

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

AMBASSADOR JAMES RICHARD CHEEK

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: Ambassador Cheek died before this interview was completed.]

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program telephone interview with Ambassador James R. Cheek. Today is September 13, 2010. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Ambassador Cheek, can you give us some personal background, where you were born, what's your hometown.

CHEEK: I was born in April 1936 in Decatur, Georgia which at the time was in the county outside of Atlanta. It is really now almost downtown Atlanta. Atlanta just swallowed it up.

Q: What do you know about your father's side of the family?

CHEEK: Not much because by the time I was born it was the worst part of the depression and shortly thereafter we moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, my mother's hometown. My father had been an entertainer. He actually sang with John Barber's band at one time, but the bands all went broke, couldn't get work during the depression. He would get some employment with traveling walk-a-thons. People would pay five cents or ten cents and stay all day and night watching these marathon dances.

Q: There was a movie about that: They Shoot Horses Don't They [1969]

CHEEK: Yes. He was one of the permanent cast members. They would entertain. He was kind of a song and dance man. He met my mother here in Little Rock while on the road. She was a young woman and they got married. He worked here some but it was hard to find work, so we went to Atlanta...to Decatur. They lived where his parents lived. His dad still had a job. He worked for the railroad. They moved in with them and then I was born there. My brother who was two years older was born in Little Rock. I had a sister born in Decatur, but in 1938 she passed away, very young. I was only two years old and my brother was four and then my sister was newborn. There my mom was. He had no insurance or anything. He had just been getting what work he could and unfortunately, he had never been able to get employment under Social Security which was brand new. We had no benefits and all she could do was scrounge up the train fare to get us home to her mother here in Little Rock.

When we left Decatur we came here (Little Rock) and we never really went back. We went back for a visit once or twice when I was very young. We pretty much lost contact with his family there.

Q: Obviously your mother's side for you was far more important. What do you know about them?

CHEEK: They were from Arkansas. Her father had worked for the railroad but then he was gone a lot and he just sort of abandoned them, my mother and her mother. She had an older brother and a younger sister so my grandmother had to make do. There was no welfare, food stamps or anything. If you were hungry you worked. That was it. She made it and she lived here. My mother, fortunately all three of the children, managed to get a good high school education here in Little Rock. My mother had even learned secretarial skills: shorthand, typing and everything. That was unusual. Probably only 20 per cent of the people in Arkansas even had a high school education. It was very uncommon to be able to attend high school, even as late as the 1930s here.

That turned out really well because she came back here and after a series of really bad jobs working in bakeries and stuff, along came World War II and Little Rock became the site of Camp Robinson. It was going to house a whole division that was created and trained here.

[Ed: Almost abandoned after World War I, in early 1940, the United States reclaimed Camp Robinson and began construction on a temporary cantonment for the Thirty-fifth Division. There was a National Guard division being called to active duty for one year of training and scheduled to be released from active duty on December 23, 1941. Elements of the Thirty-fifth began arriving in early January 1941. With the start of World War II, the post took on a new role as a replacement training center. Initially, there were two centers, one for basic training and the other for medics. In 1944, the two were combined into the Infantry Replacement Training Center. In addition to its role in training soldiers, Camp Robinson also housed a large German prisoner of war facility, with a capacity of 4,000 prisoners.]

It was just a straight infantry division and it continued to be a big base. Camp Robinson was named after Joe T. Robinson, the only person before Bill Clinton from Arkansas who had ever run for national office – vice president with Al Smith. Mom got a job at the camp as a secretary. She had all the skills. That saved us because she worked all through the war and as soon as the war ended the Army Corps of Engineers was going to be real big here. They were going to start all the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers stabilization programs. She transferred to the Corps as the war was ending and she stayed with them until she retired after 30 years. It was a good job.

Q: Let's talk about being a young kid growing up. What sort of neighborhood did you live in?

CHEEK: We lived right across the street from the state capitol here in a little frame house. Money was so tight my grandmother rented one room in the house and took in a roomer. My aunt, mother's younger sister, lived there too so the three of us shared one room in this frame house which we also shared with a roomer. It was only really after the war, I guess maybe in the 1950s, when my mom was prosperous enough from her good civil service job that we were able to buy our first house and move out of there. It was a nice neighborhood. We looked out the front door at the capitol grounds just across the street from the house and we walked down the street to an elementary school about 8, 10 blocks away. But, life was hard.

Q: As a kid, did you realize life was hard? I mean, when you were young or was it just the way it always was?

CHEEK: Yes, we did. There were lots of other kids and we weren't living in such a well to do area. Like the other kids, you got clothes at Easter and Christmas maybe as presents though mom sewed and always saw that we were well dressed. Our grandmother took on the role as the mother and raised us, while mom took on the role as the breadwinner.

Q: What was your grandmother's background?

CHEEK: Arkansas was a pretty hard scrabble place. She was from a small town in the northern hill area. It was a railroad town and I think she probably only had about a fourth or fifth grade education which was actually saying something for Arkansas, but she was hard working. We got through it, even without public assistance like food stamps. The war really saved us, enabled us and we got a good education.

Q: Let's talk about grammar school. You went to, were there several grammar schools or elementary schools in Little Rock?

CHEEK: I had a bit of an unusual experience. I did 12 years of schooling in 10 years, so when I graduated in 1952 I had just turned 16 years of age. Throughout almost all of my senior year in high school, I was only 15 so I was two years younger than most of my peers.

Q: Was someone pushing you or what?

CHEEK: No, what happened was I was four, my brother was six. He started the first grade but he had asthma. In those days they didn't know much about diseases and sort of quarantined them and he could not go to school. So for the first two years he was schooled at home by my grandmother with a school person coming by to advise her and guide her. He did all his first and second grade at home and I was there. I was only four but I just sat in with him so I learned everything he did. When it came time to go to the first grade, I was really at third grade level. I had already done the first and second grade.

In those days they had a half year system, the first half was "A"; the second half was "B." If you were new to the school system, you didn't have to wait. Every September the school started a 1A and a 1B so you could start in September (1A) or you could start as though it was January (2B). I could only advance a half a grade at a time so what they did with me is I started in 1B instead of 1A and then I went to 2B and then 3B and by the time I got to that point after a year and a half, I sort of caught up with everyone else. I started even but by that time I was a year and a half ahead. I had gone through the first three grades in a year and a half. I started in fourth a year and a half ahead.

As fate would have it when I got to the seventh grade, a year and a half ahead, they decided to abolish the A B so the single grade started starting in September and I was to start in September as B. There wasn't going to be a B so we either had to repeat and start at 7A or I could take summer school and get the B half. So I acquired another half ahead.

Consequently by eighth grade I was two full years ahead and two years younger.

Q: During this period were you much of a reader?

CHEEK: We did have a good public library thanks to Andrew Carnegie. The state of Arkansas was a poor state, still is, ranked 49th of the 50 states, I think, but we had that and we read. I always thought it remarkable that my grandmother with her fourth or fifth grade education taught me, and taught me well. As well as my brother, because he did not suffer from that two years of home education either. The school provided a visiting teacher who came as I recall once a week, went over everything, advised my grandmother and checked up on us, etcetera. But I was lucky, I ended up with a good education, graduating here in Little Rock in a segregated system. We only had one white high school (Central High School), which was famously integrated in September 1957.

Q: Did you do any outside reading? Was there any particular book or books that particularly grabbed you, interested you?

CHEEK: Yes, we read all the standards, The Bobbsey Twins, Jack London, Little Lord Fauntleroy. People would give us books too. We could always go to the public library because it was only eight blocks away and check out books.

Q: Where did your family fit religiously or did it?

CHEEK: Fundamentalist and Christian Baptist is the big majority here. We were Methodists and Methodists were a lot less vocal about religion. Of course, we had all the fundamentalist groups; the Pentecostals, the Assembly of God, you name it, very active. We went every Sunday, walked over ten blocks to a Methodist church and went to Sunday school, went to the church service. You didn't miss Sunday church.

Q: I take it that the whole area at that time voted straight Democratic Party. Was it?

CHEEK: Ideologically it is Republican conservative but in terms of economics it is very populist Democratic as we are about to see in this election. But we have always elected, as I think we did in the last election, Republicans at the national level. I think we were next to Mississippi in the biggest majority, 20 percent, lead over presidential candidate Obama, but we elected all Democrats to state offices and most of the congressional and Senate seats. We are a split state, although pundits are predicting that this year we are going to elect Republicans to Congress, maybe even a Republican Senator, which we have never done before. But our presidential vote has been overwhelmingly republican. Clinton has been the only democrat since FDR who has ever carried the state.

Q: What were your favorite courses in elementary school?

CHEEK: There wasn't much opportunity for electives. It was a good strong curriculum based on the three Rs. When you got to high school I took a very varied course offering. I loved history, took a lot of that, mathematics as well. We had no money and to go to college I thought I was going to work in a retail store or had a part time job at JCPenney. From the time I was 10 I worked. I worked from 10 until I retired from the Foreign Service at 62. I got a paper route and worked every day.

Q: You say you worked at a retail store after school?

CHEEK: Yes. In addition to my paper route, I worked at JCPenney. I was in high school from 1948 to 1952, but as we came up on high school graduation, keep in mind I only just turned 16. I had a paper route; if there was money to be made, we did it; as soon as we got old enough. I got my first paper route at age 10. I really never missed a day of work from then on until I retired, straight through. I was in the army.

Q: Did you experience the drama of integration of Little Rock schools in the mid 1950s?

CHEEK: It came in 1956. 1957 was bad. That's when they closed the schools, rather than integrate them. I was long gone by then.

Q: In your neighborhood and at school, was there much contact with blacks?

CHEEK: We had a black neighborhood because we lived in a lower income white neighborhood and we played with black kids all the time in the neighborhood. People like us integrated the system. No blacks lived next door, but there were pockets right together and, of course, our big playground was the capitol grounds which was like a big park so we played there. The black kids played there too. If you went to a boys' club or swimming pool it was all totally segregated.

Q: I assume around the capitol grounds you had benches on which the old-timers would sit there, the old guys and chew tobacco and comment and all that?

CHEEK: Oh, yes. The whole war time it was loaded with soldiers, especially on the weekend because they didn't have much money and not much to do. They would come hang around there. The capitol grounds were also a place to meet girls for them. I had all these patches they'd give to us, army brass and souvenir things they'd give to a cute little kid. They'd play with you. They were just hanging around in droves.

Q: Were you able to follow the war very well or was that a little too much?

CHEEK: Oh, yes. That was the big thing. You had all the fighters, the model airplanes. One of the ways I got hurt was on VE Day. I had one of these scooters, just two wheels, didn't even have much of a brake on it. I went flying down a hill with tin cans tied on the back of it to celebrate VE Day and went splat. I split my head open over my right eye, still have a little scar here. One of the GIs ran and got me and took me home. Especially on weekends we were just surrounded by the soldiers. We were very much into it.

Q: In high school did you have any time for extracurricular activities?

CHEEK: That was the problem of having to work. By that time we had a morning paper and an afternoon paper and I carried both of them. You weren't supposed to do that but I

didn't carry them in the same neighborhood so they never knew. I had to work right after school and most extracurricular activities were also right after school; so as soon as I got out I had to head home and get my bag and go deliver my papers. In those days you had to collect for them too. For every hour of delivery you spent two hours collecting, trying to chase people down. It was about two bits a week for a subscription. You'd be amazed at how many people didn't have that back then. It was a lot of work. I never had any time for clubs or that stuff. I was in pretty good shape. Keep in mind I've had a job from an early age.

Q: Obviously World War II was going. Were you paying much attention to what was happening in the world?

CHEEK: Yes, quite a bit. That's all we had. We always had a newspaper. I realize it really contributed to my being able to know about the world and get out of it and even I think get into the service. Everyday there was a newspaper there to read. It wasn't the New York Times but it was pretty good. In fact, our local paper, the Arkansas Gazette, which now has been swallowed up, when I was growing up it won two Pulitzer Prizes. It was the first newspaper west of the Mississippi here in Little Rock. I read it every day. I tried to tell my kids and anybody else to read a newspaper every day, especially if you want a career like the Foreign Service.

Q: We have interns here and I tell them all to read the papers but they can do that now on the internet, but it is the same thing.

CHEEK: When I was younger, we had lots of newspapers, because you would always come home from the paper route with extras. One could almost go into the newspaper business, certainly as a carrier in those days you were a businessman. You bought the newspapers from the publisher and paid them and you had to collect from the subscribers and then the difference between what you had paid for them and what you got back was your profit. You had all these subscribers; you had to pay your bill to the paper once a week. Sometimes you never knew quite what you were going to make, because you might have all these outstanding bills. It was hard to collect from some people, because they just didn't have the money.

Q: In high school you say you sort of assumed you would be a store clerk, but did you have aspirations beyond that?

CHEEK: Well, Little Rock High, because it was the only white high school, was enormous. We had about 500 to 600 students in each of the four grades. It is still there; it's a national monument; a huge school. The counselors, they had just started counseling, would push you that way. You just didn't think beyond. You were lucky to get your high school education and college was something for rich folks, people better off than we were. I didn't think of going to college though when the time came and we graduated we had a little junior college here. It was pretty simple. Like a two year school today. I could live at home and work and go to it. Taught a lot of its classes in the evening, because

while it is a big university now, it still has a large proportion of students who work, working their way through college. It was private though, not a public school. There was no public university or college here in Little Rock in those days and I couldn't go away to school. There is a state school probably an hour away if I could get there. After high school I continued working almost full time and enrolled in this junior college. [Ed: The current University of Arkansas at Little Rock was founded in 1927 as Little Rock Junior College.]

I had gotten about two years of credit, 1952 to 1954, and then by one of these twists of fate, my mother had coffee with a lady who ran the draft board. She told my mom that there was this Korean GI bill, that we were about to sign a peace treaty, and if the war ended that would be the end of the bill's benefits. If she had college age boys they ought to go get drafted and get the benefits of the bill even though they served for only a few days before the war ended. By then I assumed it would take maybe six years to work full time and go part time to get a degree, so I volunteered for the draft. I got drafted to Korea in 1953. [Ed: the Korean War GI bill was signed on 16 July 1952.]

I did that route because as a draftee you served only two years, the least you could enlist for was four years in the army or air force or navy. I just wanted the bill, get in there, get it and get back out as soon as I could. I was drafted to go to Korea. We stood around for two years negotiating. At any moment they expected the war to resume. We were trained, but by the time we finished basic training the war had formally ended [Ed: the Korean War armistice was signed 27 July 1953].

Instead of going to Korea, I was hustled to Germany. We had stripped all our forces from Germany. Typical of the U.S., we don't ever want to pay the cost of war. We did the same thing in Vietnam. Here they hid the cost of the war by drawing down troops and equipment from Germany which is where the bulk of our army was waiting for the Soviets who never came. So, as soon as the Korean war ended we were probably half strength throughout Europe. We were put on a ship and sent to Germany to try to beef up our troop strength. By this time the Russians were threatening Europe again.

I served in the armed forces from 1954 to 1956. I went to Germany when we were still the army of occupation. In April of 1955 we became guests of the German Republic. We were no longer an occupier and in a whole new world. I was there and that's why I have an occupation medal.

I had the two years of junior college. Of course that was a big deal in the military. It was unusual to have a draftee with some college. That was my first big taste of integration too because the army was integrated. Most of the guys who got drafted were black. I went into a unit where the majority was black. Many were illiterate. I wrote letters for them and mail for them.

Because I had math and some college I got to go into field artillery and give fire direction which in those days was done with slide rules. Sighting, everything was done in your

head. We were the brains of the battalion. Fire direction and control was a nice job. The data came into us, we decided where the guns should be set up. We entered the data and told the crews to fire the guns. Because I had some education. Otherwise, I'd have been down on the guns pulling the lanyard.

Q: You say it was an integrated unit. Were there a good number of black soldiers in it?

CHEEK: Yes. Artillery, the headquarters battery where I was, that was probably more whites. All the three firing batteries, probably the majority, were black. They were good gunners.

Q: Later in the Vietnam War there were some strong differences between black and white soldiers, I mean, racial tensions. Was that true during your period of service?

CHEEK: We had some of that in Germany. Basically, in Charleston, South Carolina, we were segregated. If you stepped off that base, you were in another world. In Germany again you had de facto segregation. The black soldiers had their bars; the whites had theirs. Occasionally they would brush against each other and end up fighting. We had a riot on the base; there were really tensions on the base between white soldiers and black soldiers. And we had a big refugee camp near our base.

Q: Where were you located?

CHEEK: I was in Ulm which is about midway between Stuttgart and Munich. The nearest big city is Augsburg, about 30 miles away. Ulm has the distinction of having the tallest church spires in the world. It is all spire and no building. Fortunately it had been relatively spared during the war. It was a railroad junction and is famous because Rommel was from there. In fact, that's where the Gestapo assassinated him. His son was later the mayor. First they covered up the fact they had assassinated Rommel. There is a museum there. While you couldn't glorify the Nazis, you could glorify him and he of course was a victim. They drove out to his house a little ways out of town, took him into town, and before he got there, he was dead.

Q: Did you have much contact with Germans at that time?

CHEEK: Ironically, here is the United States government which knew by the time I got there we are going to go from being an occupying army to being the guests of the Germans. We still had a non fraternization policy. You had to go off base in uniform; our military felt the Germans had to feel they were occupied. Of course, we were totally unwelcome in uniform. One of the big businesses around the kaserne [German word meaning "barracks"] was civilian attire. Germans ran these little businesses. If you were an officer and switched to your civvies, the MPs (military police) really didn't enforce the non-fraternization rules.

You could see it all coming but we ended up totally unprepared for the turnover. We had all these officers living in all these nice houses, which we seized at the end of the war. If the owner shows up, we've got to pay rent to keep that American family in that house. Families had to move back on base while we tried to figure out how to house them.

By the time I left it had completely flipped. We were encouraged to take German language classes, whereas we were prohibited earlier. Of course the Germans were glad. In a railroad station the only nice room, many of them were still bombed out, was reserved for GIs. The first day they took these waiting rooms away from us and gave them to the Germans. We didn't pay for our electricity and phones, but as soon as we turned over the keys to the Germans, they sent us a phone bill, a light bill. It was bad that first year. I don't know what we thought was going to happen.

Q: Did you see yourself as making a career out of the military or not?

CHEEK: I knew I was going to come back and get my degree. I was going to have four years of college under the GI bill, or thirty six months calculated as nine months of classes per school year so I was going to go four years. I really didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew I could have a pretty good career. I was in a job where you used your brains and was promoted from private to sergeant. I was always doing a job that was over my rank.

We had in those days a two year active duty obligation and then we had a six year active reserve obligation. We had to join a local unit, attend drills, and go to summer training camp. I knew I was going to stay affiliated with the army and sure enough about a year later I was in our first summer camp. Our direction center was commanded by a major. Our artillery battalion had a lieutenant colonel or colonel commanding it and two majors. One was the executive, the other was the fire control officer. And there is a captain in there as the intelligence officer. And I am out at Fort Sill on summer duty and the major and captain had gone to get coffee and a mission came in and we processed it for our division.

On this day, just by chance, the commanding general of 4th Army descends on us. He helicoptered over, meets the brigadier and walks in. Here he sees a private first class doing the major's/captain's job. He looks really surprised. So in front of the brigadier he said, "You want to be an officer?" I said "Yes." "Well, put your paperwork in and we will get you a commission." He is an army commander and an army commander has the right to commission an officer on the spot. I said, "Are you serious?" He said, "Yes." So I went back and filled out all this paperwork and sent it down to Fort Kirby and within a month I was a second lieutenant. At that point there was a temptation to actually make a career of the army. As a reserve officer you never really had a full tenure, they could call on you from time to time. I had visions of having a college degree.

Nevertheless, after completing my enlistment in 1956, I went into the reserves. At the same time I returned to college since I now had the GI bill benefits. What they did then

was give you a monthly stipend. All you had to do to qualify was show you were enrolled in classes. The money came to me, not the college, because it was also to help with other expenses. When I came back I didn't have to work full time and go to school. I worked part-time. I finished at a state school. I went to Arkansas State Teachers College. It had about 1,800 students and was located in Conway, Arkansas. [Ed: Arkansas State Teachers College was renamed in January 1967 as the State College of Arkansas and renamed again in January 1975 as the University of Central Arkansas.] By this time I had a car, but I still worked part-time because I was married. After I got my bachelor's degree in 1959, that's when the Foreign Service comes in.

Because I was going to be a teacher; that's why I went to a teachers' college. I was preparing to be a social studies teacher, which was taught mainly at the junior high level. And one had to be prepared to teach all the social studies courses. For graduation one needed 30 hours of history and so many class hours in other subjects. I had 60 hour majors of social studies. I did the minimum 10 hours of history, political science, economics, psychology, sociology and very important to my future, geography. It turned out this was the perfect preparation for the Foreign Service exam. Foreign policy issues are not just political. They involve a range of issues and disciplines, economic, even geographic. I was pleased to graduate as a social studies teacher, but I had taken an international relations course from a professor who had traveled abroad. He had just come back from a Fulbright. That was rare in those days. Arkansas was very insular in those days. And he in that course sort of opened my eyes. He talked to me twice a week and I personally had two years of G.I. Bill left, so I could go to graduate school. So that is what I did and enrolled at American University in Washington DC.

Q: Had the Foreign Service come across your radar at all while you were in the military?

CHEEK: I was...no not really. I was getting to travel, even though I was still a corporal and didn't have much money. I could travel. I got to go through Holland, and Amsterdam was a big city; Italy, you know, I'd never been out of Arkansas! So all of a sudden I was getting to see the world. Definitely Germany. That just, all of a sudden, breaks you out of this closed world, because nobody here (Little Rock). Well nobody but rich people; we didn't know anything about this. So I came back. I had been out to see the world.

And I lucked out and proceeded to get this bachelor's degree. Thanks to Fulbright, I was ready to follow Senator Fulbright. That's where I really began to focus on the Foreign Service. I read everything he wrote, and if I had to write a paper, I wrote on him. He was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for years. [Ed: J. William Fulbright was a Democratic Party Senator from Arkansas, 1945-1975, who introduced legislation in 1946 creating the Fulbright grants for international educational exchange, which are administered by the Department of State.] Also Brooks Hayes, our congressman, was a ranking Democratic Party member on the House International Relations Committee. [Ed: Congressman Hays served from January 1943 to January 1959.] So Arkansas had this modest international aura. But before he could become chairman of the committee, Hayes lost an election to a segregationist candidate in a write-in campaign.

Anyway, I was steeped in all this and was already thinking of going to Washington for work. I had visions of working for Brooks Hayes because my wife's father was a friend of his. Maybe I could get something in international affairs, maybe on his personal staff, maybe on the committee's staff. But by the time I got there he had been knocked out, lost his election. So I went to Washington anyway and looked to Senator Fulbright's office to get a job. The best thing he could put me in was the Senate post office. But I discovered I could get a better job with better money as a research assistant at the National Education Association (NEA). So I worked there from 1959 to 1961 until I went into the foreign service. I was on the staff of NEA working around in various divisions. It was a big organization. I worked in international relations, congressional relations, rural education, wherever I could get the best hours and pay. I was still a full time graduate student at American University, so my days were long.

Q: What sort of work was it?

CHEEK: Well, my first piece of work was on their Committee on International Relations because that was my background. That's what I was studying and I was just the junior guy in the office. So I would help with a program, write a newsletter on international relations, which they distributed to the teachers, their members. Then I got better hours and better pay in the classroom teachers division, which was supposed to be all female. It was the biggest division; in fact there were very few male staffers as classroom teachers. And I would do research because I needed to have flex hours where I could come in at night or on weekends. We did a long study of how teachers were treated, what their working conditions were. I worked in the rural education division, looked at their hours and pay and edited their newsletter. I helped in maintaining their connection with their membership and helped them plan meetings and conferences. I had a good two years and went from the NEA straight into the Foreign Service.

All this time I'm still a reserve officer moving up the ranks. Got promoted, stayed in artillery. In the event of a mobilization we were in charge of those big army trucks. That was our job in case of war. That was good extra money, the reserve pay.

Q: Just to track back a little bit, what was the background of your wife?

CHEEK: She was from Little Rock. I was two years ahead, so I sort of caught up. When I was a senior in high school I was 15; 18 year old girls don't date 15 year old boys. So I had to date the kid sister of one of my classmates. When I came back from the Army, I started back on the campus of the teachers' college initially. She had just graduated in 1956 from high school. I sort of caught up. Though even then at that I was two years ahead. And I met her and I guess it was love at first sight. I had perhaps six months of bachelorhood before I met her. At first we were going to wait until we graduated. As that date drew closer and closer, we just did it. But I still had a year and a half to go and she was going to college too. But we had a child and with all the extra work, she had to forgo her education, although she accumulated two years of college.

Carol's dad, Forrest Rozzell, was Executive Secretary of the Arkansas Education Association [1954-1977], which was the Arkansas teachers union. Very powerful; he was a lawyer, a self-made man; educated; went to law school at night. He literally put education on the front burner when he took over the teachers union. Became close to Senator Fulbright.

Q: While you were at AU (American University) did you take the Foreign Service exam?

CHEEK: I did the first time, when I first got there. I failed, but I was close to the cut off line for that year. I took it again the next year. By that time I had a year of graduate studies. And I just barely passed. Now at the School of International Service (SIS) at AU most of my fellow students were enrolled in what was called a professional master's program. It was a sixty hour, two-year program. So one of the professions was the foreign service and there were other government fields one could investigate. As well as other international organizations.

Q: And the NGO (non-governmental organizations) field was very small in those days.

