

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

AMBASSADOR MONTEAGLE STEARNS

*Interviewed By: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Stearns prior to his death.]

Q: Today is April 30, 2013. This is an interview with Monteagle Stearns. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. I move rather deliberately. I start first about getting information about your early childhood, your family, education and all and then on to various assignments. This will take a while but it is not onerous. We will do it deliberately.

STEARNS: One reason I have delayed in the past is that I have written about three books which set forth a lot of the things that you will probably want to cover in the oral interview. I published with the Council on Foreign Relations a book on Greece, Turkey and Cyprus called Entangled Allies and I wrote a book on American diplomacy called Talking to Strangers published by Princeton University.

Q: Okay, that's not going to be a problem. We will repeat some of this. The big thing about what we are doing is that this will be on the internet and this means that people are doing research often go to the internet.

STEARNS: Yes, sure. If there is overlap it doesn't make any difference in other words.

Q: So repetition is not a problem at all. First of all, when and where were you born?

STEARNS: I was born in Cambridge on September 5, 1924.

Q: Can you tell me something about the Stearns family?

STEARNS: On my father's side it is a New England family. My father, grandfather and great-grandfather all went to Amherst College. There was for many years a well-known department store, kind of an upscale store that sold pearl chokers to the nice ladies of Boston called R. A. Stearns and Company. That was my great-grandfather.

I was born in Cambridge. My father, after getting his BA from Amherst, went on to get a master's in education at Harvard. He had married a couple of years before coming to Harvard so he was living there, studying in the city, with my mother, so I was born while he was getting his degree.

He then came down with tuberculosis and in those days tuberculosis was pretty much a death sentence. It was highly contagious so he was evacuated to Saranac Lake, New York for a cure. My mother and I had to remain behind and lived in Norfolk, Connecticut, for about a year or so with my paternal grandmother. Then, when my mother got a little sick of that (she was a Californian) she moved with me back to California. So, my formative years were all in Carmel, California.

Q: Where did the Stearns come from originally? It sounds like it was from England?

STEARNS: From England. My father did a lot of research on this. The Stearns came over on the Arbela in 1630 and are descended from the line of Lauren Stearns of Christian Shandy fame, a Congregationalist minister. So they have been around quite a long time in the States.

Q: As a child, how old were you when you lived in Cambridge?

STEARNS: Probably just a couple of years. I spent while I was three and four in Norfolk, Connecticut, and then at the age of four or five went out to California.

Q: I guess your real memories go to Carmel, do they?

STEARNS: That's absolutely right.

Q: How long were you in Carmel?

STEARNS: From about 1928 to '38.

Q: What was Carmel like in those days?

STEARNS: It was a real artist colony. My mother was interested in the arts. John Steinbeck was just starting as a novelist. He had published Tortilla Flat and was a friend of my mother's, lived on the other side of the hill in Monterey on Cannery Row. I remember him coming to parties that my mother had with his then wife, Carol, who for a young kid was a very glamorous figure indeed, very attractive looking and played the guitar and sang.

Q: Were you too young to go around Carmel or did you get out at all?

STEARNS: Oh, out continually from the moment I bicycled off to school until I came back for supper. It was a time to do and go anywhere we wanted. Carmel has a wonderful beach and I had lots of friends. Sunset School, the elementary school, was a superb school. I think in some ways the best I ever attended, very much ahead of its time so it was an idyllic existence.

Q: Thinking back on it you said it was an artists' colony but what was, were they mostly retired people? Who were there?

STEARNS: There were young people. There were very few retired people in those days in Carmel itself. There were both artists and writers, most of them on the way up. It was a very cosmopolitan atmosphere. I was a little bit young for that but I certainly appreciated the environment. I grew up surrounded by books because my mother was a great reader.

Q: Did you get over to Monterey much?

STEARNS: Very occasionally, usually because the Monterey cinema, the State Cinema, had major productions that didn't always come to Carmel. When we went there it was usually to see friends of my mother or for me to go to a Sunday matinee with my friends at the State Cinema.

Q: Carmel in my time when I was in the Air force I went the army language school in Monterey, the Presidio.

STEARNS: I later went there myself to do a study on hard language proficiency in the Foreign Service after I left Greece.

Q: The water was really too cold to do much swimming, wasn't it?

STEARNS: We kids would venture into the water although we didn't bask in it. The water, you are absolutely right, was very, very cold and remains very cold but the beach was wonderful. Most of us learned to ride horses and in those days you could ride on the beach early in the morning. So there were lots and lots of uses for the beaches. Fourth of July was the great occasion because we could fire rockets from the beach into the ocean.

Q: Where did you go to elementary school?

STEARNS: Sunset School was the Carmel elementary school. As I said, it was very advanced. The superintendent was a man named Argo Vargeson who believed at that early time in audio visual aids. I remember we used to receive every Wednesday a copy of The Literary Digest up until the time they predicted that Alf Landon would win the 1936 election when they cancelled their subscription and the magazine went out of existence.

Q: It had been a major force.

STEARNS: That's right.

There was also a theater which still exists. The buildings of Sunset are now a cultural center and performances are still held at the auditorium where I graduated.

Q: At elementary school as a kid, at that age, were you much of a reader?

STEARNS: Yes, I was a passionate reader.

Q: Do you recall any of the books particularly influential or enjoyable?

STEARNS: I was very much taken by the novels about American Indian life by James Willard Schultz. The local library was a wonderfully inviting place so I spent many hours at the library. Also the Oz books I enjoyed.

Q: How about in elementary school? Did you find any courses particularly interesting?

STEARNS: Everything was new and interesting and I had my favorite teachers, of course.

Q: Who were they? Do you remember their names?

STEARNS: Frances Johnson, I think was my favorite teacher. The head of the eighth grade was Mr. Hull and I remember a lot of students. My best friend was Bill Coffin, later became well known as a war protester and chaplain of Yale as William Sloane Coffin.

Q: Oh yes, very much during the Vietnam War.

STEARNS: I saw Bill here a number of times before he died and remained in touch with his younger sister, Margo, who lived in Lexington, Massachusetts.

Q: In your family, were you at all religious?

STEARNS: My mother was pretty much a free thinker so I didn't go to Sunday school. We went to church mainly on holidays.

Q: What church did you go to?

STEARNS: The Congregational Church. My paternal grandfather was a Congregational minister in Norfolk, Connecticut.

Q: How about politics; where did you family fit in the political spectrum?

STEARNS: The Stearns family had traditionally been Republican but my mother and father broke away from that. I remember a Hoover sticker for one of the windows at the house in Carmel for the 1928 election. We'd just arrived but by 1932, they were replaced by Roosevelt stickers.

Q: Did politics play any particular role in the early days? Were you aware of political positions and all that?

STEARNS: Not really in detail until later. I was also quite young because I skipped two grades. It is ironic these days. I often read about parents who want their children to

remain longer in kindergarten because they will be older when they enter first grade. It was just the opposite in my time. I skipped two grades so I was always two years younger than my contemporaries.

Q: That was sort of the feeling at the time, keep going, push, push, push. I skipped a bit. I was going to the California system but down in South Pasadena when I was a kid.

STEARNS: Yes, it has been completely turned on its head.

Q: But at the time the California system was considered quite advanced and quite good, wasn't it?

STEARNS: Very good. The public school education system of California was really the state of the art in the United States.

Q: How were you in math or arithmetic?

STEARNS: I did quite well in the elementary grades but was never drawn to math and the sciences with the thought of a profession. I was much more interested in literature and to some extent in history.

Q: Did they teach much California history to you?

STEARNS: Yes, we did get much more emphasis on California history and history of the Hispanics on the Pacific Coast, in particular, than we would have had we gone to school in the East.

Q: I certainly learned about the missionary system in school.

STEARNS: Carmel has a perfectly wonderful mission which is still used for the annual Bach festival in Carmel.

Q: When I went to the Army Language School, it was a delight to be able to hop over to Carmel and enjoy its ambiance which was quite different from the military

STEARNS: And there were a lot of cultural attractions in addition to the Bach festival, good theater and performances by visiting artists. I remember hearing Richard Crooks sing there, the Metropolitan Opera star and the Don Cossack Chorus and things of that kind.

Q: How old were you when you left there?

STEARNS: I was 12. My mother remained in Carmel for I believe two or three years, but I went off to boarding school, Flint Ridge School in Pasadena.

Q: My grandson and granddaughter graduated from there just two years ago.

STEARNS: A good school.

Q: They really enjoyed it.

Why did you go there rather than go on to high school?

STEARNS: There was no high school in Carmel, and Monterey was, in that sense, a foreign country. We used to play them in sports and I think my mother had heard good things about Flint Ridge so that seemed a logical move at that time.

Q: What was Flint Ridge like when you were there?

STEARNS: It was very small and had excellent instruction. I first became definitely interested in history from courses I took from a teacher, Mr. Meyer. And I took Latin also and geometry and all of these were well taught.

Q: Did you get out and around in Pasadena?

STEARNS: We went on escorted trips. The masters would take us on Saturday night to a movie in Pasadena. I learned to play golf about that time and the golf team had matches at Altadena and local courses.

Q: Did you get involved with, Pasadena Playhouse is a big thing in those days?

STEARNS: Not at that time. I did, however, have the rare occasion to go to the Rose Bowl to see Jackie Robinson play football for Pasadena Junior College.

Q: Was the Rose Parade going in those days?

STEARNS: No, I don't believe so.

Q: How about the Depression? How did the Depression hit you all?

STEARNS: We lived on a fairly tight budget, I know. I well remember my mother in those days I think it was \$45 a month rent for a nice little house on Carmel Point which you probably couldn't get in the front door for \$45 today.

I do remember Prohibition because while it was still in existence, my mother used to go to a bakery on Devore Street in Carmel and get black market liquor there for her cocktail parties. That bakery was the very picturesque. Hugh Comstock designed the bakery which still exists, not as a bakery anymore. Now it is a tearoom on Devore Street. In those days that's where you could get illicit liquor.

Q: Were you much of a movie fan?

STEARNS: I was a big movie fan, loved the movies.

Q: Who were your favorite stars?

STEARNS: We followed the young stars like Mickey Rooney and Jackie Cooper. In those days you had double bills on Saturdays and Sundays so we became familiar with stars like Kay Francis who was usually in the flip side of a double bill. Dick Tracey as a great favorite of ours and Henry Fonda at the time he made the “Trail of the Lonesome Pine”. Also Bette Davis.

Q: She was always on the first part of a double feature and I'd have to sort of sit and wait. She was always crying about something. She was not attuned to a young boy.

STEARNS: Paul Muni was also someone I followed in The Good Earth and Scarface and various others.

Q: I am four years younger than you but I know the environment very well because it hadn't changed.

STEARNS: We had also not only the commercial cinema in Carmel but the Golden Goth Theater. This was an art theater and also during the summer usually staged repertory productions of live theater. I got to know a lot of films that would not have played commercially at all like Don Quixote with Boris Chaliapin and Charles Lawton in Henry, the Eighth. Things of that kind, so we had ample opportunity for enlargement of our cultural horizons.

Q: One of the things in people of this era that people don't really appreciate is how much young people were turned loose on their own. You were turned out of the house at a certain time and told they were going to eat at such and such a time and the rest of the time is for you to get out and play with your friends and do something but don't mope around the house.

STEARNS: That's absolutely right. As you remember, Carmel is a great place just to roam and the weather is unusually pretty good so it was an ideal place for a kid to grow up.

Q: In Flint Ridge, what courses did you particularly like?

STEARNS: The history courses were the ones that really opened my eyes to the fascinations of the study of history, European history, English history. I had already seen George Arliss in films like Disraeli so the movies in Carmel introduced me to subjects and historic characters that I was able to go into much more deeply at Flint Ridge.

Q: I was particularly struck as a young boy by the stories of the British Empire, India and the lives of Bengal Lancer.

STEARNS: I was too and the French Revolution was fascinating.

Q: Oh, yes, the Scarlet Pimpernel

STEARNS: That's right and Leslie Howard was one of my favorite stars in the Scarlet Pimpernel and Barkley Square.

Q: How about radio?

STEARNS: I listened to a lot of radio, usually just before going to bed and the usual things like the Lone Ranger. On weekends often my mother would tune in to the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts and so I became familiar with them from the radio.

Q: Today is the 7th of May, 2013 with Monteagle Stearns and we left off, we were talking about your very early years.

I think it is time we move maybe to high school. Where did you go to high school?

STEARNS: I went to Flint Ridge School in Pasadena California. Carmel in the '30s did not have a high school. Also, I had skipped a couple of grades and was 12, and I think probably my mother, who was raising me as a single parent since my father was still curing with TB in Saranac Lake in New York, thought it was time for me to begin to operate more or less on my own. I found Flint Ridge a very good school. It really ignited my interest in history in particular, but all the courses were well taught. I was a boarding school student and made a good many friends there.

Q: Where did you go, you graduated what year?

STEARNS: I only went two years to Flint Ridge, which would have been at the end of the '38, '39 semester of the school year. My mother thought it was time for me to get reacquainted with my father who was still in Saranac Lake, so I entered Northwood School in Lake Placid. My mother pursued a master's degree in social work at Simmons College, living in Boston. I spent one year at Northwood but found it a little bit stilted and self conscious as a school. I remember at our opening session with the headmaster, the headmaster warned us about associating with girls from the town saying that we would meet more suitable girls at the Lake Placid periodic dances. It seemed to me I probably was not going to be terribly comfortable there. I finished my high school or boarding school education at Tilton School, Tilton, New Hampshire. That was a very rewarding experience. It was a little less formal as a school. It didn't have tea and cinnamon toast with the headmaster's wife on Sundays. I found the courses, particularly in literature, very rewarding.

Q: What were your interests by that time in reading and studies and all?

STEARNS: I was always interested in writing. I became very interested in history so those really were the dominating passions. I did a great deal of reading in high school. I

remember the first grown-up book I read, if that is the right way to term it, was Louis Bromfield's The Rains Came, that I read at Flint Ridge. I was passionate about John Dos Passos's USA when I was at Tilton. I also read more conventional American literature and was introduced to some foreign literature.

Q: At this point World War II had really started, hadn't it? During this time we are talking about, World War II had started in Europe in 1939.

STEARNS: World War II started when I was at Northwood in the fall of 1939, right.

Q: Did you take considerable interest in this in developments?

STEARNS: I did in part because my classmates at Northwood were divided between those who thought stronger and quicker U.S. intervention was needed and those still with lingering memories of the havoc of World War I who felt that we should try to stay slightly apart and aloof from this. I was a bit of an isolationist although not an America firster as a young kid in school. I believed in helping the Allies, but I had been influenced by a lot of anti war writing and the feeling that we had been mistaken in entering World War I and we'd probably be very careful before we entered World War II.

Q: Particularly up in New England there was pretty close ties or at least feelings toward the role of Great Britain. Did you feel that there or not?

STEARNS: The role of England?

Q: Yes.

STEARNS: Yes, I certainly felt some of it. I had always enjoyed English films and was very much an anglophile. The Stearns family were all anglophiles. I remember in Norfolk, Connecticut, in my preschool years I used to leaf through The Illustrated News of London. My maternal grandmother and grandfather subscribed to a number of English publications so I was very open to English influence. My father's brother had married an English woman and was living in the UK.

Q: Did you find that World War II sort of opened your eyes to more than they had been to the world? It really was a world war.

STEARNS: It certainly broadened my reading interests. I became acquainted with the cartoons, Low in the British press and paid more attention but it didn't fully arouse my interest. My interest still was focused on American literature and American history.

Q: Did you read, I can't think of the author's name offhand, about Benedict Arnold, Rabble in Arms?

STEARNS: Oh, yes, Kenneth Roberts. I thought he was wonderful and I read Rabble in Arms and Northwest Passage and a couple of others. Yes, I was passionate about those. I thought they were wonderful.

Q: One book he wrote, not to well known, Oliver Wiswell.

STEARNS: I read that too. That was one of this last, I think.

Q: And the fact that it presented the Loyalist point of view really opened my eyes to history being a diverse field. It wasn't all one sided.

STEARNS: I had the same reaction. Rabble in Arms also was told through a Loyalist or Tory point of view so that also awakened my awareness that there was another side to the Revolution.

Q: At the high school level, you were going to a school in New Hampshire, was this?

STEARNS: That was in Tilton, New Hampshire, right.

Q: Did you feel that you as an individual were going to get involved in the military? Did that seem to be on the horizon?

STEARNS: I didn't think that far ahead, as a matter of fact. My focus was on going to Stanford and getting started then. We were not yet in the war, of course, and when I entered Stanford in the fall of 1941, the war was still several months away. I really didn't think in terms of whether or not I would be serving.

Q: What was Stanford like when you entered in '41? How would you describe it?

STEARNS: I discovered girls although girls didn't discover me for several years. I didn't take my education at Stanford seriously enough. My aim was to get a gentlemanly C and I got some Bs but I also got one or two Ds, I think. I best remember the one course that influenced me greatly was a course on world cinema, Darkness at Noon, that's what we called it. That really did increase my interest in films and made me think when I grew up I wanted either to be a journalist or a movie maker. Those were my two career goals as of 1941 and '42.

Q: Did you have any connections, friends in the movie industry?

STEARNS: No, none whatsoever.

Q: Not even at Stanford?

STEARNS: A journalist on the Open Tribune and in the absence of my father, my uncle had been a role model for me. He had gone to Stanford and I think that was what first interested me in Stanford. I began to follow Stanford sports in the green section of the

San Francisco Chronicle which you probably remember. Bill Lisner was the editor, 'The Sporting Green', they called it.

Q: Were there many Orientals, particularly Japanese, going to Stanford at the time?

STEARNS: No, that certainly wasn't a significant component of the student body. It was pretty much a white, Anglo Saxon student body from reasonably well-off families. Stanford had not yet diversified. Our great interest, of course, was that Stanford had gone to the Rose Bowl in 1941 and had beaten Nebraska. so as we entered in the fall of '41, we had great hopes that Stanford would be able to repeat itself, which did not happen.

Q: How did Pearl Harbor, how did you hear about it and how did it hit you and the campus, would you say?

STEARNS: I was visiting with friends on the ground floor of Knowles Hall, the freshman dormitory, and we were listening to a radio program which was interrupted with the announcement of Pearl Harbor. I think it took a while for the implications of that, particularly the implications would have for our lives personally, to sink in. In my case, I supposed rather than feeling that I would serve my country and fight fascists. The prospect of donning a uniform was a rite of passage to adulthood. I had just passed my 18th birthday at the end of my first semester as a sophomore at Stanford when I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Q: Why the Marines?

STEARNS: Again, it was a challenge. I felt that if I was going to wear the uniform I might as well pick the most demanding one as a test of myself. I think I entered the Marine Corps on the first of April, appropriately, April Fool's Day, 1943 and went through boot camp in San Diego.

Q: How did you find the boot camp?

STEARNS: It was tough, but I had always been interested in sports even though I wasn't very good at them. So I didn't find the physical demands overtaxing but the discipline was demanding, for sure. I was selected for sea school to become a sea-going Marine. After sea school my first assignment was to the USS West Virginia which had been damaged badly at Pearl Harbor and was dry-docked at Bremerton, Washington. I served as part of a Marine detachment on the West Virginia. We were in dry-dock, and while there in Bremerton I was selected to become the driver of Captain King, the captain of the West Virginia. This involved taking him and his wife around to the Officers' Club and sitting and waiting for them. I was reading then a book, a biography of John Barrymore called The Nicely Prince, a wonderful book. Mrs. King became interested in my reading habits. Not long after I started driving for them, we all took an examination, what amounted to an IQ examination, I guess and I was selected to go to officer training school. I was detached in the fall of 1944 to enter the 12 program and I spent one semester as a Marine at Occidental College. Then the V12 program was closed and

amalgamated with the program at University of California, USC. I spent two semesters at USC, one at Occidental, two at USC.

Then we were shipped off to Camp Lejeune for pre-officers' training before going to Quantico. Before I got to Quantico, the war ended. I was asked whether I wanted to continue and get a reserve commission. I felt I had other priorities at that point so I returned to civilian life.

Since I was on the East Coast it was a good opportunity to visit my father. I took a bus and went up to Saranac Lake and promptly fell in love with a young woman in Saranac Lake who was enrolled in the Art Students' League in New York. So I knew I wasn't going to go back to Stanford to complete my college work and that I would be somewhere near New York. I read Doc Parson's Peace in America which made me think that Columbia College was probably the best available and it probably was. It had a wonderful English Department in those days with professors like and Mark van Doren. I, with a copy of Peace in America under my arm, went down and talked my way into Columbia College. Those were the days, and completed my education as an English major with a history minor at Columbia College, graduating in January of 1948.

Q: Was Columbia, would you say it was fairly radical? Did it fit somewhere on a political spectrum?

STEARNS: I wasn't really following campus politics. I thought of myself as an adult by then .

I took my classes much more seriously but did very little participation in campus life and wasn't aware of various radical and conservative factions on the Columbia campus.

Q: How did you find New York?

STEARNS: I loved it, thought it was wonderful, exciting. A wonderful place to be at the end of World War II, wonderful theater. I saw the opening of the original production of Elia Kazan's The Death of a Salesman, terrific theater. While I was completing my degree during the day at Columbia, I went to work at the Institute of Adult Education and wrote for a documentary film magazine called Film for Review published by the Institute for Adult Education. That led by a circuitous route to the Foreign Service or at least to the State Department.

My boss, Morris Cartwright, the director of The Institute of Adult Education, recommended me to the State Department which was then recruiting motion picture officers. Of course, the whole information program was at that time part of the State Department with George Allen running it as Assistant Secretary of State of Public Affairs.

After interviews, a visit to Washington, and security clearances, I entered the State Department as a motion picture officer and was assigned first to Iran. That was canceled

and my assignment was transferred to Turkey. In the spring of 1949 I went to Istanbul, which was my assignment, via Cairo. I spent ten days in Cairo to become acquainted with a film program that already existed there.

Q: Before you went to the State Department had you ever basically picked up a camera and filmed anything professionally?

STEARNS: Not really, no, I hadn't gotten that far. My interest in films was almost entirely intellectual. I was interested in taking snapshots and pictures but it was at a very primitive level.

Q: What was the film department like in the State Department at that time? Were there people who knew what they were doing?

STEARNS: I think it was a good program. Its director was Edwards who had produced Nanook of the North. It was divided into a production unit based in New York which made some quite good films, although not entirely appropriate for audiences in the developing world. They were all films designed to show the world the best side of the United States. One was called Hopeville, Alabama. There was an exchange program that followed an English student who went to UCLA, I think; films of that kind.

The distribution side was just beginning so that there was a film program in Egypt, a film program in Iran, and mine was the third -- created in Turkey.

Q: You were in Turkey from when to when?

STEARNS: I was in Turkey from 1949 to '51. I started out in Istanbul but the public affairs officer who was based in Ankara wanted to have a closer relationship with the film program so I was transferred with my wife and young daughter to Ankara. Over the course of two years I was just building a very good film program. We showed films from complete mobile units.

I also absorbed then a very large aid program which had mobile units. So we had a honeymoon in our relations with Turkey and I was able to travel all over eastern Turkey which was a very rare experience, a wonderful experience.

I very quickly learned that the Turkey that I saw when I was traveling in the east, where women were pulling plows, was very different from the one being discussed in embassy staff meetings which were devoted to whether Turkey could be admitted to NATO.

Q: Was this the type of thing you would go in a pick up or jeep or something loaded up with a camera and a generator and go to villages and show movies or what?

STEARNS: Yes, that's what we would do. It was a countrywide program and revealed a part of Turkey that made me realize that foreign affairs were far more complicated than they sometimes appeared at embassy staff meetings.

Q: Were you able to participate in the staff meetings and all?

STEARNS: Well, not really. I was an observer sitting in the back row. We had a large diplomatic list and I was the low man on the totem pole so I was probably 36th out of 36 which meant that I wasn't invited to participate actively.

The film program became so successful and well-known with columns being written about it in American newspapers that the ambassador began to take an interest in the program and an interest in me.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

STEARNS: George Wadsworth, an Arabist.

Q: Very much so.

What kind of films were you showing?

STEARNS: These were very standard documentaries, often industrial documentaries but the occasional showing also of films being made by the State Department. Production facilities were limited to the State Department as was the budget. So the majority were films that had been made for the domestic audience, either films like The River and The City, very good documentaries produced during the New Deal years, or commercial.

Q: Were they dubbed?

STEARNS: They were not dubbed so that they were very unsuitable for the audiences we were showing them to, probably incomprehensible in many ways.

My first showing, I remember when we got our first mobile unit, my Turkish assistant and I were still then in Istanbul. We decided to drive to Ankara after collecting the jeep unit. In those days there was no highway linking Istanbul and Ankara and it took two days. You had to spend the night in a mountain town called Bolu. Haluk, my assistant, and I just decided we would give the jeep projector and mobile unit a test by giving a showing in Bolu. We put up a screen against a wall in the center of town. The only films we had with us in the jeep were one on the Grand Canyon and Toscanini conducting the New York Philharmonic. We had never operated the projector before which you may remember operated off the motor of the jeep. During the Toscanini showing, the motor stalled which meant the screen went blank. We completely lost the picture and there was shouting from the villagers in the square. I turned to Haluk and said, "What are they saying?" and he said, "They are saying somebody shot the maestro." We got it started again.

My cumulative experience with the film program was that we were just not getting our message across because we were showing the wrong films. So I began on my own hook

with the help of my Turkish staff to conduct interviews. We would bring in village audiences, show them films and then interview them. We found after several months of interviews that the films that they understood best were, of all things, Walt Disney films made for the Alliance for Progress, the Latin American program during the war. That led me to believe we should focus our attention more on producing cartoons and less on documentaries per se which were meant for American audiences.

