

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

SIDNEY CHERNENKOFF

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was conducted almost 20 years after Mr. Chernenkoff's retirement from 30 years' service in the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID). After retiring, he continued working for USAID as a contractor for the next 12 years until December 31, 2010. His views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of AID.]

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Entered the Foreign Service—USAID	1966
Oahu, Hawaii—Vietnamese Language Training	1966–1967
Qui Nhon, Vietnam—CORDS Deputy District Advisor	1967–1968
Saigon, Vietnam—CORDS Evaluations Officer	1968–1971
Washington, D.C.—Desk Officer for Latin America Bureau	1971–1976
San Salvador, El Salvador—General Development Officer	1976–1978
Washington, D.C.—Program Officer for Near East Bureau	1979–1983
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Khartoum, Sudan—Assistant Director for Program & Policy development	

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Acting Deputy Mission Director / AID Mission Director	1988–1989
Washington, D.C.—Brookings LEGIS Congressional Fellow	1989–1991
Washington, D.C.—Deputy Director for East Asia	1991–1991
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LIST OF KEY WORDS

Doukhobors
 Canada
 University of California, Berkeley
 Bank of America
 Vietnam
 General Westmoreland
 CORDS
 MACV
 William Colby
 Robert Komer
 George Jacobson
 Viet Cong
 Tet
 ARVN
 Regional Forces
 Republic of Korea (ROK) Tiger Division
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Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
George Soros
Open Society Foundation
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 21st of August 2017, the interview with Sidney Chernenkoff.

CHERNENKOFF: Okay.

Q: Chernenkoff.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, it's an anglicized Russian name. It would actually be "Chernenko" in Russian.

Q: Alright. Let's start at the beginning; when and where were you born?

CHERNENKOFF: I was born on February 16, 1941, in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.

Q: And let's start with your family on say your father's side first.

CHERNENKOFF: Okay.

Q: What do you know about the background of the family; where did they come from and all?

CHERNENKOFF: Okay. It's a very interesting and somewhat complicated subject. He was born in Canada to emigres from- they were actually from Russia but emigrated from Turkey. They belonged to a minority religious group called Doukhobors.

Q: Oh yes.

CHERNENKOFF: They're very small in number, just a few thousand and much like the Quakers. I am not an expert on this history but this is what I have heard and read. Doukhobors were strict Christians and pacifists, opposed to killing and war. They existed for perhaps a couple of hundred years, in various parts of Russia mainly because they just didn't want to fight in frequent and endless wars, and they especially didn't want to fight for the Czar. Doukhobors were also vegetarians because they did not want to take the lives of animals either. They were constantly a problem to the Russian government and to the Czar, really, and to the Orthodox Church as well because they defied Church teachings. As a result, they were forcibly grouped together and repatriated, so to speak, along the Russian border with Turkey, and for many years they lived in that general area as well as in Georgia.

At the end of the 19th century, once more they were asked to take up arms against Turkey and were given weapons to do so, rifles actually. But they refused, some were arrested and jailed, and others put their rifles in a pile and burned them. The Czar and the Church decided enough was enough and said we've had enough of you guys; you're going to have to get out of here, out of Russia entirely.

They agreed for them to depart, to emigrate to Canada, only on the promise that they would never come back. Canada offered them large plots of land they could farm if they homesteaded and cleared the land. Doukhobors had financial backing from Leo Tolstoy, who was a big supporter of their pacifist philosophy, Quakers in the U.S. and Canada, and some other religious minority groups. Beginning in 1899, boats were arranged to take them away. There were four boats, I believe, three going to Canada and one to Cyprus.

But the land for farming in Cyprus proved inhospitable, and those folks soon found their way to Canada anyway.

They were given land grants in the middle of Canada, in Saskatchewan and had to clear the forested land. Each family got about 160 acres, called a quarter section. But at first, they lived in a large commune, living and working together, with no private property. Clearing the land was very difficult work. While most men found work away building the trans-Canada railroad line, at home and without animals, groups of women had to pull plows to till the soil. My dad was born in 1905. His family lived near Canora, Saskatchewan, a very small town that still exists. There were different ideas among the Doukhobors even though there were only 5,000-7,000 people at first. In both provinces they faced discrimination for their practices and religion by some of the predominately Anglo-Saxon residents.

Q: It's fascinating.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, it is, actually. So, after some long struggles with winter and housing and just being able to survive on the prairies, they made it work. Some in the group were more religious than others and wanted to stay in communal living, others preferred assimilation and wanted to become part of Canada right away. My dad's parents, grandparents, stayed in Saskatchewan and Alberta while a traditional but more radical group moved to British Columbia. They were called the Sons of Freedom and were in constant struggle with local authorities over schooling and property.

My dad's family owned 160 acres and rented three more quarters, a square mile, essentially. They grew mainly wheat and barley or maybe oats, I don't remember. They also had some animals. While they could eke out a living, there wasn't much future on the farm for my dad. Though he did go to an agriculture college in Manitoba for a year as I recall, as a young man with four siblings on the same farm, it would not work for him.

About 1925 when he was 20, he decided to move to Chicago. He told me he drove delivery trucks, once for a Jewish grocery. Since he was vegetarian, he was therefore Kosher as far as his Jewish employers were concerned. Driving a bakery truck for another employer one morning, he saw a Chinese-owned store explode nearby. He said there were "Tong wars" among the Chinese immigrants.

After about 2-3 years, and I don't know exactly what happened he went back to the farm in Canada. Perhaps he couldn't stay legally in the U.S. for some reason or maybe the siblings moved away but he went back to the farm. During that time, he met my mother, who was of Ukrainian descent. They were married in a Ukrainian Orthodox ceremony. My sister was born in 1932. My dad continued to work on the farm for several years. About 1939 I believe, they moved to Chicago. My dad immediately found work as a car mechanic. He was even offered a job maintaining cars for the Al Capone mob, which he kindly declined. I was born in Chicago in 1941. So, I was born to Canadian citizens in Chicago. I'm an American citizen but I might actually be Canadian as well though I've never pursued that.

Q: I was born in Chicago, too, but in 1928. Of basically German and Scottish background. So, we're all from somewhere interesting. I left when I was about three for California.

CHERNENKOFF: Well, it's funny you should say that because when I was six months old, my parents decided to go back to Saskatchewan to try to farm again. I don't know what motivated them but there was some reason for them to move back to the farm in Saskatchewan, perhaps the health of my grandparents. For a year and a half, I lived on that farm and don't recall hardly a thing except the death of my grandfather.

One day my father said I can't make it work here, let's go to California. So, like you I was about three when we moved to California. This was during the war at that point, of course, it was 1943. My dad found a job immediately because there was a labor shortage. And he found an apartment exactly next to the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, where they had reduced or free rent as long as they ran the elevator which was for their residents. They had a buzzer in the apartment. It must have been a real pain to do this. I guess it was about a four-story building. Soon he found a good job in nearby Emeryville working for a factory building engines for tanks called Lorimer Diesel. And he also found a part-time job unloading railcars for Railway Express. My dad was a hard worker.

Q: During this time, we'll come to- well, we'll cover it; go ahead.

CHERNENKOFF: The apartment arrangement wasn't suitable. So, we moved from Berkeley to Oakland about 1944 on 54th Street, I remember that well. This was a brand-new duplex with two stories, with two bedrooms and maybe a bath and a half bath downstairs. I recall it cost \$54.50 a month to rent. And Safeway was right across San Pablo Avenue. I remember putting my gum wrappers in a recycle bin there for the war effort.

Q: Okay, well, let's discuss your mother.

CHERNENKOFF: My mother was born in Canora too. Most people in Canora were Ukrainian. At the beginning of the 20th Century her family migrated from general vicinity of Chernivtsi in western Ukraine. They came over as economic immigrants. They were just sort of run of the mill Eastern European immigrants. I don't know how they got to Canada but they too were given acreage once they cleared the land and started out as farmers.

I knew my grandmother who lived into the 1960s. But my grandfather died in the early 1930s even before my sister was born. The family was very successful in Canada. They remained in Saskatchewan except for my mother, of course. My cousins became, for the most part, lawyers or health workers. Some later got involved in politics. My cousin Ray Hnatyshyn ultimately became the Governor General of Canada, which is the country's head of state. His father had been a senator in Canada, appointed by Conservative Prime

Minister John Diefenbaker. They were conservative politically. Well, a conservative in Canada is not as conservative as in the U.S. And I'm sorry to say I don't know enough about that side of the family.

Q: Did the Doukhobor faith carry through with your parents?

CHERNENKOFF: No. My dad was more attached to it because of his ethnicity and the history, and he wanted to belong to something but quite honestly, he didn't really believe in God. This was a big problem because Doukhobors are very faithful believers in Jesus Christ. My dad followed their vegetarian and conscientious objector principles. Though he was in California just above draft age during World War II, it wasn't an issue. Plus, he was in a wartime job making tank engines, so that alone would have probably exempted him.

Q: What sort of education did your parents get?

CHERNENKOFF: They both finished high school. My dad went briefly to an agricultural college, I think in Manitoba. He took farming seriously but he just couldn't make it work back home, the finances were just not there.

My mother had two years of what they called Normal school for teachers. She taught in a one-room schoolhouse near Canora for a few years, maybe 12-15 kids, all grades. It was the only time she did any teaching. But she had two years' equivalent of college, I guess, which allowed her to teach at that level.

Q: Well then, what do you recall- you basically grew up in sort of Berkeley and Oakland, is that right?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, we lived in Berkeley briefly and then we moved to Oakland. And then after five years, let's say, we moved to San Leandro, which is suburban Oakland. I did not go to kindergarten. I started school in 1946 in Oakland's Golden Gate Elementary School, which was about eight blocks away from our house, and attended it to through the sixth grade. Oakland had low and high, half-year grades at that time. When I was in the low second, I was skipped to the high second and continued through the sixth grade.

Q: Well, let's take as a kid up to, oh, grammar school; what was it like being a kid in the Oakland area?

CHERNENKOFF: It was changing a lot. The war had ended or was ending and I remember a parade on San Pueblo Avenue with jeeps and troops and stuff just ending the war; it was an informal parade, I think, I don't remember it being announced but I was four years old. The neighborhood was fine, there were a lot of kids in the neighborhood. The school was okay, I had some okay teachers. There were one of two that I thought were exceptional. When I started there were very few black kids. It was predominantly white but there were Asian kids, Chinese and Japanese who were my friends for a while

and some other neighborhood kids. And for the most part we got along. I remember an Italian immigrant kid who came in and didn't speak any English and he had a rough start. He was sort of kind of picked on a little by some of the other boys and he got angry and cried and fearful and the teacher brought in another- I remember the other kid, they said who's the student body president, he's Italian? I said, oh, I know his name, and they brought- this is up to sixth grade- so they brought the Italian-speaking student body president for the middle school that was also there, junior high actually, and he interpreted for her and tried to settle this poor boy down. The racial composition of the student body began to change as more and more black kids began to enroll. They were largely the children of workers who were brought in to work in the shipyards in Richmond and elsewhere in the Bay Area to increase labor- the labor shortage- they were all from the deep South. And by the time I left it was probably a third black; in about five years it went from almost zero to a third.

Q: How did the racial mix work?

CHERNENKOFF: Not especially well. There were fights sometimes among white and black kids, at recess and after school. And I think that's one of the reasons my parents wanted to move. There were fights among white kids too, me included. But I had some black friends. I remember once I was being picked on by three boys, and one of the black girls stood up for me, told them to lay off. They did.

Nevertheless, at the end of 1951, we moved to San Leandro, south of Oakland. The area was predominately white, with some Asian and Hispanic kids, but no black children at all. As we lived in the unincorporated part of San Leandro, I first attended Edendale middle school and later San Lorenzo High School where I graduated from in 1957.

Q: At home, were you much of a reader?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. When I got to San Leandro my parents bought the "World Book Encyclopedia." I guess I was 11. My mother worked full-time in a department store in downtown Oakland. I was one of the original latchkey kids. I was alone a lot but she left sandwiches and clean clothes for me. But in our first summer, my parents bought an encyclopedia set. I thought, wow, this is great. We didn't have a TV yet but now I have something to do. So, I read or reviewed almost all the encyclopedia that summer and really learned a lot. I still remember some things about Greek mythology from reading the encyclopedia.

Q: I did, too. It was a big deal. I mean, so many of the people I talk to read through a set of encyclopedias.