CHEEK: Very small. The international organization field was small and that included United Nations jobs, which seemed hard for Americans to get. But that was another option, or you could do religious. SIS, you would not know it today, but it was created by the Methodist Church. AU was founded by the Methodists. In fact I got a little help on my tuition, because after they opened the doors to the SIS program, they did a study of their student body and found the largest group was Jewish. They hardly had any Methodists. The church was very unhappy, so, since I was Methodist, they gave me some financial help.

Q: When did you take the oral exam?

CHEEK: I was in my senior year at AU. Here again is a story about how individuals affect your life; of course, the whole school was organized to send us in this direction. For example, one of my professors, Ernest Griffith, had just come down from heading up the Legislative Reference Service [now called Congressional Research Service]. But one of my favorite professors was a fellow named Phil Kaiser. He was sort of in between. He had been Averill Harriman's right hand man, when Harriman was governor and everything. He got appointed under-secretary of labor for international affairs. He was the youngest under-secretary in the government. He was a big union man, even though he did not come out of organized labor. He came out of the University of Wisconsin. At this time he was out of power and teaching courses on international labor. I took all of his courses. I was getting all kinds of job offers. Kennedy was coming in. Even toward the end of the Eisenhower administration, it seemed the government was expanding. I think maybe twenty different government agencies were after me. All of them offering more pay and rank than the Foreign Service. So I was in a quandary about going into the Foreign Service. But I did it, turned down all those other jobs. I think they started at

something like \$8,000 a year and I think we started out in the foreign service at a salary of \$4,200.

But I took my oral examination there. It was one of those little tricks of fate. I knew about State because I would go over, hang around, go to its library; did a lot of my research there. Hey, the graduate school was just a few blocks away. So I had an idea of how State worked. So, I arrived for my orals, which in those days was in front of a senior, three man panel. Usually they were trying to integrate USIS (U.S. Information Service), so at least one of the officers might be USIS, or more rarely maybe AID (Agency for International Development). I got there early and was sitting there waiting to go in, since there was a fellow already ahead of us. So I started chatting up the secretary, since I knew how important secretaries were. Now they talked to you until they made up their minds. You went out and they decided and called you back in and that was it. You got the up or down decision on the spot. You could be in there for thirty minutes or you could be in there an hour. Depending on how long it took them to feel like they could make a decision.

So I went down to the library. Now in those days you still had the stud book [Ed: colloquial term for the unclassified State Department publication The Biographic Register, which listed all foreign service officers and staff, and which ended publication in 1975]. So I looked up these three people and found that the panel chairman had spent much of his career working on the International Trade Organization, an international organization that failed to go through. The WTO (World Trade Organization) later was successful. He was a senior economist working on the ITO. Just by chance, I had written a paper on the ITO. So when my opportunity came to face the panel, I was able to show my knowledge on the ITO. I walked out not being very confident of my chances. After all, I had the lowest passing grade on the written exam.

One of the fellows who had been ahead of me, they called him back in and gave him the results, didn't pass. When he came out he broke down and ran out the door. I went and told the secretary how upset he was. She said he should be because he had the highest score on the written exam and was an honor graduate at the Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service! Well, that made me think what chance did I have with the lowest score on the written exam and graduating from a new school. We were the first graduating class from SIS.

Q: Before we break off, when did you come into the Foreign Service?

CHEEK: It seemed to me that it took a long time before we heard about the results on the written exam. Waited again to schedule the orals. Once you got the results of your orals, you had to go through all the processing, medicals, security and finally about a year later this was all complete. So, I came in October 1961.

Q: Today is September 25, 2010. Where did we leave off?

CHEEK: I had just gotten into the Foreign Service. We finished with all the private, pre service life biography. In 1961, October I just entered. I had just graduated from American University with a masters in international service. I passed the foreign service exam with a low written score and a very high oral exam score.

Like everyone else, I went into A-100. Our A-100 was unusual in that we were the first class to be integrated with USIA (U.S. Information Agency). USIA had its own service with FSIOs, they called them, Foreign Service Information Officers. They were independent but they decided to integrate training and as much stuff as they could with State. We were about 20 or so State FSOs and at least a dozen FSIOs which is interesting in one aspect because they had more females. I think we may have had two females out of our 20 and they had something like four out of their dozen or so; that was the principal difference between the two groups.

We had taken the same exam except for those who opted for the FSIO track. They took a separate exam in the afternoon on the written and, of course, they had their own oral.

Q: How did you feel? Were these pretty much your contemporaries?

CHEEK: We were a very diverse group. In those days you still had the age thirty as the maximum age for eligibility so we only covered roughly 21 to 30 age range as opposed to today where the average age may be 40 for an A-100. I thought the course was very good. We were in that basement. They hadn't moved to the FSI building yet. They were still leasing space in the garage area of Arlington towers; the lower floors. It was fine. We were very diverse, even more diverse than when I was in the army.

I was in a group of people from all over the country, and all kinds of different backgrounds. We had two very good, sort of, I think they were 03s under the old system of FSO 8 to FSO 1. Chester Beaman and I can't think of the other's name; they're both deceased now. They were both very good. They were good mentors, the course was good. They got a lot of good people to come over, speakers would talk to us and that is mostly what I remember about it. We didn't make much money. We were all in the same boat. There were people in our class from wealth who drove a Jaguar or something but most of us shared the same fate of trying to live off our \$5,000 a year.

Two things happened to me in this period though. I think while we were in A-100 they finally got the legislative approval to bring in people at the FSO-7 level. The rules were if you had a graduate degree or you had two years' work experience making the salary of an FSO-8 which wasn't hard to do in the private sector and, this is what got caught me, you had to be 25 years old on January 1st or something on the year you entered. I wasn't 25 until April of the year I entered, so for the four months I lost. I had the master's so I remember I was very dispirited. I went to see one of the mentors, Chester, and he said, he told me something very profound and proved to be true. He said, "Look, you'll have ups and downs in this career throughout the career. One time you make out on something and

another time you don't. You lose out but don't let it discourage you. You'll probably get compensated."

It meant almost another thousand dollars a year. That was what hurt. My wife couldn't work because we had two kids at home, including a newborn baby. There was nothing you could do about it.

Q: Where did you live?

CHEEK: We were living out in the District where I had been living while I was going to AU, on Hawaii Avenue – you know every state has an avenue. It is behind the National Cathedral and Catholic University. It was almost directly behind the old soldiers' home. This was down behind there, a fairly short street, living in these rows of duplexes, two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs and a living area and a kitchen downstairs. In the basement was a cellar and a little room that I used for a study because I was taking 15 hours of graduate school as well as working 30 hours a week. So, I did a lot of study late at night.

He was right; it worked out. I remember the guy who qualified on earnings. He also had the age requirement which the officer who had sold paint, a traveling paint salesman. He made well above his Foreign Service salary.

The other thing that happened as we, near the end, we got assigned to language training. I got assigned to Spanish, not because I had much but it was what I wanted. Also we got our onward assignments and language dictated that and I was being assigned to Santiago, Chile. That's where I learned something else about the State Department. We got orders to take the 12 weeks of Spanish and then proceed to post which would have put us going about April. But stamped in a great big rubber stamp over the orders was; "Do not travel until after July 1" because the State Department was broke. The fiscal year then ended June 30 and so they had no money to send us to post so I wondered what kind of agency this was. Nothing was going to be done about it except just freeze everything. They froze all movement. As you can imagine the Foreign Service was paralyzed and almost all travel was stopped.

It turned actually to be good because after I finished the Spanish I had about two months on the Chile desk, sort of hanging out as a supernumerary. That allowed me to learn a lot about Chile so that when I got to post in 1962 I was really ahead of the game.

Q: What would you say was the situation in Chile by the time you got there?

CHEEK: In my 18 months there it turned out to be the end of an era because Chile was like Uruguay. They were sort of the Switzerland of Latin America and they never had a coup and everybody else had had dozens of them. You could see this was coming. The economy was in trouble; they had to devalue the currency. They had a very conservative, (Jorge) Alessandri (Rodriguez) president from the Conservative Party. There was a lot of

unrest. You could see the country was moving to the left. The communists and socialists were united in a very active way under Allende. The Christian Democrats were offering a leftist non-communist alternative to oppose the communists. But none of that happened until after I left. We lived under the last two years of the old era and then everything in Chile changed dramatically. They elected (Eduardo) Frei, of course, and then after his term came Allende and the revolution and all that, but I was long gone by then.

Q: Had you had much knowledge or experience in Latin American affairs before you went there?

CHEEK: No. I'd studied Latin American history since I had done a lot of history and political science because I had 60 hours. Actually I took another 10 hours and ended up with 70 hours of graduate work, almost a PhD. I studied it and knew about it.

Something else was unusual about my assignment to Chile. We were what turned out to be the end of a great experiment. We were not assigned to a position. My orders read I was a Foreign Service officer generalist, FSO generalist. This was a new idea. What State had done was take all the junior officer positions, FSO 6, 7 and 8 whether they were consular, economic, or political, or admin and then put them all together in a pool called general, the general pool. So you weren't assigned as a consular or economic commercial officer. You were assigned as a general and then you rotated so that you would spend six months in each section. You had a real job because the section head had given up a real job to put in the pool for this junior generalist assignment.

The other good feature was the DCM was charged with mentoring all of the generalist junior officers. We answered to him. He didn't do our performance review but he reviewed all of them. We had John Jova who was really a special person; later ambassador to Honduras [1965-1969], Mexico [1972-1977] for years and then headed the Meridian International Center. He took it seriously and we would meet with him regularly. We would sit around with him, maybe have a drink, talk. He followed us closely. We could go to him at any time. I got through the assignment to the admin section and did general services officer work, did the consular assignment issuing visas in the consular section, went into the economic section for that six months and mainly did commercial, with a scattering of economic reporting, because the junior position had been the commercial. I was up to do political as my last job and then State suddenly transferred me. A two year tour was shortened to 18 months. I received orders to go to London.

There wasn't much of an explanation why, but I was told, when I asked why, well London desperately needed consular officers and that's why I needed to get there. They even hurried up my home leave enroute.

I got to London and discovered the consular section didn't know anything about the big problem. It was a screen and what they were doing was they were ending the FSO general program. They wanted to raid the treasury and get the money that was locked up

for all these positions. Somehow they could juggle the books. You had to vacate the FSO general position and then you could get all the money that was in there. It didn't make much sense to me because my transfer cost them. I had a wife and two kids and household goods. They shipped everything in those days. It cost them at least twice my salary just to ship us to London and have home leave. Then I was told by someone that transfer funds were out of another pot. The people who were raiding the FSO general pot got that money even though it increased the costs for somebody else's money pot. That was one of my early introductions to the arcane ways the State Department worked. Somebody was always juggling the books, juggling money. There never seemed to be enough.

The other aspect of that was by aborting my tour I didn't get the two years. I brought a new car into Chile and Chile was one of these almost Latin American posts where you sold a car for about three times what you paid for it because it had a 300% duty on it. The Department years later put a stop to that by saying you couldn't keep the money, the profit. You had to give it to charity but at that time it was still fine. So I sold it; a \$2,000 Chevy for about \$5,000. That was a fortune. But because I had not been there the full two years I didn't get the full exemption. They prorated it so I lost about \$1500 of the \$3,500 profit by being transferred.

Q: What was your impression of Chile at the time, the government and the people?

CHEEK: You could just sense everything was changing. There were a lot of strikes and violence. The socialists and communists were waving a bloody shirt. We were in a downtown office building, had two floors of it at that time, only about two blocks from the presidential palace, La Moneda they called it. You had to be careful out on the street because you'd turn a corner and here came a bunch of demonstrators being chased down the street by the police. Their main riot control was water cannons. It'd shoot water out at high pressure which would literally knock you off your feet. It only happened to me once. I stepped out of a shopping gallery right into the path of, they call these guanaco. Guanaco is an animal in the Andes like the llama. He defends himself by spitting on its enemies. The elections were already hot and debating. You could see that big change was in the offing and the only issue was how far to the left the country was going to go.

Q: What sort of social life was there?

CHEEK: It was a very good life for us. Of course, we had a lot more money when we got overseas because you didn't have to pay rent and utilities and that automatically gave you a 25, 30 percent salary increase. Of course you didn't pay local taxes. It was duty free. Then they started devaluing the escudo so it got down to one of these situations which I encountered once in Argentina where you would go out with a twenty dollar bill and something would only cost three or four dollars. Of course, prices would eventually catch up but we'd be way ahead.

Of course, we were also on an economy that had everything. Santiago was a wonderful place with lots of food. It was a very sophisticated country, well educated population. It wasn't like when I was later in Sudan when people had a lot of money but didn't have anything to spend it on. We had a good life. We had a good group of junior officers.

Q: Did you have the feeling that embassy people were associating with the more affluent side of society and that there was not much contact with the social critics, like the socialists? Was there a strong intellectual left that appealed to our people?

CHEEK: Well, we found a home with the Christian Democrats because the Communists and the Socialists wouldn't have anything to do with us. They weren't interested in dialogue. We had a political officer who specifically covered this but it was very hard to talk because they didn't want it. We were just dead to them. All their contacts were with the Russian embassy. We were following JFK's [President John F. Kennedy] Alliance for Progress and for the first time U.S. policy opposed military coups and backed reform. In fact, Chile and Columbia along with Costa Rica were the three big recipients because the alliance policy was if you would make reform, structural reform, political and economic, you would get the big aid package from the Alliance to help finance education, housing, health, and democracy. Chile was already participating and growing faster than some of these dictatorships who couldn't be qualified. So Chile was getting a very large chunk of what in those days was 200 or 300 million a year which was a lot of money.

(Teodoro) Moscoso, a Puerto Rican, headed the Alliance for Progress. Richard Goodwin was in the White House. Chile was one of only three or four favored countries that were qualified, star pupils, you might say. So we were very big, active. We had a very active AID mission.

One characteristic of Chile was it was made up of all kinds of immigrants, an immigrant nation. So you had big British, Italian, German, Slavic and Lebanese communities and of course each one maintained its identity. They had their own social club, country club. They intermarried a lot. I remember we belonged to the Italian country club because it was close to our house. We were accepted as diplomats. It was a very good life but the stress was coming in strikes. Economically these devaluations were wiping some people out. People were getting desperate. But, all that happened after I left.

Our big problem was trying to figure out where this was going to come out and try to get ahead of, or at least be aware of the change. We had a very good ambassador, Charles Cole who had been president of Amherst College for years and a very distinguished historian. He was ambassador there because he had been Dean Rusk's boss at the Rockefeller Foundation. So when Rusk became secretary he talked Charley into taking this job, ambassador to Chile. He was really good. He was also very good at trying to be a mentor to first tour officers. I thought the FSO generalist program was just great. [Ed: Ambassador Cole served in Chile from October 1961 to September 1964.]

Q: While you were there did you have any contact or knowledge of Allende at all?

CHEEK: He was the center of everything with fiery speeches and literally waved the bloody shirt. He would wave a red shirt that had animal blood on it, I guess. He seemed to fire people up a lot. The betting was that he was going to win. He had already run twice before and was getting closer to winning; he was head of the Socialist Party. Chile had a traditional communist Party but the Socialist Party was closer to Moscow because it was more of a majority party. It was the bigger of the two. Allende was very tough, a very popular character. The contest with Frei was already beginning. He was close to them. He played by the rules but he, which was after I left, he lost and it was pretty close to Frei. He accepted the results. He didn't try to stage a revolution or a coup. That was something I remembered when he later got overthrown. Here was a guy who had lost three presidential elections over a period of twenty years and played by the democratic rules. Finally gets elected and overthrown.

Q: Well, you are off to the consular section in London then. When were you there?

CHEEK: Yes. 1963 to 1965. I must say Chester Beaman was right. Right away I got jumped up so that within three years I was promoted to FSO-6. You could spend seven or eight years to get promoted from eight to six. The system was not that predictable. In fact, I got to FSO-6 before some of the people in my class who had been adjusted and entered as FSO-7s got to FSO-6. So much for that theory. I should also note that in those days we did not have the cone system used today. Skill codes were rendered in four letter abbreviations. I came out of Chile as a generalist. In London I picked up the skill codes for consular and then political.

In London another one of these Foreign Service things happened. I had done my six months in the consular section's visa mill. We had about a dozen junior officers in little cubicles because everyone had to be interviewed then, there was no automation. We had roughly three to five minutes max to make up our minds about an applicant, in or out. We were in a little cubicle with a big flag all in a row. It was a visa mill.

After six months in the mill I got rotated over; there was a vacancy. We had a special citizen services section. They did all citizen services, passports and a lot of legal work and notarial work, deceased Americans and everything. There were two officers there, one a senior officer and the other slot was vacant. Some problem with somebody there so they put me in there for six months and that was just fabulous. I got to take depositions from the British. Britain is the only country where they recognize our courts and we recognize theirs. I took a deposition from Judy Garland. She didn't want to come in but she did because the British judge honored a U.S. court order to order her to appear at the U.S. Embassy and give this deposition which was when she was accused by her ex-husband of adultery [Ed: Mark Herron]. She'd gotten married on a ship.

I was just completing six months there and all of a sudden a vacancy occurred up in the political section. In those days London had the really choice jobs for officers representing the regional bureaus. So every bureau, the Africa bureau, the Mideast bureau, the Asia

bureau, all except Latin America, had senior officers who were sometimes an ex ambassador from the area or at least a DCM. Almost all of them went on from that job to become an ambassador. They were almost all FSO-1s or FSO-2s. They handled the liaison with Britain on their regional area.

So for the Africa person, all the traffic from Africa would go to him and he'd go each day to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and liaise. It turned out that the officer that handled the Asia bureau, this is right at the heat of the Vietnam war, was named Chalmers Benedict Wood, sort of a blueblood from Massachusetts or something. He had to go back to the States for a divorce from his wife. There was a lot of money involved. It got very messy. He was supposed to be gone a couple of weeks; weeks went by and it got into over a month so I was pulled out of the consular section to go up there and temporarily sit in at his desk and do his job.

Hermann Eilts was the Middle East man; he left while I was up there and was replaced by Bill Eaton, another distinguished Middle East officer. I had everything east of Suez because Bill had all the Arab world there. This was the 1965-1966 period. Harold Wilson was Prime Minister. I had a very busy portfolio because I had three wars going on; the Vietnam War, the Rann of Kutch war between Pakistan and India [Ed: April 1965], and the Indonesian-Malaya dispute, Konfrontasi, started on Malaysia's creation and independence. It just happened that under the British system the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had an office for each of these areas. Vietnam was one office, India and Pakistan were in the commonwealth office, and Indo-Malay was in the colonial office. I spent my mornings reading the incoming traffic and every afternoon I went to the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) to brief and conduct liaison with British officers who were at the level of an undersecretary, like the number three at FCO. Here I am an FSO-6 on his second tour in the foreign service! Like the other regional officers, I accompanied the Ambassador or DCM if Washington instructed us to make a particular demarché and drafted the reporting cable.

I would get all the traffic particularly related to these three wars and go over and decide what we would do. Sometimes I would cut off the top of our reporting cable and just give them the text. Some days I would have a thick folder of material for them to review. The job of these three regional officers spoke volumes about our close relationship with the UK. Sometimes the reporting was so sensitive I briefed them, but did not share the text. And they would share with me; this was a daily consultation. After I had briefed at the FCO, I returned to the embassy to type reports on what the FCO's response was to the issue or query of the day. The FCO officers treated me professionally; this age and rank difference didn't seem to matter. I say this because this temporary assignment dragged on and we suddenly realized that three months had gone by and I was still there.

I recall at one point I collaborated with a very senior USIS officer, who was assigned to London just to handle Vietnam, on a book entitled Flags Over Vietnam. Where, like in Iraq and Afghanistan, we tried to show an international coalition was involved in Vietnam; that we were not going it alone. Of course, the Australians were committed

there. The book was designed for a British audience and I think the cover showed 38 flags. Boy, did that cause a ruckus. Even Ambassador Bruce raised questions, because some of the flags were rather specious. A country had sent a hospital or medics or something, or supplies for non-combatants, not combat troops. Maybe half of the flags were inappropriate. It was embarrassing. We had to quickly retrieve all the copies. It would have been a great book for American audiences, which USIS couldn't do, but we were trying to influence a more skeptical British public to help out our British allies.

Q: How did you personally feel about the Vietnam War?

CHEEK: Well, I was young. I was from a liberal democratic background and believed in democratic government. But in time I could see the difference between the public face and reality. I began to see that a lot of these peace missions were just for show, to cover our ass. And began to get a little skeptical, but I was not there to provide policy guidance. Although I could do my briefings with careful confidence. But, you know. I think even Ambassador Bruce might have had some misgivings. There were things he said in private, off the record, discussions. But he would not cross LBJ (President Lyndon Baines Johnson). (Senator) Fulbright found that out when he took a different view of Vietnam and moved from best friend to worst enemy. Remember this is 1965-1966, the domestic opposition to the war had not fully bloomed. We were talking temporary expedients; we were going to be home by Christmas. No one saw the long subsequent involvement. And it was a bipartisan cause supported by most sectors of the society. We had very few demonstrations in those days in London. The Ambassador and others would go out and make speeches, carry on a public diplomacy campaign without drawing too much attention. We didn't want to appear to be turning down speaking opportunities. We certainly put in a number of long days.

In time my own job situation clarified. I can't remember his name, he had been Consul General in Hong Kong, one of the big posts in the East Asia Bureau, and he was assigned to this liaison job in the political section and he came through and his wife was a famous artist. Something went wrong. He couldn't get his daughter into the right private school he wanted to, so he stops in London en route to his home leave. Well, while he is in the States he arranges to get assigned as senior assistant to the undersecretary. The London assignment is canceled. By this time the whole assignment cycle is gone and I had been there about four months. At this time the embassy just stopped pushing to fill the job and they did a very good thing; they insisted that State assign me to the job, which State was very uncomfortable with. How do you put an FSO-6 into an FSO-1 or 02 job? Embassy London finally forced it because the DCM was none other than my old professor, Phil Kaiser. The ambassador was David Bruce. The key thing was the political counselor was a political appointee, a fellow named Brubeck, Bill Brubeck who had been the chief of staff at the House Foreign Affairs Committee. When Kennedy came in he was talked into coming over to State and given the rank of an FSO-2.

Although not being career people and, of course, Kaiser knew me very well, spent a lot of time with me as a student, they didn't care. I remember Brubeck had me clearing

everything that I had cables through Eagleton before they came to him. After the third month, he called me in and said, "Look, your work is as good as any of these other officers. You just send it straight to me." I was on a direct line and it was just incredible. Here I was. Actually, I still have to this day, when I left, they gave me the famous book about the lights going out in Europe in 1914 by Barbara Tuchman [Ed: The Proud Tower? Or The Guns of August?]. It was for my going away and it was endorsed by Brubeck and it says "You are going to spend the next 20 years of your career trying to get back to this job."

Talk about a career boost because you are getting these EERs (Employee Evaluation Reviews) that cite your work in an FSO-1 position. I did the job. Of course, we had audits, we had consular review stuff. They all came through. That's how I got to know Adlai Stevenson. I was there, because I would automatically be visitors' control officer. I was there when the call came that he had passed out on the sidewalk on the way back to the embassy and did not survive. [Ed: Democratic Party politician Adlai Stevenson died in London July 14, 1965, from a heart attack.]

Averill Harriman came through and, of course, as the East Asia person I got to accompany him and be his note taker during calls on the prime minister to pursue all these Vietnam negotiations. Harriman would do all these special missions. (President) Johnson and his sensitive antenna were always out. Of course, the interesting part was coming back and sitting down with Harriman, who was called "honest Ave the hair splitter," and trying to get him to clear my draft cable reporting on his meetings. Fortunately Kaiser was there. Kaiser, of course, had been his executive aide when Harriman was governor and he knew how to handle him. I remember, eventually Kaiser would say, "Oh, come on. For Christ sake, sign the damned thing."

It was a real education for me; all the big names, and I'm just a spear carrier. It was just one of those things. If it hadn't been for Ben Wood's messy divorce and the fact he had to return to the States, and the replacement not being able to get his daughter in school, this would never have happened. I would have been up there only two, three months. I would have waited 20 years to do anything like that in the Foreign Service. But I have the EERs here to prove, you know they are all exemplary for an officer in training. They treated me, Brubeck, Kaiser and Ambassador Bruce, as if I was just like the other officers, British or American, as though I was an FSO-3. So it was probably the greatest job I ever had.

But my final year was coming up. Earlier the embassy pressed the Department to fill the job. The embassy, once they assigned me to this regional slot, just stopped asking. So I had a full tour. The Vietnam War was the major issue in east Asian events and I was fully engaged in that. The hierarchy of embassy London appears daunting, but I had ready access to the front office. I think this embassy worked because the DCM and the political counselor were career officers.

My experiences in London proved a benefit later when I next went to Washington. I was the only person with ARA background who had London experience. At that time the British were just shedding themselves of their colonies, especially in the Caribbean. They were letting them all go. Independent in the case of Barbados, or semi-independent in the case of all the Windward/Leeward Islands. So, in the State Department responsibility for covering these new entities moved from the EUR (Bureau of European Affairs) Bureau as part of the UK Desk to the ARA (Bureau of Inter-American Affairs). So there was going to be a desk of Caribbean affairs created in ARA for all these former colonies, Barbados, Leeward/Windward. And I was assigned this desk because I had the London tour.