At the end of my two years in Turkey, I did a long report explaining why I thought we were not making the right films or showing the right films. I was assigned to the Motion Picture Division of the State Department and the director, Edwards, had read my report and asked me to prepare script outlines for films that I thought would be appropriate for audiences like the villagers in Turkey. One that I suggested was a cartoon film modeled on a Disney film which we called Man Learns to Farm. Herb Edwards agreed to set aside money to produce it with an animated film company in New York called Film Graphics. During my year in the motion picture division, I shuttled back and forth to New York where he would film graphics to actually produce an animated film, Man Learns to Farm. He did the story boards and I did much of the script.

After I left the Motion Picture Division, at the end of a year, the State Department entered it in the Venice Film Festival and won a first prize in the instructional film division, my proudest achievement.

Q: Did that spur you to become the John Ford of the next generation or not?

STEARNS: By then I had begun to think in terms of a Foreign Service career. I realized the whole practice of diplomacy was fascinating and that there were far more dimensions to it than I had realized before. Ambassador Wadsworth had asked me to accompany him on a round of golf and it turned out what he wanted to do was talk to me about taking the Foreign Service exam. He sent me an announcement of the written exam and had written in the top corner, "Tell Stearns to take a crack at this" so he decided to reinforce his argument by talking me about it. By then I had become a reserve officer. I think I had been promoted to an R 4 or something like that. I said to the ambassador on the third or fourth hole, "Mr. Ambassador, isn't there some way I could enter laterally?"

He said, "Don't even try. You will find that in the Foreign Service getting there is all the fun there is. Once you get to the top, they are just going to try to push you out." It had been heard that he was being transferred.

My first awareness that he had some interest in me personally came before that when after the Korean War broke out I was summoned to the deputy chief of mission office probably in July of 1950. The deputy chief of mission was a very, very conventional officer. He said to me that the ambassador and he agreed that after the outbreak of the Korean War was it was only a matter of time before the Soviet Union attacked Turkey. Therefore the ambassador was getting the names of people who would be willing to be interned with him. He said the Turks would resist the Soviet invasion gallantly, but would be overwhelmed which meant that the diplomatic corps would be interned. The deputy

chief of mission, Warren Perkins, said to me, “Your name was mentioned to me as someone who should be among those interned if you are willing to do so.”

I was, as I said, way down, the last man on the totem pole. I thought perhaps the fact that I’d traveled around eastern Turkey and written memos about what I saw meant that they wanted someone who knew the terrain outside Ankara. It was only later that I learned the best people being interned with the ambassador had to include those who played both bridge and golf.

Q: What were your impressions, you mentioned almost two Turkeys, eastern Turkey and western Turkey. Did you get any feel for how the Turks you met viewed the United States?

STEARNS: As I said, it was a honeymoon period. The United States had backed Turkey against the pressures of the Soviet Union to establish bases in the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and to draw new boundary lines in the region of Ardis Ardahan in eastern Turkey. So there was strong feeling that we were the best friends the Turks had at that moment. This facilitated the work that I was doing traveling around. It would be hard today, I think, to travel as freely as I was able to do in eastern Turkey, much of which is now under security wraps. So relations at a formal level were very good indeed but, of course, the ignorance of the United States on the part of Turkish villagers was intense.

I became aware there were changes going on, however. One of the sensational best sellers at the time I was in Turkey, probably came out in 1950, was a novel called , My Village by a young novelist. It told the story of a village boy driving turkeys from an eastern Turkish village to Istanbul to sell them and losing one turkey after another on the trip. It was a precursor of what became a real demographic shift, explained in large part by having an Islamic oriented government in Turkey today and movement of eastern Turks and village Turks to the cities.

Q: Did you run across Kurds?

STEARNS: I took films out around Jamarkir so I was aware that Kurds existed, but I tended to accept the official Turkish view that Kurds were mountain Turks. We knew there had been Kurdish uprisings as late as the 1930s and certainly aware that the Syrian and Iraqi frontier areas were lawless. You could hear gunshot fire during the night almost any night you were up there.

Q: How about your Turkish? Were you picking up much Turkish?

STEARNS: No, I really didn’t. I was still intent on trying to improve my French so I learned survival Turkish. I had a perfectly wonderful Turkish staff, all of them or most of them graduates of Robert College in Istanbul so they had fluent English and I relied entirely on them.

Q: Did you feel being in the motion picture business with the State Department you were off to one side of the real guts of the business at that time?

STEARNS: I think so. As soon as I became aware that there was a profession of diplomacy and that it was extremely interesting and called on one's interest and knowledge of history, that was when I decided in Turkey that I should take the exam and the encouragement of the ambassador propelled me forward to do that. I took the written examination in the fall of '52 and the oral in '53.

Q: Was the exam the three and a half day exam?

STEARNS: It was a very long, arduous process. The written exam, as I recall, was two and a half days. The oral examination was something of an anticlimax because what I didn't realize was the orals' board had my record in Turkey in hand and the recommendations of the ambassador. It lasted for only about half an hour. I was scheduled to go on leave the next day up to the Adirondacks and I called to see if I could get the results of the exam. The young woman said, "We are not allowed to, you'll receive the results by writing" and I said "I won't be here." She said, "Hold on a minute."

She came back a few minutes late and said, "I think you can enjoy your vacation."

Q: How nice.

STEARNS: Very nice.

Q: When you came in, was there what later became the A-100 course, officer training course?

STEARNS: No. After taking the oral I got hung up in the McCarthy period when no appointments were made for about a year and a half. During that period, it may have even been two years, during that period the information program of the State Department, including films and press and culture, were detached during the Eisenhower administration from the State Department. I was informed that my eligibility for an appointment in the Foreign Service had lapsed when I was no longer an employee of the State Department. I protested this and won my protest so they restored my eligibility. I hadn't even been aware of this, that it had lapsed.

I finally entered the Foreign Service proper in the spring of 1955, that is to say, two years after passing the written and oral, two years.

Q: What did you do during those two years?

STEARNS: I continued to work for the information program, not in the film section but in the press section.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

STEARNS: I was providing so called policy guidance, doing short articles. We attempted to provide policy guidance and information for the Voice of America and for the other parts of the information program. So it was basically a linkage proposition between what was now the State Department and USIA which had become independent. We used to joke that John Foster Dulles set up the State Department as an independent agency.

Q: How did you feel about Foster Dulles?

STEARNS: I thought he was a terrible secretary of state. I remember when the first day after he became was sworn in as secretary, we all received on our desk a memorandum saying that he expected not only loyalty from Foreign Service officers but positive loyalty.

Q: Oh, yes. This is when they were saying we were a nest of Communists and everything else.

STEARNS: Well, and he brought in Scott McCloud as the security director who was a venomous influence in the State Department and suspected everybody of being a Communist.

Q: It is a hard period to understand if you weren't there at the time.

STEARNS: I was fortunate when I did enter in '55 that I was in the press section or news section of the NEA Bureau which was then Near East and Africa Bureau. I was working on east Turkey and Iran and George Allen was the assistant secretary for NEA. I began filling in for Bob Gordon as the special aide. After one period Allen took me aside and said that he was being sent as ambassador to Greece and if I was interested in a posting in Greece, he would be happy to have me there. I said I would be.

My wife in 1952 had had a nervous breakdown so we had been separated for almost six years. She was in the hospital. I realized if I was continuing in the Foreign Service it would have to be without her. We had agreed that divorce was the only outcome that made any sense for her or for me. We started divorce proceedings when I was assigned to Greece.

Q: When did you go to Greece?

STEARNS: I arrived in Greece in January of 1958.

Q: The civil war was still a strong memory, wasn't it?

STEARNS: Still a strong memory that ended in the Gramos Mountains in the summer of 1949. It was recent enough to leave wounds that were still very painful and sore and the Communist Party was still outlawed. Greece was a monarchy in those days, quite conservative in its approach certainly to politics.

We used to joke that Greece was an underdeveloped country economically but an overdeveloped country politically but in fact, the opposite was true; there had been many economic changes and demographic changes but the politics were still stagnant and unresponsive.

Q: What was your job in Greece?

STEARNS: I was second secretary in the political section.

Q: Who was the DCM?

STEARNS: The DCM in those days was Sam Berger. Jim Penfield first and then he was succeeded by Sam Berger.

Q: Sam was DCM in Saigon when I was consul general there.

STEARNS: And he also served as ambassador in Seoul, as I recall.

Q: How would you describe relations with Greece at the time when you arrived?

STEARNS: You can never fly relations with Greece on automatic pilot. They are, as you know, an explosive Mediterranean people so that the Cyprus problem had created many rifts. There was always a feeling in Greece that we were partial to the Turks and the Turks were considered by the Greeks their great enemy so that relations were always delicate and required careful handling and skillful reporting.

Q: Did you feel you wanted to sort of specialize in Greece or not?

STEARNS: Not really. It was my first real Foreign Service posting and I hadn't yet developed clear ideas about area specialization. Having served in Turkey and now serving in Greece, there was always a feeling that this would be a natural place to return to at some point.

Q: Before we move on to working in Greece, I do want to ask about did you get any training, the equivalent to junior officer training or not or were you just sort of melded in?

STEARNS: One of the first things that happened after my assignment to Greece was that the new ambassador, Jimmie Riddleberger arrived. He discovered that nobody on his staff spoke Greek. This was highlighted by the fact that Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus made a visit to Athens over a weekend. All of our Greek staff were out fishing or swimming or picnicking and so Jimmy said, "We've got to get some Greek fluency fast. I want you to take the latest arrival in the political section. I will give him six months to learn Greek in Greece and he has to learn as much as he would in a year and a half in Washington."

I was the latest arrival and so designated although I resisted. I really wanted to do political reporting and it wasn't clear that I wanted to spend six months learning Greek, but I did work out my own program and in the end it worked out very well indeed.

Q: We will pick this up next time really about your time in Greece. We talked about they gave you six months of hard Greek training and all but then what were you doing there.

Today is the 14th of May, 2013 with Ambassador Monteagle Stearns.

We have just reached, you are in Greece and you have been told to go learn Greek in the impossible period of six months. When did you get to Greece and let's talk about your early experiences there.

STEARNS: I arrive in January of 1958 and you may remember that I was assigned to the political section in Athens when George Allen, then the assistant secretary for Near Eastern and African Affairs told me that he was going to Greece and asked whether I would like to be assigned there. I had said yes. The irony was that by the time I arrived, George Allen who had been there for about a year, had already been reassigned to Washington to head USIA. So they were awaiting a new ambassador who turned out was James W. Riddleberger who had been ambassador in Yugoslavia.

My then wife and I were beginning divorce proceedings so I was a geographical bachelor in Athens, newly assigned to the political section with a new ambassador arriving. To look ahead, it turned out the new ambassador was bringing not only his wife but was being visited by his beautiful, young daughter who had just finished Goucher College. She just turned 21. Eventually, Antonia Riddleberger and I began to date and became engaged and finally were married. It had a very happy ending.

Q: You were there from when to when?

STEARNS: I was there from '58 to '62, the end of '62. It was a long tour in part because my father in law as he became was pulled out of Athens after a little more than a year to head VOA in Washington and that meant that Toni and I could stay on for another two or three years in Athens. There was no question of nepotism since he was no longer the ambassador. He was succeeded by Ellis Briggs.

Q: This oral history was started way after Ambassador Riddleberger was gone from the scene. Could you talk a little bit about him? Your impression of him and anything that you can think of, stories he might have told or anything like that?

STEARNS: He had wonderful judgment, very, very careful in reaching decisions but always able to reach them and totally objective in his analysis of events, both political and economic of the countries to which he was assigned. He'd handled a very difficult

assignment as ambassador to Yugoslavia. This was the period when Tito's break with Moscow occurred and we began to give economic aid to Yugoslavia and to Tito. Of course, Yugoslavia was still a Communist state although not a satellite state of the Soviet Union. There was much conservative criticism of giving any aid to Tito, so Jimmy handled that with great skill and conducted very even handed policies in Greece. It was he who decided that the embassy in Athens could not exist effectively or successfully without having members of his staff, preferably the political section, able to speak Greek. He had arrived at that conclusion because early on in his tour Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus had made a surprise visit to Athens. It was over a weekend which meant that the Greek staff of the political section was wisely off on the beaches or fishing. He depended on the American staff to come up with a report of the meaning of the Makarios visit.

Because none of us spoke Greek or read Greek, we had to rely on the English language Athens news for what scant information we could glean and that was very late, very superficial. So Jimmy looked at our draft telegram and said, "I don't want to have to go through this again. Let's get someone to learn Greek quickly so we don't have to rely on late, superficial reports for our own telegrams."

Since I was the most recent appointee to the political section, I was selected to devise my own course in Greek in Athens and had been given six months to learn as much Greek as I would have been able to learn in Washington in a year and a half. I decided the best approach would be for me to memorize long passages in Greek even though I couldn't understand them just to get the flow and rhythm of the language. I selected Aesop's Fables and my first memorized sentences in Greek were not very useful in conversation. It was a fable about a boy who inherited a large amount of money and wasted it on high living. So while it helped me learn the flow of Greek, it didn't help my conversation ability at the dinner table, for sure.

In any event, I picked three instructors: one who directed my memorization, the second who taught me grammar, and the third with whom I had conversations in Greek. This system for me worked out extremely well and at the end of six months I was able to satisfy the requirements of my assignment.

I incidentally had been not at all enthusiastic about being the selected language student because I was impatient to begin political reporting and thought that learning Greek would interfere with what I then considered my real duties. I was, of course, totally wrong. Learning Greek turned out to be a very important asset in my own career.

Q: I want to go back to the political situation there. Before that, could you give me the background of Ambassador Riddleberger? Where did he come from and all?

STEARNS: He was a Virginian, one of several children, born in Woodstock, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley. While his great grandfather, I think had been a U.S. senator, it was not a family with a great deal of money and his own father had been a shoe salesman for Walkover Shoes. So he made it by hard work, his own intelligence and dedication, not by connections. He went to Randolph Macon University, was always a good student and

came in as one of the first Foreign Service officers to be enrolled after the passage of the Rogers Act.

Q: 1924, yes.

STEARNS: Along with that distinguished group of George Kennan, Chip Bohlen and Jake Beam.

Q: Was he concentrated in any particular area?

STEARNS: He was a Europeanist, essentially, but had the hard posts of Europe which is why Yugoslavia and Greece. Yugoslavia, as I explained, was difficult politically because we began giving economic aid to Yugoslavia after Tito's break with Stalin. Greece was always, and continues to be, a complicated country to maintain an even keel within our relations.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the political situation?

STEARNS: Going back earlier, General Metaxas had imposed a military dictatorship on Greece in 1936. In 1941, the Germans invaded and occupied Greece for the balance of the war. As soon as the war in Greece ended at the end of 1944, when the Allies entered Athens, a civil war broke out between communist resistance and the non communist resistance. That totally ended in the summer of 1949. Really for the period of 1936 to 1949, there was no normal political life in a democratic sense in Greece. This had its effect on Greece's relations with other countries, notably with the United States which took over as the chief provider of aid to Greece when the British came to us in 1947 to say they could no longer afford Greece and Turkey. Dean Acheson agreed to talk to President Truman to see whether we were willing to and take up the burden which we were. The result was the Truman Doctrine of 1947 which gave massive aid to Greece and Turkey.

The prevailing government was conservative under Constantine Karamanlis when Jimmy Riddleberger arrived and the opposition to that government was very disorganized. My own job in the political section was as chief contact in the embassy with the opposition so I very quickly became interested in seeing whether the opposition could assume an electable identity to provide a real alternative to the conservative government.

The matter came to a head very early. I had arrived in January of '58. In the elections in the spring of '58, due in large part to the disorganization of the opposition parties, the communists and communist front parties came in second after conservatives who won reelection. This set off panic bells in both in Washington and in Athens and the fear was that communists represented a real threat to take over Greece in the subsequent election unless the opposition parties were able to provide a credible alternative. So that really placed the focus on the opposition and my job became a more important one, even though I was only a young, second secretary of embassy. I found the Greeks extremely accessible and I was able to establish good contacts with leaders of the opposition,

including the former liberal prime minister, George Papandreou and his son, Andreas, who was an American citizen and head of the Economics Department at the University of California in Berkeley.

Andreas when I met him in 1959 was visiting Greece on a couple of fellowships, Guggenheim fellowships, Fulbright and we became friends and saw a lot of each other, particularly when the young Papandreou moved to the same street we lived on in the suburbs of Athens.

Q: Was he married?

STEARNS: He was married to Margaret.

Q: A major figure later.

STEARNS: His earlier marriage ended while he was still in the United States and teaching at the University of Minnesota. Margaret had no Greek roots herself. She was a graduate student living and working in St. Paul. They were married in Reno, I think a day or two after his divorce in Reno became final. They produced four children and had all four very young children with them when they arrived in Greece for the Guggenheim, Fulbright year in 1959. The kids were young enough that when the Papandreous moved near us that Toni on occasion babysat for George, the oldest, who later became prime minister.

Q: With the senior Papandreou, at the time how did, what was his view towards the United States, would you say?

STEARNS: On the whole he was well disposed. He realized that while he spoke no English and his only studies outside Greece had been in Germany, he did recognize that the U.S. was providing technical aid at a time Greece badly needed it. So he was by no means anti-American and was ready to establish a reliable contact with the embassy to exchange views and information. I represented that.

I think the older Papandreou soon realized that the younger Papandreous and the Stearnses had become close friends and this was also a useful link from the standpoint of Greek political parties.

Q: Were we concerned at the time that we wanted to see a viable opposition to a relatively Conservative party there? In other words, a party that would take away from the Communists and more a Socialist or were we

STEARNS: That's why I mentioned the 1958 spring election which brought the communists or the communist front organization apparently to second place. I emphasized the need for the non communist opposition to come together and create a credible alternative to the Conservatives.

Q: How did we view the Conservatives? Was this in the first place the king's party, would you say?

STEARNS: Constantine Karamanlis, while a conservative, was a very independent minded conservative and a reforming conservative. His longevity in Greece over many years showed that he was a very effective leader and was not a stick in the mud conservative by any means. The American relations with Karamanlis were on the whole good, although Karamanlis had a mind of his own and was not about to be pushed around by any foreign power, including the United States.

Q: What sort of role did the king and actually the queen at the time play, would you say?

STEARNS: The royal family had been quite popular during the civil war when Queen Frederica and the king had visited embattled villages. But Frederica, the queen, was German by birth and highly intelligent but not particularly prudent, politically. She had a reputation for interfering in an unseemly way in internal Greek politics. Some of this was exaggerated by the opposition but she was not a born diplomat. I think inadvertently the U.S. contributed to her reputation as a power behind the scenes, an unelected power behind the scenes, by establishing mainly through CIA a relatively close relationship with the royal family.

Of course, the ambassador couldn't be seen to be doing business primarily with the royal family. His business was with the elected government and that left it to the Agency to provide support to the royal family. This was done in some indiscrete ways. For example, I remember the station chief and his wife taking the Queen and her daughters to the U.S. PX to go shopping. Of course, this became widely known because the Greek staff at the PX saw them and it contributed to the feeling that the U.S. was in some way actively supporting the royal family over the elected government. This may also have contributed to the later breach that Karamanlis had with the royal family, resulting in his own self-imposed exile.

Q: These relations are important. I had the impression talking to people who served there at that time that within our own establishment at the embassy the AID chief was sort of the power. The politicians and all, the Greek politicians would cozy up to the AID chief as opposed to, bypass the ambassador. Was there any validity to this impression?

STEARNS: I think there was a general assessment in Washington and the embassy in Athens also that the Karamanlis government was trying to do an effective job and was not a reactionary government or government that didn't believe in democratic processes. The main fear was that in the absence of a credible alternative it was impossible to have anything approaching a two party system in Greece at that time. And that was where the communists and communist-fronters, particularly in the aftermath of the civil war which left so many deep wounded feelings on both sides might, along with fellow travelers, fill the void. So there was a general recognition that while the Karamanlis government was doing as good a job as could be expected under the circumstances, there was an absolute

need for an alternative, and the scattered nature of the liberal-central-left parties was contributing to instability in Greece.

Q: There was a period when the United States government and the political body of congress and all was horrified if any government called itself socialist or came at all from the left. This tended to drive us towards the more conservative governments. Was this going on at that time?

STEARNS: I think from Washington's standpoint Karamanlis was a known quantity and believed to favor close relations with the United States and the West and, therefore, there was no feeling that he, himself, would contribute to instability. I don't think anyone believed that the likes of George Papandreou and Sophocles Venizelos, the two leaders of the center left opposition, were unfriendly to the U.S. or the West. On the contrary, the older Papandreou was known to be anti communist. He had served as prime minister in exile and again when the civil war broke out. He had suffered the attacks of the communists when he was minister of education in the Venizelos government in the '30s so there was no fear that the center left represented a threat except to the extent that it was not a credible alternative when it came to elections. Sophocles Venizelos and George Papandreou were by no means close; while George Papandreou was certainly oriented to the West, he was not necessarily a strong monarchist whereas Sophocles Venizelos had many ties to the royal family and was more conservative than George Papandreou.

Q: What sort of following did Venizelos have at that time?

STEARNS: The more conservative members of the center left opposition. Those closest to the royal family, I would say, represented his following but it was probably less and a broader array of the center union than the George Papandreou following.

Q: Did you find your connection to the Papandreou side of things, did you find you were listened to? You were a fairly junior officer or the junior officer in the political section. How much sort of clout did you have?

STEARNS: I didn't really have problems from that standpoint. There was general recognition that the center left was going to have to get its act together. Therefore, any embassy contacts with George Papandreou and other members of the center left were a necessary way of following developments and seeing whether that array of politicians was capable of forming a coherent role.

Q: It sounds like our embassy in Athens was somewhat advanced in contrast with our other embassies in Europe which tended to move towards the conservative side and sort of almost shun the more liberal sides of it.

STEARNS: Later there were disagreements between the Papandreou led opposition and the embassy, not during that period from '58 to '62 when I was first assigned to Greece. Ambassador Briggs had very little patience for Greek politics and he had succeeded Ambassador Riddleberger in the beginning of 1960. The elections of 1961 resulted in the

re-election of Karamanlis and the conservatives. George Papandreou and the liberal left denounced the results of the elections as fraudulent and boycotted any government of them. Ellis Briggs felt he had gone too far and our relations, his relations with George Papandreou, never got close. When he left in 1961, George Papandreou and the liberal left did not attend his farewell party.

Q: What about the role of the Central Intelligence Agency at that time? When I was there from 1970 to '74 the CIA station was really almost the power. It was very much sort of the policy driver. How was it during the time you were there?

STEARNS: It changed. When I first arrived in '58 there was an awful lot of reporting being done by the station that should have been done and could have been done by the political section itself because it was overtly acquired information. That, however, changed. I think the agency itself thought they should concentrate more on communist activities. Therefore, from about 1959 or 1960 through '62 the separation in reporting responsibilities between the political section of the embassy and the agency was much clearer and more effective.

What created a certain imbalance was what I mentioned before. Because the ambassador was believed to be properly engaged in doing business with elected officials, it left the royal family contacts mainly to the agency. This did occasionally result in misunderstandings. In my experience up until the time I left, relations between the embassy staff and the agency were perfectly smooth and we exchanged information. There was no real problem.

Now, of course, I can't speak for the time you were there because the colonels were in charge. My impression was the agency people were closer to the colonels, at least in terms of reporting responsibilities, than the embassy staff.

Q: They were. This is my impression too. Although I was off to one side, I was the consul general there. I was not a reporting officer.

STEARNS: Certainly after the fall of the colonels and when I returned in the summer of '74, there was no question of the agency calling the shots or having the greater influence on policy.

Q: At that time how did we see the communists? Were they strictly an instrument of the Soviet Union or were they touched with Titoism or what?

STEARNS: We had really misread the situation during the Greek civil war because we attributed the main support to the Greek communists to Stalin and the Soviet Union whereas, in fact, it was Tito and Yugoslavia that were supporting the Greek communists as a way to gain access the Aegean. We hadn't paid enough attention. We later learned from Milovan Djilas in a wonderful book, Conversations with Stalin, which was when he went on behalf of Tito to Moscow, Stalin told him personally "Roll up the Greek communists because the West will never allow them to win" so we had misread badly

where the support for the Greek communists was coming from outside of Greece. This, of course, contributed to misreading of secondary issues that flowed from that.

Q: Were we able to talk to any communists or was that verboten?

STEARNS: When the non communist opposition began to take form and did become the representative of a credible alternative to the conservatives, the communists and non communist members of the opposition who had had an engagement of convenience, began to separate. Really, from the beginning of the Greek civil war there was a split in the Greek communist movement between Marcos, supported by Yugoslavia, and Saar Ayaves was an 'unreformable' Stalinist. By the time I was doing active political reporting it was pretty clear that we weren't going to get anything but the party line from the most Stalinist conservatives in the Greek Communist Party. I made no attempt to establish contacts with them even later as ambassador because I didn't feel they were an independent force.

Q: Did the Yugoslavs, outside of trying to overthrow the government, when you were there were the Yugoslavs a factor in local politics?

STEARNS: Not really to my knowledge. I never felt there was a strong diplomatic influence being asserted by Yugoslavia. What influence there was really came through Andreas Papandreou who always regarded Yugoslavia as a Jacob Malik model in the way the socialist economies behaved. He was wrong about that but nevertheless that is what he believed. He had visited Yugoslavia a number of times. He was himself basically a Trotskyite rather than a Stalinist.

Q: Did you notice this, I don't want to overplay it, but this tendency on the part of Andreas at that when you knew him?

STEARNS: Yes, I think that's right. He was not starry eyed about the Soviet Union or Stalin but he was a little starry eyed about Yugoslavia and Tito.

Q: Having served five years in Yugoslavia during the '60s, I found it a little bit difficult to think of this as being a model of anything. They were trying to make some changes but it wasn't very impressive.