CHERNENKOFF: Is that right?

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: It's interesting. I guess it's a predisposition to want to know more about the world.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: I should mention one other thing about the encyclopedia. My mother answered the door one day and there was a door-to-door salesman selling the "World Book Encyclopedia." It turned out he was the music teacher from the Golden Gate Elementary school I attended in Oakland -- Mr. Meagher. I remember his name even now. It was great to see him but kind of sad too as it was indicative of how poorly teachers were paid then. He had to sell encyclopedias in the summer door-to-door to make ends meet.

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

CHERNENKOFF: They were not particularly political. My dad was a machinist in large bakeries, and my mother worked in a department store first as an elevator operator then as a sales clerk. At that time elevators required elevator operators, and then when elevators were automated, she became a sales clerk. Both were union members. They too voted Democratic. I don't remember much discussion of politics at home.

Q: Religion; did religion play much of a role?

CHERNENKOFF: No. My mother had been baptized in the Ukrainian Orthodox faith. She always told people she was Greek Orthodox, not sure why. But she never, to my knowledge, went to church. However, I understood my parents were married in an Eastern Orthodox Church ceremony in Canada but I know no specifics about it and there are no photos.

Q: Did your family have a car and get to travel around the California area much?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, but not until 1950 when we got a two-door grey Pontiac. After WW II ended, car production resumed. We were living in Oakland and my dad had made a down payment for a new Nash. He went to pick it up one day, and we waited for him to come home with the car. When arrived, he came without the car. He said that a man at the dealership offered to pay him way more than my dad paid for it, so he sold it to him. He came home with extra cash but we didn't have a car for another three years, I think. As the street cars ran practically in front of our house so you could get around easily so, it wasn't really a big deal. And there were buses too -- one of our neighbors was a bus driver. And the grocery store was across the main street so it wasn't a serious issue for us. But we did not see much of California until we got the Pontiac.

Q: Yes, we survived quite well in the little town of Annapolis with no car. Did you get into San Francisco as a kid?

CHERNENKOFF: A few times, yes. I remember it being called “The City.” Everybody who lives in the Bay Area even today calls it The City. It definitely didn’t mean Oakland. It meant San Francisco, a serious city. We had to dress up to go there. I remember going on the car ferry from Alameda, which still existed and which were the main way to cross the bay before the Bay Bridge was constructed in the 1930’s.

Q: Oh, ferries were great.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, they were. And it was fun. Although you didn’t have to take the ferry, the Bay Bridge was constructed. But if you didn’t have a car you could take the Key System train; it was the precursor of rapid transit, an electric train system that went from San Francisco to the East Bay and into Berkeley, Oakland and Richmond. But it was limited, it didn’t go real far but into the city, just into the main transportation terminal, and we took it sometimes.

Q: Were you much of a student?

CHERNENKOFF: On the whole I always regret not being a better student. I always did enough to get by. And I always got by pretty well if put my mind to it. I did not go to kindergarten and started first grade at Golden Gate Elementary just making the age cut off, and was the youngest in my class. The Oakland school district had half grades too.

Q: I know, I remember that system.

CHERNENKOFF: The next year, I moved up to low two and I was doing fine. But I had a friend in high two. As he lived near my house. I waited at school to walk home with him. The teacher said I could go home but I said I would like to wait for my friend so I can walk home with him. She said you can just do the schoolwork too. So, I did the work and they promoted me to grade two-and-a-half. So, I skipped half a grade which lasted until the sixth grade.

In December 1951, we moved to San Leandro where they did not have half grades. I had to take a test which I passed, and instead of continuing in elementary school I was put directly into the high seventh grade. So, I skipped the first half of seventh grade.

Q: Well, I remember I too skipped at one point a half a grade.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: There was an awful lot of- I think that’s why they eventually got rid of the thing.

CHERNENKOFF: Oh, it was too complicated, yes. So, I basically skipped two half-grades.

Q: Well, as you moved up, just before you got to high school, how’d you find school?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, my parents always working, so school for me was a social outlet. I had some friends, but I was a year-and-a-half younger than a most of them and so some of them didn't want to hang out with me. I tried not to tell anybody how old I was because I feared they wouldn't want to be with me. So, I wouldn't talk about my age. You know how kids are.

Q: Oh yes, very important.

CHERNENKOFF: Very important, yes, you bet. As I am tall, I appeared older except I was a year-and-a-half younger. Socially, though, I was not well-developed.

Generally, I liked school. In both middle and high school, some of the teachers were very weak. I remember I was pretty good at spelling, and my eighth-grade teacher decided instead of selecting the best speller she would let the class vote who should represent the class in the school contest. I didn't win the vote. The kid who did was popular but a poor speller and was quickly eliminated. As a result, I learned to have misgivings about school fairness.

Q: Well, where'd you go to high school?

CHERNENKOFF: I went to San Lorenzo High School and took a school bus my freshman year. During my sophomore year, a classmate got a 1950 Chevy and I rode with him to school. San Lorenzo High School was a very mediocre high school with a few good teachers and some not-so-good. Most kids were from working class families and not interested in going to college. In those days, kids out of high school could get a decent-paying job and some even get married right away. I was glad to finish high school but I should have tried harder all along as my grades were not great until my senior year. Starting high school so young was not a good thing for me. I didn't turn 16 until February of my senior year so I was socially awkward. I did go to a few dances but didn't have a girlfriend and seldom was invited to parties, although people were usually nice to me. I enjoyed belonging to Key Club, a service club, and I tried out for baseball, though I broke my wrist only a few weeks into the season.

It wasn't until my senior year that I recognized I had to decide what I am going to do after high school. My mother wasn't particularly pushing me in any direction, but my father was. He said you'll go to college, you're going to study, and you're going to be a dentist or a doctor. But my grades were insufficient to get into Cal-Berkeley (University of California, Berkeley). They were okay to get into San Jose State College, but I decided that I wanted to go to Cal. You had to have a B average or better in a dozen core subjects plus score 500 or more on the CEEB (College Entrance Board Examination). Up till then, I wanted to go to Oregon State College, mainly because we had a relative who was a physician who lived in Bend, Oregon. We used to visit him sometimes and I loved Oregon. But a high school classmate, one of my smarter friends, said why would you go to Oregon State when right on your doorstep is one of the finest universities in the world? I realized that's definitely true. So, I started to pick up my academic act, but my act was a little too late and I couldn't get into Cal immediately. Instead, I went to Oakland Junior

College for a year, took the required subjects, got my grades up and transferred to Berkeley.

Q: You were on the Berkeley campus from when to when?

CHERNENKOFF: I started right away with summer classes in June 1958.

Q: What was it like then?

CHERNENKOFF: Widely recognized then as a world-class institution, not impossible to get admitted to but a very high drop-out rate after year one. You had to study or face the consequences. It was mostly white, many Asians, few blacks or Hispanics. I was very impressed with the many excellent professors. There was some of radical political activity such as the protests against Senator Joe McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which held hearings in San Francisco. I remember that, some of my student friends participated. Generally, it was a nice place to be.

If you look at my 1962 yearbook, most men had short hair and wore coats and ties. All freshmen and sophomore men were required by law to take ROTC since Cal was a land-grant university. Fraternities and sororities were active in campus politics though as new high-rise dormitories were built that began to change. My first year, we were very good in basketball and football. A Trivial Pursuit question might be, what was the last all-white team to win the NCAA basketball championship - Cal-Berkeley in 1959. Upon arriving, I joined the Cal Band. The football team went to the Rose Bowl that year and I marched in the Rose Parade. Later, a small band went to Louisville to see the Final Four basketball games. I was in the band two and a half years, then later dropped out.

Q: What did you play?

CHERNENKOFF: Trumpet. Not very well but it was an all-male student band, not a class. It was and is run by students, we got money from the student association. It's a very good band, very Big Ten type marching band. Strangely enough, the band at Berkeley is almost militaristic in its marching and style. Uniforms are like the Big Ten bands have - Ohio State, Michigan - not the kind of marching band you'd think Berkeley would have then or now.

Q: Well, what was life like on the campus?

CHERNENKOFF: It was good. A beautiful place. I lived at home for a year then moved into a dorm. But I had too much fun and I nearly flunked out, mainly because I was trying to be a doctor or a dentist to please my dad, I was taking chemistry, physics, zoology - hard subjects I really had no interest in. And I was making life decisions too soon as I was just 18. I didn't want to be a doctor but I wasn't certain what I did want. After hanging on by the skin of my teeth, I became a political science major and I did fine, no problem. I took history, political science, economics and did great, mostly A's and B's. In those days, as you know, a B was a good grade and an A was an exceptional grade.

Q: Well, what did that mean, political science?

CHERNENKOFF: Then?

Q: No, I mean what was the focus?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, I took classes on local, state and Federal governments, how the Congress and Executive Branch work, on elections, political theory, non-governmental organizations, (NGOs), and foreign policy.

Q: How about the outside, the world beyond the borders of the United States; did that engage you at all?

CHERNENKOFF: Well sure, because had family in Canada and we visited often. While growing up, I could see there were clear differences between the U.S. and Canada. We'd drive through Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and then across Canada to Alberta, and Saskatchewan. I became very much aware of another country, another system of government and other customs. In Canada Ford cars were named Meteor and Monarch, not Ford and Mercury. In 1955, while visiting my sister in Regina, Saskatchewan (at 18, she had married a Canadian and moved back to Canada), a new law was introduced for universal health care. Local doctors went on strike. This was a very informative event for me.

Q: How about the Cold War? Did that-?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, that was a big deal. And with a Russian name it wasn't always easy because I got a little bit of a hassle; some kids would pick on me. Our neighbors' kids, who happened to be Mexican-Americans by the way, picked on me for being ethnically Russian. Although I was half Ukrainian that didn't matter; as far as they were concerned, I was a Russian, not an American. So, the Cold War impacted on me in that sense. I was aware of it. I wished it went away. But as I grew older, I would read the newspapers more to understand our foreign policy. At Cal-Berkeley, I took a class in Soviet politics.

Q: You graduated what year?

CHERNENKOFF: I graduated in 1962 with a BA in political science.

Q: Had Berkeley turned activist at all by then?

CHERNENKOFF: It was partly activist because of the HUAC protests. Berkeley was activist but it was before the 1964 Free Speech Movement.

Q: Well, was Kennedy inspirational and all?

CHERNENKOFF: Absolutely. In Spring 1962 when I was a senior, I was a member of the Californians, an honorary membership service group which promoted the university. I was selected to be in a line of students wearing caps and gowns when President Kennedy came to visit Berkeley. He came to the football stadium which was packed, perhaps 90,000 people. It was full of students from local schools. Faculty were in chairs on the field. He walked right in front of me. Everybody's jaws just dropped because he took his hat off - he had a cap and gown on but he took his hat off so people could see him better. The crowd just went wild for him. Governor Pat Brown also gave a speech though it was not as well-received.

Q: The son of the-

CHERNENKOFF: The father of the current governor.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, right. Kennedy said he owed as much to Berkeley as he did to Harvard for his cabinet. I remember Robert McNamara was a Cal graduate and there were some others but offhand I don't recall who. President Kennedy made a profound impression on me, I remember that very clearly.

Q: When you were doing this were you thinking about working for the government?

CHERNENKOFF: No, I wasn't at that point. Most of us were worried about getting drafted. Friends convinced me to join the California Air National Guard, which I did in March 1963. Its base was located in nearby Hayward. Basic training was in Texas. So, I flew out in March to Lackland Air Force Base. While I was there, I learned I was accepted to both Graduate Business School in Berkeley and to the University of California Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. I was at a major fork in my life, was 22 years old and had to make a decision quickly. I opted for business school because I just didn't know what I was doing. It was a tough choice and I've thought about it many times, what would have happened if I'd made the other choice. I could have easily been a lawyer in the state of California somewhere but I elected business school. It was business school that eventually got me to join USAID (United States Agency for International Development).

Q: How long did you go to business school?

CHERNENKOFF: It was a two-year program for an MBA, in the early days of MBA programs.

Q: How did it grab you?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, it was totally different than political science and focused on the private sector. I had a little difficulty at times. Some of it didn't appeal to me because it was aimed at working in corporations and companies, and I wasn't turned on by working

for a company. Yet I went through with it even enjoying some classes including economics, law, marketing and personnel, but accounting and advertising, not so much. I sort of went with the flow and graduated.

Q: What was dating like in those days?