Now while I was in London, Jack Vaughn, who later became head of the Peace Corps, came over to London to attend one of these Ditchley House conferences, they called it, very fancy, very high level people, brought in, usually from the U.S., Canada, and Britain. This is a big country estate; you dress in a tuxedo each night for dinner. And you deliberate on some big world problem. Jack was the head of the Latin American Bureau at State. He and the head of Alliance for Progress came over to represent the United States. The Ditchley people actually invited David Bruce, the ambassador, to be there, but he wasn't going to go. It turned out not only was I in the political section, but I also had Latin America background. So he designated me as his representative. Although I wasn't very comfortable with this, all these big shots, but I went up, rented a tuxedo and met up with Jack. He and I would take long walks over the three or four day conference in this isolated country manor. And we became good friends. So, years later, after he became director of the Peace Corps, I'm walking through the lobby and I bump into him. He complained that Foreign Service officers never took management assignments with the Peace Corps. That personnel discouraged such cross training. He assured me the Peace Corps encouraged such sharing.

So, during these two years in London all sorts of things happened and opened doors. Talk about being in the right place at the right time. This is when I got a lesson in the role of luck and being prepared when opportunities present themselves. London really helped my career. There was a saying in the mission: you could have the post or the job. Enjoy the amenities of London, or have a great job. That first job in the consular section is a bit of 9 to 5 job, regular hours, infrequently standing as the section duty officer. We all lived together in an apartment building on Portobello road. Some people have four years in London, that's OK, but here I am having a blast. The Vietnam portfolio was hot; in due course the British really began to disagree with us on our course. Henry Cabot Lodge came through town, the Oxford dean of Vietnam, and I was his control officer. He was very smart, but he did not listen to his staff.

Yet, I am a second tour officer buried in the political section. But coming back from London to be the first desk officer in a new ARA office was a real advantage. My London work seemed to be recognized and I was promoted.

Q: Did the ambassador cross your horizon much?

CHEEK: Bruce? Yes, he was good with the junior officers. He set aside time, he had a big suite up there. We would go up, sit in these big chairs, and have a drink with him. This would be every couple of weeks, we'd get this invitation. Just being around him was awesome; he was like a god in terms of foreign affairs. I think he is the only person who was ambassador in the big three European posts: France [1949-1952], Germany [1957-59], and the United Kingdom [1961-1969]. As junior officers you got invited to things. And, of course, it seems like the entire U.S. congress came through London.

Q: You must have had frequent control officer duties.

CHEEK: Especially when I moved from the consular section to the political section. We had three very senior British employees who were invaluable in handling CODELS (congressional delegations). I forget everyone's name but Joan was a real institution. She really took care of these guys. Congressman Wayne Hayes [Democratic-Ohio, Chairman House Committee on Administration], for example, saw to it that she got orders every year to go back to Washington. Of course this was at a time when there was no budget to send American officers to Washington. But, yes, there would be large congressional delegations. They were almost shameless; came in their own planes which they loaded up the British china and everything else, since they didn't have to go through customs since they were on an Air Force plane.

Q: On the visa line, did any interest problems arise? People shopping for visas?

CHEEK: Because of the British Commonwealth connection, we had a lot of people from the Commonwealth applying for visas, Pakistanis, Indians, middle eastern people. They would apply for a visa in London. In those days you had to get clearance from the post of origin. So they had to either pay for a cable or you sent an OEM, which could take weeks through the mail pouch, to get clearance. We were checking with the embassy in the country they were from for any derogatory information, to forestall an end-run. We had one person in the section who did nothing but correlated responses from the other embassies, which varied from we-have-no-negative-information to we-have-refused-this-person-many-times.

We had one visa section supervisor Charley Gilbert, an FSO-03, I think, who had more officers working under him than anybody. He was determined that we would be the number one visa issuing post in the world. We were always in a race with the consulate in Toronto, Canada. Now the number of visas issued is automatically calculated by the visa stamp. Each day you changed the date on the visa stamp. So when we got to the end of the year, he left "June 30" on the visa stamp for three or four days. So all of those visas date stamped "June 30" were counted as being issued during the previous fiscal year and that put us over the top.

Charley was unique in many ways. He was a chain smoker. Those days you could smoke in your office. He would call us in and we would get these pep talks. Charley would go up and down the visa line with a stopwatch. Timing our production. He gave us three

minutes to make a decision, up or down. If there was enough uncertainty, you could defer to a special unit of two or three officers, which took the “maybes.” You weren’t to sit there and try to resolve the case. You were to kick the cases off to this special unit, which was staffed with more senior officers. They would make the final decision, refusal, waiver, or whatever, and this helped get the applicants off the line, so they didn’t clog up the waiting room. So, we got used to making these decisions within three minutes; everyone had their own technique. My technique was to ask the applicant two or three minutes of questions, and then look them straight in the eye and say “Why are you coming back?” Depending on how they answered that, I made my decision.

It was a real mill! It was all done manually. We didn’t have any automation. Our biggest automation was these big old trays, big machines with trays. There were a half dozen British gals, each one manning one of these machines with alphabetical trays with little visa forms in them. It was unlike today where the applicant might get a date to return. We were obligated to process everyone who walked in the door.

Q: When did you leave London and where did you go?

CHEEK: I left London the summer of 1966 and checked into the next job in the Department in June. I went to ARA and was the first desk officer for the newly independent British colonies, Barbados and all the Leeward and Windward Islands, they were called associated states. And ARA threw in the British Virgin Islands for good measure. London kept Bermuda; that stayed with the UK desk. We were not happy with Britain’s handling of the Leeward and Windward islands. We did everything we could to talk the British out of it. It was irresponsible for them to allow such small states. Of course, we were scared of Cuba. Later that’s why we invaded Grenada. Of course, to the Brits this was a business decision. These islands were costing them money, not adding to the treasury. London was coming under budgetary pressure and they just wanted out of there. Nevertheless, there is some irony in the Department placing these British colonies in Latin America.

Q: Today is November 5, 2010. When we left off you had just gone to ARA to do Caribbean affairs, the Windward, Leeward Islands and all?

CHEEK: Barbados, yes. I had come back from London to be desk officer for State and AID in the Caribbean office, ARA/LA/CR. I was the desk officer for, well, I had all the Caribbean. I had Barbados, the Leewards, the Windwards, even had the British Virgin Islands and to make good, they also threw Puerto Rico in there.

Q: How could you have Puerto Rico? It belonged to us.

CHEEK: There apparently was no place else in the U.S. government that wanted it and, of course, at that time the Puerto Ricans were very active. They were getting themselves invited to inter-American meetings as a separate entity from the U.S. delegation so there were all these issues related to the fact that there is a U.S. delegation at this

inter-American meeting but there is a Puerto Rican delegation there and also the commonwealth vote on continuing statehood was coming up. So I ended up having to do it because somebody in the government had to deal with them. They just couldn't find anyplace else to put it.

Q: In the first place, you were there from when to when?

CHEEK: Looking at my EERs, I left London in June 1966 and came in and left ARA/LA/CR in November 1967, so I was there about a year and a half.

Q: Let's talk about Puerto Rico. I would have thought the Department of Interior or somebody would have had that.

CHEEK: That's what we thought but then they weren't a state, they weren't a colony. Nobody ever defined what 'commonwealth' means and there was never an agreed pigeonhole to put Puerto Rico. So, I had these weird states. The Brits had given these states; they had severed the tie with all these. They called them in and said, "Look, we want to get out of here. We want to get out of the colony business" with the notable exception of Bermuda which they kept and still have today. "We are going to give you a golden handshake" and then sort of pushed them out the door toward the United States because they were all money losers for the Brits. You couldn't make any money; in fact, you had to subsidize most of the islands. The British assumption seemed to be, "If you guys were independent or semi independent, the United States would be your sponsor and they'd give you all this aid money."

We were, of course, furious with this. Dean Rusk was Secretary. The whole concept of mini states just drove him up the wall. He just couldn't conceive of them though as we started looking at it, facing the issue of what to do about it, we discovered that places like Barbados had as much or more population as Iceland, and a lot of existing states, so we had already accepted states with small populations and small territory, such as Singapore.

The only state that forced the issue was Barbados. They opted for immediate independence and the Leewards and the Windwards opted to stay in what they called 'associated states' status. WIAS it was called, the West Indies Associated States, in which they would remain in association with Britain and Britain would be responsible for their defense and foreign affairs but otherwise, they would be independent. It was sort of half independent and viewed as a transitional status. I think there were about eight of these islands. No, there were six of them in the Leewards and Windwards, and they were states in voluntary and free association with the United Kingdom. They became known as 'associated states'. That created a problem for us because, ...but we accepted this and reorganized the State Department desks and brought these island desks from the EUR bureau to the ARA bureau, these associated states, and established a relationship with them.

The only area we had interest really was in Antigua because there we had big tracking stations for both our missile program and for NASA (National Air and Space Agency). The big advantage we had in the development of missiles over the Soviet Union was we had a trajectory of monitoring stations - because you shot them off down range - which was land based because we had these big tracking stations on Antigua. The Soviets had to track from ships which was really not nearly as good a procedure. We had been getting these stations sort of free from the Brits. We sort of took care of the Brits and gave them discounts on missiles and stuff as compensation. Now all of a sudden Antigua was saying we want to get paid. We had always maintained the façade that these were free, these were allied. They weren't charging us. We weren't having to pay our way, London was freely giving us the use of these bases. Of course, that was never true. Only with independence did we have to come up with some unique way to finance and pay for these bases without paying rent, because we didn't want to admit we paid rent.

The final solution to that was cut by a deal between George Ball and the British foreign minister in the back of a car. We agreed that some of the money that the Brits paid us for R&D (research and development) for missiles and atomic submarines and other technology, I didn't know this but this money didn't go into the Treasury. When they bought the missile they paid the production cost of it. If they bought it from the Air Force, that went into the Treasury or if they bought it from a private contractor. But the R&D portion of that missile or whatever the equipment was went to (the Department of) Defense. It was off the books. So Defense had a big slush fund. This unaccounted money didn't have to be appropriated by congress. They then agreed to pay the Brits out of that slush fund to give back some of that money and then the Brits in turn would give it to Antigua to pay the rent on the facilities and that way we didn't pay for the base.

The only other was Barbados because it was going independent and we had to decide. One of my first action memos to the President, would we recognize Barbados or not? Rusk really didn't want to. He was anti mini states, he called them. So it was quite a debate going on. We had a consulate general in Barbados which covered the whole area but that was a consulate general accredited to Britain so it was going to be fairly easy to convert that to the embassy. We could also continue to have it cover the associated states from there. It only had a couple of officers.

We went forward to recognizing them. It was going to be almost impossible not to. We didn't have real interests there other than the fact that Cuba was there and stirring up problems and we were worried that they would pick off some of these islands. Of course, they later did with Grenada where they moved in and began to exert influence there which resulted in our invading them and throwing the Cubans out. But that was our strategic concern, that somebody else might get them, not that we had other strong interests. Anyway, we agreed we'd recognize them and they set up an independence date, a big ceremony. I had to write another memo to the President to recommend a delegation. Since Barbados was small and not too significant but a beautiful place to go, I asked for the vice president to head the delegation, which was unusual because you usually send some member of the cabinet.

I didn't get him but lo and behold, the White House came back and they gave me Earl Warren, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, the number three ranking person in the hierarchy. I was overwhelmed, Warren as the head of the delegation. By having a person of his stature that automatically entitled us to get all sorts of attention and support and stuff that we wouldn't otherwise get.

I also got George Meany because the island was going to be governed by a labor party, the Democratic Labor Party, led by Errol Barrow, a union party and a union government so they had ties to American labor. So Meany came and A. Phillip Randolph who was still alive joined the delegation. Then I got the congressman from New York who was the chairman of the ARA Committee in the House. I got some sugar baron from Florida. They had some sugar interest in Barbados. He was a nice younger man, very rich. Barbados independence was November 30 and it was cold in the U.S. so that probably explained why I got such a great delegation. I got to know these people very well because we were all together throughout the trip.

By having Earl Warren we got an Air Force plane and all the support you get. We all went down there. I was the personal escort along with someone from Protocol and we just had a great time. They had landed the Supremes to attend, to perform at the ceremony and of course, they were probably the hottest singing groups in America at the time. There were four of them. The lead singer, Diana Ross, later split off and she went on to have her own career and made a fortune, a very popular singer on her own. In fact, they were already being known as Diana Ross and the Supremes. They were the hottest musical vocal group in America at the time. That wasn't us that invited them; that was the Barbadians. They agreed to go, sort of for free and perform.

It was about a three day affair. I will never forget we came in in the afternoon; it was almost dark and we moved into this brand new Hilton Hotel that had just been completed. When we looked out the windows, the lawns were bare. The next morning when we woke up big palm trees were out there; they had come in and planted overnight.

That was the highlight, I think, of what otherwise would have been a sleepy tour with little islands that nobody cared about. There was the strategic concern which would become even greater about Cuba picking them off. There was the issue of what to do about our tracking stations and then there was the issue of Barbados, whether to recognize them and all that.

They were accredited later on after my tenure. Antigua was the first of the countries that decided to divide with the associated state status. They could always opt out and go for total independence. They later went in and then eventually all the states.

Q: Were there any embassies? Did they have any embassies?

CHEEK: Most of them had one in New York or Washington, would be jointly accredited to the UN and the U.S. and as they came into the OAS usually got in all three because they didn't have much money.

The other fascinating thing I had was the consular post really didn't have much travel budget so they only went to these islands when there was a consular problem and somebody got in jail or there was a killing or an accident or plane crash. So we didn't know anything about them. There had never been any political or economic reporting on them. By insisting the Brits were solely responsible, we avoided working with the Brits on them because we didn't want to get stuck with them and we didn't.

One of my first jobs was to go and visit each island and spend a few days and come back and write a comprehensive report about them. We had nothing in the files about the leaders and all that. It was fascinating because the Brits had primed them to believe that if they split with Britain, went associated or independent, that America would be wooing them and overwhelming them with aid. So as I stepped off the plane, in one case I went between the islands in a fishing boat, I was greeted royally. I was put up in the governor general's; we still had the governor general. That was the big house on the island as an honored guest. In several instances I signed the guest book under the queen's name because she had just made a tour through the islands not too long before. I was then immediately pounced upon by these premiers, they called them, wanting to know how much they were going to give them, where was the money? Had I brought it with me?

For me, I think I was an FS0-6, and in those days you couldn't get a travel advance that was more than 80% of the estimated travel cost. By the time I got to the fourth island of the six, I was running out of money and didn't have any money to call back on in the States and of course, you didn't have credit cards in those days that you could whip out. By the time I got to Antigua where there was a base, both Air Force and NASA, State was able to cable down an authorization for that base to get me some more money.

On one island I had to ask the governor to cosign my personal check so I could go cash it and get some money, because I was completely out, after quickly calling my wife to get a loan from the credit union to cover the check. Here they are thinking I am carrying millions of dollars and they don't even know I can hardly pay my hotel bill. Fortunately, in most of the places I didn't have to stay in a hotel. I stayed as a guest of the governor general. Still, I was about as junior as they could get. Here I was, the first official contact they had had with the United States government, and they treated me like the President had sent me, particularly to sign checks to give them money. Of course, that wasn't easy to handle, to explain to them there really wasn't going to be any money unless they could figure some way to make themselves important to us, which they later did. Cuba began to threaten, and they discovered if you were threatened by Cuba, you could get U.S. aid.

Q: Did Grenada cause any problems at the time?

CHEEK: No, it didn't. That all came later. Cuba hadn't yet seized on it and, of course, under the associated status that came after they became independent because under associated statehood, the Brits wouldn't even let the Cubans on the island. Of course, there was no natural connection. Cuba never paid any attention to these islands. They are all English speaking and black population so Cuba after the revolution became more African Cuba than it was before.

That came later with independence and then they opened the doors to Cuba and Cuba had the opportunity. You could see then that was probably the only way that they were going to get our attention, with the exception of Antigua which had this base which was both the military and NASA which was absolutely essential, vital. We had to have that and I think that was true, just technologically speaking. As I said, we'd come up with this ingenious way to pay rent for it. I think later on as they went to full independence that became formalized. I think it is still there although I think the down range tracking stations are less important. We actually negotiated a base agreement. We established an embassy on Antigua. I think we have one there now but when they became independent because of our interests there we opened an embassy there with a couple of officers. We gave it jurisdiction over some of the islands, sort of split them up between there and Barbados.

Q: How did you find the British governors on the islands?

CHEEK: The associated states were still deciding whether they wanted to keep them or not. The queen was going to remain the head of state for them and so you'd still have a governor general. They were all very nice, nice career civil servants mostly, had beautiful houses, usually the most prominent view of the island. The hillside had this beautiful old house, colonial style beach entrance. They knew what was going on. Fortunately I could have frank talks with them. They knew what their government was doing and that these islands were being pushed out the door. They also knew we were resisting opening the door to them and taking over responsibility for them.

Dean Rusk used to lecture. Any time he got near the press he'd lecture about their irresponsibility, walking out, leaving. It was all economic. They had ceased in any way to make money for the Brits and the Brits no longer had strategic or any kind of interest there and they were costing them a lot of money. They all had to be subsidized, their budget did.

That's where I got some of my best insight as to what the islands were, what was going on, who were these people, who were these premiers? In most cases there was some sort of a legislative chamber on the island to do local rule and they just sort of became the chamber for the associated state. The head of it became the premier. The status of associated states lasted beyond my tenure.

The islands didn't have any transportation links among them so it was very difficult to get there by plane. There was one airline, and I think it was Leeward Islands Air Transport

that linked most of them together. Its big slogan was ‘leaves indiscriminately, arrives tardily.’ It was just little planes that island hopped.

The Brits had in no way linked them together and there was no trade between them. However, there were these schooners that would ply back and forth between some of them, carrying some products and stuff; that was the only way. I took a schooner once to get there. That all got developed and they all became big tourist havens.

Q: This was really before the big tourist business started, wasn't it?

CHEEK: One of the reasons Antigua went for independence first was the casino people, and some even thought mafia people, moved in on Antigua and said, “You know, you guys could get rich and give us these casinos and hotels.” They did that. The Brits weren't going along with it so that was another incentive to them to become independent; that and the fact they could then shake us down for more for the bases than they were getting and make us negotiate a treaty, open an embassy.

That was the one island where I think tourism business because big casinos, gambling casinos were established there with charter flights that flew in from the States for two or three days. Then there were all kinds of questions about corruption, shady characters.

Most of the islands just developed their tourism. It was pretty small scale in those days. It was usually local entrepreneurs trying to develop a lodge with ten or twenty cabins, beach houses. The big hotels then moved in except for Barbados, though the Hilton project was the first big hotel. Barbados had been a tourist mecca for Brits and Canadians for years. The Canadians were very involved there because this had been a big vacation spot for years so most islands had a Canadian bank and there was some Canadian presence of some sort but that was about it.

Of course, the Brits were trying to get out and pretty well did. I would love to go back and just see how much the islands have changed.

It was also unique in that most people forget now that for a period State and AID were integrated in Latin America. Kennedy had started with the Alliance for Progress so that the two bureaus, the LA Bureau of AID and the ARA Bureau of State, the only place they did it, were a single bureau, back to back and belly to belly. So the ARA State assistant secretary was number one and the AID director became the number two of the bureau. In most cases it just meant moving; AID had a country desk and State had a country desk and they just moved them physically together into the same suite of offices.

In my case we didn't have a desk officer for the Caribbean so I was the only place where this integration came together in one person; I was both the State desk officer and the AID desk officer for Barbados and these islands. My secretary was paid by AID. She was AID and I was State. I will never forget the furniture in my office was half and half, so

AID had gray metal furniture, really cheesy looking stuff and State had old wooden furniture, especially for junior officers. I had a mixture of the two.

Q: In Puerto Rico from time to time there were resolutions promoting Puerto Rican independence in the UN. Did you get involved in any of that stuff?

CHEEK: I ended up having to be the action officer for this portfolio and then having to take the lead. I remember two issues; one, there was a vote coming up on independence and then there was this big issue of what to do about the Puerto Ricans turning up with their own delegation, a separate delegation in these meetings. How did we handle that and how did we treat them?

I did get a trip to Puerto Rico out of it, which was real nice although I couldn't say I was the desk officer for Puerto Rico. I was just the responsible officer for Puerto Rico. Whenever we tried to pursue a legal definition because there was no agreed law or agreed definition of 'commonwealth status' and what it was or wasn't, we just sort of got along. We just lived with that. The ambiguity was built into the commonwealth status intentionally and neither side wanted to push this to a definitive definition so you just had to be very imaginative.

I can remember going around having to get clearances and walk papers around and people looking at me. Sometimes Interior would get involved because there would be issues touching on its equities. The lawyers would always be involved. That made it very interesting. As I say, I got my trip, one trip. I was warned not to do anything that treated them like they were independent, but it was fun.

By this time I had been in the Foreign Service for about four years, just been in Chile and London and that was pretty heavy stuff. Of course, this serving as both State and AID. I learned a lot about AID. I was the AID staffer too; I was the AID person.

Q: What was AID doing?

CHEEK: They were consistent with our policy. They didn't want to get involved with these islands either. AID's position was stay-away-from-them, and not assume the British wardship. Throughout my tenure that pretty well held up but that later crumbled. We started giving aid but at the time there wasn't any aid program for the area. There wasn't any AID mission or AID officer at the embassy. Sometimes we would give them gifts, like we had to give each island a gift for their independence. The only way we could find to fund it was AID money. So I would get involved as an AID person, getting a grant, making a purchase. I learned a lot because AID and State were to stay integrated for some time. AID was always a big part of the relationship so as I later served in Latin America I could say I was an AID officer. That was good for the credentials. Processing a hundred thousand dollar grant to give a post as a gift at independence is about the same as AID processing a ten million dollar health project; the system, the paperwork was all the same. That was really good training.

Q: What was your feeling about the people who were rising to power within these islands?

CHEEK: In most cases the only party on the island was the Labor Party because it was a sugar workers' union, especially in Barbados, a banana workers' union on another and they were about the only organizations they had that had some background in governance and politics and stuff. They naturally became the heirs. They were a bloc, they were organized, they had leadership so when the elections were held, they were all called labor parties, the Labor Party would win. Later on, after my time, the question of going to full independence came up then you had other movements form and had other issues such as whether you were pro or anti independent. At that time it was pretty neat.

I remembered this as I came back and wrote about each island, what was the dynamic of the island, politically and economically and socially. Then we just sort of had this one organization, the labor union that became the Labor Party and the leadership. Most of these premiers stayed in office for a long time because they sort of became the fathers of independence. I found years later the Bird family, I think one of his sons was still running Antigua. John Compton in St. Lucia. They hung around a long time; I never had anything more to do with the islands.

But ARA/LA/CR was a great tour. In those days the country directors in ARA, especially with the AID integration, were very powerful people and most of them were ex-ambassadors. So my country director, I think his name was C. Allen Stewart. He had been ambassador to Venezuela [1962-1964]. That was true of most of them. In a few instances, the AID person got the number one spot, the country director, and State took number two. The theory then was that the assistant secretaries and deputies would get out of the way and that the country director would be the sort of supreme authority for most things rather than the front office. They would go directly to the seventh floor, the Secretary. That was also part of the reason for putting former ambassadors in the jobs to give stature to the position. In the traditional model, the deputies, which I found out when I became a deputy assistant secretary, divided up the bureau and each took their assignments and they became the main policy node. But ARA country directors in those days could pretty much sign off on things. You could go from there to the seventh floor to the Secretary's office. It was kind of an experiment. It didn't last.

I think particularly when State and AID split up again and they went their separate ways, the country directors got downgraded. Part of the reason for upgrading was that these were huge offices. If you took all of State office for the Caribbean plus the AID office for the Caribbean or Central American or whatever division and put them together, that's a lot of people. It was an interesting environment to be in. It lasted through all my tenure. I forget when they began to dismantle it.

This tour was cut short after a year and a half. I went off to the Peace Corps in Brazil and was there four years. When I was there we still integrated. The economic minister in the embassy in Rio was the AID director.

I went to Brazil in November of 1967 for four years. I first went there to be the deputy director of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps had a director with two deputies; one was sort of the exec officer for operations. The other was called a program training officer and he had a big operation overseeing the programming of all the volunteers and all their training, which was huge, millions of dollars, because we were the largest Peace Corps program in the world. It was the peak of the Peace Corps. This is November 1967 through to 1969 that I was in that job on detail to the Peace Corps, reimbursable detail. They rented me out and they paid all of my salary and expenses. I stayed on the books as an FSO, but under Peace Corps rules while I had diplomatic status, but I couldn't claim the benefits of it. I wasn't allowed to live in a fancy apartment on the beach. I wasn't allowed to have duty free privileges, had to drive an old, local Volkswagen. I couldn't import a car. As far as State was concerned, the Peace Corps lived on the economy, so I lived in this hybrid world.

The way I got to the Peace Corps is fascinating. In London I got to go up representing Ambassador Bruce to this conference, Ditchley Conference it was called from the estate where it was held. There was Jack Vaughn, the head of the Latin America Bureau of State [Ed: March 1965 to February 1966] and the head of AID for Latin America. So Jack and I would take walks and stuff, talk and drink. We really got to know each other well. By the time I am back a year and a half later in this desk job, I am walking through the building one day after taking my noon walk and I come back in and ran into Jack coming out of the building. He was director of the Peace Corps then and he had just been over to complain to Dean Rusk about Foreign Service officers not wanting to go on a Peace Corps detail. He claimed State would discourage it. They couldn't disapprove it but they tended to pressure the officer out of it. He was complaining about that because we were supposed to be able to do it.

Rusk had assured him that they would not impede any Foreign Service officer going on such a detail. Vaughn wasn't sure but he believed that was going to happen so he immediately seizes on me and says, "I have just got this problem with Dean Rusk. Let's put him to a test. Why don't you come to the Peace Corps? I'll give you any assignment I can give you."