STEARNS: Andreas approached this as a man of the left who was by no means a communist but did believe in socialist government, socialist economics. In terms of his attitude toward American politics, he had many, many contacts in the upper echelons of the Kennedy administration; Walter Heller, you may recall, became head of the Council of Economic Advisers and Heller and Andreas were very close friends at the University of Minnesota. I think Andreas, when the Kennedy administration was elected in 1960, expected a shift in U.S policy which would benefit the Center Union and his father in the long run.

Toni and I were on home leave in 1960 and the Papandreous had returned to the U.S and Andreas was doing his job as head of the Economics Department at the University of California. They came and stayed with us in Carmel and so we had lots of long talks about what changes the Kennedy administration would bring to U.S. domestic and foreign policy. I think Andreas had unrealistic expectations about the degree to which the change in our government was going to bring a dramatic change, our attitude on the question like internal Greek politics. Therefore, he became somewhat disillusioned with the failure of the Kennedy administration to support his father. That was more the result of an ingenuous hope than any realistic expectation would have been.

Q: Again, I am not a Greek expert but it does strike me that Greek politics and in a good number of other countries almost tribal. You had your leader and people followed a particular leader rather than ideologically. George Papandreou was a tribal leader in a way.

STEARNS: There was a tribal aspect and certainly Greek politics were personality driven to a large extent. When you look at it in retrospect, one realizes that that long period in which there were no real democratic contests, from 1936 to 1949 and later, meant that there was no opportunity for real political alternatives to develop. That handicapped Greece very badly when it came time to resume or start normal democratic political life. What had passed for left right politics in Greece was a contest between Venizelos and monarchists. Yet these two groups represented basically the same middle class economic interest. So there was real need for parties, particularly on the left, that recognized and represented demographic changes that were occurring all the time bringing people from the country into the cities and changing the attitude of voters on what was important and what was unimportant. Differences between Venizelos republicans and monarchists became less and less important to the electorate as a whole.

We used to joke that Greece was an underdeveloped country economically but over developed politically, but the opposite is true; Greece was changing economically and socially even as we talked but the political situation was very stagnant. The main political parties did not recognize or understand the changes that were occurring under their feet.

Q: Did George Papandreou feel slighted by the embassy? How would you say his relations with us were?

STEARNS: He had had a perfectly reasonable relationship up until the time of the 1961 elections. It was after that, when the embassy said publicly that we thought the election had not been a fraud, that a break was occurring which as I explained led to Papandreou and his colleagues boycotting Ambassador Briggs' farewell party.

Q: Did you find you were playing the role of explaining why we were doing this or that or where we stood to the Papandreous' side?

STEARNS: To some extent, yes. As we developed a close and personal relationship, the Papandreous allowed us access to a remarkable extent, I now realize. For example, we

spent the election night of 1961 with the Papandreou family up the street, following the returns. George Papandreou was always anxious to ask me how we thought the election would turn out. I had to be very careful and even handed in my replies. So the break that occurred after '61 was temporary and centered on a misunderstanding between George Papandreou and Ambassador Briggs.

Q: How did you find Ambassador Briggs? Did he come in with his own attitude? Had he been in Czechoslovakia before?

STEARNS: He had been, yes.

Q: Having served in a communist country, this sometimes can turn a person.

STEARNS: He also had served in Seoul. He had a lot of experience with the communists. He had very little patience with the musical chairs of Greek politics especially when he realized the opposition chairman was so disorganized. On the plus side, Ambassador Briggs was a very honest and forthright guy. He kept tight control on both military and the agency. I think he was a very effective in that sense.

Q: You are pointing to one of the great criticisms of our presence there over the years. That is, both the agency and AID and the CIA both of whom had powerful influences there and often used them in a way not necessarily policy controlled.

STEARNS: Yes, I think that's right and I do think that's the problem that Ambassador Briggs took hold of -- to make sure he was the ambassador and there was nobody else speaking for American policy on Greece. A very important contribution.

Q: One of the things that always struck me is how the Greeks love to, the Greek press, anyway, overplay the role of the ambassador. You were later ambassador there. They would see things, so and so is named ambassador because of this or that and if anything bad happened, it was the Americans' fault. Did you find yourself running up against this?

STEARNS: Yes, to some extent. The American ambassador is always headline news and I can give more detail on that when we come to the period that I served as ambassador. Certainly during that initial assignment from '58 to '62 there was a tendency to attribute anything bad that happened to American influence.

Q: I think that we just replaced the British in that role.

STEARNS: The British had been the lightning rod before the Truman Doctrine, and after the Truman Doctrine the U.S. became the lightning rod.

Q: What about the American military presence there? Was there much at that time and did it cause problems?

STEARNS: There were always problems on status of forces agreements and individual incidents, but in that earlier period there was no general movement to reduce the American presence. The civil war was too fresh. The American role had been too conspicuous in defeating the communists to lead to any other conclusion.

Q: How did you find social life in Greece?

STEARNS: We had a wide circle of friends. I have always enjoyed contacts with journalists so I made a great many friends among Greek journalists. Of course, Toni's position as the daughter of the ambassador and the fact that she was a member of the Unix Dore, a very, very attractive slender blonde who was good with languages, picked up Greek very quickly and was a wonderful dancer didn't hurt our social position in the least. She was also courted unsuccessfully by the Crown Prince. She looked upon him as a teenager and didn't take it too seriously but I think he took it quite seriously.

Q: While you were there did the royal family get out a lot as they had during the civil war?

STEARNS: Less than during the civil war. They were certainly not reclusive socially in any way. Toni, in particular, spent an awful lot of time at Tatoi.

Q: That's the palace.

STEARNS: to the royal family, more than I did.

Q: What about the Greek army? Were we looking at the officer corps there?

STEARNS: Relations on a personal basis with senior military officials was pretty much the providence of the Defense Department and the defense attaché so we on the civilian side saw less of them. We didn't sense any looming problems.

Q: What did you think of the media, the press?

STEARNS: As I said, I made many friends among journalists, some of whom I have kept all my life. The problem with the Greek press has been that it was so heavily politicized. The nearest thing to a New York Times in my time and probably in yours was Kathimerini which was, nevertheless, a conservative paper. The other papers represented political parties or splinters of parties.

Q: Did you have any visits from Washington? Was Greece sort of on the important visitor list, the Washington list?

STEARNS: Yes, indeed. We had a visit from President Eisenhower. That would have been the end of 1959 or perhaps the end of 1960 after the American election.

Q: The elections would have been in November of '60.

STEARNS: That's right. Then one of our first visitors after the Kennedy election was Jackie. We had a wonderful time with her in the spring of 1961 including a dance party that she arranged with our help at the embassy. She and Tish Baldrige, the social director, were marvelously relaxed and so it was one of the most enjoyable official or semi-official visits that I can remember.

Teddy Kennedy came when he was about to run for the senate from Massachusetts and that would have been the early summer, probably June, of 1962. He hadn't yet turned 30. He was visiting Greece, Italy and Poland. I arranged for him to get together with Andreas Papandreou and all of that worked out very well.

Q: At that time how important were the Greek Americans?

STEARNS: They weren't of paramount influence on our policy but there was certainly awareness that there was a Greek constituency in the United States and that it was politically active.

Q: Did it fall anywhere on the political spectrum, any particular party or was it AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association) and those other organizations were they sort of?

STEARNS: For example, I was control officer for John Brademas when he first visited Greece.

Q: He was a congressman or senator.

STEARNS: He and a couple of his colleagues had a very serious and useful visit and they became friends later on when we were in Washington. We saw them socially. John remained close to Greek politics and of course, as a good liberal democrat, tended to be mainly interested in the liberal side of the Greek political spectrum.

Paul Sarbanes later became equally involved.

Q: A senator in Maryland.

STEARNS: In Maryland, right. And Paul Tsongas also.

Q: Senator from Massachusetts.

STEARNS: Right.

Q: Greek Americans paid close attention to what happened in Greece.

STEARNS: But Greek Americans were not a significant influence or factor in the period from '58 to '62.

Q: How about Tom Pappas?

STEARNS: Tom Pappas was only known in those days as an investor, and his more controversial role when the colonels came in was not yet a factor.

Q: I guess this is a good place to leave you. Is there is anything else you'd like to talk about Greece at this particular time?

STEARNS: Let's leave it at that and we can pick it up from the time we left Greece for the first time.

Q: Yes.

Today is the 28th of May, 2013 with Ambassador Monteagle Stearns.

We had left off, you have left Greece in 1962. Where did you go?

STEARNS: We had been transferred by the Department to the Congo, to what was then known as Leopoldville and today is Kinshasa. We had about a six month period in the U.S. including home leave and brushing up our French so we arrived in Leopoldville in mid or late April of 1963.

Q: Let's talk a bit about while you were in Washington. This was a time when the Congo was on the front page every day.

STEARNS: It was indeed and you may recall that the president actually gave a televised address in which he made clear that the Kennedy administration considered the Congo a test of our policy toward the Third World generally. He was intent on proving that the U.S. was not a neocolonialist power. So, on the subject of the Katanga succession from the Congo, we opposed that secession strongly. Britain, France, and Belgium were much more sympathetic to it because Katanga was controlled by Union Miniere and copper interests and had what was considered a very conservative government. It had many supporters in the United States, including the father of the present Senator Dodd who was a vocal supporter of the prime minister of Katanga, Moise Tshombe.

Q: He was senator from Connecticut.

STEARNS: From Connecticut also.

Q: What were you getting sort of from your colleagues before you went out about the situation because you know, Lumumba and Tshombe and other names I am beginning to forget now but at one point these were rippling off all our tongues.

STEARNS: That's absolutely true. There was a very, very strong Central African office and Congo desk with people like Charlie Whitehouse and Frank Carlucci so that we had

plenty of expertise. We were all excited with the idea of forging the new Kennedy administration policy of anti-colonialism. Our intent was to oppose Katanga secession and to nation build in the Congo as a whole.

Q: You were brushing up on your French?

STEARNS: I had French but it needed polishing. I had passed the French examination to come into the Foreign Service, and I had a special course in Washington at FSI which got me up to, I think actually I achieved a 4 level.

Q: Did you have any feelings about the Congo one way or another when you went there?

STEARNS: I was excited at the prospect of going and it turned out to be one of the most interesting posts in our series of good posts. We had many illusions still. We hadn't yet learned the hard way that nation building in other nations is something that is virtually impossible to achieve, so that sense of optimism infected what we did.

Also the Congo is rich not only in mineral resources but culturally. Much of the most interesting and impressive African art comes from the Congo. From a career standpoint, it's too large and important to ignore. So you don't suffer the worst fate that could happen to a Foreign Service officer which is to be stranded somewhere and that Washington forgets about.

Q: What was your job going to be?

STEARNS: I was head of the political section.

Q: Was it Leopoldville when you got there?

STEARNS: It was Leopoldville, right.

Q: How long did you serve there?

STEARNS: I served exactly almost two very eventful years.

I crashed in the air attaché plane on the equator near Coquihatville. I had invited the Austrian consul general to accompany me because he was looking for a missing Austrian rubber planter and I was looking for a missing American rubber planter. We almost got missing ourselves.

Q: Who was the ambassador and what was the sort of the political section like at that time?

STEARNS: Ed Gullion was the ambassador when we came and he left about a year later and was replaced by Mac Godley.

Q: What was the situation in the Congo when you got there?

STEARNS: First of all, we faced the Katanga secession, as I mentioned. But then the left wing secession started in Stanleyville up in the north. Our consul, Mike Hoyt, and his staff were taken hostage so we were faced with a couple of different secessions; one right wing in Katanga and one calling itself revolutionary in Stanleyville.

Q: The Simbas, I think they were called.

STEARNS: The Simbas, right.

Q: We have oral histories of Mike Hoyt and also of among others Terry McNamara who was down in . . .

STEARNS: Both of them I know, Mike particularly well. In fact, I did the introduction to his interesting book on his experience as a hostage.

Q: When you arrived, was he a hostage at that point?

STEARNS: No, that happened a year later.

Q: At that time you were reporting on political developments but it was really a matter of not political parties. Wasn't it more political power?

STEARNS: It was politically very fragmented and very tribal and I spent a good deal of time traveling around and visiting areas. We were always checking out reports, for example, that the Katanga Gendarmes had escaped from Katanga and were on their way either to Leopoldville or Angola. We flew out and located them near the Angola border. We were always checking out reports of that kind as well as checking on the welfare of Americans.

Q: Congo, later Zaire had the reputation at one point and for a long time as being sort of the playground of the CIA. How stood it when you arrived there?

STEARNS: Operating in as turbulent and incoherent atmosphere as the Congo was in those days, the CIA had a lot to do with checking on developments in the interior that our small political section was unable to cover so we worked fairly closely with them. I did some travel with CIA officers. We had the same interests.

Q: Were you all seeing eye-to-eye or were there debates?

STEARNS: There were no differences between the agencies that I was aware of at that time. We all opposed Katanga secession and we all opposed Stanleyville secession.

Q: Let's talk about Katanga first. What could we do? Could we do anything?

STEARNS: We worked a lot behind the scenes. This was not something the political section of the embassy in Leopoldville was directly involved in. Washington had decided at some point that the only way to end Katanga secession was to unite Katanga with the rest of the Congo by negotiating with Tshombe, the prime minister of Katanga, to come to Leopoldville. That is eventually what happened so that Moise Tshombe became the prime minister of the entire Congo and that ended the prospect of a Katanga secession.

Q: Were you involved with relations with say the Belgian embassy and how powerful were they at that time?

STEARNS: I think they were the best informed without any question. They had a great political officer who was my opposite, Alfred Kayen, who later became Belgian ambassador to France. He was wonderfully well informed on the Congo, and it was a first class embassy so that we worked very closely with the Belgians. I have a personal friendship with Alfred which remains through the balance of his life.

Q: Were we involved in arming groups or trying to disarm groups or what?

STEARNS: I am assuming that the hiring by the Congolese government of mercenaries led by Mike Hoare from South Africa was done with the cooperation of the U.S., but this was not something we were directly involved in. It would have been done through the CIA. Since we were supporting the central government against the two secessions, there was no conflict of interest there. In fact I got to know Mike Hoare.

Q: Yes, he was a name to conjure with at the time of running one of the true sorts of professional forces.

STEARNS: He was a good soldier, and he came by the embassy in London when I was stationed there and left a copy of his book inscribed 'for old times' sake'.

Q: Were things happening in Elizabethville? I keep getting my places mixed up.

STEARNS: It's easy to do because the names have been changed. Elizabethville, now Lubumbashi, was then the capital of Katanga.

Q: What was the name when you were there?

STEARNS: Stanleyville.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived?

STEARNS: The secession occurred later when Mike was taken prisoner, but before that happened, the Department, when Tshombe came to Leopoldville from Elizabethville, they wanted to Africanize him. I remember in particular that on fairly short notice word was received in Leopoldville that a high level African delegation was paying a visit within a few days to Leopoldville.

Tshombe was meanwhile touring the southern part of the Congo. He was not going to be present to receive the delegation, and the Department was very worried about that. I was sent down to get word to Tshombe because we couldn't reach him by phone or wire or other than by having a meeting with him. I drove all night to Matadi where he was staying, slept in the car, and early in the morning knocked on the door of the Merchant Marine headquarters where he was spending the night and was admitted by showing my diplomatic passport.

Tshombe opened the door of his apartment in his dressing gown and asked me if I had had breakfast and I said "No, Mr. Prime Minister."

He said, "Well I am just about to start and there is enough for two" so I had breakfast with Tshombe. We went over his mail. I explained my mission and he agreed readily to come back to Leopoldville to receive the delegation. That was typical of the way things happened in the Congo.

Q: I am thinking of the book, was it The Making of a Quagmire?

STEARNS: That was Vietnam.

Q: Didn't Halberstam start out in the Congo?

STEARNS: He was in the Congo but not when I was there. He had gone there in the first year. I made many friends; Tony Lucas for example of the New York Times became a close friend. John Randall is still a friend living in Paris. He was then with Time magazine. There was a very large press corps and we tended to work fairly closely with them.

Q: What was your impression of the press corps because sometimes they fly in and come back after a week at the bar with all sorts of impressions, often not very well founded. How about at the time when you were there?

STEARNS: I think they stayed in Leopoldville longer than fly by night operations and they were a high caliber group. Tony Lucas after all later won a Pulitzer Prize for his book called Common Ground and John Randall was a first rank of what the French call journalist ____, who really knew the stuff. So the quality of the best of the journalists was very high indeed and one recognized the worst of them and stayed apart from them very quickly.

Q: Did you find as a political officer, what about the various groups? I mean the Europeans and the Americans. In the first place you had a very significant missionary group there. Were they a good source of information?

STEARNS: We didn't have direct contact with the missionaries up until the time that Mike Hoyt was taken hostage in Stanleyville; Mike and a number of missionaries with

him. That was the period, this would be the fall of 1964, when Washington arranged for a rescue mission with Belgian paratroopers.

Q: Dragon Rouge, wasn't it?

STEARNS: Dragon Rouge, exactly. The U.S. supplied the C-130s to drop the Belgian paratroopers on Stanleyville. Mike Hoare and his mercenaries were supposed to converge on Stanleyville at the same time as the para drops. It was hoped that the rebels holding the hostages would flee in panic. As of November, 1964, I was dispatched out to the Kamina base out in eastern Congo to act as interpreter between the head of the Belgian para brigade and the American air force general, Mike Nichols, who was the senior American on the ground or in the air. We had to postpone the para drop because of bad weather. When finally the green light was given to proceed, the general asked me if I had a way to get back to Leopoldville and I said, "Well, I hadn't thought about that".

He said, "Well, you better come along with me" so I rode along on the paradrop. We were supposed to rendezvous with the so-called Congolese air force just north of Stanleyville before dark or before sunlight, before dawn. When we got to approach the rendezvous point, it was recognized that the Congolese air force pilots were all Cuban exiles who spoke only Spanish. We had no pilots who spoke any Spanish so the real fear was that we were going to have a midair collision because we couldn't locate each other. We finally found someone who could speak enough Spanish to avoid that catastrophe. We made the rendezvous and the drop was completed although not without the loss of several people; fortunately, not Mike Hoyt and his staff, but unfortunately the missionaries suffered badly.

Q: You had mentioned prior to this taking over Stanleyville by the Simbas, we hadn't had much contact with the missionaries. Why was that?

STEARNS: I think other sections of the embassy had a lot of contact. Most of the missionaries were within the circle of the Stanleyville consulate so that it wouldn't have been the first responsibility of the embassy in any event.

Q: I refer those who look at this transcript later to that of Terry McNamara. He talks about it and his boss's name escapes me right now. He was the consul there.

STEARNS: The name of Stanleyville today is Kisangani. The best known of the missionaries who died in the Stanleyville incident was Reverend Carlson who had been featured in a spread in Life magazine shortly before all this happened, so he was a very well known figure.

Q: Were we aware of the danger in Stanleyville before the Simbas took over?

STEARNS: Oh, yes indeed. We knew that there was a threat to Stanleyville. Given the Kennedy administration's desire to have support of the central government of the Congo as our top priority, we had not evacuated Stanleyville.

Q: I am trying to get the view from the embassy. How did we, you and others feel about the stand firm policy there?

STEARNS: I think we felt at the time that the Simbas could be defeated and we hoped that the Congo government, with a retraining of Congolese force supported by mercenaries, would be able to keep Stanleyville safe. After the disaster happened, Mac Godley had organized what was supposed to be a local effort to free Mike and the hostages. That was called Operation Black Bow, but that was called off by Washington.

I talked to Mike almost every day on the short, single side man radio. I knew personally the leader of the Simbas, Cristo Domina, who had had an appointment to come see me the day before he split and fled to Brazzaville. He was regarded as not as a dangerous man but as irresponsible.

Q: What was our initial evaluation before the takeover of Stanleyville by the Simbas?

STEARNS: We didn't know. We knew they were loyalists to the old Lumumba regime. Gbenye was attempting to become the new Lumumba, but they were hastily organized and poorly led on the whole and determined persistence could have stopped them.

Q: Later or even maybe at the time, the Congolese army had a reputation of being, as today of being almost a lawless bunch, certainly not one of any dependability. Did it have that at that time?

STEARNS: We were beginning the retraining and the government was a much more responsible government than its predecessor but the process was just beginning and the Congolese army hadn't really been tested. This had been a problem right from the day independence was declared in 1960. That was why Mobutu had emerged because Mobutu in the second half of 1960, was the one who didn't run away. Those who later justly criticized Mobutu as a corrupt and ineffective chief of state were correct. The Mobutu that was needed in the fall of 1960 was not the Mobutu who became chief of state. You can't always pick and change your leaders, a great dilemma of foreign policy.

Q: Was there you might say dissent or unrest within among the officers about our leaving Mike Hoyt in Stanleyville?

STEARNS: Not that I was aware of. I think it emerged later because Mike himself felt he should have been evacuated. I think the balance of opinion was we should try to hold Stanleyville for the central government. The great problem was lack of resources and the inability of the government to get forces into Stanleyville in time to stave off the Simbas.

Q: It was sort of our policy for quite a while to try to hang on. I have talked to people who served in china when we the communists were taking over the place and we kept people in Mukden and Shanghai when the communists came in, sort of hoping for the best.

STEARNS: Well, of course the situation was very different in the Congo. The main point was the Kennedy administration had declared that we supported the central government and that was the policy that we were carrying out. We supported it against the Katanga secession and we were going to support it against the Stanleyville secession.

Q: Did you get involved at all other than flying at the last minute on the Dragon Rouge putting together this para drop or not? In the organizing of the para drop?

STEARNS: As I say, I went along on the drop and served as the interpreter between the Belgians and the Americans, but I wasn't involved in planning the operation; that was all done Stateside.

Q: I have interviewed Douglas MacArthur and he talks about when he was ambassador to Belgium getting involved in this. It basically was an operation, wasn't perfect but it. . .

STEARNS: We were informed, of course, of the plan when it was completed and that was when I was assigned the job of acting as interpreter.

Q: What happened after we got the people we got out? Did that change how we viewed the situation there?

STEARNS: We deeply regretted there had been a loss of life, Reverend Carlson and some of his others. In the immediate aftermath of the operation the relief was that Mike and his staff had emerged unscathed and that the Stanleyville rebellion had been defeated with Gbenye leaving the Congo. Congo as a whole remained a very fragmented, vulcanized and turbulent country.

Q: Before I move on, how was the Reverend Carlson killed? What happened to him?

STEARNS: The mercenary contingent which was supposed to arrive at the same time as the para drop was late getting there. So the conjunction of air and ground forces that was envisioned in Dragon Rouge didn't materialize. The Simbas in Stanleyville took the hostages and formed them in a group to march out to the airfield because they had been informed that the para drop had occurred and the drop occurred at the Stanleyville airport. The Simbas' plan was to use the hostages as a human shield, but halfway to the airport one of the Simbas fired into the hostage crowd, killing one. Then everybody scattered and there was more gun fighting and Reverend Carlson was killed in that exchange.

Q: Did we feel that the Simbas, did they represent any national threat?

STEARNS: They represented a tribal group that had been affiliated, but we are talking about a country which was divided in a hundred different ways as it still is. What we learned the hard way was that nation building is easy to talk about with PowerPoint but very hard to do on the ground.

Q: What were we doing about the tribal bases? There you were on the ground. Were there people you could talk to who represented tribal powers who could be dealt with?

STEARNS: Well, we had to travel around to meet them. We saw and I saw personally as many of the factions as were represented in Leopoldville. That was how I came to meet Gbenye, for example, got to know him. We are not talking about a country in which there were authorized representatives of coherent political parties. It was very much a tribally, ethnically divided country to the extent that it was a country at all.

Q: At our embassy, did we have anybody who was really knowledgeable about the tribal setup?

STEARNS: Not really and I think that was a big lack. We were operating in the dark whereas the Belgian embassy, with Alfred Kayen in particular, knew much more about the tribal makeup of the Congo than we did. I learned a great deal myself from Alfred and other members of the Belgian embassy. We worked fairly closely also with the British who, however, were also almost as blindfolded as we were, and to some extent with the French.

Q: What about Tshombe? How did we feel about Tshombe?

STEARNS: We concluded the only way to end the Katanga secession was to bring Tshombe to Leopoldville. We had concluded he was the lesser of many evils and would probably be a fairly effective prime minister, as well as guaranteeing the end of the Katanga's secession. That was, I think, the correct reading of what happened.

As far as the negotiations that brought Tshombe back, I think they took place in Spain. Averell Harriman, who was then the roving ambassador, was a central figure. Harriman came to the Congo, came to Leopoldville, and I acted as his interpreter. That led to his hiring me as his chief of staff when we were transferred from Congo to Washington in the early summer of 1965.

Q: What was life like in Leopoldville at the time? Were you pretty well, could one go to the market, move around or was it dangerous or what?

STEARNS: Big shortages. When we first arrived it seemed the only thing in the grocery stores was white shoe polish for some reason. There was a black market for meat. The crossing to Brazzaville was possible for about six months after our arrival, and we could get good supplies, including excellent brie cheese, in Brazzaville. There was a coup in Brazzaville. Abbé Youlou, who had been the president of Brazzaville, was deposed by a rebel group and therefore our source of supply from Paris via Brazzaville ended. So it was a matter of operating on the fringes. Toni, my wife, would have to go out early in the morning and negotiate for meat and bread and things of that kind.

Q: Was there concern about going on the streets, about roving bands of armed people who were dangerous?

STEARNS: It was usually more dangerous at night. In the day it was fairly safe and I am not aware of any incidents that occurred then. Our daughter, who is a Foreign Service officer and her husband, also a Foreign Service officer, are serving in Kinshasa now, and life seems to be much more hazardous from a standpoint of burglary and petty theft than it was in our time.

Q: The military there has always been sort of a not a very disciplined crew at any time and more a bunch of people armed and you worry about them.