CHERNENKOFF: Fairly traditional. You could meet girls on campus easily, either in class or through friends or somebody would fix you up if you needed a date. Thursdays and Fridays were for drinking alcohol mainly beer. But Saturday night was the night for dates.

Q: But did you have a significant other at this point?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. I dated a sorority girl for a while in 1963, even met her parents. But she was more interested in me than I her, so I did not continue asking her out. I had a more significant beginning in Fall 1964 lasting over a year. We were very serious, considered marriage, but she decided I was not socially advanced enough for her. I have to admit it probably put a damper on my grades and on my ego.

Q: Well then, so you graduated from business school when?

CHERNENKOFF: 1965. I went to work for the Bank of America in San Francisco at their main office in their Branch Locations Division. This office made decisions on where to locate or expand branches of the bank. I was paid \$500 a month. We basically did field studies all over northern California looking at community growth, average income, and what other banks were doing. My MBA major was Marketing and fit in nicely with this kind of work. At that time the Bank of America was the largest bank in the world, even though it was located only in California. At the time, no bank in the U.S. could have branches outside its own state. This was the original Bank of America founded by A.P. Giannini who opened it for the working poor, especially Italian immigrants, in San Francisco. Giannini made a point of having a branch of the bank in every county in California. There was even one branch in Alpine County, which is right next to Lake Tahoe. At that time, it was a very small county with hardly any people, perhaps less than 1,000. But a branch of the Bank was located there. But it was only a window in the Post Office with single person handling banking functions.

Q: How'd you find banking?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, banking per se – the finance side - I didn't really enjoy.

Q: You weren't in it.

CHERNENKOFF: No. My job wasn't banking as such. I could have been working for any company that had branches. It was the same principle as setting up franchises. I focused on a community's potential for a branch bank – its average income, the direction

of the growth, whether it would make sense to put a bank there, who lives there, what the competition is. So, it wasn't financial banking.

Q: Did you ever get down to Southern California?

CHERNENKOFF: I did a few times but not related to work. It was considered almost foreign territory if you lived in Northern California. Even in the 1960s, people were talking about dividing California in half, cutting Southern California loose because it was a totally different culture.

Q: Yes. I went to the Army language school in Monterey. That, of course, is sort of betwixt and between.

CHERNENKOFF: It is, yes. Probably more northern, generally speaking.

Q: The fog.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, the fog can be depressing. I hated it in the summers in the Bay Area. Sometimes wouldn't burn off all day.

Q: Did you get to the East Coast at all?

CHERNENKOFF: I did. When I finished business school in summer 1965, my girlfriend who had also graduated, decided to visit the east for the summer (not a good sign for me; her way of breaking up though I did not realize it then). She ended up in Washington, DC. I missed her and used my membership in the California Air National Guard to get a free U.S. Air Force flight to Washington. I stayed with her for a week or so, saw the usual sites—White House, Capitol, etc. — then went to New York City to look for a job. Luckily, I had a friend from business school there who was working there and he and his wife put me up for a few days. With a resume in hand, I just walked into a few places without appointment, including Pan American Airlines and some major advertising firms. The interviewers were nice but I didn't find anything. And I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do so I went back to California. I spent my time still looking for a job and preparing for my final overall test in Marketing to graduate.

Meanwhile, my National Guard unit went to Panama for our annual two-week summer camp at the Air Force base in the Panama Canal zone. That was another foreign experience of for me and very interesting. We didn't really have much to do and it was a waste of money. We sat by airmen observing them work but not really doing anything ourselves. The Air Force guys were busy doing their work but it was clear they didn't want us there at all. But we did go sightseeing a lot. We took a great train trip right across Panama along the Canal to the Caribbean and back. I also learned while in Panama from a letter forwarded by my mother, that I passed my test for my MBA.

Q: What were you doing in the National Guard?

CHERNENKOFF: I was a communications specialist. After I finished basic training at Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas in the Spring of 1963, I was assigned to communications training at Shepard Air Force Base, near, Wichita Falls Texas. I spent about four months there learning to operate teletype machines and send both routine and classified messages of all kinds. I finished first in my class, earning a day of leave.

Q: Well then, you're back to the Bank of America and all?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: How long were you doing that?

CHERNENKOFF: After I returned from Panama, I got my job with the Bank of America and worked there about 11 months. About August 1966, I saw a full-page ad in the San Francisco Chronicle that said AID (United States Agency for International Development) was hiring for service in Vietnam. AID was looking for experts and trainees for civilian efforts with refugees, community development, education, agriculture, and a plethora of other skills. The ad directed us to go to the Federal Building for interviews which were being held for a week even into the evenings. In 1966, there was still considerable support for the war. So, I went down there after work and I interviewed, along with dozens of other men. I described my background, work experience, where I went to school and what degrees I had. They indicated interest but wanted me to take the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), because if selected, we would have to take language training before we went to Vietnam.

Q: Yes. MLAT?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. It was a test to determine your aptitude to learn a foreign language. They present you with a language strange to most people, and then you have to learn to read in it.

Q: I think they use Kurdish or something like it.

CHERNENKOFF: It was totally new to me. I took the exam the same evening. I did well enough for another round of interviews. AID officials seemed interested in me and said we might be able to hire you. So, I said okay when and how will I know? They said we'll get back in touch with you; we have your phone number. I thought they declined me as it took over a month. But they called me and said we've accepted you, and in 10 days you have to be in Washington. So, after a good-bye luncheon, I left the Bank of America and arrived Washington for two weeks' orientation in the State Department.

This was a wonderful change in my life and I was very excited. Main State was quite a different place then. I just walked in - there were guards but nobody checked anything. Nobody. I went directly to the designated room. There were about 30 trainees, five who had attended Cal Berkeley, I noted. After the orientation period in Washington, we would be sent to Hawaii for language training.

Q: What year was this?

CHERNENKOFF: This was October 1966. And there I was, getting to know my fellow trainees and having meetings about Vietnam, USAID, and general orientation, before going to Hawaii to learn to speak Vietnamese. I returned to California, spent a couple days with my parents and then on to Honolulu for language training.

The Hawaii program was run in conjunction with the East-Center of the University of Hawaii. The language instructors were native-speaking Vietnamese who came directly from Vietnam, some of them ex-military officers, teachers, and half were women. All were trained to teach languages. In addition, time was set aside for lectures and experts on Vietnam - its history, politics, culture and why the U.S. was there. This gave us a pretty good understanding of what to expect in addition to the language capability. We had language training six days a week but we got Wednesday afternoons off. So, we went to Waikiki beach and enjoyed the experience. It was wonderful!

Q: How did you find the tonal language?

CHERNENKOFF: Very difficult. It was totally different than romance languages because it's not intuitive, it's totally learned. There are five tones in southern Vietnamese which is what we were learning, and six in north Vietnamese. You must learn to differentiate tones precisely. Even though various words are spelled the same they have different meanings. For example, "chua" can mean "not yet", "pagoda", or "pregnant" depending on the tone. There are tonal marks when reading Vietnamese but exact word pronunciation was key. The language was fun to learn but when I left Vietnam, I pretty much left the language there.

Q: What did you feel about Vietnam at the time? And what was sort of the feeling around you?

CHERNENKOFF: Okay, that's a good question because in 1966 things were really starting to heat up at home and in Vietnam. President Kennedy had started with U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam but they weren't great in number. Johnson increased them further. Everyone of draft age was concerned about this it, and it began to stimulate more antiwar protests, more strong editorials and more strife. And opposition was building up even in 1966. Our involvement in Vietnam was something on which many people had strong opinions. On my way to Vietnam while in Berkeley, I happened to run into a previous girlfriend who asked seriously if I was crazy, going to Vietnam. I answered I guess I am. Maybe this was not a smart thing to do but I was not strongly against our involvement. I kind of accepted the premise that Communism was trying to expand into South Vietnam and that people in South Vietnam did not want to be Communists. I accepted that at face value, not really knowing much about it.

So, yes, Vietnam was becoming a big subject. Laos was to a certain extent but Vietnam overshadowed Laos much more. My views about Vietnam evolved dramatically on the

job. I could spend a lot of time on the subject of Vietnam. I was there four years, I remember almost exactly what happened then and I still have strong feelings about it. And I have a lot of photos to trigger my memory.

Q: I'm trying to grab the whole thing, and Vietnam is obviously a very important element in the period and one's feelings were very mixed on this whole.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, for sure.

Q: Well, what was your impression of the people you were studying the language with?

CHERNENKOFF: Good. They were selected from a large pool of applicants, selected because they had been interviewed carefully, did well in the aptitude test and appeared to be fairly well educated and experienced. They were a cross section of people -- a high school teacher, city manager, ex-Peace Corps volunteers, a parole officer, a retired U.S. Army officer, for example. A subsequent group included a former Dallas Cowboy football player and a special assistant for Mayor Lindsey of New York. It was all white male, by the way. We were a mixed bag, with the attitude that what we were going to do was a good thing, sprinkled with a little bit of skepticism. Trainees could bring their dependents including young children. We lived in former Navy dependent housing. It was really quite nice, and all meals were included in a separate dining area where I learned to love fresh pineapple so sweet it often had to be salted.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese you were taking classes from and all?

CHERNENKOFF: I liked them as they were agreeable and loved Hawaii. We got to know them well and switched teachers frequently. The entire program and language training were run by FSI (Foreign Service Institute).

We spent the first four months on Oahu, the last two months on the Big Island also called Hawaii. We were all assigned to one location at an elementary school and were housed where sugar cane workers had lived, very basic rough housing. This was deliberate to get us used to living in very poor quarters. After a month, we were divided into teams of four, with one language teacher. Each team was given an area on the island, given a rental car and told to find housing. We were supposed to do different community development projects throughout the island. Ours was cattle ranching, specifically the Parker Ranch. It was a huge operation on the Big Island. I didn't know that before. And there are cattle in Vietnam too. At the time, the Parker ranch was the largest cattle ranch in the U.S. under a single private owner.

The Vietnamese, language instructor, Mr. Truong, was with our team for a whole month. We got to know him personally and went everywhere with him; it was a really close relationship.

Q: Were they pointing you towards different types of work or specific types of work?

CHERNENKOFF: We planned to work within the framework and resources of the nationwide joint U.S.-Vietnam Pacification program which was aimed at improving the lives and security of the rural Vietnamese people. This included civilian efforts to construct or repair schools, village offices, irrigation, roads, as well as provide training for teachers, city managers, and farmers and assist refugees.

Upon arrival, we expected to be sent to provinces and districts throughout Vietnam, and that we would be working closely with the U.S. Army MACV (Military Advisory Command Vietnam) advisory teams. These were specially trained typically eight or nine-man units advising Vietnamese Province and District Chiefs on military affairs. At the district level, they were led by a major and a captain, two lieutenants, several sergeants, a medic, and a radio operator. These guys lived in the district compound and trained local forces how to fight the Viet Cong (VC). We would join a MACV unit and carry out civilian projects working with the district chief and his staff. I was assigned ultimately to Tuy Phuoc district, Binh Dinh Province on the coast of central Vietnam. I worked side-by-side with the MACV unit, coordinated with them and ultimately ended up living with them, advising the district chief on all these matters that were not military. Shall I keep going?

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up again when you go to Vietnam and what you're up to. Great. This is going very well.

CHERNENKOFF: Good. Thank you. It's a little rambling. I'm sorry.

Q: Today is the 28th of August 2017 with Sid Chernenkoff. And I guess we come to Vietnam. Let's put it back in perspective; when did you get there?

CHERNENKOFF: I arrived in March of 1966.

Q: So, what did they do with you first?

CHERNENKOFF: I think we were all well prepared because of our language training and studies about Vietnam. Upon arrival, most guys went directly to specific field positions around the country. But when I arrived at Tan Son Nhut airport a fellow named Bill Stewart, who was a regular State Foreign Service officer, met me and told me I'd be working for him in Saigon. I was very disappointed because we had largely trained to work in rural areas. I did not want to work in Saigon. Bill took me and another guy from our training cycle to dinner at a floating restaurant and briefed us about what was going on. From the restaurant we could see flashes in the distance of outgoing artillery firing; nothing you could hear but just enough so you could see flashes.

Q: I know, yes.