That started that in motion and that's what ended in cutting my tour short by about six months, leaving in November instead of staying until June. Sure enough, they really tried to discourage me. I got lectures about the system and was told I was getting out of the mainstream, what a shame. I had a promising career and I am going to ruin it.

The Peace Corps was looked on with great suspicion. They were like a bunch of hippies, draft dodgers in the 1960s, which they were, and real no communication with State at all. A few of us went with them.

Ed Corr was the other good example; he was in my class at Columbia and later became ambassador to Peru [1980-1981], Bolivia [1981-1985] and El Salvador [1985-1988].

Anyway, I jumped in and took it. Originally I was going to be the country director for Nicaragua but ended up taking this job in Brazil because from the State side it was almost impossible to get assigned to Brazil. There were 50 applicants for every opening.

Q: Why was that?

CHEEK: Everybody wanted to go to Rio, just that simple; great living, luxury apartments, a huge commissary because we had a huge military mission there with a military government. You could even buy refrigerators at the joint PX we ran with the Brazilian military, good life, big apartment right on the beach. So that was part of the attraction that I was sure I could get a tour in Brazil.

It was one of the biggest jobs I ever had. We had about 1,500 volunteers out of a worldwide Peace Corps total of 14,000, so we were almost 10% of it. It was the largest program in the world and here we had these 1500 volunteers scattered over an area the size of the United States with provincial offices running programs that were the size of country programs elsewhere. Sometimes 100, 200 volunteers in the biggest states. We weren't in the south because that was too prosperous. All of the Amazon and north and west and our national office was in Rio.

To keep our numbers level while I was we had another 700 people in training and I had all these training contracts. I was negotiating million dollar contracts. All our training was contracted out to universities, corporations, NGOs, whatever that did it. These were huge contracts and all this was my baby.

I was also continually training, trying to get 30 volunteers to go out to the state of Pará and they are going to try to develop cattle or something. There was a tremendous variety of projects; huge numbers of people, and huge amounts of money. It was again like in London. I'd spend the rest of my career trying to get responsibilities like that; supervising, budgeting, and making decisions.

I was constantly on the road and in those days Brazil didn't have that much of an air link developed. You went in these old DC-3s often out to these capitals of provinces, long trips. Then you'd go out in a jeep and pal around because every program I had to go out there and decide, it was up to me to go convince Washington to authorize this program and to give us 30 volunteers to work in primary education out in the Amazon and recruit them and all that so it was a big administrative job. I really never administered anything for the rest of my career, anything that big. Even my largest embassy, Buenos Aires, never approached it in terms of numbers of people and the amounts of money.

I did have to forgo my diplomatic privileges. It was interesting because State was constantly trying to upgrade their apartments and convince Washington that the minimum apartment even for a low level officer or secretary had to be some palatial place on the beach. I was on the books as a State officer so when they would get looked at or try to justify here was this exception, an officer who was paying one quarter usually of what officers of his rank were paying for an apartment. So State would continually call me over and want me to sign a statement saying I was living in substandard housing so they could then discount me, take me out of the equation because Washington would say, "Look, if you can get housing for 400 a month, why are we paying 1500?"

The reason was, of course, I wasn't allowed to live in a beachfront apartment. We lived about four blocks off the beach in an interior street. I couldn't even by Peace Corps standards live in one of the nice fronting apartments. We were on the back view but it was nice. It was perfectly fine. I wouldn't sign. They had to live with the curse of my accommodations, dragging down their inflating housing cost for the whole two years I was there.

Of course, the FSOs we knew over in the embassy, they would treat us like we were missionaries or something. They'd come over and bring a care package or something. We were perfectly happy. The Brazilian economy was developing. You could go to a supermarket even then and buy familiar foods, Hellmann's mayonnaise, corn flakes. We didn't really didn't want to disabuse them of whether they were helping us out. My little Brazilian Volkswagen was fine. I didn't need a big car, even though you could make a fortune off of them when you sold them. It was a great experience, again, a very unique experience.

Pictures from that time, I had shoulder length hair because that was the mode of the Peace Corps. Everything was just completely different. We staff weren't supposed to have very much difference between us and the volunteers. We were allowed a little. Of course, we were living in Rio.

It was one of those great experiences. There was never any indication that it ruined my career by being out of the mainstream. In fact, later on State began to put an emphasis on management experience; management experience became the word of the day and I was competing for DCM and ambassador jobs with the fact that I had real management experience. I think it paid off. Although at the time I did not have much of a background in management; but we wanted to do it, it was a challenge. It was a challenge you couldn't get with the State Department at the time, or had any prospect of getting, until you got promoted into higher ranks.

It was a great time to be with the Peace Corps because it was their golden years and we were doing fantastic things. AID began to see the value of the Peace Corps and began to finance Peace Corps projects and create small project funds and that was great for me. I knew how to get money out of AID and how it worked and was very successful. AID just had hundreds of millions of dollars with a huge staff. This was just small change for

them. They were very grateful, very happy to do it, though we never wanted to get the volunteer too much backing because it all had to be self sustaining. It was a fantastic experience.

Our kids could get the State Department education allowance and go to the American school. As soon as my Peace Corps tour ended I was transferred over to State and stayed there for the next two years, a State assignment in the Rio embassy. I was immediately moved to the most luxurious apartment I have ever seen in my life, a whole floor on Copacabana Beach. It had been rented for the political counselor who had come in and didn't like it. His wife wanted to live elsewhere, so they had to go rent another huge apartment. We are talking about a whole floor. I was ordered to take that apartment to get me out of this low ball rent. Suddenly we were living in this huge apartment. We looked down on the Copacabana Palace Hotel, a huge building next door.

Q: What type of government did Brazil have at the time?

CHEEK: It had a military government. They were in place when I got there. Castelo Branco, when I first got there in the Peace Corps, was the president. He was killed in a plane crash up north and another general, Emilio Medici, succeeded him. It was a period of real repression. They weren't quite as vicious as the military governments in Chile and Argentina but they were pretty bad news and controlled everything. We were dealing at most with the governor and the state assembly. We didn't have much association with the national government. So for the Peace Corps, it really didn't interfere much on the big national thing. I was later to see more of that when I was on the embassy staff.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

CHEEK: While I was with the Peace Corps John Tuthill was the ambassador [Ed: Tuthill served as ambassador from June 1966 to January 1969]. He was famous for 'Operation Topsy'. [Ed: Ambassador Tuthill wrote an article on Operation Topsy for the autumn 1972 issue of Foreign Policy.] Every agency of the government seemed to have a need to have an office in Rio with luxury apartments on the beach and some of them you never heard of. You wondered what on earth were they doing overseas. He undertook to slim down the embassy and the vast number of agencies represented there. By the time he went through that exercise and cleaned it out, I went over to the embassy, and William Rountree came in [Ed: Rountree served from November 1970 to May 1973.].

William Manning Rountree was one of these career officers. He was from Savannah, Georgia, a portly, southern gentleman who also had good, conservative credentials. During Nixon and the Republican years he was a favorite of theirs. At a very young age he had been made an assistant secretary for Europe, he'd been ambassador to South Africa. I think he came to Rio from South Africa, a very nice man. He was career but he was what we called career-political. His career advancement was largely due to very favorable connections to the political people and particularly good conservative Republican credentials. You didn't really notice that in his demeanor.

Then by the time that I got over, he left. He didn't stay that long. It seems to me there was a health problem or they wanted him to go do something else, I can't remember exactly. He was only there a couple of years and then C. Burke Elbrick came in [Ed: Elbrick served from July 1969 to May 1970]. He was one of the most senior officers in the service, had been ambassador to everywhere. He was famous because he was the one that got kidnapped.

Q: I had been his chief of the consular section in Yugoslavia when he went there. [Ed: Elbrick was ambassador to Yugoslavia from March 1964 to April 1969]

CHEEK: Tuthill was there almost all my Peace Corps time, as I moved over to the embassy Rountree came in, and Elbrick came in near the end of my tour there because I was two years in the Peace Corps and two years in the embassy. I span the three, mostly Rountree and Elbrick.

The Rountree thing was interesting because I go over, I am transferred over to the embassy. Meanwhile Peace Corps wanted me to become their country director in Africa and we were working on that and then the Democrats lost the election. Vaughn was out, and the head of Africa, who was a friend of mine, was out and the Republicans came in with some real questions. Nixon didn't like the Peace Corps and the question was if he going to get rid of it or not. He really wanted to but he couldn't get rid of it because it was too entrenched and strong and popular.

So, that offer fell through. All the people involved were removed, so State just transferred me over to an embassy position. I had beautiful Portuguese because that's all we ever spoke and it was good, colloquial street smart too; Brazilian Portuguese. The embassy still didn't have that much of that. I was transferred to the economic section as the transportation and communication officer (TCO).

The economic counselor, who was the ranking State officer in the section, was Dick Bloomfield who later in his career was ambassador to Ecuador and then to Portugal before he retired. The head of the section was the AID director. His title was economic minister. He was nominally our chief so he had a huge suite of offices over in this palatial AID building. While he had an office over in the embassy, he rarely came over there and he pretty much let Bloomfield run things.

I had the TCO portfolio. Those were big issues for Brazil in those days. Brazil was growing and pushing and so we had big issues with civil aviation. They tried to protect their flag carriers. We had big shipping issues, fighting over cargo and trade between this group and even telecommunication issues so it was a nice portfolio.

I was preceded in that office by John Q. Brements, who later became assistant secretary and ambassador in various places in ARA. It was an unusual thing because we had all these issues. Of course, State was the lead agency, so I had a lot to do. Rountree was

delayed in coming and so our DCM, Clarence Boonstra, was coming from Costa Rica where he had been ambassador [March 1967- August 1969]. He was a famous case because the story goes he suddenly got booted out. He served on a promotion board with a political, rich, millionaire political figure, some woman. She asked him in all that time they were together about his post and she liked the sound of it so much that she just told the White House she wanted to be ambassador there and the next thing Clarence was being told he had to vacate. A new ambassador was coming. The best they could do for him was number two in Brazil, in Rio.

He was delayed in getting there too so Bill Ellis, he was the number three as economic minister, he becomes the chargé. He was just really, you talk about loose; a young guy, a real swinger. So Bill comes over to me because I was already on his staff and he says, "Look. I want you to come up here. I don't intend to spend my days over here. I've got an AID mission to run. I want to install you up here as my executive assistant and I want you to pretty much run things over here at the embassy."

It didn't take long before people realized that anything that went up to the chargé, keep in mind there is no ambassador, no DCM, that it was actually going to be decided by me. Bill would come over at the end of the day and I'd have all this stuff laid out for him. I'd tell him here's this and this. I think you ought to do this and he'd sign off. So it was a very powerful position. I was just up there temporarily because on the books I'm still down as the TCO. This lasted about four months, very heady stuff. By being a non-career appointee and not the least inhibited, Bill didn't have any problem with me making decisions.

It was really something, very close to where I found myself in London. All of a sudden you're up way above your pay grade and given huge responsibilities. All very humbling, but I'm not sure this guy was likely to document it in that EER what you were doing. This was just an incredible experience. Of course, the hours were terribly demanding because I'm the one there from early in the morning until late at night. I had the whole executive suite up there, this huge, most of a floor with a big ambassador's and DCM suite and their secretary and they gave me a junior officer to help out with paperwork. We're the top floor.

I'd call Bill or he'd come over, usually at the end of the day he'd come over. Finally, after I think it was more than four months Boonstra arrived and took over as chargé. He wanted me to stay up there to help break him in and then soon after Rountree shows up. He also wanted me so I ended up putting in another couple of months up there. It was not the same thing. I was functioning more like a staff aide. Finally they get their own staff assistant assigned and I'm allowed to go back down to my job in the economic section.

Rountree was a real courtly southern gentleman. One of the first days he was there he buzzed me to come in and see him. "Where do I get a haircut?" Then he looked up at me and I still had my Jesus hair from the Peace Corps. He said, "Well, I can see I've asked

the wrong person.” Actually that called my attention to it and soon thereafter I trimmed back my long, shoulder length hair.

Q: Did you run across a phenomenon I have heard from other people who served in Rio maybe before your time that the Brazilians particularly those of some substance and all, all had mistresses and that many of the embassy officers began to pick up the habit and all. Was this an issue while you were there?

CHEEK: Yes. It was very easy to have a mistress, regular or whatever you want to call it. In fact, in those days at the embassy, but especially AID, had several transient apartments that the government ran for TDYs or transients and stuff which were all very nice. At any given moment one or two of them would be vacant and they were known to be safe houses for assignations and partying. You really had to go out of your way not to; to avoid it. There'd be all these, you are surrounded by all these beautiful, sexy, hot women. It was so easy to fall into it that it was quite common.

Q: Did that cause problems within the embassy? You've got the wives.

CHEEK: Well, some of the wives ended up playing around too, I found out. It was kind of a very loose environment. It fostered my conviction which I later voiced when I was in Uruguay at a big OAS conference on corruption. I said corruption was like adultery; it was one of those sins or crimes which was 90 percent plus opportunity and given the opportunity, you usually fell into it. My comment was picked up by others. And it was true, of course. AID had a lot of contractors too and they were less worried about scandal or their careers than State people. It wasn't rampant, it wasn't some Sodom and Gomorrah, but there was enough of it and everybody knew.

The Brazilian military, of course, weren't that way, but the civilians were. They didn't go for that. They were trying not to be corrupt too. The heads of shipping and air and communications were all generals so I was dealing with generals. They generally knew their stuff so the heads of aviation were all qualified military generals who knew communications and transport; an admiral who knew shipping and all that.

Q: While you are still in Brazil I want to ask some questions about dealing with the Brazilians at the time and your impression of the Brazilian economy. We will look at sort of what was happening in Brazil.

Today is November 12, 2010. I attended Steve Low's funeral yesterday.

CHEEK: I first ran into Steve when we were in Brazil. Steve was the principal officer up in Brasilia. Our embassy was still in Rio, but the Brazilian government had finally realized that none of the countries were going to move from Rio to Brasilia even though they had given them free land in Brasilia to build their housing and chanceries, so they finally gave a deadline. They said by date certain nobody could be accredited as a diplomat in Rio. You could only get a consular accreditation in Rio. That forced

everybody to get serious. So our policy became, as people left their replacement would go to Rio and from Rio go to Brasilia, be assigned there and that's what happened in our case. I left Rio and my job which wasn't the nicest way to do it. But Steve was sitting there as the principal officer running this. We were in the situation of having two embassies in effect; one in Rio and then one, I think we called Brasilia the embassy office or something. It wasn't a consulate, of course. He was the principal officer there. When Elbrick left, his replacement went up there. So both when I was in Peace Corps the two years and the two years I was in Rio, I was dealing with Steve, especially on Peace Corps issues. I would go to Brasilia a lot. We were gradually having to, as the Brazilian government forced Brazilian government agencies to move up there because they had been dragging their feet too; we were forced to go to Brasília to see government people, escort visiting delegations and stuff.

He was principal officer and in effect a second ambassador up there running what became increasingly a big office. We built a chancery; we built a residence on all the lots they gave us. It began to swell and by the time I guess he passed off to an ambassador it was probably almost got to be full embassy size. It was probably one of his first big responsibilities.

I think when he was assigned there, State probably didn't have any intention of moving a lot of stuff up there, just trying to keep a presence, a sort of adjunct embassy, Embassy Office Brasilia. Then it became in effect under his command more and more an embassy every day. I guess he did a good job because I think he went on from there to one of his first ambassadorial jobs.

Q: Steve had several rather major accomplishments. Most people in the Foreign Service you really can't point to something but Steve was a prime player in the settling of the Rhodesian situation. Then he really was responsible for making sure we have a good FSI. At one point they were ready to put FSI in an empty warehouse or out in the boondocks somewhere. He was also key in establishing our little organization, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and this Oral History Program.

CHEEK: I remember getting letters from him soliciting support for that. The key coup of his was snagging Arlington Hall from the military. FSI had never owned anything. It had always been leasing space scattered all over Rosslyn and, boy, this put it on the map. He got State to invest some money in it and convert it into a real institute.

Q: Back to Brazil, where are we now?

CHEEK: I had been in Brazil for two years with the Peace Corps and almost two years assigned to the embassy. I was in the economic section as the transportation and communication officer but the real highlight of the tour was from 1971. I guess I had been there about a year. I ended up one month with Bill Ellis who was the number three, serving as the chargé because we had neither an ambassador nor a DCM. I was just reading my EERs where I was called the executive assistant to the chargé. It was

incredible because Ellis just sort of let me run the embassy. For example, Bill Ellis's memo on the month I covered for him read, "He has a sense of what is important and I soon found that I could rely on him completely to staff out major problems and handle minor matters independently of me."

At the same time, I might add, I was doing my TCO job. That was part of the deal so I had to do both. Looking at these evaluations there are evaluations for both the front office, executive assistant for about seven months and the TCO for that same period of time. Boonstra wasn't going to let me go either. While I did the TCO job I was physically up in this big front office in the embassy in Rio which had the whole top floor of the building. That was an incredible experience.

As far as Brazilians and working with them, of course the TCO job, I worked with one set of Brazilians. In the front office job, I was more the in-house man.

Q: Jim, can you describe for us some of the duties of the TCO?

CHEEK: Transportation Communications Officer, sure. Rio was one of the few embassies in the world that had a full time TCO. I think two of my predecessors went on to become assistant secretaries, ambassadors. You had all the transportation, communications issues. Many of our major problems with Brazil were in this area. We were practically at war with them over maritime shipping. We were in a big knockdown, drag out over civil aviation, their subsidies to their airlines and their restrictions on Pan Am and Braniff in order to protect their airlines. In telecommunications, even then in the early 1970s, we were trying to break in and, of course, Brazil has a state monopoly, Embratel. In fact, they have a state monopoly for everything.

It was a military government but even though the military took over from the Socialists, Kubitschek, who had made it a statist economy, they didn't change anything. They weren't Pinochets; they weren't free marketers. In fact, they just appointed generals and a few colonels to head all these government agencies and businesses.

Even as TCO, I would deal with, I think a general ran Embratel, the shipping was an admiral, civil aviation was an air force brigadier. We had heavy negotiations. We'd have delegations that would come in from America. That's how I learned all about the international maritime organization, commerce. Shipping was one policy portfolio that State had already lost, unlike civil aviation, which remained at State. Shipping was over at Commerce so I was in fact working for the undersecretary of Commerce. It was really quite a good break for me, the TCO job. In the State Department personnel classification system, it was a secondary skill under economic officer. There were only about five maybe six big posts where there were portfolios that were big enough and complicated enough that you broke out transporting and communications in the embassy economic section. It was a mid level job. It was ranked as an FSO-4 job and I was an 04. We were still under the old 01 through 08 system at the time.

The Brazilian foreign office didn't have that many of these problems and fortunately the Brazilians weren't all that insistent that you went through the foreign office. One reason, I think was that the foreign office was professional civilians but these agencies I was dealing with, communications, transport and shipping were all run by military officers so the ministry of foreign affairs wasn't going to attempt to assert authority over them. So, I generally just went directly to the agencies.

There were some things I took to the foreign office. They have, and I think still have, one of the most impressive foreign services in the world. Most of their ambassadors are career. They would send career people to Washington and big posts in Europe. They have the system like we do where they go and recruit college graduates through an exam procedure. Then they assign them to a Foreign Service academy for two years. Instituto Rio Branco they call it after the guy who founded their foreign service. They go through a two year specialized program, like a graduate course in diplomacy. I don't know of any other country that really has that. I know some countries like Argentina have something like a Foreign Service Academy that they go to after they recruit them but it is only about a year, I think. As a result, of course, they produce a really high quality, professional diplomatic corps.

Q: One of the things I have been told, it may have changed considerably, is that yes, they probably have the most professional corps in the world of diplomacy but they tend to all recruit from a narrow upper class, unlike the broad recruitment in the U.S.

CHEEK: That's absolutely true. It was true when I was there; I don't know what has happened subsequently. They were definitely elite. They were drawn from what we were before what we called democratizing the Foreign Service, which really took place about the time I came in in the 1960s. They were still drawn from the elite. Many of them are almost going to be ambassadors from birth, because there were a lot of tight relationships there. A lot of the junior officers you were dealing with were sons of ambassadors. That probably wasn't that big because Brazil wasn't that democratized a society then anyway. My guess is that as their middle classes emerge and people with university educations evolve, you can get in without being from the elite and maybe even from the working class. I don't know whether these democratic trends have done that or not.

By being elite, their foreign service has always been a bit detached. Almost everybody, it wasn't just socially and economically based; they were all concentrated in other ways. They were from Rio or Sao Paulo. You never ran into anybody from the northeast.

Q: I suspect there wasn't much in the way of African or Indian blood.

CHEEK: No. Because speaking good English was a qualification, a lot of them had gotten graduate education from abroad before they came in. They were very much an elite; certainly after graduating from this academy, which was probably closer to the British system of elite schools. The academy was exclusively for the diplomatic service. It was certainly that way then. My guess is they are probably a lot more diverse and

democratic now than they were then, though it can take generations to broaden and diversify something like a foreign service, particularly as they let them keep choosing that profession. What preserved our Ivy League schools' domination was the fact that the people who selected the new diplomats were selecting people just like them.

Brazil is still a nation of have and have not. There is the one third of 200 million Brazilians who are just like us. There is the middle class, modern and all that and then there are the two thirds of them that still live like they did a hundred years ago, just were poor peasants. Although Lula [Ed: 35th president of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva] has done a lot to address that, extend education into this other Brazil, he used to call it. Now I think a third of Brazil which is sort of a middle ground between these two Brazils, the haves and the have nots, is emerging.

Q: At the time how did we view all these disputes over Brazil not wanting to allow anybody, other countries to come in, its autarchic economic approach? Was this a matter of hostility or was this philosophy or what was behind this sort of this almost exclusivity?

CHEEK: I don't think it was a matter of ideology but they were stuck with all these state enterprises. When you got into communications and transportation, it was all state-owned. So the flag carriers, all the airlines, were either the state or the individual provinces were subsidized. The shipping lines, either the state or the individual provinces, were subsidized. They had to protect them because they were inefficient. They couldn't keep up and compete, so they had to protect their shipping line from the American shippers, McCormick and Delta. Especially McCormick was a big player then Grace Line. The Brazilian carriers had to be protected with all these barriers. We were constantly running up against them because it was a lucrative traffic from Rio and Sao Paulo to the United States.

Bumping up against this they would have to limit capacity to what their carriers could handle and hold down our ability to increase market share, all kinds of problems which result from protectionism. But note their military takeover was completely different from Chile's where their military came in and adopted all these Chicago, free market principles and turned it over to civilians and stuff. The Brazilian generals just stayed with the statist economy and the socialist system of Kubitschek and just put it in the hands of the military.

They would often agree with us that this was ridiculous, what they were doing. It was only while I was there that they began to make the decision to force these airlines, particularly, to compete because they were just eating up the country with subsidies and they began to squeeze them, especially most of the bigger states had a state airline. VASP, which was the big international carrier, was the Sao Paulo state airline. It was all over the world. The federal government began to cut off the subsidies to the states, which subsidized the state enterprises. Since it was heavily concentrated, almost all of my sectors were state enterprises, no private sectors, so there was friction as we put forth the interests of the American private sector.

My first big chance to work with the American private sector, with American companies, and to pursue their interests was this tour in Brazil. I became very close to Braniff and Pan Am and their senior executives and stuff just by being their representative. We were dealing with a government and all the issues were government to government, they couldn't handle them themselves. They had to rely on us, the U.S. State Department.

Even the shipping people, while their home was in Commerce with the Maritime Administration, Maritime Admin had nobody stationed in Brazil. I was their man in Rio. That was something Ambassador Tuthill and "Topsy" had done. He cleaned out the embassy and ran off the Maritime Administration attaché so there were no longer two senior civil service people there as shipping attachés. State took back the portfolio in the form of this TCO, transportation and communication officer.

Brazil was a fascinating job when you put the seven months as executive assistant up there with the two charges and a new ambassador on top of that and the authority to sort of run the embassy, particularly interagency issues. I came out of that after almost two years in the embassy with all this experience of representing and meeting with the private sector which at that time wasn't that big a deal for State. It was sort of frowned upon as getting your hands dirty but later on as I ascended and I got in the top ranks it became a very valuable attribute.

After I retired, it really paid off. I started my involvement with civil aviation there and for five years after I retired I worked for American Airlines.

Q: One of the things I think all of us in the Foreign Service have encountered is a state-owned telephone system that is singularly inefficient with terrible customer service.

CHEEK: The same way. They were so retarded. Now, their state system, because the military ran it and they had some really sharp officers with a real communications background, they could kick ass because they were military running the government. They were not as bad off as Argentina. Argentina didn't clean up and privatize the state telecom until about the time I got there in 1993. When I got to Argentina in June of 1993 we were still paying a 30 percent rent premium if there was a phone line in an embassy apartment because you could wait for years to get one. If an apartment came with it, they got 30 percent more rent from whoever rented it, not that the line worked most of the time, but all that changed immediately within months after privatization.

Brazil began to force these state enterprises. Theirs was Embratel. Even when they opened up they kept Embratel but they made Embratel compete. Of course, that's where the friction with us was because this was an incredibly lucrative market. Our companies, AT&T and all the big guys, wanted to get in there and make money and they could only make as much as Embratel could make or offer the same service. So there was this continual friction as we pushed against this restriction. I must say in Brazil, even in the 1970s, the military, these generals in charge, the same thing was happening in their oil

companies. They were run by the army, still has a big army influence. It is one of the biggest petroleum companies in the world but it is still a state company.

The Chileans and the Argentines, the only way to improve the state companies was just to sell them, close them, and privatize them whereas Brazil was able to convert these state companies. Embraer, the big airplane manufacturer, was a division of the Air Force run by a brigadier when I was there. They kept it under the Air Force and finally weaned it off.