STEARNS: That's for sure and there were lots of hazards. When we first arrived in Leopoldville, a wonderful way to spend a Sunday would be to go with friends, usually from the British embassy. We got filet mignon in Brazzaville and barbecued them on one of the sandbars of the Congo and would go waterskiing, so we did a lot of that. That more or less ended one day when I had the duty. I was unable to join my wife and a party of water-skiers. When I got home after dark, I found that Toni had not returned. I called the British embassy and their chargé had not returned. So I concluded that something had gone amiss. I drove down, this was after dark, hired a boat and boatman and went out looking for them on the Congo River. I found them huddled around a fire because the engine on their outboard had broken down. So that kind of thing was not uncommon.

Q: One of our great concerns and interests in the Congo was, of course, the minerals but also the Soviets were playing a big game in that time. How did you see the Soviet influence and menace there?

STEARNS: I don't think they had much real influence. They were trying to gain it, but they were aware that the Congolese who considered themselves leftist were a far less credible instrument than the Soviets thought was necessary to accomplish anything. In 1964 or '63 the Soviets were expelled and the embassy closed. That was definitely '63, shortly before President Kennedy was assassinated.

Q: You were in the Congo when Kennedy was assassinated, weren't you?

STEARNS: By an odd quirk, I was chargé d'affaires.

Q: How did that affect you all at the embassy?

STEARNS: We were deeply affected and so were many Congolese. We had long lines to sign the condolence book. There was a memorial service shortly after. It created a profound shock in the Congo as it did elsewhere and, of course, particularly in the embassy.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia and it had the same effect there.

STEARNS: It seemed to have been virtually worldwide.

Q: Did our policy change, vis-a-vis the Congo around that time for one reason or another?

STEARNS: No, it remained a consistent policy of support for the central government. Now it was a central government led by Tshombe. Both the Stanleyville secession and the Elizabethville secession had ended. To that extent, on a very short term basis, the problem had been postponed if not resolved.

Q: Later Tshombe, was he still the prime minister when you left?

STEARNS: He was still the prime minister when I left. It was later that his aircraft was hijacked when he was traveling in Europe and he subsequently died in Algiers in 1969.

Q: Was much happening economically in the Congo? Were the minerals still coming out and all that?

STEARNS: They certainly were from the eastern Congo; not only in the form of copper but also industrial diamonds of which the Congo supplied something like two thirds or three fourths of the world's supply. The main American interests at that time were palm oil and rubber.

Q: What was there about palm oil?

STEARNS: Palm oil was used extensively in American soaps so it was an important export.

Q: Were we trying to establish communication lines and all there because in the Congo everything had to be done by air, didn't it?

STEARNS: That's right. We flew everywhere. You could make shorter trips by river, but it was a country that was very difficult to navigate in. I spent a certain amount of time in the eastern Congo and would always fly out to Goma.

Q: What was happening in the eastern Congo because this later became of course the site of...

STEARNS: The Congo, even then, was beset by its own rebel forces and a degree of anarchy which has since crystallized with the intervention of the Uganda and Rwanda. In any event, we can conclude that our effort to nation build was a failure and that the Kennedy administration's hope that we would show the world that we were not neocolonialists faded away as well.

Q: Your first ambassador there was who now?

STEARNS: Ed Gullion.

Q: What was your impression of him and his view?

STEARNS: He became a great friend when he came up here (Boston area) as head of the Fletcher School (at Tufts University). He was a remarkably astute diplomat who operated much by instinct. He had first come to know President Kennedy when Kennedy, as a young congressman, had come out to Saigon where Ed Gullion was charge d'affaires. They had gotten along very well so that actually one of President Kennedy's first appointments after he took office was with Ed Gullion. It was Kennedy himself who thought that Gullion would be the right man to send to the Congo with the arrival of Lumumba and the breakdown of order.

Q: It was after your time but were there reverberations or opinions about Lumumba at the embassy at the time?

STEARNS: It was a period when the left leaning group, tribal groups called themselves Lumumbists and sought to create martyrdom for Lumumba, have him accepted as a model and a martyr. But these were not real political commitments. They were simply slogans so there was no avowed Lumumbist faction when I arrived in the Congo until Gbenye tried to set himself in Stanleyville as the new Lumumba.

Q: Lumumba, of course, became quite a hero of the left. The university in Moscow is called Lumumba.

STEARNS: More so as time went by, including the Soviet Union. The experiment to create a Lumumba University failed spectacularly when most of the Africans who went to Lumumba University in the Soviet Union decided that they would prefer to be capitalists.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia at the time when sort of an offshoot of Lumumba University in Bulgaria. Almost all the African students left there en masse and ended up in Belgrade asking for both asylum and give me scholarship to some American university. We were very busy.

STEARNS: We used to say that instead of spending money on Fulbright grants to the U.S., we ought to subsidize grants to Lumumba University.

Q: When you left there in, was it '64?

STEARNS: '65.

Q: In '65, what was your impression of whither the Congo?

STEARNS: In the narrow terms of my own career, it probably had more a direct effect than any other post. We found we also made friends because it is always hardship posts

where you make the best American friends. We stayed in touch with an enormous number of people we first knew in the Congo. It was both a remarkably satisfying experience and an experience that taught me a great deal about the limitations and importance of keeping one's foreign policy objectives to things that can be achieved, not things that sound noble as political slogans at home.

Q: A lesson which obviously we have not learned yet.

STEARNS: No, and perhaps never will.

Q: Your wife is a Foreign Service brat. What did she come away with do you think?

STEARNS: I think she would agree with me that it was a fantastic post but she has often told me the first few weeks she suffered cultural shock. Her father, Jimmy Riddleberger, had of course been a Europeanist. She had gone to school in Berlin and Paris and so the Congo was a new world for her. She came to enjoy it and did wonderfully well.

Q: It is one of the things that's sort of forgotten about. The Foreign Service went through a crash course in Africa around 1960 when all these African posts opened up and we, as an organization, sort of discovered Africa for the first time.

STEARNS: Yes. It is sometimes hard to remember today that the Kennedy administration regarded Africa and the Congo as a test of our ability to present ourselves as a liberating force for the Third World, not a neocolonialist one.

Q: Did you run into many academics at the time? Was this an academic abstraction that sort of inspired this or was this more from just American do-gooders wanting it, would you say?

STEARNS: I am thinking particularly of Crawford Young from the University of Wisconsin who became a very knowledgeable Congolese expert and he came out on a mission with State Department people. We learned a great deal about the history of the Congo from him. He wrote later a valuable book on the Congo. Conditions were not sufficiently tranquil to permit wide-ranging scholarly research in the Congo in our time.

Q: It really was unknown territory.

STEARNS: Pretty much so. When it was a Belgian colony, it had been pretty much operated behind closed doors as a fiefdom of King Leopold and later as a formal colony of Belgium.

Q: There's a very good book called King Leopold's Ghosts or something.

STEARNS: And there have been many others too.

Q: Talking about a British consular officer got in there in the early part of the century and was the first one to sort of blow the whistle on . . .

STEARNS: When we arrived in the Congo in '63, there were only six or seven college graduates that had been permitted by the Belgians to attend the Evenium University or the socialist university in Belgium and they were all priests. There was no preparation and that contributed significantly to the chaos that erupted in the Congo after independence was declared in the summer of 1960.

Q: What would you say was the role of the church and I am talking about both Catholic and Protestant in the Congo? Was it a good positive influence or was there much influence?

STEARNS: I don't think there was significant influence. It certainly didn't play a role in the larger developments which occurred.

Interestingly enough, the private physician of Mobutu was Dr. Close, the father of Glenn Close, the actress. I think her father was either a Jehovah's Witness or Seventh Day Adventist, I can't remember which, but he was probably the man closest to Mobutu. If he had political influence, I am not sure what it was. The rest of the country was divided among Protestant and Catholic missionaries. The Belgians were of course, Catholic missionaries. Most of the Americans, Protestant.

Q: Did you find that they were at all useful as a political officer getting involved with them?

STEARNS: No, not really. They were not. For example, Reverend Carlson who died at Stanleyville knew the local situation I am sure but we didn't rely on him or other missionaries for political advice. They tended to regard themselves as aloof from that and tried to stay aloof to American policy to the extent that it was possible.

Q: In interviewing Terry McNamara he was saying how the missionaries tried to stay away from the consulate there. Oh, no. They didn't need any help until all of a sudden all hell broke loose and then they started screaming for help.

STEARNS: Yes, that's true. That was our experience as well.

Q: Where did you go in '65?

STEARNS: In '65 I went to work for Averell Harriman in Washington so maybe when we resume we can talk about that.

Q: We will stop here.

You left the Congo and are going to be with Averell Harriman. How did that come about?

STEARNS: It came about because Harriman was involved in the negotiations that brought Tshombe from Katanga to Leopoldville. He came out and paid a visit to the Congo and I served as his interpreter. That's when I first met him and that's what led, after my Congo assignment was finished, to a job as his chief of staff.

Q: How was your initial meeting with him? He had a reputation of being somewhat arbitrary and

STEARNS: Well, he was known as the crocodile, biting heads off but I found him, while demanding, a wonderful boss and he became a friend. We continued to see him regularly until his death in 1986.

The great benefit of working for Harriman was that if you didn't have too thin skin, you knew you would always have a place at the table. You were treated as a colleague and an equal not as an errand boy.

Q: That's a wonderful thing. Particularly at that time you were a junior officer and could easily been relegated to the kindertisch.

STEARNS: I think that's right. I think I was promoted to an O3 probably about the time I went to work for him. I was definitely a middle grade officer, not senior.

Q: Where did you operate and what were the issues you were dealing with?

STEARNS: He was then the roving ambassador and he had an office on the seventh floor and my office adjoined his. He had an excellent staff. His girl Friday was Hilde Fishman, a wonderfully bright, meticulous, and funny co-worker. Millie Leatherman was his secretary and Millie went on and became Larry Eagleburger's secretary. He had an eye for talent.

The immediate reason he hired me was that he was then working on African affairs. His focus began to change to Vietnam probably within a matter of months of my going to work for him so I had to begin to change my focus, of course.

Q: Why don't we deal with Africa first and then we will move on.

What were the issues initially he was involved with in Africa?

STEARNS: It was mainly the Congo still when I went to work for him.

Q: What were you trying to do?

STEARNS: Issues to be cleared up; whether Tshombe could be expected to remain and prove an effective prime minister of the Congo and a lot of economic and social issues so

there was a lot to be done just on the Congo. He kept an eye out on other issues that were developing in Africa, but it was the Congo that was the principle focus.

Q: Did the Congo basically disappear from your efforts?

STEARNS: Not while I was working for him because of course that was what we were then focused on. As his focus changed, so did mine.

Q: What were you doing?

STEARNS: I was his chief of staff.

Q: What does that mean?

STEARNS: It means that you are his senior assistant on all issues from arranging his appointments to preparing memos and background for him, all kinds of things. All things you would expect an aide to do. As I say, the rewarding thing was that you found you always had a seat at the table. I remember I first learned that Harriman cast a wide net when Lord Chalfont was coming to Washington shortly after I went to work for Harriman. Harriman wanted to arrange a lunch for Lord Chalfont on N Street, his residence.

Q: Lord Chalfont at that time, what was his position?

STEARNS: He was the British arms control negotiator.

Harriman gave me a list of people that he wanted to have at the luncheon and they included Charles Thayer whom Harriman had known in Moscow. I went to work and was happy to report eventually to Harriman everybody was coming to the lunch except Charlie Thayer. Charlie Thayer was traveling in Germany. There was a long pause and Harriman said, "Well?" That shouldn't be an impediment in other words so in the end Charlie Thayer came back from Germany and attended the luncheon.

Q: Was Charlie Thayer at that time in the, having his problems with Senator McCarthy?

STEARNS: Yes, I think that is right.

Q: He ended up as consul general in Munich.

STEARNS: That I can't remember.

Q: I may be wrong but I believe he had that job.

STEARNS: Then he resigned from the Foreign Service not long after. His problems grew out of the fact that while he was stationed in Moscow as a young officer he had had an

affair with a Russian woman. They had an illegitimate child, I recall. Someone informed McCarthy of this. McCarthy tried to make a major case of it.

Q: Harriman had tremendous political clout in that he could reach almost anyone and get them.

STEARNS: That's certainly true.

Q: But how did he, seeing him at the conference table or the dinner table, how would you say he operated?

STEARNS: He was a man who got quickly to the point. He had very little small talk. He had a great sense of decision making and about where the power lay so he always tried to make sure that he had clear lines of communication to the White House. His problem when we got into the Vietnam period was that Lyndon Johnson felt uncomfortable with Harriman, and Harriman had to operate with Johnson mainly through the Secretary of Defense. That was a handicap but it didn't stop Harriman from communicating very effectively. He was a man who got to the point and was very practical in terms of wanting to produce tangible actions out of policies.

McNamara was his chief link to the White House.

Q: We are talking about Lyndon Johnson was president at the time.

STEARNS: Right.

Q: Why do you think Johnson kept him on?

STEARNS: Well, because he was much too powerful to simply remove and he was a loyal Democrat. It was simply that Johnson felt uncomfortable in direct talks with him because of the vast difference in their backgrounds.

Q: Did you find yourself caught up in, I might say, the political maneuvering within the State Department of all the people who were wanting to get to Harriman mainly for personal reasons?

STEARNS: Harriman was, in some circles, Democratic circles, a controversial figure. He didn't, for example, get along at all with Dean Rusk. He didn't get along with George Ball, and on a personal ground didn't get along particularly well with the President. But he managed to operate in any event through people he did have good relations with and that included the whole Kennedy clan and McNamara and with a number of people who were influential at the time.

Q: So you became more focused on Vietnam?

STEARNS: I joined him in '65 and therefore our focus was more on Vietnam itself and what actions were likely to improve our performance in Vietnam and what were not.

I visited Laos with Harriman. He made a trip in '66.

Q: What was the situation in Vietnam?

STEARNS: We went to six or seven different Asian countries. It was after Johnson's Honolulu meeting with Nguyen Cao Ky from Vietnam. He then instructed Harriman to go with the Vice President to try to get more Asian support for Vietnam. So we had a ten day or two week trip that included something like eight countries, an exhausting order to try to achieve that.

Q: What was your impression of how the Hawaiian meeting with Ky went?

STEARNS: I think in the end it turned out to be pretty much a public relations thing designed to impress the American public and the world that Johnson was second to none for the desire for peace in his willingness to negotiate.

I also at Harriman's request monitored all his telephone calls because he was becoming quite hard of hearing. Therefore I heard virtually all his conversations in the office to McNamara and the White House. I do remember when the president called him and told him he wanted him to go with Vice President Humphrey on this tour of Asia. He said, "I want you, Averell, to tell your friend, Bill Fulbright, that nobody wants peace more than the president."

In Johnson's mind it was a way to demonstrate his desire for a non military solution, although he continued to add troops to the American force in Vietnam. I don't think Johnson ever took diplomacy too seriously.

Q: What was your feeling as you got more and more immersed in Vietnam in the situation? How did you think it was going to come out?

STEARNS: I became increasingly pessimistic and I didn't see a possibility of a military victory in the field. I thought at best we might get a stalemate out of this. It seemed to me we were investing far more than the value of Vietnam warranted in world terms so I tended to be pessimistic and I felt that the bombing campaign in Vietnam was bound to be counterproductive. My own views of the issues were stated by Robert Shaplen's book called The Lost Revolution which I read while working for Harriman and summarized in a long memorandum to Harriman.

Q: Did you have any feel for what Harriman's real attitude was towards the situation there?

STEARNS: At first he believed we could make progress on the military side. He consulted people like Av Lincoln, the then well-known army colonel who was teaching at

West Point and had definite views on counter insurgency. Harriman was very close to Bobby Kennedy who believed in counter insurgency. So in the initial phase of his attention being diverted to Vietnam, Harriman was working on improving the military performance. I think principally because McNamara as early as December of '65 began to become disillusioned. I remember a telephone conversation that Harriman had with McNamara, probably in December of '65 in which McNamara said, "Av, what kind of a war is it where you can't tell if you are winning or losing until you count the bodies?"

So by then McNamara was becoming disillusioned with the military solution and that led, of course, eventually to a breach with the President and eventually McNamara was replaced as secretary of defense.

Q: How did you feel about the Vietnamese leadership, the Republic of Vietnam, our Vietnamese?

STEARNS: I think we were aware, and this is something Robert Shaplen made clear in The Lost Revolution, but to most Vietnamese, Nguyen Ky represented a continuation of the Bau Dais, neo colonialist regime whereas the great advantage the North Vietnamese and Ho Chi Minh had was as the leader of the national movement in Vietnam.

What we really didn't understand was how deep the historic cleavage between Vietnam and China was. On the trip with Humphrey to Asia, Humphrey would continually say, "You can't permit Communist China to take over the region." Jim Thompson, the aide on the trip would say, "Mr. Vice President, you know that there is no love lost between Vietnam and the Chinese."

Q: They were at war shortly after our war.

STEARNS: The vice president was a neophyte in foreign policy, he saw a unified Communist front.

Q: Did you feel you might say the powers that be but also maybe the people under them who were dealing with our policy there were, there is what has been called straight line thinking. In other words, if you are Communists, you are all together and a win for the Communists is a loss for us.

STEARNS: There was a great deal of straight line thinking and of course, it began with the president. The President said to Harriman, "I am going to give General Westmoreland whatever he needs." I think the president's view of what one American soldier could achieve were better results than ten Vietnamese.

Harriman was more sophisticated than that. Initially he began looking for ways to improve military performance and only gradually became convinced that that wasn't going to happen.

Incidentally, Harriman, among other things, was the chief contact with Henry Kissinger. He being sent by the Johnson administration as a private citizen, a Harvard professor out to Vietnam, would prepare memos, come back and have long sessions with Harriman in which I participated. It was clear that Kissinger himself was very skeptical about military solutions in Vietnam.

Q: Harriman was close to Bobby Kennedy, was that correct?

STEARNS: With Bobby Kennedy.

Q: How did you feel about Bobby Kennedy?

STEARNS: I was a little bit dubious about Kennedy's credentials as the eventual leader of the antiwar movement because he had been such a hard liner earlier and chief part and parcel of counterinsurgency. I had heard through the campaign on the William and Mary campus in 1960 in which he took a very hard line. He had worked also for Senator McCarthy so I was a little skeptical of his bona fides as a newly born liberal but he was very close to Harriman. Harriman thought very highly of him.

Q: I never could warm to Bobbie Kennedy because I kept seeing him as, he and Roy Cohn as McCarthy's hatchet men. I never got beyond that particular thing but that was just me. I think a lot of other people had the same view.

STEARNS: I am very much of that opinion.

Q: How did Dean Rusk operate?

STEARNS: He didn't get along very well either with George Ball. Part of that was simply a contest to see who could get his ideas to the president more effectively rather than a strong ideological difference. I don't recall Harriman and Dean Rusk ever conversing on issues. George Ball was someone Harriman didn't like either.

Q: What was your impression of foreign policy apparatus?

STEARNS: It was so Vietnam-centric, and so led by the strong personality and rather black and white views of the president, that one's impression was there was very little room to evade issues that the president had already decided.

Q: Did you find within the Harriman staff and in the State Department, did you find the people who knew Vietnam better than most? We had people taking the language and work in the CORDS.

STEARNS: Very, very few.

Q: Did they seem to have much in the way of influence?

STEARNS: No, they weren't being consulted because the foreign policy apparatus of the State Department and Defense Department were being led by the views of the president. The president had spoken on the issue and believed in the domino theory and therefore there was very little room for debate except on smaller issues.

Q: Did you get involved in the relationship, one way or the other, between Senator Fulbright and his supporters and the

STEARNS: My earlier quote to you about the president saying to Harriman, "You tell your friend, Bill Fulbright." It was obvious that the president thought of the Harriman as someone who could influence Fulbright and people who thought like Fulbright.

Q: It doesn't appear that many people, I mean, Fulbright didn't really have a much either love lost or respect for the State Department by this time. Did you feel that?

STEARNS: No, I didn't have a sense of that. What I knew was that he did have confidence in Harriman and Harriman had good relations with him, although Harriman's views were at that stage still quite hawkish.

Q: Did he have good contacts abroad because he had served particularly during the war had been an influential figure. Was he able to sort of call on war contacts and others in foreign governments?

STEARNS: Harriman was always very careful not to appear to bypass or overshadow the president in any way and he had very little personal vanity of that kind. For example, with his background in World War II and his close personal relations with Churchill and FDR, he nevertheless never hesitated when Jack Kennedy offered him the job of assistant secretary of state for East Asian Affairs he accepted it immediately.

Q: He was also surprised because that was not for a man of his stature, was not a prestigious job but probably more influential than many of the fancier sounding titles.

STEARNS: That's true. You probably also remember that one of the first appointments announced by the Kennedy administration was Soapy Williams as secretary for African Affairs.

Q: Yes, and would often I am told would often mention to people I was the first appointment to the State Department.

STEARNS: Right, and Harriman, to his vast credit, didn't think much very much of this need. He was totally unpretentious in that sense. He just liked to get the job done, whatever the title.

Q: Did Harriman spend much time cultivating particularly the Senate but the House too?

STEARNS: I think his principal contact probably was Fulbright. He didn't spend a great deal of time talking to individual senators. His main concern at that point was to keep his lines of communication as clear as possible with the White House.

Q: During the time you were able to observe him, how did Harriman work with the media, particularly more in those days the press?

STEARNS: He had very good relations with a wide number of influential correspondents and editors and was very keen and very conscious of the need to cultivate a good press.

Q: Being a politician, he had been a governor?

STEARNS: He, of course, had been governor of New York and was defeated when he attempted reelection. So he had a background in politics, although I don't think political skills were the top of his list of qualities.

Q: Would you find that Harriman sort of after meetings and all sort of sit at the table, kick his shoes off and talk about what had happened and sort of mull over where we are going and all?

STEARNS: Well, he didn't do much mulling over. As I said earlier, he was very good at getting to the point, extracting the kernel of truth whoever his interlocutor was.

Q: Who were some of the other people on his team?

STEARNS: He didn't really have a team. He had me as his chief of staff and a junior officer, John Countryman, as a special assistant and that was the team. He would work through a working group through the bureaus at the State Department when he needed to get action from the State Department. He did have, as I have mentioned repeatedly, a very good, close relations with (inaudible).

Q: How about sort of internal operations. Was the Vietnam, I guess it wasn't even a desk. It was a very large task force. Was it

STEARNS: Vietnam operations in the State Department?

Q: Was it much of a player?

STEARNS: Who was the deputy assistant secretary of state responsible for Indochina under Bill Bundy? Harriman had good relations with the Bundy brothers. He spent a certain amount of time communicating with Bill Bundy and a lot of time (inaudible).

Q: Did you have much of a feeling about the White House side of things?

STEARNS: I had come to know Bob Komer when he visited Greece with then Vice President Johnson. So probably the person in the White House that I had the most contact with had been Bob Komer.

Q: Did you go with Harriman to Vietnam?

STEARNS: We added to the staff because I had no background in Vietnam and Harriman became more and more involved in peace initiatives for Vietnam. We added another person who specialized in Vietnam.

Q: Were the Paris peace talks going on?

STEARNS: It was later, after I left. It had been when I was transferred from Washington to London, and Harriman was given the job of negotiating peace in Paris.

Q: When you left for London, you left when?

STEARNS: I left in '67, the early summer, probably June or early July, of '67

Q: How did you feel about, was there such a thing as progress or not?

STEARNS: I thought we were approaching a stalemate. It seemed to me Harriman himself had come to that conclusion.

Q: Were there groups within the Foreign Service who were of one mind and groups of another and all?

STEARNS: We were a little removed. If that debate occurred in the Vietnam working group it didn't necessarily involve us, but we were aware of the views of non State Department people like Robert Kaplan, and people in the government but outside the State Department like Robert McNamara. They were more disillusioned to the military effort.

Q: What about sort of military expertise? Who was giving Harriman the low down on where things stood militarily because it can be very complicated?

STEARNS: We relied and had access to all the most sensitive military information and Harriman was great very good about checking repeatedly with non-governmental sources, including Henry Kissinger, but also newspaper people as to what their views were on the military. He was clearly influenced by the increasing disillusionment that was reflected in those quarters.

Incidentally I didn't mention the name of the chief Vietnam adviser that we brought onto the staff: Ken Cooper, White House expert on East Asia. Ken and I worked very well together and I came to like Ken a lot.

Q: You moved to London when?

STEARNS: June or early July of '67.

Q: Was this something you requested?

STEARNS: Harriman asked me when my two years with him were coming to an end if I had any preference where I would like to go. I knew the geographical jobs in London and Paris were very rewarding jobs and that the Africa job in the political section in London was coming so I expressed an interest in that and Harriman arranged for it to happen.

Q: What exactly was the job?

STEARNS: The geographical jobs followed closely developments in their area of responsibility and how the British government viewed them.

Q: And you were following which one?

STEARNS: There were many, and the Africa job in London turned out to be the most active of any of the geographical jobs.

Q: Do you have any comments you'd like to make about this period you worked with Harriman, either on Harriman personally or the work we were, or what we were trying to accomplish?

STEARNS: I came away with great admiration for his ability to get things done, a strong practical intelligence and his loyalty to those who worked for him and with him. You always had a seat at the table and he wanted to hear your views if you didn't mind him occasionally snapping your head off. He became a friend right until the end of his life. I had great affection for him as well as admiration.

Q: He was a man who had his finger in many pies but at the same time was not an operator for the fun of it.

STEARNS: He was a man who believed in getting things done and by and large was very good at making that happen.

Q: We will pick this up the next time when you are off to London.

Today is the 25th of June, 2013 with Monteagle Stearns.

You have left Harriman and you are off to London. When was this and what were you doing?

STEARNS: I was transferred to London in June or July of 1967. The position was the first secretary in charge of following African affairs in London. There were three

geographical slots in the political section in London; one for East Asia, one for the Middle East and one for Africa and I was the Africa man.

