been a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Yeah, do you have any final comments as we wrap up?

SHURTLEFF: Not really. It's been a fascinating career. I'd do it all over again if I could. I don't really want to, but it was a good run. I met my wife in the Foreign Service, fortuitous. Met my father-in-law in there too.

Q: Well, thank you so much. It's a distinguished career.

End of interview