By injecting free market principles and forcing these companies to compete, they were actually able to, I think even to this day, still have state enterprises that are very efficient. But they don't have a monopoly over whatever sector of the economy they are in. They did sell and let a lot of people off of Embratel. I suspect today the majority of their telecom is private and all the big companies are in there.

Q: Did you find that the Brazilians who were having to deal with these organizations were looking to the United States or to European countries for better efficiency?

CHEEK: Yes, some of that. Although they were lucky that by using military officers who had expertise in the areas of my portfolio, transport and communication, they actually had savvy people. They staffed out the government company with other officers so division heads would be colonels. They knew communications so they were substantively sharp people.

Until I took this job, as you can imagine, I personally knew little about these economic areas, but after these two years I came out of there knowing a lot about the shipping business. Aviation stayed with me the rest of my life. When I became an ambassador, I knew how to go negotiate. One of my big accomplishments in Argentina as ambassador was negotiating two big civil aviation agreements that really opened up the market. I became familiar with these issues from this two year assignment but up to that point - certainly not in Arkansas, nor in Chile as a junior officer, nor in London, nor Washington - had I ever had any exposure to transport and communication issues. After this assignment, however, I became an expert. That's the nature of the Foreign Service. You know, we are generalists. They parachute you in and say, "You're an expert on civil aviation" and you become one pretty fast.

Q: During your time 1967 to 1969 with the Peace Corps and 1969 to 1971 in the econ section, how did we view the Brazilian government at that time? It was a military government. How was it dealing with its people? Were we concerned about, in later years we'd be talking about human rights and that sort of thing?

CHEEK: This was Nixon-Kissinger and the U.S. supported these military governments. We've since learned through freedom of information requests about the double dealings that Kissinger did where he would go to a meeting and defend human rights and castigate these guys and then he'd meet with the Pinochets and the Chileans and the Argentine

civilians and wink at them. Or tell them, “Look, if you’re going to clean up these guerrillas, you gotta be quick and dirty” which was the advice he gave to them.

The administration was strongly encouraged by Congress to focus on human rights and take it into account but certainly they were not, we supported all these coups because they were anti-communist. We viewed Kubitschek and many of the governors as communists. We didn’t distinguish between socialism just like a lot of people today certainly here in Arkansas say, “Socialism, communism. It’s all the same thing, right?”

So they were anti-communist and the guerrillas were considered to be leftist communists so we didn’t get all that upset. In fact, it was Brazil where we first realized how dirty these dirty wars against the subversives they called them, were. When they kidnapped Elbrick we had not yet locked into a “no negotiation” policy. While we wouldn’t negotiate, we didn’t object to the Brazilian government negotiating his release. The Brazilian government, we believed, knew where he was, but the danger of storming the place and liberating him that he’d be killed was too great. So they actually negotiated his release and released a group of prisoners, subversives, subversivo they called them, in return for his release. [Ed: Wikipedia comments: “while stationed in Brazil, Charles Burke Elbrick was kidnapped for 78 hours by the Revolutionary Movement 8th October (MR-8) in Rio de Janeiro, on September 4, 1969. The incident formed the basis of the 1997 Bruno Barreto film *Four Days in September (O Que É Isso, Companheiro?)*, starring Alan Arkin, Pedro Cardoso and Fisher Stevens. The storyline was adapted from the 1979 memoirs of Fernando Gabeira, former member of revolutionary cell MR-8 and later a journalist and congressman in Brazil’s Green Party. After his release in exchange for 15 imprisoned leftists, Ambassador Elbrick coolly remarked, ‘Being an ambassador is not always a bed of roses.’”] It was when they were released and they all went to Europe, flown out under the embassy, to these European countries for asylum, many of them were crippled, were maimed for life and then they began to tell the horrible stories of what went on, what the military and police did to these political prisoners.

The Brazilians had also negotiated out the same way a Japanese consul general in Sao Paulo and I think one other ambassador who had been kidnapped. The revelations of the ones released in the case of Elbrick were so damning to the Brazilian Government that they then drew the line and said no more prisoner releases for kidnapped diplomats. But Elbrick at least benefited from that. [Ed: Time Magazine, August 24, 1970 noted: in 1970, Nobuo Okuchi, Japanese consul general in São Paulo, was kidnapped and exchanged for five prisoners who were flown to Mexico. Curtis C. Cutter, U.S. consul in Porto Alegre, was wounded in the shoulder but escaped kidnapping. Also in 1970, Ehrenfried von Holleben, West German Ambassador, was kidnapped in Rio and one of his bodyguards was killed. He was exchanged for 40 prisoners who were flown to Algeria.] In a way his kidnapping served to unmask how dirty these dirty wars were in Argentina, Brazil, Chile. Otherwise it was a lot like a holocaust. Until you really got in there, nobody could believe what was actually going on inside those camps.

We knew though. I knew enough especially when I was running the front office to know that our military and our CIA were as thick as they could be with their counterparts in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. They knew what was going on. There is a lot of revelation today and documents have come out about how much we really did know about how much torture and disappearance and all that that was going on but we weren't saying anything about it. We supported the government. That's all that mattered. It continued that way for a long time through Nixon and Reagan before it finally changed. Of course, it was the Carter Administration [1977-1981] when the executive branch actually seriously pursued human rights for the first time.

Q: During the time you were in Brazil was the Vietnam War something that sparked street demonstrations or protests or was that of no interest?

CHEEK: That was one of the things that the leftists, the subversives, as the government called them in these countries, were all anti-war and there were a lot of demonstrations in the 1960s against the war. So, yes, these people, Communists, subversives, they were giving us a hard time on Vietnam as well as other criticisms. We were okay with that. I think at one point 15 of the 20 some odd governments in Latin America were all military, installed by coups, all of Central America except Costa Rica and all supported by us. Our standard was if you were anti-Soviet, anti- Communist, we didn't care what the hell you did.

Q: Were the Soviets represented in Brazil?

CHEEK: They were but it was a very frosty, formal relationship. The Brazilians made no attempt to have any kind of relationship with them. Of course, Communist China wasn't even recognized by a lot of these countries. They still recognized Taiwan, though that was to change. But no, they were the enemy.

Q: You left Brazil in 1971. Where to next?

CHEEK: To Managua Nicaragua and it cut short my Brazil tour. I still had some months to go on the tour. In fact, I was told I was the only State Department officer who ever curtailed a tour in Rio. Almost everyone there extended and fought to stay every day they could.

What happened was I am in Rio and I get this call from Bob White who was over in Managua. He hadn't been there too long as DCM with Turner Shelton, this incredible ambassador.

Q: Yes, Turner Shelton was renowned, not in the positive sense.

CHEEK: He had been sort of a second grade movie producer. He had a big thing on his desk from one film he had produced, T-Men about the Secret Service. [Ed: 1947] He had come in during the Eisenhower administration as an FSO-2 reserve appointment and was

consul general in the Bahamas. Every administration before it leaves is usually given a little leeway to integrate some of its political appointees and convert them into career, both in the Foreign Service and the civil service. He was one of those few that Eisenhower was able to leave behind ensconced as a career FSO-2 in the Foreign Service, one rank short of the highest rank. He stayed an FSO-2 the whole time he was in but when Nixon came in, he was the big friend of Bebe Rebozo in the Bahamas where he had been consul general for four years. Rebozo, who was Nixon's big buddy, got him appointed ambassador to Managua. Bob was sent in to try to counterbalance Turner. The State Department knew what they had on their hands with him there. He didn't just admire [Nicaraguan President] Somoza; he literally worshiped Somoza and almost embarrassingly so. Bob was in there in a constant daily battle with him to try to keep him honest and try to keep us from just being at the service of Somoza.

Bob called me; he needed some help. The political section chief job was vacant, the number three in the embassy, the political counselor. I was an 04 and it was an 03 job. That was one detraction but it was my chance to head my own section, probably four to six years before State would normally have given me that opportunity. It was very difficult in those days to get a job above your rank. I hadn't even been in political jobs.

So this was extraordinary circumstance and Bob pleaded and my boss agreed so I agreed to do it. But I will never forget because DCM Boonstra, who was a career guy, had been ambassador in Costa Rica, and one of the real distinguished officers in ARA, saw the cable assigning me, the TM1, and called me up to his office. He had a lot of friends and influence in the Department and he said, "Don't worry, Jim. The Department made a big mistake here. I'll get this thing, this assignment canceled."

I said, "Well, you need to know that I volunteered to do this."

"What? Don't you know that Managua is a backwater? Your career will be over; it's a road to nowhere."

I knew all that except I was going to be a bigger fish in a little pond.

OK, I went and shortened my Brazil tour because I arrived in Managua in August 1971. I was supposed to have stayed in Rio into 1972 so we cut off almost eight months of the tour.

The head of political I discovered had quite a status in Nicaragua because there had been a tradition of non-career ambassadors. None of them were as bad as Shelton as far as worshiping Somoza but our government policy was to back him. So the political counselor was always viewed as the place Nicaraguans could go and get a fair hearing and get their views to Washington, or as the place where officers of other embassies could touch bases with the U.S.. This made me realize I had a unique standing in the local situation.

The problem was that Bob was constantly fighting with the ambassador. For example Shelton didn't want any of our cables or reports to go into Washington as we drafted them. He wanted to change all our conclusions and they were supposed to be pro Somoza. As we would find out about Somoza's corruption and suppression and disappearing people, although they didn't do it on a wholesale basis, that was supposed to be all censored out. Of course, it was our job to see that it somehow got through Washington.

To Bob I guess it was just intolerable. You couldn't have that much friction. The DCM couldn't substitute for the ambassador. If you went to the mat, the ambassador had to prevail in authority so they moved Bob out. In fact, they rewarded him by making him DCM in Bogotá which was a big jump up for him. I was left there alone. One of the reasons I took the job was I said, well, I'll have Bob who is really a tough guy, one of the great Latin American experts of all time to run interference for me and I'll be protected.

The Department, having seen a good officer whom they supported burned, let Shelton pick his own DCM. He picked Leland Warner Jr. who had been a consul general around Latin America. I think this was his first DCM job. He was a very nice man but he was under Shelton's control. The Department just sort of gave up on Managua and tried to confront Shelton.

Then that shifted everything down to me as the number three. Warner would faithfully execute what Shelton wanted; every cable, every report. Sometimes we would spend two or three days just negotiating over what was in these reports, particularly anything that reflected badly on Somoza. We discovered Shelton would allow a cable to sit there for days. He didn't refuse to sign it; he just never signed it.

We worked our way around that by using airgrams.

Q: You may explain airgrams because they are no longer in existence. What were they?

CHEEK: We did a lot of airgrams in those days. It was a typed report sent by the pouch to Washington. First of all, it could be old by the time it got there because a lot of these posts, especially backwaters like Nicaragua, didn't have pouch service more than once a week at the time. Nothing important was supposed to be in an airgram. The hot stuff was sent by telegram. That worked to our advantage because Shelton knew that so he didn't care as much about what was in an airgram because he said that nobody is going to read them. As a result, we could get stuff out through an airgram. They were substantive reports. Sometimes it was a breaking event. It wasn't always the long, in depth analysis or something like the role of the church in Nicaragua. Those things were supposed to be in an airgram. You weren't supposed to send long cables.

He didn't know that it was cooked up between us and Washington that the desk and bureau would get these airgrams and then flag them and give them a special distribution and even put a cover on them, calling people's attention to stuff that was in them.

I guess it was a year and a half before he really realized that we were using airgrams. I think he went to Washington for something and discovered that people were tossing around stuff that was in airgrams. He suddenly realized what we had been doing.

Of course, after the earthquake [December 23, 1972] a lot more of our stuff went by telegram because it was time sensitive so even political and economic reporting from Managua got a higher priority then. Nevertheless, reporting by cable was just a constant, frustrating exercise, because he had the authority as chief of mission to slant our reporting. During this time I did several dissent channel cables; including the big one where I was awarded the Rivkin Award.

Q: Explain what that was.

CHEEK: That was for dissent. It was called 'the dissent award' in those days.

Q: Jim, we've got you to Nicaragua. What were you doing in Nicaragua?

CHEEK: I was the number three person in the embassy, the counselor of embassy for political affairs. There was a long tradition in Nicaragua of the American embassy running things and the ambassador being sort of a viceroy as in many other Latin American countries, a long history of that. The political counselor was always called the "secretario politico" in Spanish. Then there was the label, 'the dark hand.' I was known as la mano escudo.

Q: What does that mean?

CHEEK: The dark hand. It means you are always involved in everything. The opposition looked to us. The main function of the political counselor since the ambassador traditionally was in bed with the government and supportive of Somoza; in Shelton's case it reached to the level of adoration of the Somozas, and the DCM was seen as an alter ego to the ambassador. The political counselor was sort of where the opposition to Somoza went to get their hearing. Because of the ambassador's intimacy with Somoza, he didn't allow the DCM to deal with the opposition. So my job was very much the de facto, sort of the ambassador to the opposition and, of course, there was a lot of opposition.

Now you'd think the opposition would be beat down. I remember Somoza telling me in one of his philosophical moments; he said, "I don't torture them like some Latin countries do. I don't imprison them even. If I do, I treat them well. I don't assassinate them." "But", he said, "Nothing good is going to happen to them." That was pretty much the case. He tolerated a very active opposition. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro became a national hero with his newspaper, La Prensa. He was eventually assassinated [January 10, 1978]. His widow, Violeta Chamorro, became president a decade after the fall of Somoza. That was another Somozism that he once said, that he really didn't care about the print media and didn't need to in a country that was about 70 percent illiterate. He did worry

about radio and he censored radio very heavily whereas he would tolerate the press and cite this as an example of freedom of the press. It was true. If you belonged to Somoza's party which was ironically called the Liberal party, you got a little card. The color of the party was red and Latins always have colors for the political parties and that card was known in Nicaragua as "la magnifica," the magnificent, and without it you couldn't work for the state, you couldn't get a teaching job, you couldn't get a business deal. You had to flash that card so good things happened to you if you backed Somoza and while bad things might not have happened, nothing good happened to you. It was an interesting system.

Q: Before you went there were you getting any words of advice or anything in the corridors or more directly or what about the situation there?

CHEEK: I think I told you earlier, in Brazil when my orders came through, the DCM, Clarence Boonstra, a very senior Latin hand, career guy had been an ambassador in Costa Rica, knew the region well, was horrified that I was ruining my career by going to this backwater, banana republic. Nicaragua didn't figure very big in peoples' eyes. There wasn't a communist threat yet, which later got our attention. They were a banana republic. There weren't big economic interests other than United Fruit and sometimes a mining company and those interests were taken care of. It wasn't on anybody's front burner. In fact, that was Boonstra's concern. I was a bright, promising young officer and I was going to get out of the mainstream and go to this backwater post, which it probably pretty well was.

Fate seemed to intervene with every assignment I had though and so about six months after I get there we have an earthquake that destroys most of the capitol. Then it was on everybody's front burner.

Q: For this oral history program some time ago I interviewed our ambassador to Costa Rica, Curtin Winsor [July 1983-February 1985] and he said the highest political visitor there from the United States he got was the lieutenant governor of Mississippi.

CHEEK: That was probably pretty well true. Even a democratic country like Costa Rica, none of them really counted. They were backwater countries; they were lucky to get to the sixth floor in ARA, let alone the seventh floor or over at the White House.

When Secretary William Rogers came on May 14, 1973, I think that was the first time a secretary of state visited the country in years. [Ed: State Department historian lists the previous visit as Secretary Philander Knox in March 1912.] He was horrified at what he saw while there. I will never forget. Rogers arrived just a couple or three days after the earthquake and we were in all these cars at the airport. Somoza had all his motorcycle escort, about ten big beautiful Harleys, and they all pull out and start practically running the crowd down. We didn't get three blocks out of the airport with Rogers because I was sitting in the car with him trying to brief him. He said, "Stop the car." The ambassador was sitting next to him. "What?" Rogers said, "The escort has to go. We are not moving

until they do.” Which said a lot about the character of William Rogers, a very honorable, very dignified decent man. We know from history now that Nixon and Kissinger really abused him. He was a man of integrity. He did have influence, because Kissinger didn’t care about Central America and Nicaragua. Having been designated as presidential envoy he was able to have a lot of influence over our response to the earthquake.

Q: Before the earthquake were we concerned or supposed to be concerned about this being a dictatorship?

CHEEK: No, we were all happy. Nixon had a personal bond with the Somozas because when he was vice president, to show you how much disregard Eisenhower had for him, he toured Central America, including Nicaragua. Even Eisenhower was very thick with the Somozas.

A famous picture, Nixon got his picture, the Somozas had a lion up in their military headquarters and he somehow, and I guess nobody told him, he somehow got his picture taken with Somoza with this lion in the background. What he didn’t know was this lion was used to torture prisoners. It had a cage and there was a cage next to it and the prisoner could be put in the cage and there was just enough room if he’d rest himself against the wall to be about two inches from the claws of the lion. You can imagine how terrified he would be. I didn’t know about this until the opposition somehow got a copy of this picture and brought it to me. What do I do with it, you know? Forward it to Washington. I guess he just didn’t know this was a like posing with a rack and pinion instrument of torture. All the Nicaraguans knew it, of course.

But he was very close to the Somoza. That is one reason they sent Shelton there because I am sure his instructions from the President to the extent he guided him were to take care of Somoza. He’s a friend of ours. Shelton certainly did that. Shelton’s toadying to Somoza and almost worshiping him didn’t bother the White House at all.

Q: Often when you have a situation where the senior members of the embassy are close to the government, this happened in Iran for example, the junior officers are practically in a state of revolt. How did you find the situation when you got there?

CHEEK: To a great extent Managua made my career because that’s where I got the Rivkin Award for dissent. Dissent was almost on a daily basis. I think I explained during our last session on how we used the airgram as a way to get around Shelton because Shelton thought they were unimportant. To him nobody read them and they just went to desk officers and low level people so we could get away with saying things, analysis and even reporting factual information in an airgram. His way of censoring our cables was he just wouldn’t send it. If you wouldn’t change it and drop what he didn’t like or want in there, he just sat on it.

Q: How about Mrs. Turner? How was she?

CHEEK: Of course, the earthquake changed everything and it was his undoing. It started the downfall of Somoza, and over the long run the downfall of Shelton as well. It encouraged the formation of the opposition and the making of people like me because it changed everything. She had always been impossible. In those days an ambassador's wife was inflicted on all the embassy wives. She was the queen and he was the king. Your wife was still mentioned in your rating report. Comments were made about her and you could make either good or bad comments and often particularly for any mid- or senior officer where the ambassador was going to write a review, her comments about you. So the wives couldn't tell her to go to hell and ignore her. I forget when the liberation of wives came [Ed: 1972].

The wives certainly weren't liberated then and her attitude was the wives were her ladies, including mine, her ladies in waiting and of course, she worshiped her husband. She was the counterpart to Somoza's wife. The only problem was Somoza's wife, Hope, was an American citizen. She was born in Miami of a Nicaraguan family that had emigrated, a doctor and kept her American citizenship. She didn't care for Leslie Shelton at all. It got out. There would be little things which, of course, became great sustenance and joy to the rest of us whenever there might be some slight of Mrs. Shelton.

When the earthquake came, she just continued as she would. She really helped bring him down because the earthquake destroyed the city, destroyed the whole embassy. I think it was the first time a chancery was just leveled. It was before terrorists could blow them up and it was total destruction. The embassy was sitting on the edge of a volcanic crater which collapsed and it was badly designed and in a bad location. It hadn't been maintained so the roof weighed three times what it was supposed to. It was getting waterlogged and it just literally pancaked the three story building.

There were little apartments, four apartments attached to it and that's where we suffered our casualties. The ambassador's secretary had the first apartment naturally, by rank, in the row of houses. These were little two story duplex things, living down stairs and a bedroom upstairs and her apartment was obliterated and she was killed. She was in her bed. It was about 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning, after bedtime.

Their residence was very palatial. It was up on a granite rock or hill, solid hill above the city and it being granite and solid, wasn't affected by the earthquake at all so that residence and that whole compound which included the DCM's residence. The Marines weren't on the residence in those days like they are now. The compound had a big pool and tennis courts. They suffered no damage at all.

I did three things that got me the award for heroism; one, I was the first person to get to the embassy. I heard on the Marine radio, we were out having a dinner party because it was the 23rd of December and we were going to be closed the next day, the 24th. Christmas Eve was going to be a Saturday. We had dinner and were sitting out in the backyard when it hit. Our houses didn't collapse. They were better built and lighter weight, newer. We didn't have decent phone communication in Managua. These big radio

sets you carried around was what you used. The Marine guard from post one was calling that he was in trouble and mayday and the embassy had collapsed. I jumped in my little Volkswagen and navigated the potholes and the splits in the roads and stuff and got there and got there first. I pulled into the compound and sure enough saw the devastation.

We had a big carport for shade, because it was tropical, that connected the chancery and the apartments of the secretaries. It was just a big concrete slab and it was waterlogged too and it worked like a battering ram and that's what killed Rose Marie [Orlich], the ambassador's secretary. The Managua quake was so deadly because it had both horizontal movement and vertical movement. This big heavy slab, waterlogged roof, just worked as a battering ram. It was about the level of the second floor of her apartment. It just pulverized it. Of course, it also pulverized the other end where it was attached to the chancery and then it collapsed on top of all the cars that were under it.

When I arrived, the Marine ran back in. We were still getting rumbles. He grabbed all the keys because we hoped we could get some of the cars out from under this carport because we were going to need them and especially the radios in the cars. Also ran up on top of the carport, jumped up on it, looking for Rosemary. I couldn't find her because her apartment was a pile of rubble and she was under it.

We also began digging out the other three secretaries. Now, the last two apartments, not being pummeled by the ram, just had their windows broken. Those two secretaries ran out, got cut feet and stuff. The second one in the row though was the next senior secretary, [Mary Juricak], the AID director's, she was trapped. It took us about an hour to get her out. She was under a table but her arm was on top of it under a pile of refuge and we had tunneled into her. We were debating whether we were going to have to sever the arm.

I also got a mayday call from my number two in the political section, Dan Turnquist. He was trapped in his house near the embassy in an old part of town so the buildings there collapsed. Fortunately, I had my little VW Beetle which was high off the ground. As I am going over there, the second aftershock hits and more stuff comes down. Every house had a wall around it. They started collapsing and rolling into the street. I get to his house. By way of background, robbery was so common in Managua that everybody had big iron bars on their windows and they had deadbolts on their doors. He couldn't find the keys to get the bars off the window. Not that I was Superman but I just grabbed them. They looked loosened and they just came right off, this huge thing with bars over the window. I fell down, I pulled so hard. But we got everyone out.

We were sending everybody out to my house because we knew the yard was safe and we were dragging everything outside. That was what got me my citation.

The other thing I did as soon as we got the AID secretary out; by that time we realized that the ambassador and the DCM never showed up so that left me in charge. I was the number three.

Q: Do you know what they were up to?

CHEEK: I knew then. We were in radio contact with them and knew that they were intact. There was no damage up there on the hill so as soon as we got the AID secretary out we put her on a screen door as a pallet. We wedged the seat over the seats in a jeep and took off to take her up to the residence because it was the only building in town we knew to be intact and also because he had his own power supply and water supply. He had the only water and power in the city and all the hospitals had collapsed. We were beginning to pick up pieces of information. We already knew the hospitals were out. They were all being evacuated.

I get her up there and I go to the door. We knock on the door and Mrs. Shelton comes to the door. She is perfectly coiffured; she wore these flowing dresses and the residence is lit up like a Christmas tree, there's not even an ashtray out of place, no movement at all up there, I guess. I explained to her that we've got this AID secretary and we are going to medevac her to Panama as soon as they could start the flights. They were already beginning but we had to put her someplace that was safe. I just assumed she'd let me take her and put her on a bed because it was a huge residence but she said no. We couldn't put her in any of the beds so we ended up taking her out to what was a big veranda that had been glassed in. It had been a screened-in porch and we put her on the floor. At least we got a blanket to put over her and stuff. That's where she stayed because Mrs. Shelton wasn't going to be of much assistance. That was my first realization that the residence and my house were the only assets the U.S. government had in Managua that survived and there wasn't going to be much available on the local economy. I talked to him and the DCM. He had the DCM there but as the hours went on, he finally got communication and went over to see Somoza.

I stayed in charge running the whole thing, getting everybody out that we could find whose home had been destroyed or dangerous out to my backyard as a collection point. I don't know what the ambassador and DCM did other than Shelton was talking to Washington and frantically trying to get in touch with Somoza; he was worried about him.

As time went on, this whole pattern continued. All of our commissary supplies, which turned out to be the only store of food and even some drug items, were on the chancery grounds in a separate little building that didn't collapse because it was a newer building and better built, so these supplies were all intact. Within a couple of days after the earthquake, the ambassador ordered that they be sent up to the residence, which was the only safe place. Mrs. Shelton had them all stored in her basement. The residence had a big cellar and throughout the whole thing she treated the commissary supplies, which the community owned, as her personal pantry, to make sure her kitchen I guess, was provisioned and all that. It was a horrible thing.

The only thing we had for the American staff were military tents. He was not going to let us use the residence, even though the whole downstairs, huge, lower floor was a big reception room. It wasn't their living quarters. He did allow his office and the DCM's office to be set up in there. He wanted me to set up my office in there but I refused because he wasn't going to let anybody else in there and so we ended up in tents, these big old tents they flew down from Panama, squad tents. That was the embassy, with various sections. Consular was down below at the gate. They would not let us use the latrines in the house. Well, the senior officers could. Again, I could go in there and use them. They had these bathrooms downstairs. We are not talking about intruding on the living quarters. If the other staff couldn't use them, hell, I wasn't going to. I was damned if I was going to use them.