Q: Bring me up to date; what was your African experience?

STEARNS: Two years in the Congo and work on African affairs during part of my serving with Averell Harriman.

Q: Who was the ambassador and sort of where did you fit in the embassy?

STEARNS: David Bruce was the ambassador when I arrived and Walter Annenberg when I left.

Q: Africa was still fairly new in our interest but we had gotten very much involved in the Congo. What else was bringing American interests to Africa in those days?

STEARNS: Of course, we were concerned with the problem of apartheid in South Africa. We were following the so-called tiger talks the British were having with what was then Northern Rhodesia to try to work out a settlement before Northern Rhodesia became Zambia and Zimbabwe. Kenya was of interest too. There were a number of hot spots. The Congo was extremely hot and we were deeply involved.

Q: How did you find your role there?

STEARNS: It was one of the most interesting jobs I could have had in London. The African problems that Washington was interested in were all problems, or most of them were problems, in which the British were out in front of us. There were the tiger talks and principally during in my time in London the Nigerian civil war; this meant that I was really the point man. The problem in serving in London is that since there is no language barrier between Washington and London, a lot of the business can be done over the telephone between the two capitals. In this case, where the British were so deeply involved and we were following their activities with such intense interest, our Africa man in London was the point man on a whole series of problems, the most prominent of them the Nigerian civil war.

Q: Time has moved on and memories fail. Could you explain what the Nigerian civil war was at that time?

STEARNS: The breakaway of the Biafran province; oil rich and highly educated Biafran people who wanted to secede from Nigeria. There were tribal differences as well as economic differences, and the Biafran secession drew a great deal of interest and support outside of Nigeria, including people in the United States like Allard Lowenstein and other liberals. It was an issue that was being followed very keenly by a whole variety of people in the United States and Europe.

Q: What was the official American view of the situation in Nigeria? The civil war?

STEARNS: The U.S. government did not take a position for understandable reasons. It was essentially a British problem to resolve with the Nigerians. Therefore, while there were strong pro-Biafran elements, sentiments in the U.S., the U.S. government tried to remain aloof from this.

Q: Why would there be strong pro-Biafran sentiments in the U.S.?

STEARNS: The Biafrans had a very good public relations' campaign. The Biafran people are highly intelligent and sophisticated. They mobilized support which presented Biafra as a beleaguered minority being bludgeoned by larger elements of Nigeria led by General Gowon who was then the president of Nigeria. There was a tendency particularly among liberals to say Nigeria is being led by a military man who wants to suppress all attempts of free expression in Biafra.

There was another element. Soon after I arrived in London, I learned that the Nigerian government was accepting help from the Soviet Union. Soviet pilots were coming to help the Nigerian Air Force and this, of course, gained very strong interest in Washington.

Q: You were looking at the situation. How good did you find the reporting coming out of Nigeria and out of Washington on this?

STEARNS: A lot of the reporting was being done by me. I had very good contacts in the British government and was able, in many cases, to learn about British action and what the British knew and what was happening in Nigeria before Washington learned it from any other source, including from our embassy in Lagos. I was in an enviable position for a political reporting officer.

Q: What was the British position and why did they have that position?

STEARNS: The British tended to support the government in Lagos and were not interested in supporting the Biafran secession.

Q: Did this cause tension between our government and the British government?

STEARNS: No, because our position was to be as neutral as possible and not get directly involved.

Q: It is easy to say we are neutral but

STEARNS: support the Soviet cooperation with the Nigerian government. There was no strong policy difference between Washington and London on this issue.

Q: What was our analysis of why the Soviets were getting involved and how did that play out?

STEARNS: Our assumption was that the Soviets wanted to create as much problem for us and for the British as possible. Therefore their attempt to give military support to the Nigerian government was part of their effort to create tensions that hurt the Western powers; notably the UK and the U.S.

In fact, in the end Soviet influence did not amount to a great deal. But at the beginning, as we reported from London, there was no assurance that the Soviet interest wouldn't grow and their influence on the Nigerian government wouldn't grow. That was why Washington followed it with such intense curiosity.

Q: Did you have contact with the Nigerian Embassy at the time?

STEARNS: Yes, but not primarily. What I did have was a lot of very good contacts with the Commonwealth Secretariat which of course was following developments very closely and had contacts both with the Biafrans and the Nigerians.

Q: Was there a Biafran representative in London?

STEARNS: I think there was an interest section, but the British, of course, didn't allow the Biafrans to establish official diplomatic representation in London. However, they had excellent public relations skills and used them to a very effective degree.

Q: As I recall it the Biafrans had all the what later became known as the glitterati, the movie stars and all sort of on their side.

STEARNS: There were a lot of celebrities who became interested. There was a campaign mounted by the Biafrans saying that the Nigerian government blockade of the Biafra was causing starvation, the death of many Biafrans. That, of course, aroused the sympathy of many people who were very far from Biafra or Nigeria.

I mentioned on the political side that Allard Lowenstein was a very strong supporter of Biafra.

Q: He was a major gadfly or figure or something at the time. Who was he?

STEARNS: Influential, liberal Democratic congressman. He traveled through London on a number of occasions on his way to visits to Biafra to check on the situation. He would always come by and I would meet him usually at the airport, so I stayed in touch with him.

Q: Were you able to make any headway with him as far as explaining why we felt the way we did?

STEARNS: I was certainly able to explain, to the extent that it was necessary, the U.S. position, but since we were not directly involved as a government in the issue, there was

no need to go into detail about what our attitude was. Our attitude was that we wanted to see the issue of the secession settled as peacefully as possible.

Q: While you were there, did it play out or was it still going on when you left?

STEARNS: It was beginning to play out but it was still going when I left two years after arriving.

Q: As I recall we were all rather surprised at how well General Gowon played his victory by making a fairly solid peace with the Biafrans.

STEARNS: He was quite generous in his victory and I agree with you. I was impressed and think that General Gowon showed himself to be statesman-like rather than warlike.

Q: What was the British position on the Congo?

STEARNS: The British had supported at least benignly the Katanga secession along with the Belgians and the French. But by the time I was in London, Tshombe had already been installed as prime minister of the Congo in Leopoldville or Kinshasa as it became so this was not an issue.

Q: In Rhodesia had Ian Smith already taken unilateral declaration of independence, UDI, had that already happened?

STEARNS: The 1968 election occurred while the issue of Northern Rhodesia was still very hot. The British feared that the Nixon administration might reopen the U.S. consulate general in Salisbury, Northern Rhodesia. That was an issue I warned Washington against when the Nixon administration came in. I said that any attempt to reopen the consulate general or to give any form of recognition to Northern Rhodesia would create serious problems with the British government. In the end the Nixon administration did not take a move in that direction.

Q: Why would it have caused a problem?

STEARNS: It would have caused a problem. The British were not about to accept a solution to the situation in Northern Rhodesia that brought an apartheid white government to power with which the U.S. government was doing business on a normal basis or, even worse, the U.S recognized.

Q: Were there elements within our government, either in Congress or elsewhere, that were looking to deal with Ian Smith?

STEARNS: As I indicated, the fear in London was that the new Nixon administration, which seemed to be more sympathetic to Ian Smith than the Democrats, might make a move in that direction, but in the end they did not. I think they recognized this would have created fairly serious problems for the British government.

Q: At your working level, would you have sat down at the foreign office and have serious discussions about our policy and all?

STEARNS: I stayed in very close touch in the case of Rhodesia with the Commonwealth Office. At that time the Commonwealth Office and Foreign Office were separate entities, although in the same building. So I had frequent contacts with officials in both the foreign and commonwealth office, although most of the problems, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, were being handled by the Commonwealth Office rather than the Foreign Office. Most of the British issues for me were in the portfolio of the Commonwealth Office.

Q: Did you sense sort of a division in thinking, at least privately, between the Commonwealth Office and the Foreign Office?

STEARNS: No, they tended to stick to their own areas of responsibility. So if there were tensions, they were not tensions that I was aware of or affected my reporting.

Q: Was David Bruce engaged in African matters or not?

STEARNS: He was only interested in African problems when he met representatives of African embassies and wanted a little background on them. He wasn't primarily concerned with African problems like the Biafran secession.

He was also at the end of his tour so he spent a certain amount of time away from the embassy. Walter Annenberg arrived in the spring, as I recall, of 1969.

Q: How did you find Annenberg? He was somewhat controversial when he first arrived.

STEARNS: We came to like him. I never came to know him very well but, as you know, he was a neophyte to international affairs. He turned out to be a very nice and generous man and one judged him by the people he brought along with him; Bob Scott, I think, was his special assistant who had worked for him in Philadelphia. I found that Bob was a very easy person to work with. While I only served with Annenberg for perhaps for three or four months, I probably met him only once, the embassy learned that he was not a difficult man to work with.

Q: People who worked with him came away with a very favorable impression.

STEARNS: That's right, they did indeed. My own acquaintance with him was so slight that when Toni and I were assigned to Athens years later, and the Greek ambassador in Washington gave a dinner for us, they invited the Annenbergs. Walter Annenberg and Le Annenberg had no idea we had ever served together in London.

Q: You were in London from when to when?

STEARNS: I was in London from the spring or June or July of 1967 to June or July of 1969. I had already received a number of offers to cut my London stay short. I was approached to become DCM in Luxemburg about five or six months after arriving in London, but able to plead personal inconvenience since Toni and I had just had another child and the Department recognized it would be difficult for us to move so quickly.

And Jack Bennett, our ambassador in Lisbon, asked for me to be DCM there and that was about a year after arriving in London. I was still a class three officer and the Department decided that I was too junior to be DCM in Lisbon. I was then promoted to class two, and when I was offered the DCMship in Vientiane, Laos, the Department had no objection. I knew that was a fascinating job. Even though we were very reluctant to leave London after two years, and we had expected to be there for three or more, the prospect of an assignment to Laos was too fascinating to refuse.

Q: Before we leave London, how was the Vietnam War viewed there in general?

STEARNS: There was very strong opposition to the Vietnam War and American policy. There was a huge demonstration in Grosvenor Square in 1968 which attracted widespread attention in Europe and particularly in the United States. So there was very strong opposition to American policy.

Frequently when I would enter or leave the embassy there would be picket lines of student protesters and I struck up conversations with some of them, including the very lovely Judy Todd, the daughter of Garfield Todd, who became a friend made on the picket line.

Q: Did you have any particular personal feelings about the Vietnam War at that time? How about for you? Did you have any particular feelings about our involvement in?

STEARNS: My contacts with Kissinger when I was working for Harriman led me to believe that he did not believe in the possibility of a military victory in Vietnam. I was therefore pretty well convinced personally that the Nixon administration, no matter what it said publicly, was trying to withdraw and that, of course, is what eventually happened.

Q: How did you feel about Laos?

STEARNS: Laos was a fascinating post because it was officially and diplomatically neutral, even its neutrality had been established in the Laos Accords of 1962. The Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, was himself a neutralist. During the course of the Indochina war there was a functioning North Vietnamese embassy in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, and also a Pathet Lao compound. So it was far and away the most interesting part of the Indochina war.

Q: Today is July 2nd, 2013 with Monteagle Stearns.

Let's see, you were in Laos. You were in Laos from when to when?

STEARNS: From the summer of 1969 to summer of 1972.

Q: You were talking about just beginning about Laos. It was really a pretty backward place at time, wasn't it?

STEARNS: It is a very Buddhist society and very underdeveloped economically and, of course, it is surrounded by more powerful neighbors; Vietnam and Thailand in particular. It also has a border, of course, with Cambodia so it has been in a non enviable position. It has a thousand miles of the Mekong River running along its borders which makes it extremely difficult to police smuggling, including the smuggling of opium poppies and cocaine.

Q: Who was the ambassador again?

STEARNS: The ambassador was Mac Godley for whom I had worked in the Congo. It was Mac who brought me out of London after two years when I had expected to be there for three. I think Mac was trying to reassemble his Congo team in the new crisis area, Laos.

Q: What was our interest in Laos at that time?

STEARNS: We had, of course, been instrumental in creating Laos accords of 1962 which made Laos an internationally recognized neutralist country, the only one in Indochina. That had been negotiated largely by Averell Harriman on behalf of Washington. His chief aide at that time was Bill Sullivan, deputy assistant secretary of State, who went on to become ambassador to Laos. So we had an interest in maintaining not only neutrality but also in trying to prevent Laos from being used as a pipeline for the North Vietnamese to funnel arms and men into South Vietnam.

Q: What was the situation on the ground? Was Laos part of the Ho Chi Minh trail?

STEARNS: The Ho Chi Minh trail ran right along the Lao border with Vietnam so our attempts to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail were centered in eastern Laos. The conventional fighting on the ground involved an odd twist. The North Vietnamese with the 360th and 312th divisions fought a conventional ground battle with Soviet tanks. The Lao government, supported by the U.S. government, was using largely guerrilla tactics. The minority Hmong people, the mountain people of Laos, were doing the larger share of the fighting with logistics supplied by us in the form of G-28 trainer aircraft and combat advisers.

Q: When you got there, what was the feeling? Were we losing, winning or what?

STEARNS: Actually, the summer of our arrival turned out to be unusual because the North Vietnamese retreated from their advance position on the Plain of Jars, abandoning

their PT-76 MIGs supplied by the Soviets, so it appeared that the Lao government backed by the U.S. was gaining the upper hand.

We later learned that part of the reason for that retreat had been the death of Ho Chi Minh that we didn't know about at the time. Laos as a neutralist country was extremely interesting diplomatically. There was a North Vietnamese Embassy which functioned throughout the Indochina war in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, and also a Pathet Lao compound. Pathet Lao were, of course, the communist Lao so it was the only part of the Indochina where there was a semblance of real neutrality.

The prime minister of Laos was Prince Souvanna Phouma, a remarkably astute diplomat as well as a highly intelligent man. So that all of the elements that were lacking in other parts of Indochina were present in Laos which made it diplomatically far and away the most interesting listening post in Indochina. Outsiders who wanted to contact the North Vietnamese invariably came to Vientiane to contact, with our help, the North Vietnamese embassy in Vientiane. Those people included Ross Perot who flew into Vientiane in a pea green Braniff jet loaded with frozen turkeys which he wanted to deliver to our prisoners of war being held in Hanoi. We helped, through neutral parties, to arrange a meeting between Perot and the North Vietnamese at their embassy. The North Vietnamese predictably said, "We are delighted to have you come to Hanoi to deliver your turkeys. Of course, for your own safety you will have to convince Washington to stop the bombing."

In the end the turkey mission came to nothing. All of us who had seen the Braniff jet land at Vientiane airport, one of the first jets to do so, went out to see it take off with its load of turkeys. It managed to get off the ground so there was no need or mishap there, but unfortunately the turkeys were never delivered to our POWs.

Q: What was your job?

STEARNS: I was DCM.

Q: What did you find yourself doing in that very complicated situation?

STEARNS: A little of everything but I did a lot of traveling to observe the war and to limit collateral damage to our aircraft. The DCM has his hands in almost all elements of the mission's work. We had a very large AID mission so that much of my work was spent coordinating aid efforts as well as trying to control and redirect the military efforts.

Q: What were we doing aid wise?

STEARNS: We were supplying all kinds of aid to a very poor country which was in the middle of a war.

Q: Were the Laotians, you might say, receptive to, were they being

STEARNS: They needed the aid and on the whole they were easy to work with. The Lao army itself did relatively fighting but the Hmong people, the mountain people, did a great deal.

Q: Was there a leader among the Hmong?

STEARNS: Oh, yes; General Vang Pao who died about a year ago here in the United States. General Vang Pao was the acclaimed leader of the Hmong people. Many of my trips up to his headquarters near the Plain of Jars were to consult with him and find out if he was getting the kind of air support that he needed.

Q: What sort of air support were we doing?

STEARNS: We were supplying, in addition to the T-28s, which were flown by Lao.

Q: That's basically a trainer, isn't it?

STEARNS: controlling and directing the fast movers. Phantom planes that flew out of Udorn base in Thailand to give air support to the campaign of the Lao government in northern Laos and in the panhandle. Most of the flights that bombed the Ho Chi Minh trail were divided between flights out of Udorn in Thailand and flights out of ? and flights from ? from our carriers.

Q: There was much about Cong Le Li and the Plain of Jars. Was there anything going on there?

STEARNS: That, of course, was the very center of Laos. During the dry season the North Vietnamese through the 312th division would usually occupy the Plain of Jars. They were equipped with tanks which the Lao government did not have and, of course, the Hmong people didn't have.

Then when wet season came, the tanks of the North Vietnamese would have to withdraw and the Plain of Jars would again be occupied by the Lao government and the Hmong people, the mountain people.

Q: Was there a rhythm to this war?

STEARNS: There was a certain rhythm to it between the wet and dry seasons. The exception was the summer and fall of my arrival when Ho Chi Minh had just died and there was an unexpected withdrawal of the 312th North Vietnamese division.

Q: When a leader dies it doesn't necessarily mean that things change. What was the sort of the analysis at the time of why?

STEARNS: We didn't know that he had died. It was only later that we learned that he had died at that time and that this had had a demoralizing effect because he was the

maximum leader of the entire North Vietnamese or the Vietnamese attempt to establish itself as post-colonial force.

Q: Was there much in the way of sort of an election movement? Were things happening politically there or was there a body politic?

STEARNS: Of course, elections would have been very difficult in the center of war in an undeveloped country, so Prince Souvanna Phouma enjoyed very considerable support from educated Lao. There were certain divisions in the Lao military and there had been a number of attempted coups. There were three Lao princes: Souvanna Phouma, the Red Prince who was a Communist, his half brother and the conservative right wing, also a half brother, Souphanouvong, his name was.

There was a famous story of Souphanouvong being invited to Washington to meet President Kennedy. After President Kennedy had spent half an hour with him and Souphanouvong had left the Oval Office, Kennedy turned to his aides and said, "If that's our strong man, I think we are in trouble."

Q: What was your evaluation of these Lao that you were dealing with?

STEARNS: My own evaluation was to fight the war, if it must be fought at all, through indirect means as we were trying to do in Laos rather than massive landings of American troops as we had done in Vietnam. I long before had decided that our investment in Indochina was far more costly than it was worth, but once in a war it is very difficult to get out of it. I certainly preferred the tactics that were used in Laos. They cost relatively few American lives due to tactics being employed by General Westmoreland in South Vietnam.

Q: What was your evaluation of what was happening in Vietnam at the time?

STEARNS: As I think I explained to you before, our meetings with Harriman and Dr. Kissinger had led me to believe the Nixon administration was not going to follow the Johnson administration policy of adding more American troops to the fight in Vietnam but was going to try to find a way to reduce the American presence with honor. So, from the moment I left London and went to Vientiane, I had no doubt that we would continue to reduce the American force level in Vietnam. That, of course, is what happened.

Q: Your embassy, was it very large or very small?

STEARNS: A huge embassy for a small country because the AID mission was very large. Military support was out of country. There was a very large CIA mission. So it was a very large embassy.

Q: Was this all aid or American military? I can't imagine having much in the way of consular or political or economic reporting.

STEARNS: There was a good deal of reporting on the effect of our economic aid and whether it was getting to its intended targets. A lot of it was political-military reporting.

Q: I would think in a way this would have been a rather frustrating place to be working.

STEARNS: That's so because, as I said, there was so much diplomatic activity that one could monitor what was going on more effectively from Vientiane than many other parts of Indochina.

Q: How about the North Vietnamese? What were they up to there?

STEARNS: The Vietnamese were attempting to take over Laos. In the end, of course, that's what happened. Laos today has a communist government controlled by Vietnamese.

Q: Were we able to talk if not directly sort of indirectly with the North Vietnamese?

STEARNS: No, we didn't have any contact except through intermediaries. These arranged for appointments for American visitors who wanted to contact the North Vietnamese directly. We did not have direct contacts ourselves.

Q: Did we have sort of a back yard agreement or anything like that?

STEARNS: Our main dealings, of course, were with the neutralist Lao government represented by Souvanna Phouma. Both the Pathet compound and North Vietnamese embassies existed as hostile islands in Vientiane. From the very beginning, the Vietnamese wanted to control not only all of Vietnam but also Laos and Cambodia. They were successful on the whole in doing so.

Q: What was life like there? Was it dangerous?

STEARNS: Life in Vientiane was fairly normal because the war didn't reach the city. The war was being fought around the Plain of Jars, mainly the Ho Chi Minh trail and to some extent the panhandle to the south so that life for us was fairly normal. There were not a great many luxury food items being received. We all appreciated the opportunity to take an occasional weekend in Bangkok and enjoy the fruits of a peaceful country, but life was normal.

One of our children was born in Bangkok while we were in Laos so we succeeded in maintaining family life with four children in the middle of the war.

Q: Was the war, was it one of these sort of positional wars where there really wasn't much fighting or was it a real

STEARNS: There was a considerable amount of fighting. Much of it, of course, was from the air, but the Hmong people, the mountain people, did a great deal of fighting.

Q: Were we able to talk to the Hmong and figure out, what were they fighting for? What were they fighting for?

STEARNS: They were fighting to avoid being taken over by the Vietnamese. They needed very little encouragement although they needed supplies from us and the Lao government. They were a fiercely independent people who had a warrior tradition and wanted not to be taken over by the Vietnamese or the Chinese, as far as that goes.

Q: How about the Chinese? Were the Chinese

STEARNS: The Chinese had no direct role in Laos, although they did start the construction of a road from China to Thailand through the Ping Valley. They denied they were doing it. That did go on while we were there.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Chinese?

STEARNS: Yes, we began to have relatively cordial contacts with the Chinese from the time of the Nixon visit to China.

Q: How did that play out?

STEARNS: Well, it didn't have a concrete effect but it was interesting to see the attitude of the Chinese toward us change completely, gradually but completely.

Q: I understand in other places the main early effect was that you got treated to some very good dinners at the Chinese embassies.

STEARNS: We didn't go quite that far when we were in Laos, but it continued to develop. Later on, when we got to Greece again, we had virtually normal relations with the Chinese and exchanged visits and dinner parties of various kinds.

Q: How was morale at the embassy?

STEARNS: On the whole I think okay. The political section opposed the war effort very strongly. They were less content, I think, than other elements, in part because political reporting tended to be of limited value. The war was not going to be negotiated to end the war in Vietnam, and I think there was feeling in the political section without any doubts that our effort to support the Lao government and the Hmong people was too costly. In the end, I think we were certainly supporting the right people. I can't believe that the way the war ended in Laos made people any more contented than they were or had been in Cambodia or South Vietnam.

Q: You had that peculiar thing in Laos where we kept an embassy open even when the communists took over.

STEARNS: Well, that's true. That is a result of the neutralist status of Laos so that we participated in the negotiations that ended the war in Laos and in the end never had to close our embassy.

Q: What was your impression of the Lao government?

STEARNS: There were some highly effective ministers, but in a small, impoverished, war torn country, you can't expect normal government or normal elections. That was a mistake that Washington frequently made. We had teams that would come out from Washington to try to convince the Lao government to control its borders more effectively to prevent the trade of opium and opium poppies. Of course, the war torn government with a thousand miles of the Mekong River along its border was in no position to stop smuggling so there was a rather unrealistic element to some parts of American policy.

Q: It's a problem with us sometimes in our embassies where you have visitors from Washington; politicians or policy makers who are full of themselves and are going to by sheer force of personality change the way a government reacts which never works very well.

STEARNS: No, it didn't work very well in this case either but these were usually specialists. I think the people who dealt directly knew more about it.

Q: Shall we leave Laos?

STEARNS: I think I have covered it. If I think of anything else I can give it to you next week.

Q: You have left Laos and where did you go?

STEARNS: I went to Harvard for a year.

Q: Today is July 16, 2013 with Monteagle Stearns and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

What were you doing at Harvard?

STEARNS: In those days there was a program of a year's fellowship which had been created I think in the 1960s by Bob Bowie and Henry Kissinger. The object was to bring diplomats from various countries together for a year with a loose-jointed but fascinating program of auditing courses at Harvard and conducting seminars and doing a research paper during the course of the year. It was kind of the equivalent of a year at the War College but, of course, in a very different context.

When I was contacted in Laos at the end of my three years there, I was told I could either go to the War College or go to Harvard. I decided it would be a wonderful opportunity to spread my wings a little bit intellectually by going to Harvard so I chose that. It was a marvelous year.

What I did was to take a certain number of courses on China and on Southeast Asia, but also to cast a wider net by taking Donald Fleming's course on American culture, Stan Hoffman's course on France, Leslie Peyton's course on Dr. Johnson so that I wasn't confined to specialized study. I thought there was a great opportunity to sample some of Harvard's marvelous intellectual banquet and so I did so. It was really one of the most wonderful rewarding years I spent in the Foreign Service.

I think another advantage is you make very good friends among your fellow foreign diplomats, in part because the atmosphere is more collegial than likely to be when you meet at foreign posts. There is always a degree of rivalry and detachment that doesn't exist when you are fellows at Harvard. Most of us who had that privilege made friends who lasted for the rest of our careers, even after.

Q: You did this, what year was this?

STEARNS: This would have been '72 – '73.

Q: What were you picking up on China? What was the attitude towards developments in China at that time?

STEARNS: The approach on China tended to be courses which analyzed Chinese history and Chinese culture. They weren't courses that predicted how China would behave in the future. You had to draw your own inferences. They were marvelous courses, very well known professors.

Q: After this year, did you have in mind some place you wanted to go?

STEARNS: I was really so absorbed in what I was doing at Harvard that I didn't give much thought to it. I assumed that having served three years in Laos I would probably continue in Southeast Asia in some capacity. Toward the end of my Harvard year I received phone calls and soundings from Washington; one to become ambassador in Niger. That was overtaken by the need of the East Asian Bureau to find a deputy assistant secretary for Indochina to succeed Bill Sullivan. So that was offered me and I did accept that. That was my next assignment; deputy assistant secretary for Indochina under Robert Ingersoll when he was confirmed.