CHERNENKOFF: So, the next day I went to what was then called the Office of Civil Operations and was introduced to folks around the headquarters. I would be working in the Reports Office. I met Frank Wisner there. He did his oral history too and you

probably know who he is. And his brother Ellis was in our training cycle. I was immediately assigned to a room with a couple of other guys including a retired Army colonel, and given a desk. Basically, my job was to read and consolidate reports coming from the field into summarized, information pages for senior management. I really didn't want to do this for my entire time in Vietnam but I went along with it for a few weeks. Gathering strength, I made my case that I really didn't come to Saigon to do that and would much prefer to be assigned to the field. The person in charge of our division, a USIA (United States Information Agency) officer, said, well, we don't always get what we want in life. Nevertheless, I persisted over the next few weeks, and one day he said you're going to go to Nha Trang.

And so, I flew to the city of Nha Trang, which is on the coast of central Vietnam, a peaceful, beautiful former French resort, great food, great sand and water. This was the regional headquarters for II Corps (there were four military geographic divisions of South Vietnam called Corps). While still not exactly in the field, this was much closer. But again, I was assigned to work for someone who was doing basically the same kind of reports editing work that I was doing in Saigon. And again, it still was not what I was prepared to do, because given my language and other training and so on, I wanted interaction with the Vietnamese. After about three weeks there, I told my superiors that I would like to go to a field assignment somewhere in II Corps. Surprisingly, they assigned me to the city of Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh Province. Qui Nhon was a major port for the U.S. Army and Navy for the delivery of goods and troops.

Q: Before we leave these two reporting consolidation points, what was the general feeling of the people, you and others, dealing with them? Did they feel they were accurate or fudging the figures or what?

CHERNENKOFF: Good question. Honestly at that point, I wasn't in Vietnam long enough yet to make a judgement. And as 26-year-old young man, I was still somewhat in awe of senior people so I just went with the flow. I didn't encounter anything outrageous at that early time in my tour, although later on I did. We accepted the field reporting at face value. It did seem a little disingenuous given my lack of experience to have someone like me editing field reports. But yes, later I saw reporting that was inflated.

I arrived in Qui Nhon city, and after being assigned temporary housing, the U.S. Province Senior Advisor – a USAID employee - immediately assigned me to work in a district called Tuy Phuoc. This was the rural area surrounding Qui Nhon but not including the city, and was deemed a very pacified district. In fact, it had been included in a CBS news program as a success story - how secure it was. The district capital, a hamlet really, was about 12 kilometers outside of Qui Nhon city. Located there was a small MACV advisory team. I would be the first civilian assigned to that team. And I was given my own vehicle – an International Harvester Scout, much like a small SUV today, reliable but junky.

I was not given any instructions, was just told to go out there and hook up with the MACV team. Tuy Phuoc's district capital was pointed out to me out on the map and I drove off alone. I was told it was very safe, pacified district. But I drove too far and I

ended up coming back on another road from the wrong direction. I saw a Vietnamese soldier and asked him, in my poorly accented Vietnamese, where the district capital was. He said he did not know, probably because he did not understand me. I just kept driving and eventually found it.

The district had about 110,000 people, with about 100 hamlets. It was a beautiful district. Green rice paddies and blue sky with hills north and west. There were tall, perhaps 50 feet, brick temples about 20 kilometers apart constructed by the Cham people about 800 years ago, I was told. Now gone, they were the original inhabitants of central Vietnam.

Some of the hamlets were further out and unoccupied, because they had been leveled by B-52 strikes in 1966. But in most of the district, roads and, bridges were safe and not much affected by the war. The district capital, where the District Chief, a Vietnamese Army Captain, and local government offices were located, had about 2,000 people. The District buildings, a warehouse and a small one-story building for MACV were in a compound surrounded by walls and barbed wire. It was heavily guarded by Binh Dinh Regional Forces (RF). I introduced myself to Major Elden Wright, head of the U.S. Army MACV advisory team, and said I'm here to work with you and the Vietnamese District Chief on civilian matters. The MACV team was already doing some of it, such as distributing U.S.-provided bags of bulgur wheat and construction materials to hamlet and village officials. Major Wright said great but that while there was no room for me to live with them, he said yes, we'd like to have you work here.

Our MACV district unit consisted of eight or nine soldiers - a major, a captain under him who had different responsibilities, a lieutenant who was an intelligence officer, two or three sergeants working on weapons and training of the local forces, a sergeant who was the medic, a private who was radio operator, and me.

Before we move on, one incident worth mentioning I think encapsulated the craziness of the war and my introduction to it. Before arriving in Qui Nhon, I had been sick for over three weeks having eaten something in Saigon that gave me persistent diarrhea. Upon arrival in Qui Nhon, I suffered quietly then finally told a colleague. He took me directly to the Army military hospital where I took seat along the side of the long barracks-like building where a few GIs also waited their turn to see a doctor. We all had minor ailments. Directly across from us perhaps 10 feet away, was a row of about ten emergency beds. It was quiet when I arrived, but after about ten minutes, an alarm went off that helicopters were arriving. They landed and one by one unloaded wounded U.S. Army soldiers groaning and crying in pain. Female nurses immediately attended to them, trying to calm them down verbally and treating their wounds. More wounded GIs arrived and were treated, using up all the beds. It was quite chaotic and in stark contrast to the ailments I and the others in line suffered. Meanwhile, we quietly inched up towards our own doctor as called out next patient. The contrast between me being treated simply for diarrhea and the gravely wounded treated across from me was so stark and would have been funny if it were not so serious. It immediately brought the reality of the war in focus for me.

Anyway, back at the District, while perfectly cordial, I think Major Wright was a little apprehensive to have me move in. But after a few weeks, he agreed. That became my home for almost a year-and-a-half, and soon these guys and others became my friends. There was frequent turnover because the typical Army tour was one year. The officers and enlisted men came and went. But I stayed and over time became the most experienced officer. I experienced a lot of happy but also brutal scenes and in many ways grew up and matured there.

Q: Pretty soon you were the old man.

CHERNENKOFF: That's exactly right. And there were lots of things that went on. I'm trying to remember exactly my time there. I should have done my oral history in 1998, when I first retired since now it was 40 years ago when I was in Vietnam.

But I remember the first task I had in the District was distribution of supplies. Once a week, Vietnamese hamlet and village officials would come to the MACV compound and a sergeant would distribute, according to specific plans, food, cement, or steel enforcing bars for construction. There was a warehouse in the compound where this stuff would be delivered and stored. These were seen as U.S.-owned goods and we distributed it. The sergeant said we're so glad you're here, now you can do this. The warehouse was a complete mess, just a complete pile of bags randomly placed, metal on top of bags, broken items everywhere. It quickly became apparent to me that this was really not right because this stuff actually belongs to the Vietnamese.

I said to the major that I don't think we should be doing this, the Vietnamese should. My Hawaii training kicked in, which is that the Vietnamese should do as much for themselves as they can. So, I wrote a letter to the District Chief, whose name unfortunately I forget, to make it formal that this is his stuff, and from now on they would make distributions. He agreed and the village chiefs began to go to the district chief and who quickly organized a distribution system. About a month later Major Wright and I took a look at the warehouse. It was completely cleaned out, things were in the proper places, the bags were neatly stacked, and there were proper records. Because we had turned the supplies over to them made a huge difference on how it was accounted for, who got it and when and how it was carefully protected. This made a lasting impression on me and a proxy for how the war itself was being conducted. I learned that the more we do for the Vietnamese, the less they will do. Conversely, the more you give them to do, the more they'll do. We did too much of the work and the fighting.

Q: Yes. Well, what was sort of the situation around there?

U.S. and Vietnamese forces pretty much defeated the VC in Tuy Phuoc prior to my arrival. There were said to be only maybe 30 Viet Cong in the entire district. The district was touted on CBS News in 1966. A USIA officer named Frank Scotton was on television describing the situation. A new Government of South Vietnam force called the Revolutionary Development Cadre (RD Cadre) were part of this. Some had been in Tuy Phuoc and left. They all wore black pajamas to counter the Viet Cong image - young men

who were trained specifically to go to hamlets that were on the edge of secure territory to work with local villagers and protect them. There were 59 armed men in each unit. I don't remember why 59 but that was the official number. The RD Cadre would live in some hamlets for six months and "pacify" them, helping with health, small farming techniques, clean water, and to train locals to protect themselves from VC propaganda and attacks. Once the hamlet was "pacified", they would move to another insecure hamlet.

When I arrived, things had really calmed down and it was very quiet. Major Wright said the District compound was secure as well. The District Chief said the fields around the compound were mined so the Viet Cong could never get in.

The District Chief was usually stuck behind his desk. My daily counterpart ultimately became Lt. Ha Van Ngoc with whom I worked closely for the balance of my time in Tuy Phuoc and who became a good friend. We would discuss issues of reconstruction or improvement of schools, roads, village offices, and water flow and then drive out to various sites pretty much every day. We would get in my Scout with him and drive around to see various projects and attend certain events. Sometimes there was no road, and I would ride on the back of a motorcycle he requisitioned. There was always a big ceremony when a project or repair was completed, followed with speeches and a great lunch. The food was always very good and these visits taught me a lot about rural Vietnam.

But some day trips were dangerous. With Lt. Ngoc, I attended a meeting on security in an adjacent district. I did not understand Vietnamese well enough to realize Lt. Ngoc had unintentionally humiliated another Vietnamese officer. After the meeting Lt. Ngoc was sitting in the driver's seat of my Scout and I was next to him, this officer came over to him and pulled out his 45 pistol and started waiving it about. He was clearly agitated. Ngoc apologized profusely and de-escalated the situation. Back at the compound, Ngoc was clearly frightened by what nearly happened. So, I gave him four aspirin with a shot of brandy and told him to go home. The next day he slept very well and felt much better.

On another occasion, we entered a hamlet and were about to have a meeting when a villager came up and whispered that there were VC in the hamlet. We departed immediately.

Meanwhile, we were gaining detailed information on the hamlets we visited and entering it into new computerized Hamlet Evaluation System. This was the brainchild of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and watched over by Robert Komer, a former CIA official who ultimately became Deputy Secretary of Defense. This system was designed to measure how well the war was going. Because it was a war without fronts, there was no objective way to measure progress in the war against the Viet Cong.

Each hamlet was rated monthly based on a detailed list of questions such as condition of housing, security, government programs underway, and then put into a computer system. This would result a score that said it was an A, B, C, or D or worse for Viet Cong. Our

district ratings were always very high for almost all hamlets. Nothing much was happening.

Major Wright filled out the forms himself, and over time I began to provide considerable input into the HES based on my daily travels. The hamlets we visited were all highly rated. But it was a very imperfect rating. Because there were over a hundred hamlets in Tuy Phuoc and dozens of questions, there was no way we could possibly assess the situation in all of those the hamlets each month. But we did the best we could.

My first six months in Tuy Phuoc were very peaceful and nothing regarding security happened. I spent most of my time visiting on-going or planned projects. Just before Christmas 1967, I was asked to go to Seattle to recruit people for USAID to come to Vietnam for jobs just like mine. I flew back and with a couple other USAID officers spent some time with the local press, radio and TV touting the great work available in Vietnam. This gave me the opportunity to see my parents for Christmas and visit friends in California, ensuring them all how safe it was for me in Vietnam.

But while I was away, the Viet Cong surprised everyone one night and largely over-ran the compound, killing the District Chief, in front of his family, and other RF defenders. Our MACV Medic was shot through the chest but survived. The VC blew a hole in the side of the building next to my sleeping quarters. My parked Scout was completely shot up. They were eventually driven out with help from group of South Korean military advisors who had just arrived for a few days of training. But things had changed dramatically.

Q: Was this part of the Tet Offensive?

CHERNENKOFF: No, it was a month before the Tet Offensive. It was almost like a rehearsal. And we were shocked. Everybody was convinced Tuy Phuoc was such a secure place but we were like sitting ducks. People were killed unnecessarily as it was totally unexpected. Major Wright was very depressed because he was told the back area that was supposed to be mined, apparently wasn't. The VC just walked in. Worse yet, he was interviewed a few weeks earlier by Senator Birch Bayh from Indiana giving him a highly positive report on our district. This attack got a lot of attention throughout Vietnam, right when we were supposed to be winning.

Q: In your province, were you getting intelligence reports about what was happening beyond the confines of your district?

CHERNENKOFF: Not really, and about Tet, no. The Tet Offensive occurred on January 31, about six weeks after we were attacked. But nearby Qui Nhon city was attacked as part of the Tet offensive, though the VC there were mostly thrown back fairly quickly. With an RF company commander, I did drive into the city afterwards just to look around. The VC were stubborn and there were still some holdouts fighting in parts of the city. We saw quite a few bodies lying around.