So we dug our own. The military was very cooperative because we had a big military mission there. We had a full colonel as an attaché. We had a full colonel as a troop commander, a big military presence and so we dug latrines in military style and built our own bathrooms and everything. We couldn't use showers. The DCM residence also had stuff that he didn't make available either. No one had water or power.

Q: Was there somebody, or 'somebodies' telling Turner this is crazy? You are destroying yourself.

CHEEK: I always talked frankly to him. By this time I already had a reputation. As long as I did it in private, I never did it in front of people and I tried to explain to him, especially when I had to explain there was no way I was going to set up my office in there. They would let American women come in. We didn't have a very good trench facility for them to come in and use the toilet but they wouldn't let the Nicaraguan staff, which had begun to return to their duty stations, use the facilities. By then we had evacuated almost all, all families, the secretaries, except the couple who stayed and who wouldn't use the residence facilities either. Those actually were the only two who were left, American secretaries I think among the secretaries were working with him, his secretary and the DCM's secretary. It was just incredible.

We had a local employee who got sick one day. She was having her period and we wanted to let her go in and let her use the bathroom. Mrs. Shelton wouldn't let her in. Incredible stuff. Those were only some of the leading horror stories. And every day she would appear elegantly dressed, make-up, flitting around. I don't know that she ever stepped foot outside.

He finally got in his limo and went down to see Somoza who had a newer, better constructed house on his residential compound. The official palace was totally destroyed and a big chunk of it fell into the volcanic crater.

Of course, the media started flooding in and they began to realize what the hell was going on. This began to get published. I think the most damning thing was that The Readers' Digest, which was a very conservative publication, sent in a correspondent. He wrote a

long story about the Sheltons. After the earthquake and especially about her and things they'd done and the article was published. At this point I think he was through.

It was just stupid. I think Shelton might have known better. I remember him once telling me, I think it was even before the earthquake, when she was doing something that was just really bad and I went in to see him about it. He sort of agreed with me but he said, "Jim, you've got to learn about my wife. You either run with her or you get run over." I think that applied to him too. He wasn't stupid; he was clever, very cunning. He surely had to know, because a lot of the really horrible things that happened after the earthquake were attributable to her; you know, stealing all our provisions, not allowing access to the residence, you know, I think that was her decision. I think he knew enough that he should have opened up the residence. It began hours after the earthquake. I suspect it was probably when they, my first indication was when I would go up there with the AID secretary that, uh, oh. We were going to have a real problem. Here is this beautiful compound. The swimming pool was a great source of water except they turned off the pump system and let it go stagnant so our people would still go there sometimes and get buckets out of it as long as it lasted to wash off with.

It was the only U.S. facility that could be used for U.S. government; his residence, the DCM residence. We could use the tennis court and the pool. He let us use the pool house because it was about the only building we had access to.

Q: I would have thought, you know, the American military when push comes to shove runs its own show and I would have thought that the military attachés would have said, screw you or done something.

CHEEK: They did. They took care of the rest of us because they are the ones who brought in, it wasn't State. They realized they were going to have to take care of themselves so they brought in all the tents for us and they helped us. It was their resources and assets that created this tent city embassy, including the bathrooms and everything was in the tents.

Oh, I remember, the communicators were allowed into the pool room because we had to have a covered space because they began to bring in portable equipment. We were still running tapes through a tape reader for our encryption. That was our communications center. There was a ladies' and a men's dressing room around this big pool and that was the one building we had.

The military, they were horrified by this stuff too. Everybody had to be. The military picked people who were great admirers of Somoza. I remember our attaché was a lot more objective about him but our mil group commander, a colonel, I remember him telling me that only three graduates of West Point had ever been president. And that was Grant, Eisenhower and Somoza and some of our military just worshiped him. Others didn't. The defense attaché was an army colonel; his name was Len Trost and he played quite an influential role after the earthquake because he could go around and get pictures.

The National Guard would let him move around freely in his jeep. He began to take some pictures that showed that they were stealing relief supplies and trucking them off to their houses. They subsequently turned up at the market. A lot of Europeans, the Germans, French, Italians, provided baby food or other products as relief supplies, right off the shelf and such supplies were perfect to commercialize. We'd send in big bulk bags of beans or wheat or sorghum or something like that. Huge cans of oil. They sent in commercial pasta, ham and stuff.

All the relief was being flown in and the Boeing 707s were the big jet aircraft in those days and the National Guard controlled everything. Relief supplies from everybody else were under National Guard control. But we had our own terminal and all our relief went to it and we controlled it and took it directly to NGOs (non-government organizations), such as Catholic Relief, who kept it out of the hands of Somoza's guards. So we could account for our relief supplies.

The Europeans, many of them had no presence in Nicaragua to oversee their supply. A big old 707 landed and disgorged all these goodies. It went right into the guards' hangar. You never really saw this stuff, this relief but you did see it in the supermarkets. But Col Trost got pictures of that.

After the quake, thanks to Secretary Rogers being sent in and being a decent, honorable man he could see. He was there two days I think and the second day Somoza staged a big rally. Maybe it was when he came back the second time. Yes, I think it was when he came back the second time because we had to make big decisions about our relief, the magnitude of it. Somoza staged a big rally to show off for him. He could see right through it, Rogers. They were all paid and trucked in and given five pesos and a bag of sandwiches.

We were already documenting that they were not reliable. While Shelton was dedicated to getting a maximum amount of relief for Somoza we were already documenting that it was being stolen and diverted, misappropriated. The national guard and the party were running everything. You had to show your party card to get relief.

I was already writing cables. It was harder for him to censor post-earthquake reporting because all of a sudden everybody in Washington is looking at us. The traffic is going personally to Rogers and Rogers has already been in there and seen. Of course, he could see right through Shelton in a minute. So all of a sudden it is harder for him to censor our stuff or delay its transmittal. Washington wanted reporting.

We had it rigged where we'd get a message to Washington if something was being held up and they would call down or send a cable specifically requesting a report on such and such which was the type of report that he was sitting on. He would have to let it go.

As a result, the original \$160 million that we'd planned to give them, which was a lot of money in those days, was cut in half. Actually, I think we ended up dispersing \$60

million. I suspect it was hard, that was a pretty big thing for Nixon to do and I attribute it to Rogers' ability to influence and the fact that Kissinger didn't care and wasn't involved because, I think, had he been—. Anyway, Kissinger was noted for letting Rogers have certain things to play with; if it wasn't important to Kissinger. Rogers could then be Secretary of State. So we were very lucky and I think Rogers did influence things because it was a presidential decision to follow what was happening. That was all in my reports.

Somoza when he published his own story, Nicaragua Betrayed, his autobiography he accuses me of being instrumental in turning even Richard Nixon's administration against him. That's true. That was the first big sign of it and, of course, while he never said anything to me, I'm sure Somoza began to realize that Shelton was a liability; that he was doing him more harm than good and his own reputation was at stake.

But in another way you wouldn't believe the morale. The one good thing that Shelton did and his wife was, boy, they gave us high morale. There is nothing like having a target. They were certainly that. The rest of us banded together, we looked out for one another. All the agencies coordinated and worked together and it served to unify us because we had to take him on and we needed the strength that that unity gave us and so it unified the rest of the embassy. Ironically, it was one of the benefits.

Of course, as you go on after the quake I wrote a key message, a long airgram. There was no way I was going to get it out as a cable. I think it was about after the fifth or sixth month, a long term assessment. What were the political and economic implications of the earthquake to the country? In that I predicted that as the earthquake had destroyed the capital of the country that Somoza's response to the earthquake was being his old corrupt self, including his failure to start rebuilding. Hell, they weren't even demolishing the ruins, even though there was money there to do it, because they wanted to steal it all. His failure to respond to it, to lead his people was going to produce profound economic and political change and that while he still had a last chance to get ahead of it and be a hero, solidify the dynasty, it would require him to reform; to stop being corrupt, to stop being who he was. I didn't think he was going to be capable of making that change, changing himself and changing the nature of the regime.

I could predict that in five to ten years the regime would be swept away by these forces that were already in motion; you could see it but it would probably take that long. It turned out it only took about three to four.

When Somoza fell, there was all this backbiting and why didn't we know about this. The problem wasn't that he fell, but that the Sandinistas, the communists, took over and there was all this hand wringing. What happened? Why didn't we know? The Department fished out this airgram. It was extensively reported in a Time magazine article, saying we did know. We knew five or six months afterwards. We had an analysis that covered what would happen if he reformed the system and what would happen if he didn't. It was a

small point that it transpired in a little shorter timeframe than even I thought it would. Because even conservative wealthy people got radicalized.

Of course, you can imagine all of a sudden I'm in the spotlight. The Rivkin Award came out of this cable. There were two cables cited in it; this one and the other about the role of the church. After the quake the church emerged as the only institution of opposition. Somoza saw to it that in other institutions nobody was allowed to grow or even exist; but the church did and he couldn't crush that. The church was something we could back even though American conservatives considered it revolutionary, leftist priests at the time and even the Vatican did, I think.

In both cases Shelton refused to clear these cables. Finally they were sent on the dissent channel. That way they got to go as a cable. Dissent was set up by Kissinger, but the rules were that a committee of senior officers had to be appointed to act on it. It went to them for action and they had to look at it, they had to respond to it and take action on it. That was part of the dissent channel process. Otherwise I think the dissent channel would have just been meaningless. It guaranteed attention. Of course, some of it gets leaked, gets out to the public. I don't know if Rivkin when he set the process up realized it, but he set in motion a procedure for people like me and horrendous events like this that could only be addressed by dissent because the system was never going to allow it to be documented in a common cable.

Q: Were you able to get around Shelton's cable blockage by talking to people at the Department by phone?

CHEEK: Yes, we could do that. You didn't have any classified phone. You could only go to the classified phone by sitting in the com center which was run by the (Central Intelligence) Agency and talking on it. Shelton had that pretty well controlled. They weren't allowed to let you go though sometimes Washington would try to call for us and ask for us. You could get loose. We weren't that worried in those days about people listening in and all that stuff, especially in Nicaragua.

We had the advantage that Washington knew exactly what was going on down there and we had very strong leadership in ARA. Peter Vaky was the assistant secretary who knew just what was happening there. [Ed: ARA bureau assistant secretaries were Charles Meyer, non-career, April 1969 – March 1973; Jack Kubisch, career, May 1973 – September 1974; William D. Rogers, non-career, October 1974 – June 1976; Harry Shlaudeman, career, July 1976 – March 1977] The bureau assistant secretary was in a powerful position since ARA wasn't very prominent on Kissinger's list. Therefore he had a little more control than he might normally have. Then we had Larry Pezzullo as our country director and of course, as I told you, the country directors were powerful people still in those days. The country director is the senior between the embassy and Washington sort of concept. Larry went on to great renown. After Somoza fell he became ambassador to Nicaragua [July 1979 – August 1981]. He was also my ambassador in

Montevideo [August 1977 – May 1979] and was sent into Haiti during the first big emergency there.

Q: Wasn't there sort of an almost unified call for getting Turner out of there?

CHEEK: Yes, but this is why I think he had something on them, on the White House and on Nixon. He had been in the Bahamas for about five years as consul general. All of Nixon's pals, Bebe Rebozo, all of them, ran a lot of stuff out of the Bahamas and he was in on it, probably facilitated. I think he had to have something on them because they just could not fire him. He stayed on another two years or more.

Nevertheless, there was all this stuff. He was thick as could be with Bebe Rebozo. They talked on the phone. Howard Hughes was there. Howard Hughes came to Managua when it looked like the Bahamas government might move on him. He was already a recluse by then, living in the whole floor of a luxury hotel. We woke up one morning and Howard Hughes' plane had landed and he was in Managua. He was there at the earthquake. He was ensconced on a whole floor of the hotel. The first plane to take off from Nicaragua was Howard Hughes bugging out in his plane. He performed one service for the relief effort. He established that it was safe to land and take off on the airstrip. It was a disappointment to Somoza because Somoza had been very accommodating to him and just let him do anything he wanted, protect him with the guard and all that. I think that Somoza thought because he was still a fabulously rich person, somehow he was going to bestow great charity on Nicaragua after the earthquake. But Hughes was out of there.

Hughes also had a connection with this whole bunch, Rebozo, the Florida connection. I think he had to. Anybody else would have been treated differently.

As to Shelton, they began to overrule him. He lost a lot of disputes, but they didn't remove him.

The other thing Shelton did was we had a staff meeting. We had to get all the dependents out because even though some of their homes were OK, livable, some were even going to have water. They were in a development where there was a water supply. But we needed all our people to do their job and concentrate on it. They couldn't do that and be worried about their family. The ambassador had to order dependents to leave the country.

Well, Mrs. Shelton wasn't going to go. Of course, ordered departure had to begin with her. Some dependents didn't want to leave, especially those in a livable situation. I remember sitting with him. I knew enough never to get blunt or frank with him in front of somebody and tried to convince him that really she had to set the example, that she had to go, but there was no way she was going to go, and so she didn't. That, of course, was another one of those things where if all dependents are ordered out, she is a dependent; it applied to her. He understood, I am sure the principle of it. He understood I am sure the perception of how it made him look, but she wasn't going to go and that was that. I guess the good thing about her staying was it kept him busy, kept him out of our hair.

Q: What was her background?

CHEEK: His background before he'd come into State in the Eisenhower administration was he was a movie director, producer of B grade movies. She was a daughter and I can't remember whether it was Goldwyn or Mayer, one of those families. Her mother had been a, she was either a daughter or step daughter. It was never clear, all very vague. Her mother had been married in Hollywood to Goldwyn so that had gotten him when she married him, she got him in as a director, but I guess he was not really all that good. When Eisenhower came in he went into the government and took this job as consul general in the Bahamas. I guess they were active in Republican politics. This was a political appointment which then, when Ike left, they made him a career person. Her mother came in once. It was interesting. We watched it very closely. She wasn't really close with her mother. I don't think her mother liked her very much either. Mrs. Shelton was a very attractive lady, always elegantly made up. I think one of the things that had to be quickly found was a beautician. A beautician had to be brought in every few days to keep her made up. We are in the middle of an emergency here.

Q: I've heard a story later on that after the earthquake and after Nicaragua, he couldn't get Senate confirmation anywhere. It was proposed that he be sent to Hamilton Bermuda as consul general, no Senate confirmation required, but the British governor general in Bermuda said, "If he comes here, I will not receive him."

CHEEK: After we left, he still kept his job and stayed there for another couple of years. This again just convinced me that he had something pretty sensitive on these guys. The Nixon administration, we heard, was going to give him another job. Now there was an easy way out. Thanks to Secretary Dulles we had the 90 day rule. If someone is unassigned after 90 days after an ambassadorial assignment, he retires. Even though he was career, he would have been mandatory retired but they were going to reappoint him. I formed a committee and we were all scattered by this time, the head of USIS in Managua, all our group and we all worked together and we compiled a dossier on him and we got everything that was in the public domain, magazine articles, news articles, everything, the inside story. Whenever he would surface, we would pounce on it.

The first thing that surfaced, they wanted to send him someplace as ambassador and we immediately send the dossier up to the Foreign Relations Committee. Both Democrats and Republicans knew there was no way and they let the White House know you are wasting your time. We're not going to do it. So then they go to Hamilton Bermuda to send him as consul general. I had been in London and I knew that this was a British colony and it was under the Brits and so we got the Brits to communicate - no government wants to tell another government who they can or can't appoint as ambassador - but to communicate very nicely to Washington that they really, because Bermuda had to give him an exequatur, they had to credential him as the consul general, which they really didn't want to do. We got the governor to speak out too. That became public.

They were persisting in Washington though. The Senate used to approve all the consular commissions so when you were a vice consul it went before the Senate, when you made consul it went before the Senate. When you made consul general it went before the Senate. They finally cut a deal that this was just too much paperwork and, henceforth, you would be given one commission as a consular officer and that would be for your whole career. You wouldn't have to be recommissioned again.

Part of that deal we discovered, because I had good buddies up on the Foreign Relations Committee staff from my earlier tour with Fulbright and everything, that part of that deal was you weren't grandfathered. If you had any visiting commission so as soon as you got your next, a need for another commission, you had to go through the process but that would be the final time. He had to therefore get a consul general commission that had to go through the Senate. There we discovered because the British hold was wearing thin. It was beginning to; they weren't in the final analysis, if the White House and Washington insisted were not going to be adamant about it. That gave the Senate a veto. They had to send up there for him to take this job and get a ConGen commission and they were not going to give it to him. So we had him.

So he ended up, because it was an ambassador level position, because you've got to stay at ambassador level to stay in, they appointed him as the faculty ambassador at the Naval War College in Newport Rhode Island. I am sure with the understanding this would be his last tour but he could stay up there three to four years. It was going to be a reward for him because Newport society, ambassador. He and his wife would love the social life, kind of not much to do especially for him and be a big figure. What we did was send all the dossier to the local media in Newport; radio, TV and everything. Before he arrived all these articles began to appear in the local media; his whole background and all these horror stories. By the time they get to Newport, they're fried. That was our final revenge.

He got the assignment, he went up there. Fortunately, we had a naval officer up there who kept us informed and also kept the attention to it but they were pretty well pariahs in society and even the Navy community. Finally, I think the Democrats [Carter Administration] are in when he was retired after that assignment.

Q: It really is remarkable that he seemed to be so well connected, protected.

CHEEK: I'm sorry I know I sound cynical, but it had to be something very powerful there and I think he had to have some dirt. It wasn't just friendship. His friendships were already a few members of Congress and stuff that he was buddies with that were dropping him like a hot potato. He had something. There is just no other explanation. We'll never know and the fact that they persisted after he left.

It wasn't like he was a close personal buddy or had a history with Nixon or powerful Republicans or any of that stuff. They kept him in limbo for over a year while they kept trying to run. They first started trying an ambassadorial assignment and we would start

moving to immediate action and start spreading word and sending out the dossier, we called it. I may still have a copy of that. Most of it was stuff after the earthquake. It had to be in the public domain but there was plenty out there. Also we could count on finding individuals who knew. They ran at least two ambassadorial shots and then there was the whole Bermuda ConGen thing. They finally ended up with War College and we couldn't stop that assignment but we sure made it unpleasant for him up there. Otherwise, he would have had a victory lap up there.

I think he began to realize we were on his case. He had to begin to get feedback from somebody. What's going on here? Why is this following me around? I must say I never had any problem recruiting, getting people's cooperation in our venture. That's one nice thing about dealing with someone universally known and unsavory. People would happily cooperate if we asked them.

Q: Let's talk about after the earthquake, were there any political developments and how was Somoza doing? When did you leave after the earthquake?

CHEEK: I was there for another two years.

Q: You were talking about the response after the earthquake.

CHEEK: It didn't eliminate the people of the government because not many people were killed. It happened just after midnight on December the 23rd and so all the downtown, the office buildings, the government buildings were empty. Had it happened at midday instead of midnight, there would have been tens of thousands killed because all the buildings just collapsed. In evaluations U.S. experts did after, they said that while the earthquake was an act of God, the damage was an act of man. It was a combination of poor design, it wasn't earthquake designed, of poor construction, particularly the cheating on materials and using inferior materials; not enough cement. You could see four story buildings that looked like a stack of pancakes. The floors all just fell on one another. You could look at the rebar supports and they were just thin bars but not what they should have been.

So poor design, poor construction and poor materials, all of which reflected pervasive corruption. On the books, Nicaraguan law required that you follow earthquake standards and that you use the proper materials etcetera.

Every ministry, every office just disappeared just as our embassy did; our whole chancery. It was the first time the United States had lost, overnight, had just lost a chancery, wiped off the face of the earth.

Q: Did we have the same problem with construction?

CHEEK: Our problem wasn't that so much. It was an old building but it was badly located. It was right on the edge of a volcano which was a prominent place, right next to

Somoza's office and his military headquarters. There were sort of three buildings in a row; his presidential palace where he didn't live but used for protocol and then his military office, the National Guard headquarters, and further on around the rim of this inactive volcano was our embassy. In fact, every Nicaraguan believed that there was a secret tunnel between Somoza's headquarters next to us and our embassy so he could escape and get asylum if he needed to.

For that earthquake it was the worst place to be. That side of that volcano was just the worst place to be for an earthquake.

We compounded our problem because we had neglected maintenance, FBO had. We had a concrete slab roof, very thick, and they had not maintained the roofing. It was coated with asphalt and they had let it deteriorate so water had gotten into the cement, the roof. So it was about twice the weight it should have been, had it been properly protected. They had put a new roof on before the earthquake but it was several years overdue so the damage was already done. I suspect that even if the roof weight hadn't been present, we would still have been probably totally demolished. It probably wouldn't have collapsed as bad.

The housing which didn't have that problem also collapsed. But you had no government. Somoza was left like us. He had what had been a big coffee plantation which had been outside of town, was actually now inside the town. He had plenty of room there to set up his own government in tents and temporary buildings and stuff. His structures were properly made and new. Almost all the buildings on his property were intact. So he could quickly operate out of there.

The ministries, it was a pretty authoritarian dictatorship, so they didn't have all that much power to begin with. If there was anything important in labor or education or even foreign affairs, Somoza handled it personally. The ministers, of course, were all personally obligated to him. Some of them were not the best and brightest and many of them were corrupt. So there wasn't that much to the government, but it was inactive.

They formed as an effort in unity a junta to take over which brought in the opposition, the head of the leading opposition political party. They tried to get the church to join it but the church realized it was kind of a front, and it was. It really didn't have any power. Somoza retained all the decision power and, eventually, the opposition leader abandoned him because they were just being used.

So he continued to rule; it was just that he faced challenges he had never faced before. He had a government that was pretty inept and corrupt and that was not the instrument to face these monumental challenges.

Q: Was it apparent to you as a political officer that the opposition was saying, "See, look. This guy can't do the right thing."?

CHEEK: They had always pointed that out. It didn't matter before the earthquake that much that the country was ruled by corrupt and inefficient government with all the power in the hands of one man. It's just that the post-earthquake challenges were awesome. Somoza's challenge went from running a little corner store to having to run a chain of supermarkets. The government was faced with incredible challenges to, one, recover from the earthquake and two, to begin to reconstruct. Even though it was going to get huge foreign assistance, it never had the challenge of having to do all that, to build anything without stealing half the money and taking years to do it.

That's when I initiated a series of cables. There was the one cable that laid that out that while this earthquake didn't just change the whole economic structure of the country by destroying the economy, it was changing the social structure because it struck rich and poor alike and wiped them out. You've got the business, the factory owner as well as his employees so it had social implications and political. Things were going to have to change. The old Nicaragua could never be restored if the country was going to face these challenges and come out of it. There was going to be change. It was inevitable. You didn't just change the physical landscape of the country by destroying the capital and housing, buildings, and industry; you changed the economic, social and political landscape.

Shelton, we pretty well knew he would take our cables, those that touched seriously on Somoza to Somoza and let him read them or even our airgrams, once he found out that they were really important in Washington. He would come back and then he'd call me in or the same with the economic counselor with economic reporting and sort of pepper us with questions and challenges that he had gotten from Somoza because he'd gotten Somoza's reaction to it. That would become his position too. He would start challenging them.

The key cable was on this change and you could see it. We began to do separate cables on labor, the church, the press, the Chamber of Commerce, the business industry, all these institutions to show how they were all changed by the earthquake. They were never going to be the same and, of course, the big question was what was going to be the speed and direction of this change? Was it going to be radical? We talked about political change. Was it going to veer to the right or left?

When you talked about economic change, where was it going to go? Would the dominant role of Somoza's economy be maintained? My conclusion was they couldn't because they had to have, nothing could be done without them getting 25 percent of it, not by putting up any capital or anything. They got that off the top for any investment, including American.

Shelton, I think realized this was probably true, though he didn't agree to sending the cable out. He rejected it. He called me in and said we were going to go see Somoza. So I said, "Sure." Nobody but the ambassador could see Somoza and he had done this a few

other times. I could tell that we were having the meeting because Somoza had grabbed what I had reported and wanted to talk about it, challenge it, explain it or something.

So we went. I say this because I am just rereading his book, Nicaragua Betrayed which he coauthored. It says on the cover 'as told to' a guy named Cox by Somoza. So Somoza didn't write it; he dictated it, as told to. Somoza notes this and that I came to that meeting and he misrepresents it. Of course, the cable stands for itself but he says I came in. It should have been, "The U.S. ambassador and I have regular meetings." This is after the earthquake. "In one of these meetings he brought along James Cheek of the U.S. Embassy staff." He always referred to me as U.S. Embassy staff. He never wanted to acknowledge that I was the number three.

"This is the same James Cheek who then collaborated with Dr. Guerrero. Now Ramiro Sacasa Guerrero was the head of the only real opposition party Constitutionalist Liberal Movement [MLC] and that was my reporting portfolio. I covered it, the conservatives. Ambassador Shelton covered the liberals which was just Somoza.

Anyway, "In that session I outlined the activities of Guerrero and the damage he was doing to our rebuilding effort", meaning they were underlining all the corruption, exposing all the corruption that was going on. "I remember Cheek saying to me, "Well, General. Why don't you pull a coup d'etat? Throw the junta out and assume the presidency?"

I turned to him and said, "Mr. Cheek." He was shocked, right? "First, the world would say I used the earthquake as an excuse to obtain the presidency and, second, it would violate the democratic principles of Nicaragua." Cheek did not like my retort and I thought, "What kind of a chameleon is this man? It could have been a trap. He might have been trying to impress Ambassador Shelton. At any rate, I didn't trust him. I wanted nothing to do with his ilk."