Q: Then when you were doing this deputy assistant secretary, you did that from

STEARNS: That was '73 – '74.

Q: What was the situation in the area at that time?

STEARNS: When I was deputy assistant secretary, all American combat troops had been withdrawn. Having listened to Henry Kissinger, when I was working for Harriman, I was

reasonably certain that the Nixon administration was going to withdraw gradually with what they hoped a thread of U.S. honor left intact. That, in fact, had happened.

Therefore, the main job I had during the relatively brief period that I was responsible for the Indochina portfolio was to try to convince Congress that we should make it possible for South Vietnam to enjoy a peaceful interval by giving them adequate military and economic assistance. I spent a month traveling in the area, because while I knew Laos quite well, I had not visited Cambodia and had visited Saigon only in connection with Laos business.

So I came away from that which I think took place in October of 1973, with a feeling that the South Vietnamese were capable of maintaining their independence from the North but would require substantial U.S. assistance for some time to come. Therefore, a large part of my job in that year was testifying before Congress. I think I counted over 40 hours of testimony in the House and Senate. We did succeed in getting a supplemental appropriation in '74 for Vietnam.

I always had the feeling as Robert McNamara later expressed in his book on his experiences as defense secretary, that we knew far less about Indochina and its history and its culture than we should have to make sensible decisions.

I remember in 1966 I accompanied my boss, Averell Harriman and Vice President Humphrey on a quick trip to six or seven Asian countries to try to get them to give substantial support to the war effort in Vietnam. Vice President Humphrey was a very decent guy but didn't know very much about foreign affairs, certainly even less than we did about Southeast Asia. He was convinced the purpose of our trip was to prevent the Chinese takeover of South Vietnam. Jim Thompson from the White House, a Chinese scholar, and other members of the team tried to convince Humphrey that in view of Vietnam's animosity to China, this wasn't likely to happen. If it did happen it wouldn't last long. Humphrey simply wouldn't listen to that.

From that trip and other experiences I came away with the conviction that there is no more important qualification for a good Foreign Service officer than to know the country and the area where he is working at first hand so that he can evaluate the intangibles that usually don't appear in position papers here in Washington.

Q: Did you as you dealt with the area, was it as obvious as in later years that the Chinese and the Vietnamese were not as close as lips and teeth?

STEARNS: No, in fact they were bitter enemies. There was, as you probably remember, a brief war later between China and Vietnam. So the assumption that because both Vietnam and China were communist they would therefore work in harmony together proved to be a very shallow assessment of the situation.

Q: We had an awful lot of people who had become sort of experts on the area. Were they really experts or were they working on erroneous assumptions?

STEARNS: I think we didn't have enough and they hadn't started early enough. During most of the French colonial period in Indochina our ministers and staff members were people who had cut their teeth in France not in South Asia. So we had a short bench and not very profound knowledge. We had almost no Vietnamese speakers.

On my own staff as deputy assistant secretary there was only one officer, a youngish officer who predicted to me that South Vietnam was not strong enough to stand. By and large, I came away wrongly convinced that South Vietnam was strong enough economically and militarily and politically to be able to withstand invasion from the North. This was particularly true, I thought, because the TET offensive pretty much destroyed the Viet Cong and that had occurred in '68.

Q: What was the atmosphere when you took the job? Was it one of, we will muddle through? What were the people around you thinking?

STEARNS: There were divisions on the staff, as there had been in the political section in Laos. There were those that felt we had overcommitted in a losing cause and there were those that felt we had no choice but to do the best we could with the hand that we had been dealt. I thought the same was true by and large. It was too late to change U.S. policy, and in any event, as I said, U.S. combat forces had been withdrawn. Therefore, casualties had been reduced substantially, so that those who were most opposed to American policy in the Bureau were somewhat muted.

Q: Did you find that attention to the area had really diminished considerably by this time?

STEARNS: I found that out toward the end of my year in the job. I had just finished a long series of hearings on Capitol Hill and had gone for what I considered a well deserved vacation on Cape Cod with my family in the early summer of 1974. I received a telephone call from Washington that I had to break my leave to come down for a Washington special interest group meeting in the Oval Office or in the secure office situation room on Indochina. I no sooner had finished that than I received a telephone call saying that Secretary Kissinger wanted me to return immediately. I reminded my caller, Dean Brown, that I had just returned from Washington and had only another week of leave. Couldn't they wait until then? Dean said, "Well, the Secretary says in a week you are going to be in another country." I had no clue what this was all about.

So I had no choice but to fly back to Washington again. I saw the Secretary several times and it turned out what they had in mind was my return to Greece. The Colonels' regime in Greece from 1967 to '74 had crumbled after a botched attempt to stage a coup in Cyprus opening the way for Turkish landings. Of course Turkish troops were still there and there was genuine danger of war between Greece and Turkey.

I had the impression that at some point Kissinger asked his staff to give him a list of Greek speaking Foreign Service officers. When he looked at it he said, "What? My

Indochina man speaks Greek?” and decided on the spot I had to return as chargé d’affaires to Athens immediately in the summer of 1974.

The ambassador was Henry Tasca whom Kissinger didn’t get along well with and he did not trust, but Tasca was a protégée of President Nixon. Tasca had been in Morocco when Nixon was out of office and given him warm hospitality when Nixon went on a trip to North Africa. Nixon had always remembered that.

I protested to Kissinger that if I left immediately for Athens, I would be arriving before the ambassador he told me he was getting rid of had left. Kissinger said, “Well, never mind. I will communicate with you back channel.”

I said, “Mr. Secretary, it won’t work if we have two embassies.”

He then went on to say, “Well, I’ve talked to the President about removing him,” Tasca, “but I don’t think he was paying attention.”

We now know that was a period the president was down on his knees before the resignation of the president. Kissinger said, “I will have to talk to him again but don’t worry that I am going to leave you there for a long period as chargé d’affaires.”

So after further protest, futile protest, I agreed to return to Athens. My poor wife had to repack the bags and the children and get prepared for yet another foreign tour. We had expected we would probably be in Washington for at least two or three years. That was all in July of 1974.

Q: The coup and all I think was July 14th wasn’t it?

STEARNS: I don’t remember the exact

Q: I had left Athens. I had been consul general there and I left there I think on the 1st of July, just in time to get the hell out of town.

STEARNS: You just made it.

I arrived toward the end of July, about a week after former Prime Minister Karamanlis returned from exile in Paris where he had been for 11 years. He returned at the invitation of a group of senior politicians in Athens. My arrival was after the fall of the Colonels but before the formal inauguration of Karamanlis.

Q: Had you been following Greek affairs?

STEARNS: Not at all. I suggested to the Secretary that I hadn’t worked on Greek affairs in something like 12 years and really needed time to fill myself in, do my homework. But the Secretary said, “No, I need you immediately.”

He was bent on changing personnel both in Athens and in Washington because he felt the pressure on him to have the Sixth Fleet in the sea to prevent further Turkish landings. He was determined not to do that.

Q: Did you gather from Kissinger, had he made up his mind about what we were going to do there or what needed being done or did he just want an observer on the scene?

STEARNS: He hadn't made up his mind because it was an area that he didn't know terribly well. I found that was an advantage after I got to Athens because he actually read my cables and I got an immediate response to many of them and that of course was extremely helpful. He had not made up his mind what the next steps would be. He was determined to avoid intervention by the Sixth Fleet and confrontation with the Turks.

Q: Before you went out, were you able to talk to people involved in with Turkish affairs about what they were up to?

STEARNS: Kissinger had transferred the Greece, Turkey, Cyprus office from NEA, the Near East Bureau, to the European Bureau. So there were a whole new set of officers who were now responsible for the crisis in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey who had absolutely no background in the area.

Q: I have talked to some of the people who were there at the time. They viewed this whole bringing the Turks and the Greeks, here were two members of NATO ready to fight each other. It was like somebody had desecrated the marble halls of NATO, sort of bringing the Katzenjammer Kids into this nice little friendly club.

STEARNS: There's a lot of truth in that, although this was not the first crisis that had erupted between Greece and Turkey involving NATO. In fact, during the Eisenhower administration the President had offered to have a NATO force keep the peace in Cyprus. That was, of course, before Cyprus independence.

Q: Did you stop by the Turkish Embassy before you went to Greece?

STEARNS: No. It all happened much too fast. I had only about a week between when I arrived from the Cape and the time I was on a plane for Athens. There was no time and it probably would have been very unwise in any event for me to call on foreign embassies, particularly the Turks or the Greeks.

Q: What was your impression of Tasca before you got there?

STEARNS: Well, I really didn't know him very well. He had made a couple of calls on Harriman while I was working for Harriman, but I didn't know him well enough to reach real judgment. I did have the impression that he was an extremely ambitious opportunist and his calls on Harriman were designed to cement his relations with one of the powerbrokers of the State Department.

In fact, when I arrived in Athens in late July of 1974, I was met at the airport by the administrative officer. He told me that my residence was being renovated but they had made a reservation for me at a hotel. When we I got to the hotel I found that my room was so small I could barely fit my luggage in. I went back downstairs and told the admin officer that we are going to move into the residence while it was being renovated because we tended to bring various Greek friends over and needed a place to entertain them and to talk privately to them. That's what happened.

Tasca, himself, didn't receive me for three or four days after my arrival. The first meeting I had with him, his secretary said the ambassador could spare the time to meet with me. I went into his office and Tasca pulled a lot of books out of the bookshelf and said, "You haven't been around here for a long time so I think you should spend the next couple of weeks reading." It was very clear that he was very unhappy with my presence.

He did eventually invite me to sit in his press morning. That would have been about a week after my arrival. That was the last one I was invited to. What saved the situation was his protector, President Nixon, resigned in early August. Tasca realized that he was unable to stay on. He was certainly intending to stay on. His various meetings with the press and certainly many international journalists come to Athens. Ambassador Tasca held a series of press conferences. The return of democracy in Greece he said, was a culmination of policies he had been advocating. I think he was less than convinced of that before.

You knew Tasca far better than I. What was your impression?

Q: Well, not so well. He was rather aloof. I didn't really chat with him. I just did my business with him.

STEARNS: I understand.

In any event, my relations, to put it mildly, were strained.

Q: What was your impression of the staff, the officers there?

STEARNS: It is difficult for a staff to change gears so rapidly. They realized big changes were occurring and that my arrival was something more than the arrival of the DCM. I was carrying the authority of the Secretary of State. And certainly, by the time Ambassador Tasca left, that was perfectly clear. I was put in the position to be able to replace officers leaving. We assembled a new team gradually and the new ambassador, Jack Kubisch, was assistant secretary for Latin American Affairs. He had serious doubts about our policy in Chile. I think Kissinger was anxious to remove him from the assistant secretary-ship and Athens was the one post that was open. Fortunately, Jack and I got along extremely well. He had excellent judgment and I think we worked extremely well together during most of the period.

Q: When I was there and even much before, Athens had the reputation of being a post where the CIA had, you might say, considerable power and particularly with the Colonels and all they had had close cooperation. How did you find the CIA equation at the time?

STEARNS: Of course the situation changed dramatically and a special relationship with the Colonels was no longer an advantage. I found that I'd worked well with CIA in Laos and actually the CIA station chief in Athens was man who became a very close friend of mine, Clair George who had come there from Lebanon shortly after my own arrival in Athens. In any event, Clair turned out to be an excellent colleague. The relationship with the Colonels, as I think I explained to you earlier, the CIA relationship with the royal family was problematic during my earlier stay in Greece. I also had heard the stories that you mentioned. That the station had been close with the Colonels probably was true but was no longer relevant after the fall of the Colonels.

Q: Were you able to get an early sounding of Karamanlis and the Greek government?

STEARNS: I saw a good deal of Karamanlis after his return and my return because history devised a way to use me as his conduit rather than Tasca who of course was in the process of moving. We received a telegram saying the Department needed a series of contacts with Karamanlis who incidentally was living at ? Hotel. He was changing his residence every few nights for security. The Department therefore felt they didn't want to call attention to U.S. meetings with Karamanlis. Instead of the ambassador seeking these meetings, I did it myself so I did have a series of secret meetings with Karamanlis.

Q: Do you think that was devised in Washington to let you have the contact?

STEARNS: Well, I think so, since the Department had lost confidence in Tasca who was leaving after all. It made sense also. I think they felt they could trust my judgment better than that of Tasca.

Q: How was the new government dealing with taking power?

STEARNS: Greece was in a mess. War with Turkey was a possibility and yet Greece was totally unprepared for war. The Colonels had managed the military as badly as they managed the economy and the political scene in Greece, so Greece was in no position to be able to fight a war with anyone. Of course, the situation with Cyprus was still a mess. There were 30,000 Turkish troops occupying the north end of the island. It was a critical situation for the Greek government as well as everyone else.

What they were doing was trying to prepare the way for the return to normal democratic power by setting a date for elections and setting a date for a plebiscite on the future of the royal family.

Q: What was Andreas Papandreou doing at this particular time?

STEARNS: Andreas was in exile in Canada teaching at (inaudible). He came back rather later than any had expected. He didn't arrive until late August, September. He had, of course, already had an established reputation with fierce attacks on American policy. The U.S. was in some way involved in the arrival of the Colonels to power.

That may be a good point to pause. I think this is a good place to break off.

Q: Okay.

STEARNS: I will pick up the story with the return of Andreas and the new election and plebiscite on the royal family when we talk next.

Q: We want to talk about the return of Andreas Papandreou.

STEARNS: We hadn't quite gotten there because I hadn't quite finished my tour in Athens from '74 to '76.

Q: Do you want to continue then, please?

STEARNS: I think as I had mentioned before, a military junta had taken over Greece and overthrown the democratic government in April of 1967. My return coincided with and was really caused by the fall of the colonels and the intending return of a democratic government. In any event, the Johnson administration when the coup took place in 1967 showed its disapproval by suspending shipment of any heavy military equipment into Greece. The Nixon administration slowly relaxed its disapproval and things like the visit to Greece of then Vice President Agnew had created enormous resentment in the Greek public. So by the time my family and I returned in the summer of 1974, there was extreme anti-American feeling based on our supposed approval of the military coup.

I think actually there was no approval and certainly we were not responsible for it but the philosophy of Secretary Kissinger and the President was foreign policy should be based on the foreign policies of other governments, not on their domestic policies. That led to a relaxation of measures which would have shown we were opposed to a military takeover of the government.

In any event, during that period, '74 to '76, there were various changes of personnel the most important of which was the need for a new station chief at the embassy. I was delighted to find an old friend of mine, Dick Welch, a Harvard graduate who spoke fluent Greek and really enjoyed Greece, was scheduled to return as the new station chief. I received a letter from Dick saying I am pinching myself to think we are going to be back in Greece. So Dick and his family did come back. Things seemed to be developing fairly normally, fairly smoothly. In December of 1975, Ambassador Kubisch invited many members of the embassy to the residence for a Christmas party, and the invitees included Toni and the Welches and others.

So off we went and we left the residence after having a nice time, returned home to our respective homes for dinner. While I was sitting down for dinner I received a telephone call from the embassy. It was the Marine guard saying there had been reports of gunfire in the neighborhood of our house and he wanted to be sure we were okay. I said we were fine and it must have been a car backfiring.

About ten or fifteen minutes later he called back and said that there had been a shooting nearby and it was Mr. Welch who had been shot. My wife, Toni, rushed over to the Welch house which was not far from ours and I went down to the chancery. We found that Dick had been gunned down in front of his own house by a group that called itself "November 17". We discovered that later, and which had been following him, tracking him. Dick, himself, was a careful and vigilant guy. But I think he was so at home in Greece that he probably relaxed some of his usual precautions and didn't notice, when he came back to the house after the Christmas party, that the lights in the driveway were off. It turned out, of course, it was part of the plot which resulted in a group of terrorists gunning him down in his own driveway in front of his wife. My wife went over to the house and slept there that night. His father was visiting. His birthday party had occurred just a week before. We had gone to it. Toni's best or worst recollection of it is lying half asleep on the sofa in the Welch living room and seeing Dick's father coming down the stairs for an early cup of coffee, not yet knowing what had happened.

In any event that was a terrible event and in many ways we have never entirely recovered from it. Our relations with Greece were scarred at the time. The November 17 group continued to exist and killed both Greeks and Americans and one Brit in the ensuing years until it was finally exposed.

In any event, that ended our stay in Greece for the second time. In the late summer or early fall of 1976, I received a call from Larry Eagleburger who had been undersecretary for political affairs. He said that the administration was putting my name up to become ambassador to the Ivory Coast in West Africa.

We had moved from Laos to Cambridge to Washington to Athens in a period of about three or four years and were travel weary. So Toni and I talked it over and Toni said I really don't want to move again so soon. I called Larry back and said we would prefer to have my name withdrawn and wait for another opportunity. Larry said he would see what he could do. He called back a day or two later and said that Secretary Kissinger had already signed off on the appointment. Too late to change it so at that point we knew we were headed back to the west coast of Africa.

That, of course, leads to a two year assignment, two and a half year assignment in Abidjan.

Q: You were in Abidjan from when to when?

STEARNS: We arrived October 31 of 1976 and left in late June of '79.

Q: What was the situation as we saw it in the Ivory Coast at that time?

STEARNS: The Ivory Coast was really the pearl of West Africa because it was very stable politically. It had a tenacious and experienced president in Felix Houphouet-Boigny. Houphouet-Boigny not only had the standing of a tribal chief in the Ivory Coast but had served as a minister in French governments before his country's independence. He didn't really have hang-ups about the French and had retained 20 to 30,000 French, largely in positions of middle management.

The Ivory Coast was very prosperous, a leading producer of coffee and I think the world's first largest producer of cocoa. So it had black gold, not in the form of oil, but in the form of coffee and cocoa. Overall it was well run. Houphouet-Boigny was not an oligarch, certainly not a dictator. There were statues of him lining the boulevards, but very few photographs of him. I found him to be a wise man with excellent judgment. I remember being instructed to go see him and see if he would be willing to serve as one of the wise men to adjudicate in North Africa. He politely declined. I asked him what his reasons were and he said, "I don't want to be a wise man because I am a wise man." So he was quite an important figure. The Carter administration had relatively little interest in French Africa so that the Ivory Coast, even though it was an oasis of stability in a turbulent region, didn't receive a great deal of attention.

I remember Andrew Young paying his first visit to the Ivory Coast. I think Andy felt that French technical counselors were probably making all the important decisions for the country. I introduced him to various Ivorian ministers. He found them to be in charge and knowledgeable and the crowning moment of his visit was a lunch with President Houphouet-Boigny on his famous gold plated dining ware. I think Andy appreciated the fact that Houphouet-Boigny was not a puppet. He was really in charge and doing a good job. He made a couple of visits after that and was our best friend in the Carter administration.

The problem for the embassy was basically, while the Ivory Coast was very helpful in a variety of ways, including playing host to a very large regional AID mission, we were doing very little for the Ivory Coast itself. This seemed to me too lopsided so I tried in a variety of ways, but without success, to get an AID program for the Ivory Coast itself.

However, as a post it was wonderful for the family and our children still regard it as their favorite post. When lightning struck in Abidjan, it usually struck the French embassy not the American embassy so we lived quite a normal life and made trips together and from that standpoint it was delightful.

As I say, we left at the end of June, 1979.

Q: How did you find the French presence there?

STEARNS: They had the most lucrative contracts for the supply of a variety of needs the Ivoirians had. They occupied the positions of middle management. Our own relations

with the French were perfectly smooth and normal. There was good cooperation, but there was no doubt that the French regarded it as their terrain and the dean of the diplomatic corps by tradition was the French ambassador who was a larger than life figure, Ambassador ? who was also a French poet and also the mayor of Toulouse and stood above the rank and file of other ambassadors. I think the most attention we received from the French embassy and the French ambassador was when we were visited by Henry Labouisse and his wife, Eve Labouisse, born Eve Curie, the daughter of Pierre Curie. The French ambassador had been informed of their arrival and they were staying with us. At that point we invited the French ambassador over for dinner.

On the whole, the French occupied a position different, higher than most of the embassies.

Q: If we wanted a vote on the UN or the like, would you usually consult with the French embassy first?

STEARNS: During our period in Abidjan I don't recall any important votes at the UN that our interest diverged from the French so that we didn't have these bilateral issues that were reflected in our relationship with the Ivory Coast.

Q: Were there the equivalent of political parties or it was it pretty much a one party state?

STEARNS: There was no doubt Houphouet-Boigny was the most important political leader in the country. There were not developed political parties as such. His genius was to maintain a balance between largely the Muslim part of the Ivory Coast and the Christian southern portions. It was after his death that the delicate balance fell apart with disastrous results for both the Ivorian economy and Ivorian politico. It is very sad to see how those difficulties have accumulated after Houphouet-Boigny's demise.

As political parties were concerned in many parts of Africa, the politics were largely tribal.

Q: How about relations with other neighbors?

STEARNS: It was toward the end of our stay in Abidjan when the government was overthrown in Liberia. One of the Tolbert sons came to call on me and ask for American intervention which, of course, did not occur.

Relations with the other neighbors were largely dominated by the fact that the Ivorian economy was prosperous and therefore there was a big influx of immigrants from neighboring countries; Liberia, Upper Volta, Ghana. Ivoirians needed that kind of neighbor for jobs that many Ivoirians were not willing to do. That large influx of immigrants became a problem when the Ivorian economy began to suffer later on.

Q: Had Houphouet-Boigny started this replica of Saint Peter? Had Houphouet-Boigny started the building of this huge cathedral?

STEARNS: No, that hadn't started yet. What he had done was to announce that the political capital would be moved from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro. The construction of the cathedral and other improvements were yet to be accomplished. Yamoussoukro did have a three star hotel and a good restaurant or two and he did open a golf course, of all things, in Yamoussoukro which before that had been a small village. I remember also there were broad highways with street lights that kind of led nowhere. His intention was clear although I think the embassies have never had to move from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro.

Q: Did you see trouble brewing? Was he sitting on a potential powder keg at the time or not or we did we feel that way?

STEARNS: What I saw and I reported in my final message to Washington was that while things were going very well, everything depended on the continued prosperity of the Ivorian economy. If there were any collapse in the prices of cocoa and coffee, and if in other ways the Ivorian economy was adversely affected, and given the large number of non Ivoirians resident working in the Ivory Coast, it would become a serious problem which would have to be faced.

Q: Where were they coming from?

STEARNS: They were coming from all of the neighboring countries, Liberia, Upper Volta and Ghana.

Q: How were they being received?

STEARNS: They were working in menial jobs the Ivoirians were no longer needed to fill and there was always a need for labor in the Ivory Coast in the coffee and cocoa cultivation. The country was prosperous, and there weren't any indications of immediate problems. As I just reported, this was clear to me everything did depend on continued prosperity of the country.

Q: Outside of Andrew Young, did we have any other state visits or major figures come by?

STEARNS: We had the usual number of congressional visits, no other high executive branch officials, as I recall. I think Andy was the most important. We hosted the African chief's of mission meeting shortly after our arrival in '76 or '77. That, of course, brought people like Dick Moose and others, but by and large, since the Ivory Coast was not a trouble spot, there was no need for high level visitors and very few, if any, occurred.

Q: Sometimes you have a place like that and it means an awful lot of congressional visits there because they can say they've been to Africa.

STEARNS: There were no real publicized minority problems that would have drawn congressional attention and my main problem was to get the attention of Washington when needed.

For example, the vice president of the Ivory Coast was a man named Felix Yasei. He said he was going to have a vacation in the Caribbean and would like to stop off in Washington and meet with officials there on his way. I got in touch and reported all this to Washington. I got a relatively mild and indifferent response indicating it would not be possible to arrange a meeting with Vice President Mondale. The Assistant Secretary for Africa, Dick Moose would host a lunch at the State Department. It even gave the cost of a luncheon, a total of \$175, something like that, so it was very clear that they were not going to lean over backwards.

At that point I leaned on my relationship with the French and Averell Harriman and called Harriman who was familiar with the Ivory Coast and told him about Yasei's visit. Harriman immediately arranged a luncheon at his residence on N Street for Yasei which included Vice President Mondale. He did what the State Department at that time in the Carter administration would not do. So it was really a matter of trying to get and hold the attention at decision making levels in Washington.

As far as our relations with the French were concerned, where we had differences it was competing for contracts with the Ivorian government. On a few occasions the Ivoirians wanted to show they were not beholden totally to the French, though we did get some tension when a contract came about but, by and large, the French still dominated (unclear).

Q: Did any of the Ivory Coast neighbors or outside forces such as the Kaddafi's Liberians, were they trying to cause trouble there or not?

STEARNS: They tried to cause trouble. They did not succeed. Being an oasis of prosperity and stability, the Ivoirians and Houphouet-Boigny himself, had considerable respect among African leaders so the opportunities to create trouble from the outside were very small. That was not a problem or for us at the embassy during my time there.

Q: This was not a period of great terrorism, was it?

STEARNS: No, this was before terrorism became a number one topic, although as I have said, in Greece the November 17th group had shown how terrible the problem could be with the murder of Dick Welch.

I think that brings us pretty much to the end of our tour in Abidjan. From there I went back to Washington as vice president of the National Defense University at Fort McNair and that was an interesting two year assignment.

Q: Let's talk about that. What were you doing?

STEARNS: I was the vice president of the organization. By tradition the president has always been a three star admiral or three star general and the vice president a former ambassador, civilian. The first to occupy the equivalent position had been George Kennan who lived in quarters 15 and quarters 15 became the assigned residence for the civilian vice president of NDU. My family and I lived there very happily with the Washington Channel in the back yard and tennis courts and the officers' club next door.

The opportunity, both to learn military policy and military potential for the Foreign Service in advisory jobs of that kind is enormous. By the same token, because I found in many cases the American military take diplomacy more seriously than political administrations in Washington, there is the opportunity to influence policy, and I think the State Department has never taken that opportunity seriously. Usually jobs of that kind, POLAD jobs, the advisory jobs in various military commands, are regarded as one-way streets. Actually, they do offer enormous opportunity to learn and to teach so I think that wiser administrations usually would take these positions seriously.