There was an urgent meeting of Binh Dinh province and district senior advisors. Usually, we met every Sunday morning in Qui Nhon. We were quickly updated on the entire state of play throughout Vietnam.

I want to mention one other thing before I forget. After I arrived in Vietnam, the pacification effort was believed not to be going so well in much of the country. President Johnson said something like "damn it, I want Westie (General Westmoreland) to run it all." Essentially what happened is that the military took over all the civilian functions so that I when I arrived in Tuy Phuoc, I was fully integrated into the chain of command. Major Wright was now the District Senior Advisor, my boss, and I was the Deputy District Senior Advisor. He wrote my efficiency report and I in turn wrote the efficiency report of the Captain directly below me. The new name for the new nation-wide effort was called Civil Operations for Rural Development Support (CORDS). All civilians were fully integrated into the military chain of command with General Westmoreland and later General Abrams at the top.

Well, Major Wright's tour ended and left. There were a few weeks when Captain Don Jones and myself, were in charge. We decided we were co-equal managers, he on the military side and me on the development side. Although I technically wrote his efficiency report, providing military advice was his focus. I supported him in any way I could and likewise with me. We got along great. We thought we could do the job without a new DSA, and we did for a while.

He and I now prepared the monthly Hamlet Evaluation System. Because it no longer reflected reality, the overall district rating declined precipitously. Our ratings were much closer to reality regarding security. Apparently, this was noticed immediately in Saigon. A few weeks later, we heard that Gen. Westmoreland himself did not like what we did and was very unhappy about us down-grading the district, notwithstanding the fact we had been overrun by the VC. He was not correct in admonishing us. We were simply reporting it the facts. But we were told not to do that again!

Q: When you were overrun and before that what constituted your defense force?

CHERNENKOFF: Typically, each district compound throughout Vietnam was defended by a company of Regional Forces, perhaps 100 soldiers, who were akin to the National Guard in the U.S. They were local, fairly well-trained forces that also occasionally conducted combat operations against the enemy. They did not just defend the compound. That was the unit MACV team was advising. How the Viet Cong got past them or into the compound I don't know; I wasn't there.

So, the compound wasn't entirely overrun; it was about half overrun. Luckily, there was a small Korean unit had just come in for training and they provided good defensive fire. Because of them, they prevented total over-run and likely saved the lives of the Americans there.

Q: Koreans had an excellent reputation.

CHERNENKOFF: You know, that's another story but I think their reputation was a bit exaggerated based on my time in Tuy Phuoc.

Q: Okay. I'd like to hear that.

CHERNENKOFF: I can only speak from my own experience. In Binh Dinh province, the main military force was not a U.S. army division, it was the ROK (Republic of Korea) Tiger Division. They conducted only one action during my year and a half and seemed to do everything they could to avoid combat and suffered few casualties as far as I knew. As far as I can remember, they did not carry out any operations for about the first year I was in Tuy Phuoc. But they were known to be very proficient in the black market. I myself was asked by a Korean major, who was about to emigrate to the U.S, to exchange a considerable amount of money accumulated in the black market. I declined. A small Korean advisory detachment was located in the compound with which we got along well. They were nice guys who often invited us for meals. We believed the Republic of Korea was largely involved in Vietnam because the U.S. paid them to be there. They were flown from Korea while our troops at least in the beginning came by ships. They were a show of force to the world that the U.S. was not alone fighting communism. I can't speak to what or how well they did in other parts of Binh Dinh, just in Tuy Phuoc and adjacent districts. I'll get back to them later if I could.

Don and I realized that security in Tuy Phuoc was bad and deteriorating. We learned that North Vietnamese troops were moving into our district. The local Viet Cong had suffered quite a few losses during Tet. And for the first time in our district in 1968, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) began to arrive. An NVA battalion of about 400 soldiers began to occupy some hamlets in the northeastern part of our district. I learned later this was true elsewhere in Vietnam due to the heavy losses the VC incurred during Tet.

Villagers began to leave because they anticipated there was going to be fighting. Hundreds of people came out daily. My daily counterpart at the time was a Vietnamese Lieutenant, Ha Van Ngoc. He was a Catholic by the way. He took me to the school not far from the corner from the compound. Several hundred people were just sitting, helpless refugees with nowhere to go. We had a new problem on our hands. Ngoc said the soccer field was the only option for a temporary location. We had tents and firewood and other goods delivered as soon as possible, but it was mess. Even more refugees arrived and ended up living on the soccer field for quite a long time.

We needed to assess the NVA strength. One afternoon, Captain Jones ordered an Army helicopter and he and I flew over the general area where the North Vietnamese were believed to be. We could easily see what happened. They had dug deep holes in the open areas around and between houses in the hamlet -- and they had taken the dirt out, put boards over the holes and piled the dirt back on top of boards. These were effective bomb shelters. We clearly saw a few people trying to hide. After circling a few times, the helicopter pilot said he had seen enough and we flew away. While we didn't stay long, it was clear they were there.

About March 1968 a new District Senior Advisor, Major Buck Yaden arrived and Don and I reverted to our previous roles. His tenure would be in a difficult time. A few weeks after his arrival, the new District Chief, Major Nguyen Don Tue, ordered an RF operation to attack the NVA. The morning of the operation, I put on U.S. Army green khakis which had no markings and went out with a company of RF and most of the MACV advisors to the general area where the NVA were located. As we approached the suspected area, the RF inched forward with a couple of U.S. advisors. To my surprise, one advisor handed me his video camera and said, "film me as I run forward." I did. Almost immediately, NVA started firing at us we approached them. Bullets literally whizzed over our heads, so we hunkered down. Shortly thereafter, the RF pulled back and away out of range. They were likely outnumbered and did not want to engage a superior, main force NVA unit.

A week or so later, there were large booms outside the compound about midnight. The attack on the compound went on until about 4 am. Typically, the Vietcong were known to attack in the dark, do something, and then quickly leave in the dark as they were small in number. Well, these guys weren't leaving. We knew for sure then that this was the NVA. There was a lot of shooting, and on the radio, we identified areas for USAF air strikes almost on top of us. It was really wild, actually. By daylight, it seemed to quiet down. But as we walked out to survey what had happened, bullets started whizzing over our heads and we rushed back into our fortified bunker. There were still a few NVA who weren't caught and were still shooting at us. One was captured, a boy perhaps 17 years old who said he was so hungry. Very sad.

This attack was the final straw. The senior Vietnamese and U.S. officers in Qui Nhon agreed to clear out the NVA. As this was the Korean army's area, they would be responsible for doing something about it. Not the RF; this was too big a project for them.

Don and I were driving a week or so later, and we noticed that around wooden bridges that carried cars or light traffic, there were newly-graded bypasses around these bridges. It became apparent this was done for tanks because tanks would crush the bridges. So, while we figured out what was happening though we were not informed officially until the night before. And sure enough, we got up at daybreak and watched American tanks roll by.

They proceeded towards to the combat area and try to find the North Vietnamese. There were U.S. air strikes in that same area. You could see them in the distance pounding villages where NVA were located. ROK infantry eventually came in, kind of "mopped up," but suffered no casualties. Nor was I aware of any successes or casualties by the U.S. tanks, some of which got stuck in the muddy rice paddies.

In an adjacent District, ROK showed their faces, got a lot of photographs standing by dead bodies which they insisted were killed by infantry but more likely by air strikes judging from the massive holes in the ground. Either way the ROK forces took few if any casualties as far as we knew.

Q: Well, were there sort of fire bases, artillery bases around which you could- I mean, some distance removed but you could call upon if you were-?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. For about six months, there was a U.S. Army artillery unit that was located a few miles up the road from us prior to the NVA attack. I met the Captain who immediately did not like me, mainly I think because I was a civilian. Anyway, the Vietnamese would give us instructions, they would come over and give coordinates to our duty officer. He in turn would call the artillery unit and tell them what the coordinates were and they would fire. Almost every night there was something going on. We were all supposed to take turns doing it. I was living there and they said everybody's supposed to do this and so I did. And one night I did indeed pass coordinates to the artillery which fired some rounds on my instructions. While I was away on leave, the VC attacked the fire base. They suffered some casualties and afterwards decided to pull out entirely.

Q: Did you find yourself having to go out on patrols and all?

CHERNENKOFF: Twice. Once on a night patrol and as I mentioned earlier, on the RF operation to engage the NVA I mentioned before. I didn't have to go but I chose to do so. I wanted to find out what was going on. This was before the North Vietnamese attacked the district compound.

That's another story, by the way. Most of the U.S. troops in Vietnam and certainly around Qui Nhon were support troops and never saw combat. Many would have loved to get souvenirs such as weapons or enemy flags. Only infantry units assigned to a combat role could get Combat Infantry Badges (CIB). It means you came under enemy fire. So, everybody in our little MACV unit got one eventually. Other Army visitors would come in asking if they could partake in something to get a CIB.

But you could get shot at even in broad daylight and not on operations. One day Don and I were driving into Qui Nhon on the main road and someone started shooting at us. We could hear the bullets whizzing over our heads for several minutes. This was in secure area so we thought maybe it was a friendly ARVN or RF soldier playing games with us, though we never found out. It was a bit scary.

Q: What happened when you sent in this downgraded report on your district? You say Westmoreland and others were unhappy.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: Did that have consequences?

CHERNENKOFF: No. Nothing happened, much to our surprise. Nobody was reassigned, nobody was moved or anything and nobody came and chewed us out from the Province - nobody said anything. Westmoreland passed the word down he didn't like this, don't do again. Well, it wasn't entirely clear what he didn't want us to do but he didn't like the fact that Tuy Phuoc went from highly rated district to a significantly lower one in just one

month. I don't honestly remember what level it was but it was pretty low. But we had the facts. We were there; we knew what had happened. So, they didn't force us to change anything. And we didn't.

Q: Well, during this time I imagine your Vietnamese was beginning to pick up, wasn't it?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. I spent all day many times just with Vietnamese, most of whom spoke some English. But I spoke and understood it reasonably well, though many words were military or security related.

Q: What were you getting from the Vietnamese, the district leaders and others?

CHERNENKOFF: My counterparts were in the military and concerned about the war. As long as there were U.S. advisors and resources, I think they felt fairly confident. But they were more concerned when the North Vietnamese arrived. I don't think they feared the Viet Cong because they kind of blew their wad attacking us before Christmas. The North Vietnamese however were a main force army unit, better armed, better trained, and more of them than the VC, so they expressed new concern. Those that had families moved them into Qui Nhon. They had the attitude that this was their job, there's nowhere to go, they can't have a tour that ends like U.S. soldiers have and go back to a safe country. They were just trying to survive. I believe most of the officers were very serious about what they were doing. I think they were very appreciative of our help.

Q: Well, how about your sort of civilian work; what were you able to accomplish?

CHERNENKOFF: Often we would rebuild schools, roads, village offices, small bridges that had been destroyed in battles before I arrived. Sometimes it was new construction to improve roads or improve agriculture with seeds and equipment. From U.S. sources, we would order the cement, iron, and other items and get them to the villagers who needed them. We would go out and, even as tall as I am, would ride on the back of a motorcycle with Lt. Ngoc driving far off main roads to look at hamlets that were damaged, to find out what was needed, including helping refugees. We reacted ad hoc to the problems at hand and we had lots of resources.

On one occasion, refugees from an eastern area told us that they wanted to go back home to reconstruct their homes and lives. Major Tue and I met with several hamlet chiefs who said they needed cash not materials as there were a variety of needs. We thought this was acceptable. Luckily, I learned that the U.S. Army would give me money for such purposes if I just asked for it. So, I did, for \$10,000 in cash. It was quite a large amount of money then. I went to an Army financial office, got approval and a check for it and went to a designated local bank to get \$10,000 equivalent in Vietnamese piastres, which today might be perhaps \$100,000. I gave the money to Major Tue and we met with the hamlet chiefs. At the first meeting, the village chiefs were not prepared to describe their needs in detail and just wanted the money. To his credit, Major Tue sent them home and said come back when they can list in writing their needs and a budget. They did and he doled out a certain amount of cash. We just made-up what to do; that was the solution.

There was also some permanent refugee housing that had to be built. Some folks came from Saigon to help us get it going and we helped to construct permanent housing for permanent refugees. While it was under construction, I was informed by a civilian Vietnamese at the District Office that the builders were shorting on the cement to keep some for themselves. Indeed, it was true. I even shook a wall and it fell, shocking those present. The District Chief admonished me but I think he was embarrassed. Nevertheless, construction quality improved.