Well, what I told Somoza I went through this cable that I sent in which became the main cable for the Rivkin Award. I outlined this whole theory which I think he had already read and I concluded by saying that really revolutionary change was coming, economic, socially, politically was already coming. It would have to come politically and he, Somoza, actually was the person best qualified to lead this change because he was the only one who had any experience in government. He, the dynasty, had ruled the country for the last 34 years. But, and this was a big but, I had to tell him that the price of leading this change and making this change would be politically, particularly, would be the end of the dynasty. Economically, it would mean the end of their being able to dominate the economy and take a cut of everything. Politically, it would mean the end of his dynasty because he couldn't continue to be the dynasty's authoritarian and lead this change. That would be the price he would have to pay but that I felt that he would.

He then presents that as telling him to stage a coup. Of course, he was already in charge of everything anyway. De facto, he would have been overthrowing himself though he did have this junta there.

The junta was there by the way, before the earthquake. He was trying to obey the constitution. He couldn't succeed himself so he put this junta in as an interim government, interregnum. They would come in and then there would be an election and he would return to the presidency. It was a façade but it was important to him and it was important to his friends in Washington too to say that he was a constitutional democratically elected president.

Q: After the earthquake did his buddies in Congress and all come down and visit?

CHEEK: His big buddy was this Jack Murphy, a congressman from New York who was a West Point graduate. They were buddies, may even have been roommates. Murphy was his main supporter, although there were a lot of conservative republicans and people like the John Birch Society and these other organizations to whom he was their darling. He was their idea of a perfect Latin American president. It was really Murphy [Ed: John (Jack) Murphy was elected as a Democrat to the 88th U.S. Congress and to the eight succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1963-January 3, 1981); he ran unsuccessfully for re-election in 1980 after being indicted in the Abscam bribery scandal.]

Since nobody really cared about Nicaragua, Murphy could pretty well get his way. He was constantly in and out. We were convinced he had business interests there. Somoza would cut him in on deals. Even Murphy began to cool because it was getting embarrassing. All these revelations after the earthquake were spilling out in the States about Shelton and Somoza and the corruption, the failure to respond, the inability to even clean up the damage and take care of people. Murphy was beginning to seem kind of desperate to stop with Shelton and Somoza. The Nixon White House also, particularly, sent Secretary Rogers who was not an admirer began also to give credence and, in fact, it resulted in our cutting in half what we contemplated giving them initially. Murphy subsequently, I think he went to jail. He left in disgrace; I suppose for corruption.

Again the earthquake compounded Somoza's problems. They found it hard to cover for him because the press, he'd never been under a microscope before. Maybe a New York Times or a Miami Herald correspondent would drift through and sort of write the standard article on Nicaragua once every two or three months. Now the whole world media was in there and he was under a microscope. All this is being exposed so the heat is on him. That's why I was telling him that he could lead this because nobody else had governed the country and he did know how to do that. He had control over the security services, which would be important and were very important in the aftermath. You have to maintain order. He was going to have to change and he could no longer be corrupt and autocratic. I said, "I have to tell you in all honesty, it will be the end of the dynasty. You will not be able to pass this government to your inept son, who was kind of a playboy, as was contemplated. That's changed now. The earthquake has changed that."

So that's the meeting which he portrays here as telling him to seize power which "shocked me." I could never do that.

A similar experience was with my good buddy, still my best friend, Tom O'Donnell, who arrived at post in June of 1972. He was the economic counselor. He wrote a report about the economic side, showing that things were going to have to change, that you could not restore, rebuild this economy with the old system and you were going to have to free it up. The Somozas were going to have to take their hand off of it.

So the same thing happened; Shelton took Tom over to see Somoza because I guess he had shown him Tom's cable. These would be two, three hour meetings where you'd sit there, just the three of us. He then told Somoza his analysis, which Somoza had already read in the cable, and what he thought he had to do. I remember Tom telling me one of the things he told him was he could no longer keep everything centralized in his hands. It was now a job that was 100 times bigger than it was before and he was going to have to delegate, was going to have to give authority to his ministers in the economic area especially, which he had never done. He was going to have to let institutions such as the private sector develop and be free of him and all that. He explained that for him.

Somoza was nodding agreement and saying yes, he recognized he had to do that and he would. Tom told me he told him to decentralize because he made every little decision. About a month later or so Shelton took Tom back over there to see Somoza. Somoza is sitting there and there is a huge stack of papers and it is all about procurement of vehicles and gas and tires and stuff for the National Guard and he is signing each one of them individually. Tom came back and said, "Obviously, he didn't take my advice."

Washington really began to pick up on this cable and began to pepper us, asking questions. Is he going to change? Does he recognize this? What is going to happen? I think conniving with Shelton he made a big public speech and he actually lifted from my cable how all this had to change. Somoza recognized it. He said almost verbatim I recognize there will have to be a revolution and I, Somoza, will lead that revolution to the roars of the crowd of Somoza's supporters. Of course, Shelton immediately reports this to Washington. "Yes, don't worry. He recognizes . . ."

Well he, I think he did intellectually, but I think he was just personally so corrupt and limited that he just couldn't do it. It is like knowing you have to stop drinking or smoking but just being unable to do it. He was apparently just unable. He couldn't tolerate that. He couldn't, in Tom's observation, help but control every little expenditure. He couldn't delegate. He couldn't allow other institutions to become independent of him. It was intolerable.

Q: During all this what was the opposition doing? The Sandinistas? What was happening?

CHEEK: That came after I left. It took a while because the center of the country didn't want to go for revolutionary change, revolution and his overthrow which they knew would have to be violent because he wasn't going to leave. There was no police. There was only one armed security service, the National Guard; they didn't even have local police forces. The Guard was everything. They were the local police, the state police, and the army which he commanded, total obedience to him. It was a personalized security force. It didn't swear loyalty to the constitution and a flag but to him. Any officer who ever appeared to be acquiring stature or following was immediately drummed out, usually went into exile.

That's exactly what happened. It took time for people to accept the need for drastic change. It did not really occur until I went back in 1977. I left in 1974 so by 1977 I am being pulled back in. We're there to negotiate his withdrawal, his abandoning power and turning it over to a middle class government. By this time the Sandinistas are becoming powerful though militarily they never, ever defeated the Guard.

I was pulled back from my job as DCM in Uruguay to come in there under OAS auspices with Guatemala and the DR (Dominican Republic), their foreign ministers and our assistant secretary, to try to negotiate a transition under which he would leave to go into exile and turn it over. That's another story down the pike.

You could see it all coming; it was there. They weren't out in the streets right away but within three years they were. I told you I thought it might take five years. It certainly would happen by ten but probably by five. It actually only took about three before people accepted that he was not going to change and couldn't change and there wasn't going to be real political change or even economic. The people became desperate enough to support an armed solution, realizing that since he had a total monopoly on force, this was going to be a very dangerous and serious thing to do. The young people were already up in the hills with the Sandinistas

We are trying to avoid this. He could have survived. He couldn't survive forever but he could have led the country out of this. He had the intellectual ability and the experience to do it but he just couldn't morally make the change.

Q: Was there a significant role for Mrs. Somoza?

CHEEK: She began to bug out. She always spent a lot of time in Miami. After the earthquake, they had a big house there, and Hope tended to spend even more time there. He always had a mistress, this voluptuous sexy, voluptuous Dinorah [Sampson], who he had installed in a big house. In fact, people who lived along the route between her house and his house said his motorcade would come flying by at three or four in the morning after he had spent the night there. His wife began to distance herself from him although it was clear that there wasn't going to be a divorce or anything. We saw less and less of her.

The son was brought back to head the relief effort. He was kind of a playboy, going to school up in the States at some college. Tachito, he was Anastasio's supposed junior and was the designated successor. The Nicaraguans called him the dauphin. He was not really capable.

In the case of relief, in our case, we didn't do anything with the government. We just went directly. Like we do in Iraq or Afghanistan, we just organized NGOs and contractors and did it ourselves directly. We didn't give the government the money and say, "Build this road" or "Rebuild this hospital" or whatever because we knew they wouldn't and also steal a lot of the money. The Europeans and others didn't oversee their aid like we did.

One other thing in Somoza's book is interesting; by the time I got the Rivkin Award I was already out of there and in the United States. I left in the summer of 1974. In the interim Nixon also is out and Ford comes in. He appoints a new ambassador. He removes Shelton. Ford is another thing altogether and Shelton doesn't have anything on Ford. Ford removes him. So the change begins to come in Washington.

Somoza writes, "The effects of Nixon's departure came on me very quickly. Turner Shelton was replaced as U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua by a fellow named (James Daniel) Theberge. In our first visit Mr. Theberge told me that he had been advised by the State Department to keep his distance from me. This came as a shock and it was hard to take. Next to Nicaragua I love the United States more than anyplace in the world, but I have been told by the new ambassador that he should keep his distance between us. I thought, "Who in the State Department have I offended?" Then he said, "What would precipitate such a drastic comment from a member of the diplomatic corps?" Remember that Ford's appointee, Theberge, was a political appointee, a right-wing think tank type. "There were more surprises. Theberge began to associate with the opposition." He means with Pedro Chamorro, who is the hero there who published the only opposition paper. "He even went over there to see the opposition people and visited them socially," he said. "It seemed to me that I must be on the Nixon list and if that were true, my country and I were in trouble."

By the Nixon list he means that the list of people that Nixon supported that now were going to get it because Nixon supported them, right?

Then he says, "A good indication that trouble was on its way was provided by James Cheek. Remember him? He was a staff member with the U.S. Embassy Nicaragua who collaborated with Guerrero." Of course, that was my assigned portfolio. "Well, he was taken back to Washington and decorated with the Rivkin Foreign Service Award. Cheek was so honored because of his dissenting political reports out of Nicaragua. He had disagreed with Ambassador Shelton so he was given a medal. Doctor Henry Kissinger was present for the award ceremony."

This ceremony for the 1974 Rivkin Award just fell like a bomb in Nicaragua. I think I still have in a box somewhere Chamorro's newspaper, La Prensa, which everybody read, and it had headlines that took up almost a whole page, "Gran Bofetada de Kissinger a Somoza." "Grand Slap of Somoza by Kissinger" because Kissinger came, which was unusual, came to the ceremony and presented me with the Rivkin Award. [Ed: The Rivkin Award is not a Department of State award, but an award from the American Foreign Service Association, the labor union for Foreign Service officers, for constructive dissent by mid-level officers]. Ambassador Theberge, the new ambassador, told me that Washington was ready to distance itself from this guy (Somoza) and drop him and the Nixon connection and so on and Shelton too. So Theberge may have been right. I guess it was the first time that a head of state who happened to be a dictator complained in his memoirs about a Rivkin Award for dissent from the State Department.

I remember Kissinger spoke at the ceremony. He had a real wit, still does. He said, "This dissent, which we always welcome," and then he paused and then he said, "and sometimes grateful", and then he went on. He knew what he was doing and that he was making a political statement. Everybody knew what the award was all about, what the dissent was about. And Somoza knew and he knew largely because Shelton was telling him that this guy is really hurting you, really hurting you in Washington. What can we do about him? I'd try to keep him neutralized and under control.

Shelton, in my last employee evaluation report, was the reviewing officer. I was just reading the review of his final report. This is after the earthquake in 1974 when I was getting ready to leave. All of a sudden, after two previous years, he began to try to end my career by taking digs at me. He said that I was immature and intolerant of other opinions, his way of explaining away dissent. In those days your reviewing office had to make a recommendation about promotion, it was specifically required. He wrote that I should be promoted along with my class. He'd been in State long enough to know how negative that sounded.

The Department, expecting that this might happen, sent in a special IG (inspector general). We weren't due for an inspection but they sent one in anyway. In those days they wrote evaluation reports on everybody as part of the inspection and hence I was able to get an inspector's report. I don't think they do anymore. He was able to put all this in context and explain what was going on. You can say everybody in ARA knows about the circumstances, but when this file gets read by a neutral promotion board, they don't know. The board members are FSOs, but may be from the Middle East or Hong Kong. They don't know what the hell this means. They don't even know about Turner Shelton and what has been going on in Managua. I still had a long way to go with my career. I was only about halfway through my career.

He knew what he was doing and the bureau people knew their options were limited. While the bureau had inputs on the evaluations of ambassadors, it did not have an input to the evaluation report of a lowly political counselor. They couldn't put anything in the file but an IG could. In fact, the IG guy was an ambassador because they knew that to

deal with Shelton and try to cap what he had said, only another ambassador could deal with him. He was a fellow named Claude G. Ross. I think he had been ambassador in a couple of African countries [Ed: Ross was ambassador to Central Africa Republic, 1963-1967; Haiti, 1967-1969; and Tanzania, 1969-1972]. They did it just before I left in 1974 and the original evaluation report had already been sent in. In fact, it was within a month of Shelton's doing this that the Department rescued me by a special IG inspection report.

I still believe Somoza was an interesting character. I'm not a psychologist, but I felt that he grasped intellectually what the situation was and that he understood and agreed with my analysis of what he needed to do to survive, intellectually; but morally, he was so corrupt and so addicted to absolute power that he couldn't change. He couldn't do it. That was his downfall.

That was all predicted in the cables what was going to happen. One scenario was what would happen if he didn't change. And since Shelton shared the cables that resulted in him saying I had suggested staging a coup, I think he could have saved himself, but it was a little late.

You have to remember he had prepared for his succession. His father started the dynasty. He got in power because he had been a used car salesman in the States and spoke great English. He came back and the Marines were occupying the country. None of the banana republic Nicaraguans spoke English so they come across him and he becomes their boy. They create this National Guard as a security force because it is very similar to what is happening in Afghanistan and Iraq today. We want to stand up local forces so we can turn over everything and get the hell out of there. Of course, the Marines were in there a long time. So they hit on - just as we are doing in Afghanistan - creating local security forces, in this case the National Guard which became a monster but we created it. They put him in charge of it. He didn't have military x but he spoke excellent English and he was their kind of Nicaraguan, palled around with him, so they left. When they left they turned the country over to him because he used his control of the guard and security forces to seize power.

Then he groomed his two sons. He recognized to split the two functions, the political function and the military function so Anastasio was sent to West Point to become the military man to then come and take over the Guard. His older son Luis, who was a very adept politician, was then to take over the liberal party and the politics and run the government. So when Somoza senior departed, he would turn the government over to Luis as president and Tachito as the commander of the Guard.

The system actually worked pretty well. Luis was a successful politician; he was popular and didn't rule with that heavy a hand and tolerated opposition and stuff. But Luis suddenly had a heart attack or something and died very young, I think in his 50s. So then Tachito becomes bold. He takes over. He was really ill equipped for that role but he becomes the president as well as the political figure, the head of the party. He only knew

one way to run it. You would hear Nicaraguans wistfully talk about the Luis years and how different it might have been if he had lived and all that.

Somoza didn't follow the plan of his father. He sent his son, I don't think it was to Harvard, but to some prestigious school, his older son, to be the politician. Then he had a big, strapping, six foot two son. Somoza himself was a big guy. He was over six feet tall and, of course, always overweight and he was sent to West Point. He was the younger son. They sent him through an expensive military school in the States, one of these military academies, and he got him into West Point. He didn't really meet the qualifications, the testing for admission, but Somoza used his weight and all his contacts. He knew all these Americans, many of his classmates were becoming generals, and he got him in.

This turned out to be a real disaster for the boy because he really couldn't handle it. He couldn't handle it, I think, academically and even psychologically, and I think even within the first year he had a nervous breakdown and I don't think he ever recovered. I think he ended up in an institution in Florida. West Point broke him. I remember telling our military guys, "You know, you could ruin this kid for life because you put him in a situation he can't cope with." Their response was, "Oh, no, no, no."

Our military was looking forward to having a West Point guy at least running the military so it was sort of the reverse of what happened with his dad. His dad lost the political guy prematurely and, in his case, he loses the military son so he is forced to try to groom Tachito to be both the military and the political guy. He commissions him and starts him off as a captain, tries to give him responsibilities in the Guard, but you know it is not going to work and, of course, it never happened because he got overthrown. That was also part of his problem that his whole succession fell apart. It became irrelevant because his plans were overtaken by events.

That also did feed back on the country and they could see who this son was and they are looking at their future and what the country needs, and they are saying, "My God. We're going to be in the hands of this kid, Tachito, if this perpetuates, the dynasty is perpetuated." That was true and I think it was one thing that helped to radicalize and mobilize people. They just had to get rid of the dynasty. He wasn't going to change.

It was very sad because there was a vacuum there, and when he was overthrown it brought the armed extreme left into power when it didn't have to be that way. I am getting ahead now to the negotiations in 1977.

As he says in this memoir it was a real shock for him I think when he saw Shelton being removed. It is sort of a Latin American dictator's dream to have the American ambassador in his pocket.

One of the interesting things that happened was during Shelton's tenure. Most people don't remember, but we originally thought that we were going to take a second canal

across Nicaragua. The idea was you could come up this river and get into this large lake and then go across this short strip of land and get to the Pacific Ocean.

We had grabbed the rights, called the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty [1916]; William Jennings Bryan was our Secretary of State then when we acquired - like in Panama - in perpetuity the rights to a wide swath of Nicaragua which would be the route of this transoceanic canal. We, of course, were able to detach Panama. Panama was a better routing. We went to Panama and the canal was built there but the Nicaragua treaty was on the books. We still had these rights if we wished to assert them. We could take over just as we did the Panama Canal Zone to have sort of a de facto sovereignty over a huge swath across Nicaragua.

The State Department started cleaning up these old things and decided to get this off the books. Shelton got instructions saying we want to, in effect, abrogate this, give up our rights, to sign an agreement to in effect abrogate the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty. Shelton and Somoza cooked it up to make it look like Somoza had demanded or forced us to abrogate and this was a great victory for Somoza, as he had reclaimed Nicaraguan sovereignty. They staged a big ceremony and Shelton got to sign on behalf of the United States.

To celebrate this they commissioned a new currency bill, the 20 peso note, and they put Shelton's picture on it. It was the first time an American ambassador appeared on the currency of the country to which he was accredited.

Shelton had a hunched-over countenance. If you saw him behind his desk his shoulders were hunched up and he sort of looked like a frog so our nickname for him was 'the frog'. Well, the Nicaraguans picked up on this as well and so the nickname among the Nicaraguans who knew all the truth about him and everything was 'El Sapo', the toad. We didn't call him 'the frog'; we called him 'the toad'. This 20 peso bill became known as the "el sapito," the little toad bill. With a Nicaraguan cab driver or in a bar you'd pay "dos sapito" two 20 peso bills. I don't know if he ever realized that was happening. Shelton, of course, was very proud of it.

It was just a strange, strange place. It would never happen again that we might have another Somoza and another Shelton.

We had in our file a collection of pictures of him sitting, usually prominently in the front row with Somoza when Somoza would make a speech or appearance because he went to everything that Somoza did to show American support for him. It got so bad that sometimes Washington would instruct him not to go and that was hard for him to do. He's looking up at Somoza; it's like looking at a young guy looking at his girl or lover, the adoration on his face. He really worshiped this guy. It was really funny.

Imagine working at an embassy because the ambassador is like an absolute monarch within his own embassy. The Foreign Service is very hierarchical. You don't take on an ambassador even though you might be right. That's often the worst thing to do. It is a

very dangerous thing to do. I lived with that for three years, walking that tightrope. He could be wrong every time but you could only be wrong once. If you slipped up and he got you, you were dead. It was a dangerous game. On the other side I guess it helped make a good officer out of me. I learned at least what not to do when one became ambassador.

There was a guy going to write a book about the good, bad and the ugly about American ambassadors. I think it was John Lee Dixon. He is famous, a son of an FSO, and he was going to do chapters on the good ambassadors, the best, you know and then the worst and Shelton was going to be the worst of the worst. I collaborated with him. This was after I left a year or two. The book never got published. I don't know what happened because he was researching and collecting materials. Of course, in the case of Shelton there was tons of material out there in the public domain. It would have been an interesting book.

While I think Shelton will go down in history as a terrible ambassador, he was personally a very genial nice guy. He was not an evil person. His wife, I am not sure about her. Very amiable, soft spoken, he was a southerner. But when it came to his interpretation of his mission he was there to do whatever Somoza wanted, support him in everything, make sure that whatever he needed or wanted from the U.S. he got. He was favored by our military. We had big military assistance group there. We always had a full colonel in the attaché office. Our military in Panama, because there was still a big presence in Panama, would take new equipment and trucks, tanks, whatever, declare it surplus and then let him get it for free under military assistance. I guess it was just that West Point conceit, you know, for our military. Though the people in the attaché office were less adulatory of him. Even some of our army attaches were capable of taking an honest, hard look at him and even doing some reporting about him. The whole group was really just an extension of the National Guard.

We were very influential. I often describe the Somoza regime as a three legged stool. One leg of the stool was his control of the National Guard and all security forces, all armed forces in the country. The other leg was the control of all political and economic institutions, the whole economy and politics of the country. The third was his relationship with the United States, particularly his military relationship. What was encouraging to the opposition was they could see that U.S. leg weakening. Of course, when President Carter came in it collapsed, but it was already collapsing.

Somoza was very bitter in exile. He blamed us, using this three legged analogy, for being instrumental in his downfall, that we really were responsible. It is true to one extent. Even with Nixon it began to weaken. The Somozas did see, after we pulled out, that we were essential from the beginning. We had created him with the Marine occupation. We sustained him and though we really didn't get that much credit, the Sandinistas ended up getting the credit for having overthrown him. He was right. That's the title of this autobiography which he dictated to this American author, Nicaragua Betrayed. We were the ones that betrayed him, the United States.

Our joke was it was an appropriate title; Nicaragua Betrayed by Anastasio Somoza. Nicaragua surely was betrayed by him.

Q: You left Nicaragua when, Jim?

CHEEK: I left there in the summer of 1974. You know, today if you serve in Iraq or Afghanistan you get to pick your onward assignment or they guarantee one out of three of your top choices as a reward. Well, we did not have that reward in my time, but the Department let it be known that as my reward for over three years and everything I had gone through, I could pretty well pick my onward assignment. I picked the Congressional Fellowship. It had become so well-known and so popular that it was very competitive. The Department only had two fellowship positions.

Q: These are the Pearson fellows?

CHEEK: No, the Pearson program came along later. Senator Pearson expanded the program which began with JFK (John F. Kennedy) when he was a senator. The American Political Science Association ran this program called Congressional Fellowship and it was run under their auspices and they selected the candidates. It was originally political science people from universities, academics and history professors, especially those who specialized in Congress. Then it got a big grant from the Johnson Foundation to put doctors and medical people into it because the Congress was increasingly playing a bigger role in medicine. So they were added, funding about eight or ten medical congressional fellows.

Kennedy had had one of these political science fellows assigned to him when he was senator so when he came to the White House he was really impressed with it. He talked the Political Science Association into giving the federal government an allotment of so many slots that it would fund, paying the salary and everything of the people. The State Department very wisely grabbed two of these. There weren't that many for the whole executive branch. A lot of the agencies really didn't realize what a great program it was and, of course, it has proven to be fantastic. It was much sought after. We didn't have open bidding in those days but there would probably be 40 officers trying to get one of those two slots. They really coordinated to let me get one of the State slots. The Pearson program came along later when we couldn't get more of the APSA slots, because other agencies were keen on it. They actually had to pass them around to the other agencies, rationing the slots to government agencies. So Pearson was set up as a separate program where State and other agencies could detail people to the congress as Pearson fellows. When I went in 1974-1975, it was still just the APSA congressional fellows. I had the great fortune to work with David Obey. You did six months in the House of Representatives and six months in the Senate. You had to be picked by the member. Obey was very popular. I notice he just retired as Chairman of the Appropriations committee. He had been there for 40 years. He was very popular as host of a Congressional fellow. They even had books and fellows who wrote about their experiences; whether this was a good member or bad member. In my year there were about 20-25 fellows. Then I got to

work with Gary Hart, when I went to the Senate. Again, he was such a matinee idol. I was really lucky. I got to serve with two of the best guys in Congress.

Coming out of being the political counselor in Managua, if it hadn't been for the special circumstances in Managua at the time, the job and the earthquake and so forth, I never would have gotten that assignment. Like a lot of choice assignments in the Foreign Service, they often go to executive assistants of the seventh floor principals, people who had served in the NSC and stuff. Line officers, especially from small embassies, don't get them. I recognized that. The Department pretty well let me know that I could pick and I picked that.

I started this assignment in the fall of 1974 after summer home leave and I spent a year on the Hill.

Q: Today is December 10, 2010. Jim, it is 1974 and I guess you are starting this congressional fellowship. Whom did you work with first?

CHEEK: The way the program works is there are federal fellows mixed in with the academics and then the medical professional people in the program administered by the American Political Science Association. There is an orientation and then you are going to do six months in the House and six months in the Senate and half the group starts in one and half in the other. I was in the group to start off in the House.

You have to go bid a member. Members apply to the fellowship. It is very popular because it is free staff and high quality staff. A member in the House, especially, gets a limited allowance for staff and everything has to come out of that; running their office and all their salaries and stuff. The program had books with reports submitted by previous interns about their experience and one of the most sought after members of the House was Dave Obey who was starting his third term. He just retired this year as chairman of appropriations after 40 years. The interns that had been with him had had a fabulous experience. You didn't know if you were going to be picked so I applied to Republican (Alan) Steelman from Texas [Ed: elected to the 93rd and 94th congresses, January 1973-January 1977] and also the congressman from New York, a woman.