Q: This was the Reagan administration by this time?

STEARNS: No, it was still the end of the Carter administration.

This is not something that depends on which party is running the administration because it is by and large the career service of the State Department that has failed to recognize the serious potential of these POLAD jobs. My service at NDU was really at the end of the Carter administration. We left with the election of Reagan.

Q: Did you find yourself trying to make those officers assigned to the War College aware of both the opportunity and the importance of the relations with the military?

STEARNS: Yes, absolutely. That was the principle theme of the time we spent there, the need for close coordination of military and diplomatic policy. As I used to say to allies, without military power diplomacy would be unneeded and without diplomatic policy, military policy would be needless.

Q: I understand from people who served there at various times initially there is not much understanding on either side of what the other can and can't do.

STEARNS: I think that is one of the important reasons for having those positions. During my time I found that understanding on both sides increased as we worked together in the context of defense maneuvers so it is a great opportunity which has in some cases been wasted.

I think that military and diplomatic policy work more smoothly together today than they did say 30 or 40 years ago, or 50 years ago.

Q: I think there is much more effort made to, the understanding that, for example, when war games come they are done playing different roles and the military at a certain point sort of says okay, this is where diplomacy would take over.

STEARNS: I think also the calamitous end of the Vietnam War led the military to look more closely at the reason to go to war and the reason to avoid it and therefore, diplomacy became a more important option than it had before the Vietnam War. I certainly found that to be the case. There was probably more interest among senior military in studying what had gone wrong in Vietnam than there was at that time in the State Department.

Q: People say it was usually the diplomats at the gaming table of war games that would say well, I guess we'd better use the nuclear weapons a lot faster than the military would.

STEARNS: Yes, I think that is absolutely right. I found many of the State Department officials readier to use military means than the military themselves who better understood the cost.

Q: It's part of the leaning process on both sides.

STEARNS: That's right and those are all reasons to continue and take more seriously these programs of cooperation, not only at the National Defense University but at the Army War College and the Air War College and the Naval Academy.

Q: Someone I was interviewing last week and he said he came away with a tremendous respect for military officers, how well trained they were and how thoughtful, the ones that came there which I think for the normal Foreign Service type it is easy to come away, they come into the Foreign Service, you might say with an almost, you might say, I am not sure it is the right term but disdain for the military. You know, these are a bunch of brutal guys dressed going around killing people.

STEARNS: That was also my experience. I had worked fairly closely with the military at previous posts but I certainly learned at the National Defense University that military thinking is not narrow minded. There was a greater disposition to question policies and examine what went wrong among the senior military than I often found at the State Department.

Q: I would think too you were there at a rather crucial time. You keep talking about Vietnam. This, of course, ranks sort of next to the Great Depression and World War II as one of the molding events of our generation and particularly for the military. There must have been a lot of talk and thought about what went wrong and why did we do it and how did it happen.

STEARNS: Yes.

In any event, it does go back to what I said earlier that these opportunities for diplomats to work with the military are important for both sides. It should be taken much more seriously in the State Department than I believe it has been in the past.

Q: When you were at the War College did you have much contact with the State Department or were you kind of left out?

STEARNS: Not much official contact but I would invite senior State Department people over to speak to our classes, including military and civilian but that was more personal than official.

Q: Is there anything more we should talk about the War College?

STEARNS: The War College is part of the National Defense University and there is a senior State Department official who is usually political adviser at the War College. The National Defense University comprises both the War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

Q: When the Reagan administration came in, people kind of held their breath because he was considered sort of a cowboy out of Hollywood, out of California. How did he strike you at a certain distance?

STEARNS: There was a certain amount of disillusionment with the Carter administration. Nobody I had contact with at NDU knew what to expect in any precise way from the Reagan administration. It seemed to many of us, myself included, I tend to be a liberal Democrat in my personal politics, that the Carter administration had run out of gas.

Let's go into that the next time we talk and try to find out how these things happened and how they could be prevented from happening again so there were not only seminars and discussions about the lapses in Vietnam, but even one or two courses at the War College which dealt directly with the subject. The military did take them very seriously.

Q: Did the State Department, when I was in Vietnam every once in a while I would get a rather barbed comment about you got us into this war, get us out of it.

STEARNS: At the War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces there was a real attempt to find out what had actually happened and where wrong decisions had been made. There was a disposition to say that the military had done their job but there had been a political defeat and to ask why this was so. There was no tendency to blame the State Department or civilian policy measures intended to be the responsibility of the military of the political decision makers in the White House, particularly of the Johnson administration and on Capitol Hill.

Q: Today is the 16th of September, 2013 with Monteagle Stearns.

My question we were answering that was just recorded was, “While you were at the National Defense University, was the military looking at Vietnam, lessons learned and all?”

STEARNS: And the answer was yes, intensely so.

Q: Ronald Reagan had just been elected. What was your impression when he came in? Did we feel this was a good thing or a bad thing?

STEARNS: My service at the National Defense University coincided with the last two years of the Carter administration so Ronald Reagan had not yet been elected. He was elected just at the end of my two years at Fort McNair so I didn't have any practical experience of how policies were likely to change or which ones would remain the same.

Q: At the personal level, how did you feel about Reagan coming in? For many people he seemed sort of like a loose cannon.

STEARNS: I had become somewhat disillusioned with the Carter administration because it was ineffective. The whole Iranian crisis, the Iranian hostage crisis, only intensified that feeling. My own view was to take a wait and see attitude, find out what the Reagan administration was actually going to do and whether there would be significant changes to American policy.

My strong feeling after two years at Fort McNair was the State Department should take these POLAD, political adviser positions more seriously. They were not only a marvelous way to learn the capabilities and limitations of military power as they relate to foreign policy, but also to have an opportunity to influence that policy. I think I concluded by saying that sometimes the military took these assignments more seriously than the State Department where they were often regarded as preludes for retirement.

Q: You were in a position snuggled up with the military to see how we dealt with this. Was there any particular tie in between the War Colleges and POLAD or was POLAD assignments done kind of on their own?

STEARNS: The POLAD assignments tended to vary with the personal rapport of the State Department official serving in that capacity with the senior military officer he was advising. This was true in Europe and it was true wherever POLADs existed. To some extent it was also true at the National Defense University, although the duties of the vice president at the National Defense University tended to relate to the actual administration of programs. For example, one of the rewarding activities that I found myself engaged in was speaking to reserve officers which occurred at various times during the year and throughout the U.S. It was a great opportunity to get to know parts of the United States I hadn't visited or was unfamiliar with before. There were lots of assignments of that kind.

Q: What happened? Where did you go?

STEARNS: My next assignment occurred because I had invited Larry Eagleburger, who was then I think undersecretary for political affairs, over to speak to our FSOs at the National Defense University. Larry and I had lunch together at our house before at Fort McNair at Quarters 15. When he left Larry said, "What would you like to do next? Where would you like to go?"

I said, "Well, I think I am best qualified to go to Greece because I speak Greek and have served there twice" so Larry took that under advisement. I expected if anything materialized it would take some time to learn about it. I wasn't sure this would actually come about. In most cases, I think in the end I was the only vice president of the National Defense University who received an onward assignment. Even there it was often regarded as a bad job for a senior Foreign Service officer. It was a prelude to retirement.

In any event, after my talk with Larry I was scheduled to take a National War College group out to Eastern Europe for a tour in about two to three weeks after that talk with Larry. We were going to go to Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia. So off we went and the second stop was Budapest where I was staying with an old friend, Harry Burkholder, the U.S. ambassador to Hungary. One of the first events I scheduled in Budapest was a reception given by Harry for our National War College group. I was standing in the receiving line and the butler came up and tapped me on the shoulder and said I was wanted on the telephone in my bedroom. I was a little concerned about that because I felt perhaps my wife was calling because there had been an accident or something of that kind.

I went out and took the call in my bedroom at the residence. The voice on the phone asked whether it was Ambassador Stearns, and I said, "Yes."

The polite woman's voice said, "The president wants to talk to you." I wasn't quite sure what that meant but a minute later a voice that sounded familiar came on the line and it was, in fact, President Reagan saying, "I hope I didn't wake you up."

I said, "No, Mr. President. It is still before bedtime here in Budapest."

The president said, "I am calling because I want to ask you to do me a favor."

I said, "What's that, Mr. President?"

He said, "I'd like you to go as our ambassador to Greece" and so I was properly flattered by that and said of course I would be delighted, but I wanted to talk to my wife to make sure she was on board.

The president said, "Of course, of course. Just let me know as soon as possible."

That was how I learned that my nomination was going forward. The whole process had taken less than a month from when I talked to Eagleburger to the time that I received my call from the president. A speedy assignment I think in part because the Reagan

administration liked the fact that their nominee for Athens was seconded to the Defense Department, and I was still then a voting resident of California. So I am not sure they cared much about my ability to speak Greek or my experience in Greece than that I had those other indicators.

In any event, we completed our trip and it occurred to me that since I was not to mention the president's call to my classmates at the War College, the only people who really knew who was going to be going to Athens in the near future were the Hungarian secret service people who were undoubtedly bugging every call in and out of the American embassy.

That's how that assignment worked out. After I got back we had several months to prepare for our next trip to Greece. We took advantage of that and Toni, of course, was delighted with the prospect of returning and the children too so it was a happy family with that assignment.

Q: What was the situation in Greece before you got there? How stood relations with Greece?

STEARNS: Relations were fairly normal. The government in Greece was a conservative government. Constantine Karamanlis had gone into exile in Paris and remained there, turning over the reins of the Greek conservatives to George Rallis, a very respected but not particularly charismatic politician. When we arrived in Athens, it probably would have been into late August of 1981, the Rallis government was in power and elections had been scheduled for October of the same year. So it was a pre-electoral period, but the government was conservative. The outstanding issue that had not been concluded in the previous several years was the renewal or the cancellation of the bases agreement. That was understood to be hanging fire at least until a new government came in.

Q: During your confirmation hearings, did you run into any problems?

STEARNS: No, they went very smoothly, indeed because there were no outstanding issues as I indicated. There was no problem and I made a number of calls on people interested in Greek affairs on Capitol Hill. This was a smooth, uncomplicated process.

Q: What about the Greek American lobby? Did they take a particular interest in you?

STEARNS: I think the people that took most interest were probably people like Senator Paul Sarbanes, former Congressman John Brademas, people who had served or were still serving on the Capitol Hill and had a special interest, either ethnic or simply political, on U.S. relations with Greece. So those were the people who took special interest in my appointment.

There were conservatives, mainly centered in New York, who thought I had known Andreas Papandreou in an earlier period too well. A group of ship owners in New York wrote to Secretary Haig and said why is the Reagan administration appointing a friend of Papandreou to be their ambassador. Al Haig called me about it. I went over and talked to

him. I said I had known Andreas Papandreou when he was still minister, but I was going to Athens to represent the U.S. in Greece, not to represent Greece in the U.S. So Al considered that a satisfactory reply and I heard nothing more about it.

There were conservatives who believed that I was somehow suspect because of my earlier friendship with Andreas Papandreou.

Q: What about the military? I am talking about the American military. We'd had an embargo on particularly Turkey for some time. Were they worried about our somehow getting too close to Turkey or did that arise?

STEARNS: No. The colonels were long gone and that meant there was no longer an embargo, either on heavy military shipments to Greece or on our regular military aid to Turkey. There was no opponent who believed that as long as Turkish troops remained in Cyprus we should show our disapproval by conducting a partial embargo. This didn't really present a problem as far as my own confirmation.

Q: You went out there and you served from when to when?

STEARNS: I served from August of 1981 until September of 1985, so something over four years.

Q: When you arrived, what was the atmosphere in the embassy? Had there been, I came from a time, I was there from '70 to '74 and of course, people in the embassy were kind of in different camps and all. What about when you were there?

STEARNS: I think I covered the attitude when I had gone out in '74 as DCM and had not been received for a long period by then Ambassador Tasca. When I came as ambassador in '81 those issues simply didn't exist. My predecessor had been Bob McCloskey, former spokesman for the State Department who also served as ambassador to Cyprus. So it was simply a normal succession when I arrived. All the attention then was focused on the upcoming elections of October 18, 1980.

Q: Who was your DCM?

STEARNS: I inherited a terrific guy who had been serving with Bob McCloskey so we had a very happy relationship. When he left, Allen Berlin, whom I had known in the past was serving in NATO. Because we had taken up renewed bases negotiations, I wanted a DCM with experience in political military affairs and asked for and received Allen Berlin who came I think a year after I arrived.

Q: When you arrived you arrived just before the elections?

STEARNS: Yes, I arrived in August and the elections were scheduled for October 18th. I paid calls, of course on the prime minister and presented my credentials to President Karamanlis who had returned.

Q: Were there any, you might say, outstanding issues at the time?

STEARNS: There were no issues that were going to be addressed before elections that was for sure. The question was who was going to win the elections when they occurred. I found the Prime Minister somewhat pessimistic, but I still believed that because Andreas Papandreou had alienated enough voters, that Rallis might be able to win the election. Therefore, the embassy, when it made its assessment of prospects for the October elections, was wrong in saying we thought that conservatives would have a small majority. It turned out of course that Andreas Papandreou and the PASOK party won a very substantial victory in the elections in October.

I had not called on Papandreou in part because I wasn't at all sure what my principal relations were going to be with him. I had had no contact with him during his years in opposition. When I had come back as DCM in '74, I had exchanged small talk with him on a couple of occasions, usually at functions like Red Army Day at the Soviet Embassy. We had had a perfectly friendly but totally without substance encounter there and on one or two other occasions. So I really didn't know what it would be like when he became prime minister and I was the American ambassador. There were a number of outstanding issues, after all. Papandreou had campaigned on the platform that he was going to withdraw Greece from NATO and the European Union and the renewal of the bases agreement was, to put it mildly, in serious doubt. So there were all kinds of issues that were going to have to be addressed at some point during the PASOK administration of Andreas Papandreou.

As I said, I couldn't be sure of what his attitude toward me would be. We had known each other really too well to pretend we hadn't, but on the other hand, circumstances had changed drastically. I declined to rush into things after Papandreou's election. I deliberately waited for several weeks before asking to be received by the new prime minister. This led a couple of newspaper men to say that the new prime minister was putting the American ambassador in his place by not receiving him when, in fact, the reason he wasn't receiving me was I hadn't asked to be received.

After a decent interval and after Papandreou had been sworn in by parliament, I did request a meeting. The request went in, as I recall, on Thursday or Friday before a long weekend, a holiday weekend in Greece. To my surprise, I got an immediate call back from the prime minister's office saying he'd meet me over the weekend at his office in the parliament building.

Sometime after dark on a Saturday I went down to the parliament building. The building was dark. There was no business being conducted but someone ushered me into the parliament building and I was escorted to the prime minister's office. I was greeted in his outer office by someone I had known in previous years, his personal secretary. I noticed the prime minister's office door was partly ajar and it was bright as sunlight beyond the door. It seemed to be likely that there were feed lights and that the press had been assembled. It occurred to me that the prime minister was going to usher me in to

announce he was asking for the American bases be closed. While I was still trying to sort out what my response would be, I was ushered me into the prime minister's office. There were a huge number of photographers, journalists. Andreas Papandreou was standing just inside the door. He greeted me and then he turned to me and said, "Well, we have a lot of press here. Will we speak to them in Greek or in English? To my relief he said, "Perhaps because there are so many journalists, we will talk in English."

Then he proceeded to give a very cordial greeting saying we had known each other in the past which he thought was a good sign that we would be able to work outstanding problems together as we had known each other for years at other times. I responded in kind.

There were a lot of questions and photographs taken and when the press corps backed out of the huge office of the prime minister, Papandreou turned to me and said, "Shall we have a drink?" He led me over to two easy chairs in front of his desk and Angela made us whiskey and sodas. We sat for a while and Papandreou said, "Tell me something. Twenty years ago, did you ever think I would be sitting here and you would be sitting there?"

That's the way our relationship got off to a reasonably amicable start.

Q: Looking at this sort of back at the embassy with your staff, what were your concerns and maybe pleasures about Papandreou coming in as far as American relations were concerned?

STEARNS: His platform as leader of the opposition included the threat to leave NATO, to leave the European Community, to close American bases. These posed enormous problems so that I had advised the State Department after Papandreou's election that whatever happened in the next year or so, it wouldn't be business as usual in Greece. That was what I felt, that he had gone too far as leader of the opposition to fundamentally change Greece's relationship with the U.S. It would be almost impossible to change, if need be, his policies when he became prime minister.

So I was pessimistic that he would be able to sort out what seemed to be insurmountable problems in our relationship as his government took over.

Q: The threat to leave NATO and the prime minister can talk about that but within Greece you've got a fairly powerful military and they're going to lose an awful lot of power and military equipment and everything else.

STEARNS: The Greek military had discredited itself with the colonels' coup and its management of government. After those seven years the Greek military was in a weaker position than it had ever been in contemporary Greek history.

Also, Papandreou made himself defense minister to make sure he kept his hand on the control of the military, but there was no real threat to the government's power because

the military had made so many mistakes when it tried to govern Greece that no one had confidence in it.

Q: What about relations with Turkey at the time?

STEARNS: Relations with Turkey, as always, were dicey because there were 30,000 Turkish troops in northern Cyprus which prevented any attempt to normalize relations between Greece and Turkey.

There were at the time of the elections no immediate issues other than the Cyprus issue which was bad enough. There was a certain amount of time to address some of these issues, whether successfully or not.

Q: You had Haig as secretary of state who had been NATO commander and he must have felt strongly on the Greek issue and NATO.

STEARNS: Actually Secretary Haig made an official visit to Greece in the spring of 1982, within six or seven months of the time we arrived in Athens. There were a number of issues centered on the fact that Greece was refusing to participate in NATO exercises in which Turkey was involved. The Haig visit, since he had been SACEUR, supreme allied commander in Europe, he knew the issues very well. When he came to visit our main meeting was to take place at the prime minister's personal home in a suburb outside Athens.

So out we went, a fairly small group of Greek officials and a fairly small group of Haig's staff, me and people from the embassy. The meeting went very smoothly and, in fact, Papandreou was on his best behavior. Before the meeting began he announced to his staff at the table that Secretary Haig probably knew the issues better than any of the others present so they could close their briefing books. In fact, the meeting went very, very smoothly. While Greece still insisted on conditions for participation in NATO exercises, driving back to the residence Haig said to me, "That went a lot better than I had expected. He's really not such a bad guy", something I heard echoed many, many times from various official visitors from Washington. Andreas could be very, very disarming. While he didn't often change his mind on basic positions, he certainly was a good listener and could convey the impression that he appreciated arguments that were different from his. He was very, very smooth in that. We had very often conservatives from Washington who were impressed by Papandreou but found out that while they had amicable conversations, Greek policies really hadn't changed.

Q: Would to tell visitors and all, okay, we had a very affable meeting but the guts of the matter was, we didn't get anywhere or the equivalent to that?

STEARNS: No. He was a disarming conversationalist, but I said not to expect dramatic changes. I gave them full briefings of that background.

Q: Were there any moves to get out of NATO?

STEARNS: No, he simply nibbled away at the edges. The first indication I had that there might be some wiggle room was when Papandreou asked a French visitor who was to participate in the meeting of defense ministers in Spain which would have been in '82. In preparation for his trip to Spain (background noise) at his residence. He wondered what the schedule would be, if there would be any black tie dinners. I saw his refusal to don formal attire for events in Athens, and Papandreou was concerned that he was going to be straitjacketed in a tuxedo when he went to Spain. I said that there would be a final dinner of the NATO defense ministers which was a black tie affair. He said, "Well, you know I don't have a black tie. Will you help me out?"

I said, "I've got a Greek tailor if you trust me to be discrete." So in the end Andreas went out to the defense ministers' meeting and actually wore a black tie for the final dinner. Still he refused to sign a statement which was customary at the end of the meeting of the defense ministers of NATO. Therefore, for the first time, NATO defense ministers didn't issue a statement but he did wear a black tie.

Q: Were there other issues? With NATO for example, none of our units expelled from there?

STEARNS: The big issues were all related to our military relations with Greece. I mentioned the fact that Greece had many problems with participation in NATO exercises, some of them real and some of them fabricated. There were problems with the labor unions whose workers were employed mainly at the base outside Athens and this occupied an enormous amount of my time. At one time the workers erected a tent camp outside the gates of the base which tended to interfere with traffic to and from the base. There were a number of problems of that kind.

Of course, the big problem looming up was the need to try to complete negotiations for the status of our bases. The newer bases had to be negotiated and this obviously was going to present a lot of trouble because it ran so counter to our announced policies. I was deeply worried for the State Department. They were considering having the embassy conduct the negotiations. I had been the negotiator back in '75 but what was the possibility of having an outside negotiator. They wanted my views on which arrangement I would prefer. I consulted my British, German and French colleagues in Athens and asked what they would do in such circumstances. They were unanimous in urging for an outside negotiator and that was my own view also.

I told Washington that I thought it would be preferable to have an outside negotiator which would permit the embassy and myself to go over the head of the negotiator, if necessary direct to the prime minister, which wouldn't be possible if I were myself the negotiator. I did ask for information on who would be the third party negotiator. In due course they told me it would be Reg Bartholomew who had been assistant secretary for security affairs, a very senior officer, hardnosed, but a very, very capable guy who later went out to serve as ambassador to Spain and Italy.

In any event, I did propose an outside negotiator. When Reg Bartholomew came out I urged strongly that my own deputy, Allen Berlin, become Reg's deputy on the negotiating team so there would be no separation between the embassy and the negotiation. That was accepted. It was very hard on Allen but it turned out to be an important part of what was to become eventually a successful negotiation.

Q: Did we see Greece leaving NATO as a realistic possible occurrence or was this more political posturing?

STEARNS: We hadn't been sure what was going to happen, but by this time it was pretty clear that Papandreou was backtracking from threats he made as a candidate. In fact, he said publicly that the time was not right for withdrawal either from NATO or the European Community. Over the first two years of the PASOK administration he backed away from the more extreme threats and we had bought time.

Q: If Greece left NATO that would mean that Turkey would become even more important to us, and Greece would be basically bypassed and its rival would get stronger.

STEARNS: That's absolutely right. Of course, that was a factor that figured strongly in the reconsideration of their own decision. They came to realize that if they withdrew, that would mean that Turkey was in a greatly strengthened position. Also they were aware that an American military presence in Greece was a fact if there were hostilities between Greece and Turkey. As they pondered the pros and cons of departure from NATO, I think they concluded the cons strongly outweighed the pros.

Q: Were you able to sit down with Papandreou and say you know, if you do this, this is a natural outcome. It is not a threat. It is just what will develop or could you talk in those terms to him?

STEARNS: I didn't have to point it out to him because it was clear this was the direction in which he was moving. The fact that he attended the NATO defense ministers' meeting was a clear indication that he had no immediate plans to leave NATO. I didn't have to point out to him what he clearly was well aware of.

Q: Were you able to carry on normal relations with him during this time you were there?

STEARNS: They were almost more than normal because in some ways Papandreou was as much American as he was Greek. Part of him was certainly motivated by domestic political needs, particularly the need to convince the Greek public that he was not a puppet of the Americans. I realized this.

In fact, there were many things on which Papandreou consulted me privately, asking me over to his office for cheese and a drink, which didn't directly relate to Greek-American relations. For example, about a year he assumed office he called me over and we had a wine and cheese lunch at his office and he said, "I want you to know I am thinking of

changing the foreign minister and I wondered if my new foreign minister was going to be easy to work with from your standpoint.”

He named Karolos Papoulias who is now president of Greece. I assured him that Papoulias was a respected figure of the left, a man of integrity, and Papandreou said, “But he doesn’t speak any English. That may be a problem.” We had had ministers who didn’t speak English and an interpreter was always possible. In my case I could speak to Papoulias in Greek so on issues of that kind Papandreou really relied on our former relationship to seek advice that he regarded as fairly independent. There were a number of occasions. When we talk next time I will discuss the way we concluded the base negotiations which is a good example of where personal relations played a significant role.

Q: Today is the 23rd of September, 2013 with Monteagle Stearns. You were going to talk about the time you were ambassador. What years were you ambassador to Greece?

STEARNS: I was ambassador to Greece from August of ’81 through to September of ’85.

Q: We were talking about sort of the personal things when you and Papandreou were able to kind of work things out but you were saying a prime example was the base agreements.

STEARNS: I wanted to add something I think I omitted when we talked last week and that is you asked me who my first DCM was in Athens. I said he was very good but I don’t think you I told you it was Milton Kovner. Milton did a superb job. He was Bob McCloskey’s DCM. I was committed to asking Allen Berlin of NATO to come as DCM but had that not been possible, I would have been very happy to have Milt for the entire time I was there.

Q: How did these base agreements work out?

STEARNS: I think I mentioned there were a number of issues that had to be faced. The most difficult and apparently intractable was the question of bases because our old base agreement had not been renewed during the previous administration. Papandreou and the PASOK Party had pledged to close the bases as well as withdrawing Greece from NATO and the European Union. So all of these threats loomed over our relationship during the first several years of the Papandreou administration.

I think I mentioned the State Department asked me whether I would wish to be the negotiator to renew the base agreement or would I accept an outside negotiator. I consulted some of my NATO colleagues and we all agreed that it was wise to have an outside negotiator which would leave the embassy free if necessary in cases of deadlock to appeal directly to the prime minister and senior officials. So that is what I told the State Department, and in turn they told me they had selected Reg Bartholomew, the former assistant secretary of state for national security affairs to be the negotiator. I knew Reg

personally. He was a hardnosed and demanding guy, but he certainly knew the issues very well, probably far better than the Greek negotiators. So that was the arrangement that was settled on.

