

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project  
Tales of American Diplomacy

**WILLIAM "BILL" HARROP**

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*NARRATOR: As American ambassador to poor, socialist Guinea from 1975 to 1977, William Harrop used a \$25,000 discretionary fund, and lots of soccer balls, to promote goodwill. Here is his story.*

HARROP: My name is William Harrop; Bill Harrop. I'm a retired Foreign Service Officer. I had a career of 39 years in the Foreign Service, and was ambassador to five countries as well as Inspector General of the State Department and Foreign Service during that time. I was later chairman of the American Foreign Service Association.

While I was ambassador to Guinea, between 1975 and 1977, I took advantage of a program that was then operating--and it was really quite a good idea at the time--through USAID's (United States Agency for International Development) good offices. Every American ambassador had access to \$25,000, which he could use as he thought best for American interests, for goodwill, and for obtaining our political objectives in his country. I kind of puzzled on how to use this.

Guinea was a country that was a really in terrible poverty. It should not have been. As a French colony it was one of the most prosperous. It has excellent rainfall; excellent arable land; a good climate. Unfortunately, however, the president, Sékou Touré, was the great African socialist. His was the only country among the dozen or so of the French colonies in Africa who refused to join the French Union and retain their links to France after their independence. In 1958, he took Guinea into independence of its own, and the country then really went downhill fast. The poor people were just impoverished. The collective farming was not successful; there was hunger. Really, it was a very sad country during the time we were there--and for many years before and after that, as a matter of fact.

I had the \$25,000, and wondered, "Now, what can I do?" African boys--little children and big children around in the villages and the towns--would play about on football fields, or just on fields, kicking balloons, bags, or rags that they tied up as footballs; but they had no footballs! I said to myself, "Why don't we give these people some good soccer balls?" So, I bought \$25,000 worth of American soccer balls. Each one had the famous USAID "hand clasp" on it as a gift from the American people. Then, we handed these out over the whole country. I think President Sékou Touré was a little embarrassed because they were so popular and that he'd not been able to provide footballs for his people. But it was a

huge hit. I don't know how many hundred balls I was able to provide to them, but it was very much appreciated. Although there was a lot of criticism and carping back in Washington that this was not a serious American development effort. However, I think that was wrong. I think it was one of my best ideas in the Foreign Service to let the youth of Guinea kind of relate their love of soccer to the United States of America.

*NARRATOR: Thanks for listening to "Tales of American Diplomacy," a Tex Harris Initiative for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, "A Personal Life Story" produced by Poss Productions. Donate to support our work at [adst.org](http://adst.org). Because diplomacy matters now more than ever.*