Q: Well, then after the second attack what happened?

CHERNENKOFF: The new DSA Major Buck Yaden arrived. He was very Southern and a nice agreeable sort of person. For several months, nothing special happened aside from the run of the mill minor construction problems, nothing in a military sense. One event worth mentioning was when Lt. Ngoc and I were following a heavily loaded ARVN truck back to the District compound. As it crossed a temporary metal bridge (a U.S. Army Bailey bridge put there as the VC had blown up the old one), the bridge simply bent in half and the truck front was barely on the opposite side. This closed the direct route to the District, and I am sure the VC cheered! I told Lt. Ngoc that after we get the truck up, not to carry the same load because the next bridge was also a Bailey bridge. The next morning, Ngoc told me the truck did the same thing to the second bridge. It took 2-3 months for repairs to be made.

Then on a quiet afternoon about 4:00 or 5:00 pm, I was sitting in the MACV common area. There was a lot of noise outside when a jeep pulled up. Major Yaden walked in and was covered with blood. He had been hit with shrapnel all over his body and was bleeding in numerous areas. He and Major Tue had gone out to look at a nearby bridge that was being protected by Popular Forces (PF). These were troops from hamlets who were the lowest level of uniformed military forces. They didn't have much training and they didn't go very far from their hamlets, just a sort of low-level militia. Somebody had put a hand grenade, pulled the pin, put it under a sandbag and put the sandbag in a place where someone would eventually move it.

They just happened to visit this bridge, thought everything was okay, and then somebody, and maybe it was the major, picked it up and the hand grenade went off. Major Yaden was hit with shrapnel in his face, his stomach and other places. He could walk in but immediately laid down, and he was in a lot of pain.

And then the District Chief walked in. He too had been injured, mainly his right thumb. And then one of the sergeants, Sgt. Lopez, walked in. He was in a bit of shock and injured too. He had a lot of shrapnel wounds and was shaking. The injured PF were taken elsewhere.

Immediately, we called a medevac helicopter. The helicopter landed directly in the compound, which it never did before, to take the two Americans. I helped carry the stretcher to the chopper. We never saw Major Yaden again, though he didn't die. After

surgery, he was sent directly back to the U.S. from the hospital. We packed his stuff up and shipped it away. I visited the District Chief in a Vietnamese hospital. He was not too badly hurt but he had a pretty bad injury to his right thumb.

Sgt. Lopez was assigned to U.S. Army hospital in Qui Nhon. When I went to visit him, he was just lying in his bed babbling. I thought this can't be right because he only caught some shrapnel in a few places, and he was talking coherently when he was airlifted. So, I asked the nurse what happened. She said well, he's going to die. She said during the operation they had a bottle of oxygen used for him during surgery and the oxygen bottle went dry. He was without oxygen for an extended period of time and suffered permanent brain damage and he did die.

Q: Oh.

CHERNENKOFF: In the hospital. So, hospital error killed him. And his name is on the Vietnam Memorial simply killed in action. That was a tragic thing. He was a good guy, a nice guy.

As a result, Don and I were briefly back in charge again. Then, sadly for me, Don's tour ended. He was replaced by Captain Finocchio, whose first name I don't recall -- a very nice and capable person.

Q: Did you have to break him in?

CHERNENKOFF: Kind of, in a way. He respected my experience and knowledge. I'd been there over a year, longer than anyone. And even on military things I was starting to give advice. I wasn't trying to take their job but I just knew certain things.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: Especially on relationships with Vietnamese.

One funny story. I was relaxing one evening in the MACV common area when two young Vietnamese officers came to me said we want to talk to you about something. I thought okay, I thought this must be important. So, I walked into their little hut. They were playing guitars and singing American music. They said we don't understand the words being sung in the recording they were playing because they wanted to be able to sing the song in English. The music was "If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear petals in your hair ..." I explained the words and thought, wow, I am really useful now!

Q: Kind of reminds me of when I had a barber here in the U.S. She retired and moved elsewhere, she's Vietnamese and she played the guitar in a country band.

CHERNENKOFF: Oh, yes. Things like that happen, yes. The district chief was Captain Nguyen Don Tue (he was promoted to major later). He was the one who was injured but

he came back after recovering. He and I got along very well. And the Lieutenant Ngoc and I became good buddies. He would commandeer a motorcycle and I would ride on back. We would drive all around Tuy Phuoc into hamlets far back from passable roads.

Q: You must have been quite a sight because you're a tall man right now.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, exactly. I was almost 6 feet 6 inches but 50 pounds lighter. Vietnamese would often say in Vietnamese – “Mr. American’s, he’s very tall!” But I got along with them fine. As a result, my Vietnamese language improved. I would return to the same places I’d been before and I saw people I knew, shaking hands all around. It was a lot of fun, actually, when there was no fighting which was most of the time.

Anyway, in the Spring of 1968, the U.S. artillery battery was still located up the road a few miles. One day, Don’s replacement, Captain Finocchio, said they’re going to fire some defensive flares around us tonight and mark where they would shoot artillery in the event we’re attacked. He was an artillery officer and knew how such things worked. One night, he and I walked out a bit away from the back of the compound in an open field. He sent them exact coordinates. They fired smoke rounds but they went way over our heads and landed in the middle of the houses across the road. And I thought “oh my God.” And while they were only smoke rounds, they could cause damage and even kill. We went back into our compound and decided to go see what happened. We went out with some armed guards and we found that luckily the rounds had landed just in open space. No one was hurt but it scared the hell out of them. I think the Vietnamese were glad we cared enough about them to at least see what happened even though it was still dark.

Captain Finocchio was a great guy to work with. On another occasion he and I were riding in my Scout on a main two-lane road. We happened to be following a single U.S. Army tank with two or three GIs on top of the tank, all with their shirts off. One began shooting at dogs in the distance in a field but over the heads of Vietnamese women walking along the side of the road. They didn’t hit any but scared these women. By the way, the Captain was a dog lover, too. And he was mad and asked me to pull the tank over. So, I drove my vehicle in front of the tank and it stopped. Not something you do every day.

Q: No.

CHERNENKOFF: He got out and they jumped down. Captain Finocchio had been a wrestler and was a very well-built guy. He chewed them out something fierce. He said do not do anything like that ever again, asked for their names and said he was going to report them. I don’t think he ever did but we got in the car and left. To be quite honest, these guys made me nervous as they were a bit disrespectful.

Q: One of the things that used to scare me was driving behind an Army truck with these soldiers in it, American soldiers. Because you knew these were all kids-

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: -and they all had guns-

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: -and ammunition. I'd be driving behind it and oh God, I'd sort of move ahead in traffic.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, for sure. Where were you?

Q: I was at the Embassy. I was Consul General. Yes, '69 to '70. Well now, what about corruption?

CHERNENKOFF: We knew there was pervasive corruption. In the beginning weeks of my time in Tuy Phuoc, Vietnamese officers would come in to order food. Usually it was bulgur wheat, which nobody liked to eat but which they could feed to animals. Sometimes rice or cooking oil was available. The village chiefs would order their stuff, trucks would deliver it to us. One time it rained on these bags and the driver said it's ruined so can we just sell it before it spoils? It hadn't rained that much but some of it was clearly damaged; maybe not all of it but I gave them the one-time permission. Maybe I shouldn't have. A week later, the CIA person in our province told me he knew they sold all that stuff because it wasn't spoiled. I replied that I gave them permission to because it had rained. And he said well, they've been doing that for a long time. So, I learned a lesson, you've got to be careful when you give them stuff, they don't necessarily use it. They might sell it. That was before I turned the entire process over to the District Chief.

On another occasion, Lt. Ngoc reported that there was a massive garbage dump that the U.S. Army used to dump from U.S. facilities around Qui Nhon, and there were a lot of them dumping tons of stuff. A small Vietnamese ARVN unit (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) provided security and an American contractor was charged with managing the dump. Lt. Ngoc heard this Vietnamese unit's officers and his cronies were having North Vietnamese and Vietcong prisoners of war sort through the stuff, pack up and sell the good stuff, which was totally against the rules of war. Lt. Ngoc and I met with the American contractor who knew about this but who seemed not to care. I told him this was against the rules of the contract that the U.S. Government has with you. He just brushed me off. Vietnamese Army officers were enriching themselves illegally using prisoners of war, and selling things not for the benefit of the war effort or for the benefit of the local community but for their own personal profit. I reported this to the Province Senior Advisor, but nothing came of it.

I would like to mention one other thing before I leave this topic. The base for a Vietnamese army division was not far from our compound. I believe it was the 25th ARVN Division. One day I was driving by their base again, and this was fairly early on in my time there, I asked my counterpart where is everybody? He said well, they're not here. He said they're probably in Saigon or somewhere else but definitely not fighting. There were a couple of soldiers maintaining the base. But never once during my time in

Tuy Phuoc did they have full strength and go out on operations. They never did anything, never fought, and never were attacked. They were on paper an armed a Vietnamese Army division in a combat zone that never did anything. They were a ghost division. Soldiers were either AWOL (Absent Without Leave) or purposely doing something else with the full knowledge of senior officers who had to know that they weren't there. Since the ROK (Republic of Korea) Tiger Division was nearby, they must have decided ROK will take care of the main force enemy, allowing us to do our own thing. It was then that I became convinced that the more we, the allies, did for the Vietnamese, certainly in that respect, the less they did for themselves. Why should they get killed when someone else is willing to take a risk? It's just common sense.

Q: Well then, sort of moving beyond this where do we go?

CHERNENKOFF: After Major Yaden was wounded and left, I stayed a little longer in the district. Another major arrived, Major Baker, who happened to be black American. It was a bit unusual, even then, to have a black officer. But he and I got along great. He respected me for my experience –even though I was only 27.

It was fairly peaceful most of time he was there. Nothing serious security-wise happened. But we did have an important visitor. Mr. William Colby had recently been named the Deputy Chief for CORDS (DepCords). He ran the CORDS program nationwide. While we were fully integrated into the military chain of command, he was in charge of CORDS and reported to General Abrams. We introduced him to the Major Tue, and briefed him informally around our kitchen table well into the night. I think he was reasonably impressed with our knowledge of situation in the district. He spent the night with us too trying to learn as much as possible. In the very early morning, he woke me and said thanks for your time and I'll maybe see you in Saigon. As you know, he became Director of the CIA a few years later, a great American.

One thing I remember that troubled me was witnessing torture. One afternoon, our intelligence officer, a U.S. Army Lieutenant, and I saw through a window in a building behind our quarters a civilian with his hands tied behind his back, dangling from the ground in a very painful position. He was believed to be either VC or a sympathizer. We could not interfere and walked away. But I said I totally disapproved because I doubted real evidence could be obtained and because it was just plain wrong. The Lieutenant disagreed and said it worked and was necessary, though it was certainly against U.S. Army policy.

About September 1968, I started to think maybe I'd been out in the field long enough - it was almost a year-and-a-half. I applied for a position in Saigon at MACV Headquarters or Pentagon East in what was then called the Evaluations Branch. The Branch did field trips and reports for the DepCords and other senior officials. It was run by Craig Johnstone, a State Foreign Service officer. I was selected and in September 1968, left Tuy Phuoc with some sadness.

Along with very talented Vietnamese civilians, our job was to do specific field evaluations anywhere in Vietnam, flying Air America as necessary. These reports would supplement what DepCords and others learned from the press, intelligence or what he just picked up on his own traveling. But we were another dependable source of information for him.

One example of an evaluation was to look at the Hamlet Evaluation System back in Binh Dinh Province I had left some months earlier, to see if it was accurate reporting of what was going on. We found considerable grade inflation. In one case we went into a hamlet and saw that the hamlet chief had been shot dead the night before. We walked in and literally stepped over his body. We ourselves would have rated it a D hamlet but the civilian District Advisor insisted and reported it as a B hamlet. I asked how he could call this a B hamlet when the hamlet chief is lying dead and I'm looking at him with a bullet hole in his head? He tried hard to justify his rating because he thought, like a lot of the U.S. advisors also thought, that a low rating reflected on them personally.

Q: Yes. And it was all about the body count and all that.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: I mean, it got highly- everything got highly inflated.