I had to take a short medical leave in the fall of 1982, at Mass General Hospital in Boston and Reg, at my request, came out. We had a day to discuss the outlook for the negotiations and make sure we were on the same page. The negotiations were then scheduled to start, as I recall, at the end of '82 and the beginning of '83. So when I returned to Athens we had pretty well agreed on a course of action that was likely, we hoped, to gain positive results. Reg came out in due course. I had pressed the State Department to make Allen Berlin, my DCM at the embassy, Reg's deputy in the negotiations so there would be no split between the embassy and the negotiating team and that was done in due course.

Q: Before we move on, did you or anybody sense there might be a split between what we wanted out of the negotiations and what the State Department wanted? Did this cause us to get in a twist among ourselves?

STEARNS: No, but there was always a possibility that as negotiations that proceeded in Athens that if there were any disconnect between the embassy and the negotiating team this would become apparent to the Greeks and would certainly confuse and complicate our own negotiating strategy. It seemed to be important to make sure that that didn't happen. In fact, Allen Berlin did a wonderful job as my DCM and Reg Bartholomew's deputy on the negotiating team. It was very hard on him. He had long hours and difficult assignments but it worked out well.

Q: How did they proceed?

STEARNS: The Greek negotiator was undersecretary at the foreign office, Yanni Kapsis, who had been editor of a left wing populist newspaper, Ta Nea and had been consistently critical of American policy. So he was really a political choice by Papandreu to prevent criticism from the left wing of the PASOK Party that the Greek negotiators were not sufficiently reliable from the ideological standpoint. Yanni, while he had many admirable qualities and was an amusing guy, was not an expert on political military affairs. There was no doubt that Reg and his team were better equipped with the facts than the Greek negotiating team.

Nevertheless, negotiations proceeded through the winter of '82, '83 and into the early spring. The one issue that the negotiators, Reg Bartholomew and Yanni Kapsis, couldn't seem to resolve was the crucial termination clause of the agreement. Because the Greek government had stated categorically that they would not renew the bases agreement, they were insistent the termination clause read in Greek and English, 'This agreement terminates after five years upon written notification by either of the parties.' This was not acceptable to us because we didn't want the agreement to appear to run off the cliff after five years. The negotiating teams simply were unable to get over that obstacle.

So I decided this was an issue that deserved direct consultation with the prime minister to see if we could find a way to get out of the impasse. So I called him. He was already vacationing at a beach resort called outside Athens. He invited me over to the beach resort to discuss the issue so on the appointed day I went out there. He asked me if I wanted to have a swim and I said, “No, thanks a lot” and began to discuss the implications of the wording of the termination clause. Eventually I suggested it might be possible to have the English version read as we preferred, ‘This agreement is terminable after five years’ and the Greek version read ‘This agreement terminates after five years’, the operative clause being, of course, that in either case the written notification was required. That was the safeguard that seemed to be important to the United States to retain.

I suggested this line of approach to Papandreou and we agreed the Greek version would read, (Greek), ‘This agreement terminates’ and that the English version would read ‘This agreement is terminable’ but both would require written notification in advance.

Q: But those are two quite different matters.

STEARNS: Well, they are not different in the sense of the practical effect is that you have to rather they are terminable or terminated, you have to give advance notification. That was our safeguard.

Q: I am a bit unclear but I think this is important. If they wanted to get out they had to, it didn't seem to lock them into a base agreement except for this five year period.

STEARNS: Well, they were locked in for five years. The only escape clause was if at the end of five years they provided written agreement or written notice that they wanted out, but from the standpoint of the United States, the important safeguard was they had to provide written notification.

Q: Why did we feel that was a safeguard?

STEARNS: Because it meant the agreement didn't automatically terminate after five years. It didn't run off a cliff.

So after the prime minister agreed at the beach house, I cabled this to the State Department with some qualms, wondering whether this would be acceptable in Washington. Within a day or two I was relieved to get a message back from Washington saying that this was acceptable. So that was, in fact, the solution to the termination clause. I suppose the Greek base agreement of that date is one of the few in which the English and Greek versions are not literally the same, even though the practical effect is the same.

So that was the solution and it was an example of Papandreou's willingness to find ways to overcome the obstacles that we know inevitably can come up in negotiations of that kind.

Q: How did you read Papandreou at the time? Did he really mean he wanted to get the Greeks out of NATO?

STEARNS: Well, it was politically red meat for his left wing. You have to remember that PASOK had campaigned on the platform that they were going to make Greece independent which meant independent of American influence and closing of the bases and also withdrawal from NATO and the European Union. I knew Papandreou well enough to know that much of this was probably politically motivated rather than the result of deep convictions of his own. He was far too intelligent to think that Greece's security would be strengthened by an action like withdrawal from NATO or the closing of the bases since Greece was mainly concerned about its relations with Turkey. It was clear that an American presence in Greece and Greece's membership in NATO were safeguards for Greece in the event of a conflict with Turkey.

Q: Anybody who dealt with Greece knew that if the Greeks withdrew from NATO we had Turkey airbases and all that would move to Turkey and all of a sudden Greece would be left without any air cover.

STEARNS: That's why I was reasonably confident by this time in our relations that the Papandreou government would really not going to carry out its threat to withdraw from NATO, and we had a fighting chance to retain the bases. In fact, although the bases agreement remained after five years, we unilaterally began to close most of the bases. The most important remaining base to this day is the NATO base established by the U.S. in Crete at Souda Bay.

Q: While these negotiations were going on, what was the political environment in Athens?

STEARNS: There was considerable distrust of the United States and Greece's relationship with the United States. I think I explained last week that the visit to Greece during the period of the junta by then Vice President Spiro Agnew had convinced many Greeks the United States really didn't object to a military junta ruling Greece. We had enormous distrust, not only from the left wing of Greek politics but even from conservatives.

All that complicated the atmosphere for the negotiations of the bases agreement as well as many other issues.

Q: Were there isolated attacks on Americans during this period?

STEARNS: Not until, as I recall until a little bit later. The November 17 group assassinated a, there was one murder of an American official, the head of navy section of the MAAG, George Santos, a Greek American was murdered on his way home in downtown Athens where he had his office. That was a terrible event.

There was also an attempt to kill an Air Force courier running between the building and the Amindikhan base. There were bombs planted at our residence which went off in the middle of the night. Fortunately, while they broke window panes in the bedroom of our children, nobody was injured. We had a guest from Washington who was sleeping in the guest room right against the outside perimeter wall. He got rudely awakened by one of the bombs going off but was not injured. We escaped unscathed.

Twenty four hours later we were at a reception for a group from the War College. I received a telephone call from the prime minister saying not to be concerned that he had sent a bomb disposal squad from the Greek army to defuse a bomb at our house. I told him that the bomb had gone off and that we were all right.

He said, "I am talking about a third bomb. Don't go down to the bottom of the garden because they are taking it away right now."

Needless to say, I went immediately down to the bottom of the garden and saw a Greek army truck with a large squad of people removing something from a drainpipe next to the tennis court. It turned out that there had been a third bomb, a time bomb, detonated by or controlled by an East German watch. This bomb had been thrust into an open gutter which led under a boardwalk that all of us, including our children, used to get to the tennis court. There had been an unseasonable rain the night the bombs were put in place and, happily, this had caused a malfunction of the bomb next to the tennis court. Meanwhile for 24 hours we had been walking over that little boardwalk, unaware there was a bomb that could have been ticking under our feet.

In any event, that was the general atmosphere. The left wing was becoming disturbed that Papandreou hadn't taken more direct measures to carry out his election platform threats. This, of course, included the bases agreement as well as his failure to withdraw Greece from NATO and the European Union.

Q: Was there much contact on our part, the embassy's part, with the left wing at this point?

STEARNS: PASOK was the left wing party.

Q: That was Papandreou's party.

STEARNS: That was Papandreou's party so that was the Greek left. The extreme left was represented by the November 17 organization and we weren't negotiating with them. We regarded them as terrorists and the orthodox Stalinist Communist Party, which was legalized by Papandreou's PASOK, was so orthodox, so unimaginative, that I didn't think I could gain anything by direct contact with that particular group.

As I say, PASOK represented the non-communist left and we were dealing with them every day.

Q: Were we thinking of somehow or other having a contingency plan, saying well, maybe we're not going to get anywhere with this group here and maybe we should consider taking our toys and going home?

STEARNS: We had made considerable investment in Greece over the years ever since the time of the Truman Doctrine. The bases were extremely important and every time I went back to Washington I would have lunch with the chairman of the joint chiefs. Jack Vessey was an old friend of mine from my days in Southeast Asia and briefed the chiefs of staff in the Situation Room in the Pentagon so there was no desire in '83 or '84 to discontinue use of those three bases. Greece was in a strategically important spot and the Souda Bay base in Crete continued to be and still is an important facility in the eastern Mediterranean. There was no disposition to pick up our marbles and go home as long as we seemed to be making progress. It was a matter of damage control so that by and large our relations continued with many irritants but no serious threats during the PASOK years.

Another factor which I think reassured Washington was that the president of Greece was Constantine Karamanlis, the conservative with whom the U.S. had been dealing since 1955 when he first became prime minister. As long as Karamanlis remained president, we were reasonably sure drastic action to make Greece truly nonaligned was unlikely to occur or if it did occur there would be plenty of advance notice.

As the time came for the reelection of the Greek president, which was the end of '84 or the beginning of '85, I was scheduled to come back to the U.S. on consultation. I was staying at the Guest Quarters in Foggy Bottom. I woke up in the morning with the telephone ringing and the sound of Toni calling me from Athens to say that the PASOK party had announced it would not support the reelection of Constantine Karamanlis as president.

Prior to my departure for Washington at the beginning of '85, I had a long conversation with Papandreou and he had assured me the PASOK party would be going to support the reelection of Karamanlis so this was something of a shock. I realized that this would cause a great many people, particularly in Washington, to wonder if we were nearing the end of the road in our relations with PASOK controlled Greece. It seemed to me as soon as I hung up with Toni I received a call from the Greek ambassador, George Populous, in Washington, telling me the same thing.

I went immediately over to the State Department to inform them what I had just been advised by telephone. I said that we would have to analyze the implications of this action very carefully before we knew what to do but our best course of action would be how we should react to the loss of a good friend, a trusted collaborator as president of Greece.

It seemed to me one thing I should do is remain in Washington and not attend the National Day celebration in Athens in March. This would have been probably February or the beginning of March. This would show American concern because it would be the new

president, a left wing lawyer names Sartzetakis, who would be presiding in Karamanlis's place.

I also thought we could show our concern by my meeting with President Reagan and having this register in Athens. So until we decided what the real meaning of this action was, our concern would best be expressed by my remaining in Washington through the Greek National Day at the end of March and by my meeting with President Reagan.

The State Department agreed with this approach but I found that State was not taking full initiative to arrange my meeting with the president. The assistant secretary for European affairs, Rick Burt, who had his own reasons for distrusting Papandreou and the Greek government, had said to me you can go ahead and arrange a meeting.

At that point I was scheduled to have lunch with Jack Vessey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, just one on one. I outlined what had happened for Vessey. He said, "Well, I think you should tell that to the president."

I said, "I think that would be a very good idea." Jack picked up the phone and arranged my appointment with the president right then and there, something the State Department had been apparently unwilling or reluctant to do.

In due course I did meet with the president and his national security staff. I said that I thought that in view of the record of performance of the Papandreou government and the conclusion of the bases agreement that while it was deplorable that they had pulled the rug out from President Karamanlis, I thought our relationship would recover and we could preserve our vital interests.

Q: Could you go into some more about why the State Department was not supporting you regarding Karamanlis and dealing with the matter? Where was the divergence?

STEARNS: I think some of this was personal beef on the part of the Rick Burt. He had been scheduled to pay a visit to Athens in it must have been '82 or '83. He was doing what most State Department officials do when they visit that area; they first go to Ankara and then to Athens. Rick's schedule was Ankara, Athens and then Cyprus. He was scheduled to meet with the prime minister which had been announced in the Greek press. On the morning that Rick was scheduled to fly from Ankara to Athens I received a wakeup call from Yanni Copsis of the foreign office saying that in view of statements reportedly made by Burt in Ankara, which were regarded as anti Greek, the prime minister was cancelling his appointment and would not receive him.

So this seemed to be a gratuitous rebuff. I got in touch with Burt just before he left Ankara. I said in view of the public cancellation of his meeting with the prime minister I thought he should probably overfly Greece, go directly to Cyprus. After the dust settled in coming months, if it was desirable, we could reschedule the visit to Greece. I thought it unwise to come to Athens after the public statement that the prime minister would not receive him.

Furthermore, this seemed to be an extremely unjust view of his statements in turkey and that they were by no means anti-Greek or pro Turkish in any obvious way. So it seemed to me it was simply left wing elements in the PASOK government that were anxious to create an issue and publicly cancel the Burt-Papandreou meeting.

I think that understandably irritated Burt no end and contributed to his rather passive attitude to my need for an appointment with the president.

The meeting with the president worked out perfectly well.

I should add another interesting aspect to this. Before, when I went from the Guest Quarters to the State Department to tell them about the news I had received from Athens, I received a call from a Greek oil executive saying that he had a message for me from the prime minister, from Papandreou. He said Papandreou was determined that the message be delivered verbatim. Therefore I put my secretary on the line at the State Department. The oil executive would dictate the message he had received from Papandreou. The message was in effect that Papandreou had not meant to mislead me about Karamanlis's renomination when I had my farewell call on him before returning to Washington for consultations. When outrage in the rank and file of the PASOK party on the question of the renewed nomination of Karamanlis arose, it surprised even Papandreou. He had had no choice but to go along with the wishes of his ministers and of the PASOK rank and file that there be a new candidate for president of Greece supported by PASOK.

It is interesting that Papandreou felt it necessary to send that private message through a third party.

Q: It is interesting you were put in a position of dealing with a party to the extreme and particularly in Greek politics usually the extreme usually means something about Turkey so that even the most innocuous of statements could set off fireworks with these extremists who were looking for situations.

STEARNS: That's true. Although Greece would have been ill prepared for military confrontation with Turkey. While there was a lot of fiery oratory on both sides, it seemed to me that the likelihood of actual hostilities, except by accident, was probably slim. We do know from past experience accidental conflicts do occur and when they occur they can get out of hand. There was always the danger that hostility between Greece and Turkey would become uncontrollable. The presence of Karamanlis was regarded in that sense also as safeguard against Greece doing anything rash.

Q: In Greek politics if the PASOK party did not support Karamanlis, did that automatically mean he couldn't be elected?

STEARNS: They supported a lawyer, well regarded by the Greek left, from northern Greece named Sartzetakis. He became president and one of my reasons for not wishing to

be present at National Day ceremonies was to avoid appearing to accept wordlessly the removal of Karamanlis and the appointment of Sartzetakis.

Q: How did things proceed after this obviously very difficult period?

STEARNS: After a decent interval I returned to Athens and Toni and I and the family had home leave in the summer of 1983. The Karamanlis events were of course, later. That would have been '85. When we were back on home leave in '83 there was another crisis in our relations with Greece when a Korean jumbo was shot down as you recall by the Soviets.

Q: This is the one shot down over Kamchatka?

STEARNS: It was over Kamchatka. It occurred in the fall, late September of 1983. I was about to return the family to Athens. I had discussed both at the White House and in the State Department the possibility of an official but not a state visit by Papandreou to Washington. I thought this might help iron out some of the difficulties.

Lo and behold, a day or two later while Toni and I were in New York prior to our departure to return to Greece, word came out that Prime Minister Papandreou had publicly stated that he thought it likely that the Korean jumbo was on a spy mission, therefore the Soviet action was understandable. This was, needless to say, an outrageous statement by an allied minister and immediately demolished any chance of an official visit by Papandreou to Washington.

As soon as I returned to Athens in September of '83 I sought a meeting with Papandreou at his residence. I stated in the most emphatic terms that if he had hoped for an official visit to Washington, this had been destroyed by his public statements and there was absolutely no evidence that the Korean jumbo was on a spy mission and it was unthinkable that this would have occurred with a U.S. Congressman on board the jumbo with many innocent passengers.

Q: Why would he say such a thing?

STEARNS: To throw meat to his left wing. He had disappointed them by concluding the bases agreement, by failing to withdraw from NATO, by failing to do any of the really important things that the left wing of PASOK insisted on and which he had publicly stated he intended to do when he became prime minister. When I raised all these things with Papandreou he said, "Well, I am not saying anything that Americans themselves haven't said." He asked his secretary, Andrea Ankola, to bring me a copy of Nation magazine which had an article arguing that the Korean jumbo was probably on a spy mission. I said there was absolutely no evidence to support that and, furthermore, it was very different for an American magazine, left of center magazine, to make these statements and for the prime minister of an allied country to do so. I commented that I thought Papandreou had been American citizen so long that he had forgotten that crucial difference.

While he didn't exactly retract his statement, he toned it down considerably. It was an example of Papandreou's two roles; the American dimension to his career and the Greek dimension.

Q: It must have been difficult to have this man with this American connection but with a tendency to shoot off his mouth.

STEARNS: What he did, of course, was to compensate for his failure to follow through on closing the bases and withdrawing from NATO with rhetorical gifts to the Greek left in the PASOK party. He did this again in the spring of '85 at a meeting of the PASOK party when he stated all PASOK members, himself included, regarded the Soviet Union as a peace loving country; the United States as imperialist. This was again an attempt to mollify the left wing of PASOK in view of his failure to carry out the threats he had made so categorically as a candidate.

In any event, that really brings us to the end of our period in Greece. After more than four years I felt that I had done what I could do to keep our relations functioning. We had preserved the bases. Greece was still in NATO and the European Union and it seemed to me time to give someone else a chance to continue the damage control. While I think the State Department would have been willing, and the White House I know would have been willing for us to continue, I was ready to return. We did return in September of 1985 to Washington at the end of our four-year tour there.

Q: While you were there, were you sensing a change in the Soviet Union with Gorbachev? Was that a little early?

STEARNS: That was a little early. Andropov and one other General Secretary of the Soviet Union died during that four year period and Papandreou complained to me on one occasion that he had frozen to death going to the death of the Soviet leaders. So he very much hoped that the new one, which was Gorbachev, would not keel over in office because he couldn't stand another long ceremony in the freezing Kremlin.

Q: On the part of the rank and file of the PASOK and its leader, here is the fact that the more they tweak the nose of the United States, they are lessening the support that the United States will give them and we are the only thing that stands between them and Turkish aggression. That's an error in their minds.

STEARNS: There were moderate elements in the PASOK party, including many who had studied or even taught in the United States who didn't see the U.S. or U.S. policies as devilishly inspired. By and large the press supported PASOK; the leadership of the party had very little firsthand experience with the United States other than Papandreou himself so that the party was divided in its sentiments. A small moderate group of PASOK people believed Greece should continue to work with the U.S. and that U.S. association was a safeguard.

Q: Did the left wing see Turkey as the potential enemy or did they see Turkey as being benign or maybe even friendly because the more you move away from the United States, the more important Turkey becomes as its attitude towards the Greeks.

STEARNS: Of course, going back to the anti Greek riots in Istanbul and Izmir in 1955, Greek public opinion, probably unrealistically, expected the U.S. to do far more to help Greece at the expense of Turkey. They were very reluctant to accept the fact that the U.S. had responsibilities to two allies and that we were trying to maintain a balancing act that didn't injure severely our relations with either. There was always an undercurrent.

When people in the U.S., and particularly Washington, would say, why are Greeks so anti- American, I would usually say it isn't that they are anti-American; it is that they have disappointed expectations. They have always expected too much. There are an enormous number of Greeks who have been educated in the U.S. who have dual citizenship and it's the very closeness of that relationship that leads many Greeks to expect more forthright support of Greek interest in the Aegean or Cyprus at the expense of Turkey.

Q: What was happening in the latter part of your time with the Cypriot issue?

STEARNS: Cyprus remained pretty much as it had been. The UN was deeply involved and of course, there was a UN peacekeeping force that controlled the green line dividing the Republic of Cyprus from the north. There were still 30,000 Turkish troops occupying the north. No progress had been made. I always felt that Papandreou, while he expressed strong feelings about Cyprus, really his interest in the Cyprus trouble I don't think went very deep.

In any event, there were no developments in Cyprus during my four years.

Q: Did you get involved with any negotiations regarding Cyprus?

STEARNS: No, nothing came up at that time.

Q: I'm surprised.

STEARNS: As you can appreciate, we had a great many other things on our plate so bilateral issues quite aside from Cyprus were a little time consuming.

Q: Today is the first of October, 2013. Monty, we are really at the end of the line here. In 1985, I guess your last job. What was it?

STEARNS: As U.S. Ambassador to Greece.

Q: After that?

STEARNS: I hadn't quite finished the last bit of information related to the break between Andreas Papandreou, the prime minister, and President Karamanlis, the pro-Western president.

You remember I had gone to see President Reagan and we were registering our concern about this move. When I returned from Washington to Athens I, of course, went to see Papandreou immediately, the prime minister. He repeated the explanation that he had sent me in a private message in Washington saying that he had been taken by surprise by the opposition among the rank and file of his party to re-elect Karamanlis.

So I took that in but made sure that the prime minister knew how much concern there was about what had happened in Washington. Karamanlis and his closest aide both were convinced that Papandreou had deliberately misled them and lied to them by saying to them that his party was going to support the renomination of Karamanlis and then pulling the rug out from under the president.

I trusted their sincerity in believing that and they may have been right, although some question remained in my mind as to why Papandreou would have felt it necessary to receive me on the eve of my departure for Washington and then be forced to send me a rather shamefaced apology for having done so pretending he hadn't known the opinion of his party regulars. I was divided in deciding whether Papandreou had deliberately misled the president and me or whether he had just been out of touch with his own party's feelings. It may be the explanation to this is that Papandreou was beginning to be inattentive to governing. He had private affairs that seemed to be occupying him more and more and I think he was bored with the business of government. So the question remains open but I am inclined to think that may be the explanation because it seemed very unusual

In any event, shortly after this crisis was surmounted, my tour in Athens came to an end and I returned to Washington.

Q: When you returned in 1985, how did you see developments? Where did you think Greece was going at that time?

STEARNS: I felt I had accomplished what I could to show that the United States was able to work with a left-leaning, in a sense anti-Western, anti-U.S. government which had been an open question in Greece for a generation. We had preserved our military cooperation, including the bases in Greece, so we had preserved what I thought were our central American interests in Greece. It seemed to me for all of the mistakes and failures of the PASOK government, that is Papandreou's government, for the first time Greece did have a genuine non-communist left. He indicated the possibility of a continued increase within that stability which I think has been the case. But, of course, they had not allowed for the overspending that has led to the present economic crisis. Economic problems were not at the top of our agenda during my account of my four years.

We returned in September of '85 to Washington. Ron Myers, an undersecretary for administration, asked me whether I would be willing to undertake a study of hard language proficiencies in the Foreign Service. There had been a number of complaints registered by our ambassadors in Beijing and Moscow and in particular in the Arab world which complained that officers who were supposed to be arriving at their posts proficient in the local languages were not. They felt that the standard of language instruction in the Foreign Service was slipping. This was a subject that interested me. I made clear to Ron that I had decided to retire, but that I would be happy to undertake this assignment. I traveled around the world visiting our Japanese language school in Japan, Yokohama, the Chinese language instruction in Taiwan, Arabic in Tunis and Russian in Moscow. My conclusion was that Foreign Service standards had not slipped but even private language instruction appropriation by Berlitz raised the proficiency and effectiveness.

The biggest impediments to attracting our best language students into hard language instruction were really bureaucratic. The main one was the fact we had the threshold system created by the last Foreign Service Act, the act of 1980. This meant when an officer opened his window to try to pass into the senior Foreign Service, if he was in hard language training, the clock ticked and many officers felt they couldn't afford to take the risk of one to two years of non-competitive status just before they tried to pass into the senior Foreign Service or leave the service.

My report actually had some effect. The regulations were changed to allow for a period of respite from the strains of the ticking clock when you were in hard language study. Secretary Shultz set aside, as I recall, five million dollars to beef up hard language instruction. I think the so-called Stearns reward had good effect.

After that it was time for me to depart. The Department talked to me about other assignments but it seemed to me I had been so fortunate to be able to go back and serve as ambassador in the post where I had first begun in Athens and where I met my wife and where our eldest child had been born that anything else would seem like an anticlimax. Furthermore, I wanted to see if I could write in my own name as well as that of my government.

I left the Foreign Service as of the first of September, 1987, and became a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. I began work on a book on U.S. relations with Greece, Turkey and Cyprus and spent a year there. Then I became a Warburg professor of international affairs at Simmons College in Boston while continuing to work on my book. I stayed at Simmons for two years. After that I worked more or less full time as a writer. I became the Jefferson Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. I completed my book, Entangled Allies which was published. I received a grant from the Twentieth Century Fund to write a book on American diplomacy which I did over the next two years and that book was published recently by University of Chicago Press. It is still in print and called Talking to Strangers.

So that completed my full circle. I have never doubted that the Foreign Service was a great profession; a changing profession always but that has to be the case. Toni's and my

daughter has now entered the Foreign Service and is, in fact, serving in Kinshasa with her husband who is also in the Foreign Service. We continue to have family connections with a great service.

Q: Where has your daughter served?

STEARNS: She started out in Mexico, then went to Canada and is now in Kinshasa.

Q: Since you left the Foreign Service, what have you been up to?

STEARNS: As I explained, I have written two books which was fairly time consuming. I am now completing a third book which is on the emergence of a non-communist left in Greece and my personal recollection of the controversial prime minister, Andreas Papandreou.

Q: You are living where?

STEARNS: Living in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Q: Do you have much contact with other Foreign Service people there?

STEARNS: Oh, yes. We've kept a number of friends from the Service and stay in touch. Several of them live nearby and so we see each other and we stay in touch by telephone with others who live farther away. I value that continued association.

Q: I appreciate your account of your time in various places.

End of interview