All three had a lot of applicants. Obey had over 20 and he actually interviewed everybody personally. He didn't leave it to his chief of staff and I won. I got picked by Obey. It turned out to be a fabulous experience because he was on appropriations. He had a master's in Russian studies from Wisconsin, but he had been in politics all this time. He came out of the state legislature in Wisconsin and hadn't had a chance to pursue his interest in international affairs. A member of appropriations is entitled to two subcommittees. His primary one was health and education and welfare because that was his primary interest. The second was at the time was NASA and the space program. I talked him into switching to foreign ops, foreign operations which covers foreign aid. The State Department budget is over in a separate committee. It worked out beautifully

for both of us because he could jump into foreign affairs and I had lots of foreign affairs work to do as a result.

I was two years older than Dave and had been in the Foreign Service about a dozen years by then. I mentored him in foreign affairs and anything to do with foreign affairs, especially foreign aid. He mentored me in Congress and especially in the appropriation process, which is a very special science on the Hill. Very, very few people, including members of Congress, can pick up an appropriations bill and look at it and read it and tell you what's in it, what things mean. He taught me all that. He let me just go right in and sit in the markups with him. Even in the committee sessions when they are marking up they let the staff talk. You don't just whisper in the member's ear and pass it to him.

There were several things in the bill that were sitting here. The whole foreign aid structure which was pretty big then, lots of economic support funds which were handing out cash that nobody on the subcommittee understood and they allowed me to explain it to them, tell them the inside story, what this was really all about. I am there to learn about the Congress so I twice got to go back to the district with him and go around the district and hear the constituents and all that. Really learned about how Congress works.

He had a lot of constituent inquiries about foreign affairs. They had some form letters and they weren't really very good so I revised all of them for him. There was a lot about foreign aid, support for Israel; the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was very hot then.

He gave me probably one of the most glowing reviews. He wrote a letter to the Secretary of State about my performance. I never had a rating like that my whole career, 36 years. He was a person of stature so it had weight.

I went to the Senate side and the most popular guy over there, not that he had a background with fellows, was Gary Hart. He was just coming to town to be a senator, elected from Colorado, and he was just a pop star figure, practically. Everybody wanted to get on his staff. I think most of the fellows were trying to apply. Same thing happened; he did the interviewing and I got picked. I won the lottery.

Gary went on Armed Services, naturally. He had a retired air force colonel who handled that. I was the only one on his staff that knew foreign affairs. Most of his staff he brought from the campaign in Colorado. This colonel and I were the pros, you know. We'd been in government, we were older. All these bright, young people came to us; we had a big role to play. As a member of the appropriations committee, a senator has to deal with every appropriations bill. He'd just give them to me and I'd in effect analyze them and tell him how I thought he ought to vote on various provisions. I think that was one of the reasons he selected me because he knew that Obey had schooled me in appropriations.

As with Obey, I went back with him to Colorado visiting constituents. He was the consummate politician. I learned a lot about politics from Gary. It was just a fantastic

experience. But, I must say, I really enjoyed my relationship with Congressman Obey, which has lasted until this day.

Hart also sent the Secretary of State a letter with a glowing report. In fact, I was just rereading it. Actually, the official evaluation report was called the training and evaluations report and it came from FSI. Bill Broderick, who was the deputy director over at FSI, wrote the rating and review for these types of assignments and he just incorporated these letters.

I am just reading the last thing from the evaluation report. Broderick says he has written all these reports on congressional fellows with input from the congressional people for over three years and he said, "Mr. Cheek has received the most laudatory ratings" he had ever seen. It gave a big boost to me; the experience was just irreplaceable. I say that because you can go up there and be a fellow if you get the wrong member and he or she doesn't know how to use you, especially on the Senate side. The senator is much more dependent on his staff because he has to deal with everything whereas in the House it is much more specialized and a representative is more narrowly focused. A staff member often really is casting the senator's vote to the extent he provides the memo. Very little can be oral. It is hard to get your hands on the members. They are gone all day and only come back at the end of the day, especially a senator.

I had already, by being in State, mastered the art of taking the most complex problem, and especially if you were sending a night briefing to the White House, to reduce it to one page, max. Of course, that's what they wanted. He had me sort of instruct the other members of his staff. He would tell them this is what I want, concise but everything in there, focused. Everything he needed to know but on a page or two because the amount of paper is just overwhelming.

In those days we didn't have computers yet. They had IBM Selectric typewriters so managing paper was a lot more complex than it is today with computers.

I was in the fellowship program largely because of Nicaragua and the work I had done there. In my career, it seemed like one assignment seemed to lead to the other.

Q: Was there much interest in Nicaragua in both the House and Senate times?

CHEEK: Not so much because the issue had pretty well been settled. It certainly burnished my credentials to have been there. I got the Rivkin Award about the time I was going into the program. At the time AFSA presented me the Rivkin Award, AFSA had maybe seven or eight such awards. There has been a real proliferation. The last time I looked there were over 20. There is almost an award for every skill code in the Foreign Service now. This was sort of the most prestigious. It was the dissent award. It was the one that attracted the most nominees and attention and people knew about it and knew what it was. I think that really helped. They knew from my Nicaragua background and, of

course, I had London on my resume, that I knew foreign affairs. I had 12 years in the Foreign Service by that time. I think I was an FS0-3 by then. I had moved up pretty fast.

Q: An O3 would be about the equivalent of a colonel.

CHEEK: Well, in Hart's office the retired colonel and I, he had 20 years in the air force and I had my Foreign Service and army time too, so we were equivalent in a number of ways.

I will never forget when I left. Gary Hart gave me his favorite picture of himself. It was one where he was out campaigning and he'd taken off his coat and he had it slung over his shoulder. He endorsed it to 'Jim, my favorite secretary of state.'

Gary, he'd come close to being President without making it until the scandal knocked him out. We have stayed in touch. I figured if he got the presidency I was probably going to end up over running the NSC or a fairly close advisory position to him because he hadn't acquired a large following of hangers-on and stuff. He was still an outsider, of course, very young as well.

So this trip to the Hill had benefits on both the personal side and the career side. I don't think anybody has a bad experience with a congressional fellowship but even if it were just ordinary, it still is a fantastic experience and there is nothing like it in the Foreign Service.

When I was with Obey I got to go out on a 12 day tour of the Middle East. We went to Israel, Jordan, with Obey and Ed Koch. We were together doing everything 24 hours a day for two weeks.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of looking with a certain amount of reserve about how the Israelis treated congressional people?

CHEEK: Dave, one of the things I helped him with, he always had kind of tense relations with AIPAC (American-Israel Public Affairs Committee), the Israeli lobby because they were accustomed to kind of pushing people around. I don't necessarily think that's policy but they were pretty muscle bound in those days, really strutting their stuff. They often didn't ask a member; they told him what he was supposed to do. There was always this threat that AIPAC would go after you in your district if you didn't toe the line. Dave is a very combative guy. He didn't appreciate a lot of that and he would stand up to them.

One of the things I had to handle was his AIPAC relations and his management. The trip to the Middle East with Ed Koch, who was one of their former members, wasn't unintentional. Dave always understood the politics, especially the domestic politics of every issue. I spent a lot of time on the Israeli issue.

Israel hadn't yet gotten into the foreign aid bill. There wasn't big amounts of foreign aid. That all came about as the Sinai agreement, the aftermath of the Six Day War [June 1967]. When we gave our first foreign aid we helped Israel in a lot of ways, special earmarks and stuff, interest free on the bonds and all that. Officially, there was no foreign assistance, a little bit of credit which was more commercial.

That was an interesting exposure to Israeli policy issues to which I would suddenly be tossed because coming out of the congressional fellowship, GLOP comes along.

Q: This was Henry Kissinger's idea; global outlook policy (GLOP).

CHEEK: It had a profound effect on me. I walked right into it. There are several versions of how Kissinger came up with this personnel program. The one that I heard was that Kissinger was traveling and was overnighing in Mexico City. A very senior officer, probably the political counselor, was on night duty because you had to advance Henry 24/7. A very important telegram came in about, I don't know if it was something European or Mideast, and he had to decide whether to wake Kissinger up. He didn't see the importance of it because he didn't know about it. I forget which area was involved, wouldn't have made much difference. So it wasn't brought to Henry's attention until the next day. Kissinger was horrified that a senior Foreign Service officer wouldn't know the importance of this and know about this issue. So he came back and ordered GLOP, global outlook policy.

He did two very important things because by this time Kissinger knew all about government bureaucracies and how they worked. One, the most important, was to put Larry Eagleburger in charge of implementing GLOP. Larry, of course, was the enforcer, that was his middle name. The second thing he did was in your next assignment you could not be assigned to your regional area of specialization. You had to be assigned out of your area. If you were ARA, you had to go somewhere besides. If you were AF, you couldn't be assigned back to Africa.

Then he did the smart thing. He ordered the bureaus to designate key jobs at all levels to be GLOP assignments. The job couldn't be filled by an AF hand. So I am coming out of this fellowship and I've got this background in dealing with sensitive Arab-Israeli issues, war and peace, and calling on the foreign minister, prime minister of Israel with these congressmen.

Also it wasn't known to me until I got in the job that we were going to jump into foreign aid to Israel, with offsetting aid to Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in a big, big way. Kissinger was part of the Sinai Accords and secretly had not told the Congress or anybody he had promised billions of dollars. We are talking 1970s dollars. He bought them off with big amounts. NEA realized they had to have somebody real quick to run their own congressional operation with H (Bureau of Congressional Affairs) but they were going to have to be staffed with a real congressional pro. So here I am coming off of congress with stellar reviews that they probably looked at, dealing with the Middle East and so NEA

grabbed me for a senior job. Every other bureau had two regional offices, Regional/Political and Regional/Economic Affairs but NEA had only one, one big office with a dozen officers in it and it was just called regional affairs. Everything was in there; economic, political, narcotics, security assistance, aid, in one big office. There was an FS0-1 or 02 in charge of it. The deputy of NEA/RA was also a senior officer because Kissinger had set up these joint commissions, bilateral commissions with Arab countries, and the deputy director was designated as sort of the executive secretary or the permanent rep to them.

So, in the fall of 1975, I was assigned as the deputy director of NEA/RA. The Director was Steve Palmer. I replaced a senior 02, an NEA hand who was my predecessor. I am a fairly new FS0-3. Something that was rare in those days, I am in a job above my rank, and I was in this job until 1977.

The other thing that was different about NEA is Roy Atherton was the assistant secretary. He had what he called his senior team. In almost every bureau the senior team is just the assistant secretary and the four deputy assistant secretaries, or DASs. But Roy added his public affairs director, public affairs office and the director of NEA/RA to that team. As the deputy director, part of the senior staff of NEA/RA, I attended these meetings. Every two or three days Roy would convene all the DASs, public affairs, and RA.

Normally I wouldn't have gone so much except about this same time Kissinger decided to study Iran and the Persian Gulf policy. It was a way to keep State occupied and freeze the issue while Kissinger made his own policy. But they commissioned a study that turned out to be a year long, 12 months and interagency, and produced this mammoth national security study, NSS, which led to NSDMs (national security decision memorandum), that spun off of it. It meant that my boss, Steve Palmer, the director of NEA/RA, was detached for what turned out to be a year. It was originally only going to be a few months but for a whole year I am acting director of NEA/RA. For a year I am on Roy Atherton's team and, boy, if you ever saw a pro Foreign Service officer in your life, it was Atherton.

He relied heavily on me and his team. I handled anything and, of course, immediately all this came out that Kissinger had written all these checks for billions of foreign aid. Kissinger didn't go up to the Senate. I am sent up to attend most of the hearings and even testified at the appropriations and authorization committees who authorized the first ever type of this foreign aid. It was two billion, if you can imagine in 1970 dollars, of military aid to Israel and one billion of economic aid to Israel. This is all grant; this isn't credit. Then there was about a billion and a half to Egypt, sort of about a billion economic and half a billion military. Jordan was in the pot for three or four hundred million. Syria was in for about two hundred, two hundred fifty million. A huge package that comes out of nowhere and it's very controversial. We didn't have any tradition of aid to any of these countries and Syria was viewed as an enemy. At least we sort of viewed Jordan and Egypt more benignly. Syria didn't stay in the program after about two years. Then, it was deemed to be so uncooperative we just cut it off. Anyway it was the smallest program.

I really had my hands full when I went to the Hill. I remember Senator Inouye and Senator McClellan were still around. He was from my state; I knew him. Kissinger wisely kept his head down. How could he commit for Congress, they would ask. There was no way you were going to say no to Israel. AIPAC was mobilized and once you said yes to Israel you had to give in because that was the price of the Sinai accords, to buy off Egypt. To this day those countries still receive that same package though that three billion to Israel has not been increased. It's diminished because of inflation but that same formula is still there. It is still intact.

I remember Inouye on the Senate Appropriations getting very upset, berating me, telling me, "This is just the nose under the tent and you are going to be coming up here every year wanting this. This isn't short term or temporary or one time."

I remember my answer was, "Senator, I cannot contradict that." And it was. Here we are now, 35 years later, and it is still there, that foreign aid package.

NEA really relied on me to cover Hill issues. I carried a lot of water to sell that on the Hill as well as all the other responsibilities, of which we had lots, assigned to NEA/RA. This was also the beginning of military relationships with these countries because such a big chunk of the foreign aid was military assistance and mostly credit, I mean, mostly grant. Once you gave away to Israel, you had to give to the others. The idea was sort of parity here, sort of three billion for Egypt, Jordan and Syria and three billion for Israel.

So GLOP turned out to be for me a fantastic experience. Never would have happened if it hadn't been for that political counselor at embassy Mexico City, not understanding that cable. In my case it certainly fulfilled what it was supposed to fulfill.

One thing about being in regional affairs and being the right hand man of the assistant secretary, you get to know the whole bureau. During the course of my two years I got in some travel. Don't forget in those days NEA was everything - North Africa, Near East, South Asia - everything from Morocco to Bangladesh. And I am the regional guy. I think there were only a half dozen countries I just never got to visit, because in those days you could not travel directly. If you wanted to go from Algiers to Morocco, you had to go back to Switzerland or Paris and fly down. There wasn't any direct linkage.

Q: Did you get involved in the Indian/Bangladesh/Pakistan business?

CHEEK: Yes. Again that's where that accidental assignment in London paid off. I had been there during the Rann of Kutch War, the biggest Indo/Pak war they ever fought. So I knew South Asia. I knew India and Pakistan so they got the right guy for GLOP because I had a real knowledge of a lot of the key issues in the bureau. We're not talking about a desk officer or even a country director.

I remember Roy telling me, “As far as I am concerned you are the same as my DASs” and I had the same authority and he treated me like one. Whenever he met with DASs I was there with the public affairs guy. This is a tribute to Roy’s understanding of the process that all of his issues were really public and congressional relations issues. The problem was not the deal that was going to be Washington. He had a great public affairs guy. He had to sell to the public the whole Sinai Accords and this foreign aid. It was a mind boggling foreign aid bill to go from nothing, no foreign aid relationship, to billions of dollars. In the 1970s, with a billion, you really got peoples’ attention with that.

Q: How did the Near Eastern Bureau look upon this sudden influx of money? They had other clients besides Israel. Was there a concern?

CHEEK: The Arabists had pretty well dominated the bureau, even the South Asia people, even though they always had their own DAS. He sort of took care of South Asia. In fact, it made a lot of sense when they split it off and made it a separate bureau with its own assistant secretary, because de facto that’s almost the way it worked. It was kind of an outsider and the DAS sort of ran those things, just like when I was later a DAS in ARA I ran all the Central American stuff, Caribbean.

There was always that because things were changing. Israel was going to be a much bigger player in the bureau than ever before. Israeli issues were going to dominate; the Arab countries Egypt, Jordan, especially Egypt were being thrust to prominence whereas, heretofore, the whole focus earlier had been really on the Gulf States and Saudis, the oil states. So it was a time of change.

The Israeli affairs portfolio was a separate country directorate and it was a big office with a big staff so we had the substantive knowledge but all of a sudden this office is thrust into a big operation. We had the whole Sinai force which is still there as a part of this. A very complex agreement . . .

Roy was one of those Arabists. You could see you were probably going to have to adapt if you were going to be assistant secretary of that bureau. Israeli service was going to be important and that they were going to have a lot more say. All of a sudden our relations with the Arabs and Israel were going to be a part of that, where it hadn’t been before.

I got to know all these guys; a lot of the old. . . , almost every country director had some sort of a regional problem, a regional issue. I won’t say the Israeli tail was going to wag the NEA dog but it was clear it was going to be a much bigger and dominant factor in the bureau. If nothing else, it was going to take up a lot more of the assistant secretary’s time so it was going to be a bureau that was going to be much more heavily dominated by Israel than in the past. We just changed our whole relationship with Israel. We were not only throwing three billion in aid but we were the guarantors of the accords and all the secret agreements. None of which were kept a secret for as long as they thought. It was a time of real change.

Q: What about countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Jordan? Were they getting enough to keep them assuaged or what?

CHEEK: Oh, yes. This was a tremendous amount of money for Egypt and Jordan. For Syria it wasn't that much but that was the hardest sell. What on earth are we doing aiding this hostile Arab country, an enemy of Israel and all that. It didn't last long; I think we had maybe two years of foreign aid to them and it was always a lesser amount. This was a lot of money for these countries and a lot of it was economic support funds. It was just hot cash, they could use the way they wanted to. They didn't have to wait ten years to build a dam or something to get it. They got it. A lot of it was military, big security assistance package so it just changed the whole nature of our relationship with them as well. The embassy in Cairo suddenly becomes the largest embassy. It was sort of the Baghdad/Kabul of its day once all this huge aid, huge military program began. The staff quadrupled overnight with the agencies, programs and people. Ambassador to Egypt becomes a big job; the senior-most guys go to it whereas it hadn't been that way before.

I was present at all this and actively participated in it.

Q: Between Atherton and Kissinger, how would you describe the relationship?

CHEEK: They were both a couple of pros. Roy had his full confidence and Kissinger relied on him. He gave Roy full authority. Roy was a very powerful assistant secretary but also a fantastic diplomat. As I recall there wasn't any tension or backbiting or anything, fighting over authority. Roy pretty much had a direct line to the secretary. The seventh floor didn't get in the way all that much. Most of the issues were so big. A lot of this stuff was stuff Kissinger had done personally and nobody else knew what he had done. In the beginning we had to find out what decisions he'd made and all that.

Q: I have talked to other people who had been involved around this time. You had to develop your own intelligence service focused on Henry Kissinger.

CHEEK: Roy didn't have any enemies. He was well respected; beloved you could say, by everyone. Roy was one of the few regional assistants that had a reputation outside his bureau though he hadn't been outside the bureau in his career. As busy as he was, as incredibly busy as he was, he would take time to mentor me. I remember he would call me in on something I had drafted, an action memo or a paper or something. It wasn't editorializing or nitpicking. He'd take me through it and Roy more than anyone taught me the value of information and especially of confidential information. A lot of his power and authority was the way he very judiciously used information and words. He taught me a lot about the subtleties and the use of words and language. Of course in the Middle East one word and the meaning of it can be the cause for a war. He was just the prefect, and I learned so much from him. You could just sit there and watch him in action. I was still a relatively junior guy at this stage. I was young, having shot up faster than normal and it was just a fantastic experience.

Q: Were Israeli settlements in the West Bank at all an issue while you were there?

CHEEK: No, this all comes later. Our issue then was the war, the aftermath, getting Israeli withdrawal, complying with the agreement, implementing all that, getting the Sinai security force set up and organized, financed and in place, the proper force, the Golan Heights. We were very much involved that first year. The implementing of these agreements in the aftermath of the war, these other issues came along later.

Q: What was the feeling you were getting about the president of Syria, Assad?

CHEEK: Nobody really trusted him but that didn't bother Kissinger.

I will never forget one situation in which Assad used a Kissinger technique. Kissinger was famous for getting you to agree to something in general and then immediately, the next thing you knew, you had agreed to something specifically. He did that with Assad. Assad agreed to this proposition and then Kissinger minutes later was wrapping up. Assad said, "Wait a minute. I didn't agree to that. I just agreed to that" which sounded like a level of generalities, not the specifics. But he was a wily guy. They were very difficult people to deal with. We thought we could buy him off the way we had bought off Egypt and remove Syria as a threat to Israel and an enemy of Israel, but we really didn't because, first of all, the money wasn't big enough and I am not, in fact, I don't know that any amount of money would have because they were very sensitive to the fact that Israel was still occupying their land. Even after the Israelis withdrew back, they still kept the (Golan) Heights, so the state of war really never ended. In fact, those first few years they'd still lob shells at each other.

Implementing the peace agreement and setting up this huge foreign aid thing were just major projects. The two years I was there that occupied most of the issues we handled from 1975 to 1977. By the time I left in 1977 we had had two years of the foreign aid program, authorized, appropriated. Pretty much all the peace agreement is implemented. It is later on that we moved on to these other issues.

We used to have a saying that when you were dealing with the Middle East and Israel and its enemies, you could have all the peace that you could afford. The price tag of this was enormous. These senators and representatives we presented this to were just aghast. It was overnight. It was not like this was anything that built up.

But they bought it, we did it. It is still there to this day. In a way, that saying was absolutely right.

Q: Did you have many personal dealings with Henry Kissinger?

CHEEK: Not too much. Roy tended to manage that relationship or one of the DASs, but mainly Roy. Sometimes you are in a group meeting and, of course, I was privy to all this. You are discussing issues or cables that were in special codeword channels which were

even more restricted than NODIS (no distribution). So I got to see him in action and, of course, we were dealing with all the results and consequences of his handiwork and his peace agreement.

But no, if he called anybody up, it was usually Roy. If Roy was gone, one of the DASs acted so you didn't get to go up to the secretary's staff meetings. I didn't get that far. I could certainly see him in action and his handiwork and everything. He was noted for having a devious side to him and, of course, that really helped him when you start dealing with the Middle East. A certain amount of deviousness is required when the people you are dealing with are pretty devious.

It wasn't only the Arabists in NEA that changed. The Arab countries realized that all of a sudden Israel was the focus of U.S. attention, in the public and on the Hill, in the Department and the White House, and hard for them to compete with as well. It changed the nature of our relationships with a lot of countries. There were winners and losers, countries were upgraded, countries were downgraded from what had been the traditional mold.

It was a great time to be in NEA. Back to fate and circumstance. This is down the road but it paid off years later when I was the part of the Central American hands, having been a DAS, and they were trying to run me out of the Foreign Service. I couldn't get assigned anywhere so the NEA experience paid off. I had a place to go and that's important because after only about one round of assignments, maybe two years, GLOP was abandoned. The bureaus and even the individuals never really wanted it. As soon as Kissinger stopped applying it with an iron hand it was over. There were only about three years and the first year was a serious GLOP assignment cycle and it was gone. GLOP paid off because I ended up with a second bureau, not just ARA where I was known and had friends and contacts, senior to junior. Six years later that came in very handy.

That was the problem of being identified with the bureau. Of course, it really became a problem if you tried to become ambassador because as you moved up you could really only compete for ambassadorial assignments in your bureau. AF didn't want a Latin American hand. They wanted senior AF people.

GLOP had a very profound influence on my career. I don't know that Kissinger intended that but it did. It put me right in the center of the action, able to operate above rank and with knowledge, experience with the Congress which was extremely valuable that nobody else around had and relied upon. Roy would often ask one of his DASs, even, "What does Jim think about this?" I'd be called up. Part of my good luck was had Kissinger not dictated that the bureau had to identify key certain jobs for GLOP, all the GLOPees would have ended up in junior positions or desk officers or being a desk director where nothing was going on. They would have buried them over in the consular section of the embassies. It really worked but in my generation, that generation that came up for assignment in 1975, we were the prime beneficiaries of it. By even the second

generation it was losing steam and they were already punching holes in it. We just have to have staff with area expertise.

Q: In 1977 you left NEA, where to from there?

CHEEK: Well, GLOP was over and I, in fact, having been a GLOP, I couldn't go to another bureau. I had to go back to ARA. You couldn't be GLOPed twice, I guess. GLOP was already losing steam so I was going to go back to ARA. My friend, Larry Pezzullo, who had been the country director for Central America while I was in Managua was suddenly named ambassador to Uruguay. While I was over in NEA running congressional, Larry was a DAS in the bureau of congressional affairs, so Larry and I worked closely together. A lot of things I did I couldn't short-circuit H. H has the authority. You don't sign letters to congress and stuff. We were working together, while I am in NEA, and he says why don't I become his DCM.

Suddenly Larry is named ambassador to Montevideo, of course a really beautiful place, always had been, still is, and he insisted I am going to be his DCM. Well, I am just an FS0-3 and the DCM job there was an 01 slot. In fact, the DCM there at the time outranked Larry, the new incoming ambassador. Although his tour was up and it was an 01 job and there was no way they were going to double stretch me into the DCM job. The Director General was Carol Laise. She put up a fight and won't approve, won't sign off on it. Of course, they didn't know Larry. Larry digs in his heels and he won't take anybody else so there is a standoff there for several months.

Finally Dick Moose comes in; or maybe Eagleburger gets involved in it, somebody who is less wedded to the idea that you can't have a stretch of two ranks into a DCM job. Anyway, Larry wins but I sat there not knowing for about four months or so if I was ever going to make it to Montevideo. Fortunately, Larry was willing to wait. The previous DCM, the 01 who I think it was his third or fourth assignment as a DCM, he wasn't going to get an ambassadorship. He didn't even have an onward assignment so he was quite content to wait there, though I think Larry was a little uncomfortable with him since he outranked Larry.

Q: You were in Montevideo from when to when?

CHEEK: 1977 to 1979, two years. It would have been longer but a special circumstance occurs, a number of special circumstances. During that time I was also pulled off, brought back to ARA, and sent back to Nicaragua to negotiate with Somoza. As I look back on my career path nothing seems simple or ordinary.

End of interview