CHERNENKOFF: Absolutely. They were aggregating figures that were absolute nonsense. It was so imperfect and uneven you couldn't possibly get a true picture of the overall situation in Vietnam. Certainly, many advisors reported accurately but not all.

Q: Well, up at the Colby level, were you sorting this out and bringing things down?

CHERNENKOFF: We were trying to do this. Civilians working in this unit were like me with real field experience. We were divided, about six civilians and six Army or Marine officers. The officers who were assigned had not been in the field in Vietnam but they were experienced guys, usually lieutenant colonels and majors. They would often go with us on field trips. We would check on security for example. Someone once came up with a crazy idea that the NVA were coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and were likely to cause a diversionary attack in a border region near the border with Cambodia in the central highlands. So, we went to check it out and we could find no evidence of that. We monitored local elections too, to see that they were being held in a fair way. And we reported on refugee situations. I traveled all over the country to many places, including provinces in the Delta, the highlands – Dalat, Quang Tri and Kontum, and to Da Nang and Hue in I Corps. We visited Hue, very badly damaged, only eight or nine months after Tet. This work was a terrific experience, providing me an overall sense of how well and where the war was going.

Q: Well, back to the time that you're down working at the district level, what were you getting or were you getting anything from the Vietnamese about their government?

CHERNENKOFF: When there were elections at the national level, the Vietnamese seemed not particularly enthusiastic about it. Just two military guys running against each other, Generals Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu. Thieu easily won the election, but there was just general acceptance, not much hope things would change. I doubt there was much national identity. For most rural Vietnamese, I think there was some local identity, mostly at the hamlet level. The more educated and urban Vietnamese as well officers trained in military schools had more of a sense of nation. But I don't think anybody had a sense that South Vietnam, arbitrarily created by the 1954 Geneva Accords was a uniquely different from North Vietnam. There were slight differences amongst south and north Vietnamese of course. The language is slightly different, the accents are different. There were Catholics from the North who had moved South though most of the South was Buddhist. I remember in Tuy Phuoc that there was a Regional Forces unit, RF 448, that was entirely Catholic. Even so, they were all Vietnamese. As for a South Vietnamese national identity, there wasn't much. South Vietnam was a state, not a nation.

Q: Well, what would you say, just to get a feel, for the what Americans picked up and thought about the war?

CHERNENKOFF: While in Tuy Phuoc, all the advisors thought the war was justified. One wondered why we did not fight it like in Korea, just have main force units move north to Hanoi. We had a TV set so we could get some news. There was a one TV channel, just the signal from Saigon and then somehow it was redistributed to Qui Nhon. We got mail, newspapers and magazines and other information. Advisors came and went. Some stayed only a few months. I began understanding that while U.S. advisors were doing a good job, the ARVN should do the heavy lifting but U.S. troops, not the advisors, should be sent home. And I said so, mostly to deaf ears.

Q: What was it like living in the compound?

CHERNENKOFF: At night, we were pretty much locked up. We entertained ourselves or if we had overnight visitors, we'd stay up late and talk to them. The press would sometimes visit since we were so close to Qui Nhon. This included famous journalists Charles Collingwood, Peter Arnett, and a couple of print reporters who spent the night. We once had a visitor from the British embassy who not only stayed the night, he went out a night patrol with a couple advisors and the RF.

There were often patrols at night. Small RF units would go out of the compound to see if they could encounter or even engage VC. I only did that once, spending the night at a hamlet before I left. But this was to an area that had been shot up pretty badly by a U.S. air strike. It was probably fairly safe but I did it as much for the experience as anything.

Our Province Senior Advisor in Qui Nhon in 1967-68 was a senior FSO named Ben Wood. He was a high-ranking Foreign Service Officer, an FS 2 under the old system. He was smart, tough, arrogant and kind of old-fashioned. When I spent the night in the hamlet, and it was near the end of my tour, he came along and brought me a large cake

which we ate in the hamlet. He went on to become DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in New Zealand. I guess that was a bit of a reward for his service in Vietnam, somehow.

We had other visitors. The British Ambassador came once and spent the day with us and we showed him around. And he brought his daughter with him, of all things. It was highly unusual to have a young 19-year-old single woman, reasonably attractive, who kind of caught everybody's attention.

Q: What about food?

CHERNENKOFF: The U.S. Army provided the food such as eggs, meat, cereal, milk and so on from the commissary. We ate well. We later hired a young Vietnamese girl to cook for us. We all chipped in. Once in a while one of the NCOs would cook. We hired other locals to clean and do laundry. They came in during the day and left at night and we were locked up without them at night. During the daytime, however, if we'd visit a hamlet to look at projects, we'd be asked to stay for lunch. The food was always terrific because we were near the coast. There was always fresh fish, shrimp, crabs - largely seafood but also beef. There was always beer and Coca Cola. To be honest, I got sick frequently. But since we had a medic, he would just give me a handful of tetracycline and that always cleared it up. Probably ruined my stomach forever but that's what I did.

Q: So, were you in Saigon from when to when?

CHERNENKOFF: Okay, I was in Saigon from mid-September of '68, went back for a second tour and I ended up finally leaving Saigon for Washington in March 1971.

Q: Where'd you live in Saigon?

CHERNENKOFF: At the end of my first tour, for about five months, I shared a very nice AID-provided house near Tan Son Nhut Airport with three guys who were Hawaii training classmates. For my second tour, I stayed in a one-bedroom apartment also near Tan Son Nhut Airport. Some people were lucky to live in older French colonial houses in the center of Saigon. But as I worked nearby in Pentagon East where the Evaluations Branch was located, the apartment was more convenient. For clarification, while I was officially a USAID employee, USAID was a totally separate entity from CORDS, an entity created specifically for Vietnam. It was downtown and had a totally different role. I was assigned to CORDS and it was located in the huge Pentagon East building by the airport. It was where Gen. Abrams and Mr. Colby and other senior officials had offices. The U.S. Embassy as you know was also located in central Saigon in a beautiful area with tree-lined streets. I was lucky to have a vehicle as I could drive to work and sometimes drove to assignments.

Q: Well then, what was happening in Saigon? I mean, how did you find it? Did you feel it was a part of still the same world as the district or was it completely-?

CHERNENKOFF: It was a completely different world than Tuy Phuoc. People were working regular urban jobs, streets were clogged with traffic, restaurants and bars were plentiful, shops and movie theaters were full. But you couldn't escape the fact that there was a war because there were so many people in the military present everywhere, plus official buildings guarded with soldiers checking IDs. At night you could even hear artillery in the distance shooting defensive fire.

Q: Tracer bullets.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, outgoing. And there was midnight curfew, so there was a lively nightlife until then. There were lots of Vietnamese who appeared to be doing quite well, driving nice cars, wearing expensive clothes and watches who were perfectly happy with the status quo. To them, Saigon was just a normal city to live in. There were still some French residents and wonderful French, Vietnamese, and Chinese restaurants. There were some beautiful tree-lined avenues, with gorgeous French villas. Life could be quite pleasant. I kind of resented those who were unaware or indifferent to the war going on else-where in South Vietnam.

Q: And there's a big, well bar district or what was it called?

CHERNENKOFF: Duong To Do, Liberty Street. It was a street where there were nice shops, hotels, and a lot of bars. A good place to lose your money.

Q: Yes. Well, did you have problems with the money, the exchange? Because when I was there, this is '69 to '70, I was running sort of almost a court martial system called the Irregular Practices Committee, which we were catching people, not Vietnamese but foreigners who were getting money out of the black market and they were going to what we used to call the Bank of India.

CHERNENKOFF: I remember that.

Q: It's often an Indian money lender or someone who would do this. And if we caught them, we couldn't expel anybody but what we'd do is we'd take away all their PX (Post Exchange) privileges and all, which pretty much cut them off at the knees.

CHERNENKOFF: I remember the official piastres rate wasn't very good. I didn't have a super need for piastres, so I just changed it at the regular rate to pay the lady who cleaned my apartment. I generally went to the commissary for my groceries and other supplies and used MPC (Military Payment Certificates). If I went out to a bar or restaurant, I would just get a meal and a drink or two which wasn't all that expensive anyway. I knew there were people cheating. For example, on one occasion, I went to a restaurant with some friends of a friend whom I didn't know very well. They were civilians who had retired from the military and returned to Vietnam to work for a private company. One night they insisted on paying for their restaurant meal with MPC. The waiter said no, but they insisted and insisted until the restaurant finally accepted it. So, there was definitely a black market in currency.

Once in a while, the U.S. Army would stop everything and change MPC currency on short notice. You had to stay in place wherever you were and then exchange all your old MPC and they would give you brand new MPC with different markings in the exact amount. I was on was on working outside Saigon once when they did this. I was totally locked out because we were staying in housing that was not on-base, and so I had to go to the base immediately - I had a meeting or had to go on base for something, to meet somebody, but they wouldn't let me in. Finally, they did let me in; I showed my ID and everything was ok, and I exchanged the currency and left.

Q: I think it was apocryphal but the story about the guys who went out and took Monopoly money and said this is the new thing.

CHERNENKOFF: I never heard that, but it is a good story!

Q: Well, what were you getting during the time you were- you were there during Tet, weren't you?

CHERNENKOFF: I was in Tuy Phuoc district during Tet. Recall that we had been overrun in December, maybe a month or so before Tet. We were not attacked because we'd already been attacked. They ignored us during Tet. Whoever attacked Qui Nhon wasn't interested in attacking us because the Tuy Phuoc District Chief had been killed and the place shot up. At Tet, however, they attacked Qui Nhon. There was serious fighting for a day or two but RF finally drove out the intruders. And as we drove in later, we saw many bodies scattered around. Fighting had just barely ended; there was still a little shooting going on in a few places.

Q: Well then, during the time you were in Saigon, there were no major conflicts?

CHERNENKOFF: Nothing at all.

Q: Rockets; I mean there were sort of homemade rockets that would come in every once in a while.

CHERNENKOFF: Oh, I suppose so but none that ever affected us in any way that I was aware of. At the time there were no NVA nearby and we were was so heavily armed and guarded that there was nothing much the VC could do in a big way as they were burned out due to Tet. I was not aware of anything serious that ever occurred. U.S. military stationed in Saigon could spend an entire one-year tour and never see or hear any action at all.

Q: Did you get out to do any visiting?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. Working in the Evaluations Branch, which was re-named the Pacification Studies Group (PSG), meant lot of in-country travel. We provided our work directly to Mr. Colby. We would go out and do studies on various topics they would

assign such as local elections, refugee situations, and security issues. I did a study once on how a village actually conducts its business. We also conducted the study I mentioned earlier on the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, conducting our own HES back in Binh Dinh province to see if we came up with the same scores as the District advisors. Our findings were much lower than the local advisors. On another occasion, we visited Dalat city, the mountain resort with beautiful French-style hotels surrounding a lake. Frank Wisner was the PSA. It was cooler than I expected and Frank literally took off the sweater he was wearing and loaned it to me. I traveled a lot, always with a Vietnamese counterpart and/or one of the military officers in PSG.

Q: What were you picking up at some of the districts say along the Mekong?

CHERNENKOFF: After Tet, the Mekong Delta had calmed down a lot. There wasn't anything notable going on at that time. Whatever happened at Tet was over. The North Vietnamese were so far from there that South Vietnamese didn't feel threatened by the North Vietnamese. ARVN generals thought they had defeated the Viet Cong and believed it was more secure. However, when you approached the Cambodia border, there were some problem areas possibly with NVA. It was believed by some in MACV that there were still some remnants of the Viet Cong. We learned there were a few VC main force units, not just guerrillas. The VC actually had organized military units and some of them even had uniforms, which was quite remarkable. We visited there a few times, but in 1970-71 couldn't find anything in particular.

Q: How about Quảng Trị in northern South Vietnam?

CHERNENKOFF: I did not go there. That was the northern most province in I Corps, on the border with Vietnam. I did visit Danang and Hue in I Corps. In early 1968, one of the guys in our cycle in Hawaii, Rich Shenck, was killed by a road mine one evening in Quảng Ngãi, the I Corps province just north of Binh Dinh.

In Da Nang we talked to U.S. Marines about what they were doing. The Marines were quite a unique outfit vis-à-vis the Army, with whom they did not particularly, historically, I suppose, get along. They considered themselves a totally different organization and much better than the Army. I admired and liked the Marines a lot; I got along with them very well.

Q: They apparently had a fairly successful outreach program, I recall, sending the medics and all into places.

CHERNENKOFF: They did, that's exactly right. On their initiative, the Marines started their own Civic Action Program (CAP), a social, economic and political hamlet development effort. They would adopt hamlets on the edge of secure zones and work with hamlet people to improve their lives building on the overall CORDS principles. It was similar to what Vietnamese RD cadre we doing elsewhere in the country, but they were doing it themselves, and it seemed successful.

I should mention that a U.S. Army Civic Action Team, two lieutenants and a soldier based in Qui Nhon, would come out every and supplement our work or conduct their own in the District. We worked closely and became great friends, and I even wrote up one officer for a bronze star, which he got!

In our district our medic would go out to a hamlet with advance notice, assuming it was a secure area, and people would line up. He would treat whatever was in front of him, people with cuts or bruises or minor injuries or even broken limbs. I went out a few times with the medic to see what they did and helped him a little bit. Kids would have infections so he would give antibiotics and clean up the wounds and so on. I remember a little boy who had been treated previously by someone for a deep leg cut with a bandage. But the bandage had never been removed and skin had started to grow over the bandage causing infection and pain. The medic removed the bandage properly and disinfected the wound though the boy cried throughout. On another occasion and at the MACV compound, one of our medics removed a growth from the face of an elderly Vietnamese man and put it in a vial for him to take home. While there, the man saw our TV which was on. He had never seen TV before and the look on his face was priceless.

Q: Well, by the time you were getting close to leaving what were you, I mean, you have an awful lot of looking at the situation; what were you seeing?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, I recall that in early 1969 towards the end of my first tour (I did not plan to return for a second tour at that point) Craig Johnstone asked all the Evaluations Officers one day what would happen if the U.S. pulled its military out right away. It's a straight up, simple question he asked everybody in PSG. The near unanimous response especially among the civilians was that South Vietnam would collapse within five years. We concluded that the ARVN wasn't cutting it militarily or politically. There were many exceptions as in Hue, for example, but on average South Vietnam just relied too heavily on the overall U.S. presence believing we were there to bail them out. That was largely the sentiment amongst U.S. government civilians who had been in-country for a while and knew a little bit of the larger picture than troops on the ground might have had. The U.S. military by and large always won their battles, though they often had to repeat battles in the same place. It wasn't a question of U.S. military capability or success. The military by and large had the mentality of "we can do this, we can win, we just need a few more troops, a little more time and we will prevail."

Q: Well then, when you went were you basically a full-scale AID employee by this time?

CHERNENKOFF: No. CORDS guys were all considered limited AID employees. We were hired by AID to go specifically to Vietnam and had limited status. We all had "L's" next to our rank. I was an FSL-6. I received an in-country temporary promotion from seven to six on the old scale, which was a pretty good deal for me because there was more money. And were getting 25 percent Vietnam pay differential. As you knew, everyone in-country, wherever they were located, got the same 25 percent differential, even in Saigon which those working outside Saigon thought was unfair.

I did not plan to return to Vietnam after my first tour ended about April 1969, nor did I ever plan to make a career in AID. After travelling home through Europe, I stopped in Washington and resigned from AID. That was my plan all along. I returned to California where I spent the summer of 1969. It was then that I realized how much I and the U.S. had changed. I was experiencing culture shock. With the strong anti-war movement and with old friends going on with their lives buying houses and having children, I realized I did not fit in very well anywhere. Friends sometimes were more interested in what Johnny Carson had said than to hear much about my experiences. I had a few job interviews with municipal governments, but I soon learned that my heart was still in the challenge in Vietnam and regretted my resignation. A bit sheepishly, I contacted AID Washington (AID/W) personnel to see if they would take me back. Much to my surprise, they quickly agreed. My separation was only a couple of months anyway, kind of like an extended home-leave. AID/W made my temporary promotion permanent and even sent me back my original passport which was not yet shredded!

I returned to Saigon to the Pacification Studies Group. Many of the same military and civilians were still there. And with them for the next year or so I conducted various studies in the field as to how the CORDS pacification effort was going. In fact, where it was being implemented, it was working. Much of the country where I traveled was quiet and free from VC incursions. The VC had been decimated by Tet and some subsequent battles, and by 1969-70 we agreed that the VC could not by themselves win overall victory, at least not while U.S. troops remained. Congressional staffers and academics who visited us seemed to recognize this. Still there was reluctance to pull out U.S. combat troops.

For my last six months in Vietnam, I researched and developed an urban strategy. No one was looking at urban growth in a comprehensive way. This was aimed at getting a handle on the urbanization created and accelerated by the war. It was immense. Many hamlets were devastated by the fighting. While some folks did return when fighting ended, most did not as they had found work and built housing, however shabby, and found life safer and more interesting. It was clear this urbanization was irreversible. We had to take this into account in war and even post-war planning. I received an award from the Government of Vietnam for my efforts.

Q: Today is the 5th of September 2017 with Sid Chernenkoff.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: And Sid, put us in the picture; where are we? What was the feeling that, you know, I know that- I was hearing people talk about how fake the body count was. I mean, all these indicators. How did you all feel about those?

CHERNENKOFF: I cannot speak to body count per se. Body counts were much more related to main force action, not so much in the district where body counts were small by comparison. But as I mentioned before we saw grade inflation as to how well the districts or provinces were pacified, whether they were as highly rated or not. We found that there

was a tendency for that in the computerized HES that DepCORDS Robert Komer had introduced to assess hamlet pacification progress. I saw and also heard there was a tendency for new district advisors, who upon arrival might find his district was a place that was not particularly pacified. But by the end of his time and due to his efforts, his district was more pacified and deserved a higher rating. And then the next advisor would come in and say oh no, this can't be right, this district got to be fixed, and there would be a little dip in the HES rating the cycle would repeat itself. I think it was career enhancing for them to demonstrate real or inflated progress. Nevertheless, it was essential for the U.S. to approximate and provide a picture how the war was going no matter how imperfect the system.

Q: Well, when you left Saigon, how'd you feel about things?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, it's interesting because I didn't have a clue how I felt when I went to Vietnam, but after seven or eight months in the district, I realized that having U.S. (or ROK) combat troops in Vietnam was a big mistake except for advisors. Advising Vietnamese forces is one thing, doing the fighting is totally different. It became clear to me that the more fighting we did on behalf of the Vietnamese the less they did for themselves. We had a visit from our senior civilian III Corps Office in Nha Trang once and I don't remember his name. But he did say that he had been the campaign manager for- I don't remember his first name but Stassen, who was a perennial candidate for president.

Q: Harold Stassen.

CHERNENKOFF: Harold Stassen, thank you. In the '40s and '50s I guess he ran for president three or four times.

Q: He ran all the time, yes. He had been a governor of Wisconsin or Minnesota.

CHERNENKOFF: Could be, yes.

Q: And did very well there.

CHERNENKOFF: Anyway, one day he visited our district and asked me directly what we should do about the war. This was after the Tet offensive. I said I think we should pull out all U.S. main force combat troops out and just leave U.S. Army advisors. Otherwise as long as U.S. combat troops are in Vietnam, we can hold off the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, the war cannot be won. But if we leave, pretty soon security will become a big issue for the Vietnamese. They'll either have to fight or not fight but it's not for us to decide. We've lost a lot of boys here; we've got to think about pulling out. To my surprise, he said he agreed with me. I had changed my opinion quite a bit from the time I had arrived. And I was not against the war per se and not against the South Vietnamese because I knew there were plenty of South Vietnamese who were fighting bravely and effectively, but they were fewer in number than there should have been.

And later working in PSG in Saigon conducting studies around Vietnam just reinforced my opinion. One day, our office chief Craig Johnstone asked us what do we think would happen here in Vietnam if the U.S. forces pulled out. Most of us felt that in five years that it would be taken over- within five years the North would take over. And that's what happened except it wasn't five years, it was only a couple of years. Because the U.S. troops pulled out in '73 and then in '75 there was the collapse.

I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Q: It does, it does.

CHERNENKOFF: Speaking of body counts, I don't want to forget that there was another program called Phoenix. Two civilian guys in PSG did an evaluation of Phoenix. The program was run by the CIA and they used lots of ex-convicts and other miscreants of one kind or another to eliminate the Viet Cong infrastructure by "neutralizing" them. This included capturing or killing them.

Q: This was basically an assassination program.

CHERNENKOFF: For all practical purposes it was, although they did capture some real VC. They were reported phenomenal success rates. The PSG study revealed that a lot of people who were killed and identified as VC may not actually have been VC. They were killed for who knows what reason - old scores, money or just criminal intent. But they were dead, so they were counted. There was inflation in the PHOENIX data just as in HES for sure. More false evidence that we were winning the war.

Let me add before I forget that while I was in Vietnam, I took as many Rest and Recreation (R&R) trips as allowed. These included one-time or even repeat trips to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, and Sydney, Australia. Such trips really opened my eyes to an Asia where there was no fighting and a region with an unlimited future. In Cambodia, I managed to see Angkor Wat just months before the Khmer Rouge took over and with almost no tourists, a fantastic experience.

Finally, let me mention that the Vietnamese PSG staff took me out for lunch just before I departed. They gave me two beautiful antique rice bowls which I treasure. I was very touched. Vietnam has a special place in my heart.

Q: Well then, you left Vietnam, then what?

By the end of my Vietnam tour in March 1971, I had received three job offers in Washington to work in the AID's Latin America bureau. I had not asked for the Latin America bureau; they approached me. And in March 1971, I left Vietnam and moved to Washington. And I didn't speak Spanish at the time.

AID was fully integrated with State and called ARA/LA - American Republics Affairs (from State) and LA (Latin America Bureau) from AID. This was the organization that

implemented President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which provided focused development assistance to all of Latin America and the Caribbean. The head of ARA/LA was the Assistant Secretary of State and his Deputy was AID's Assistant Administrator for Latin America. Desk office directors were almost always State and the deputy would be from AID. Some of the desk officers were AID and the other officers were State.

My first assignment was in AID's program office where program budgets were prioritized and managed among the various USAID missions throughout Latin America. I did this for about two years and frankly hated it. I had received no training and had to learn totally on the job. It mostly involved moving numbers around and some bureaucratic in-fighting.

It was during this time that I learned that my counterpart in Tuy Phuoc, Lt. Ngoc, was killed. He was a very honest man and it cost him. The story was that it was a corrupt village chief he was about to uncover who had him killed using a road mine. I don't know who killed him, but for sure his death was attributed to the war and counted as killed by the VC.

After two years, I managed to get a transfer to the Ecuador-Peru Desk which backstopped the AID missions in those countries. I was very happy to be there. The Office Director was a State officer and the Deputy was a Civil Service AID officer. There was also one State desk officer for Peru, one State officer for Ecuador and me, the Ecuador and Peru AID desk officer. It was a very similar to CORDS in that it was an integrated organization. I found these arrangements generally to work reasonably well and I felt comfortable in that environment. By the way, the office had four secretaries, all female, who did all the typing and filing.

Q: Yes. Well, of course, we're all in the same thing and this division, I mean, we've sort of become specialists.

CHERNENKOFF: That's true.

Q: But at the same time, we're all doing the same bloody work.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, we are. However, I believe there are important differences between State and AID. First, there's a cultural difference in how officers are selected. You are diplomats. Foreign Service officers are selected through difficult written exam and oral exams and then become diplomats. We however are technocrats. AID can't select its officers with a single one-size fits all exam because AID requires multiple functions. We have technical specialists -- agriculture, education, health, economists and generalists, program and project development officers. There's no single exam that could select the best of such people. Second, I think the fundamental purpose of State, if you look at its rock-bottom purpose, is to promote stability. But AID's rock bottom purpose is to promote change. Such differences need to be fully understood by both AID and State as they sometimes come in conflict. Of course, in the final analysis, AID works for State.

You have the final say. The USAID mission director always reports to the ambassador who writes his efficiency report. So, there's never been a question about who the boss is.

Q: How stood relations between Ecuador and Peru because they'd been off and on fighting over some bits of jungle?

CHERNENKOFF: My recollection is that wasn't an issue at the time. But there was the continuing issue of Ecuador seizing U.S. fishing boats fishing for anchovies. Ecuador claimed a 200-mile limit territorial water limit. At that time international limits were, I think, 20 miles and so there was this international dispute about whether U.S. fishing boats were allowed to fish within 200 miles from Ecuador. Well, American boats did fish, were often captured and then taken into port and held. We didn't break out relations with Ecuador but it was a difficult issue. In 1974, I went on a TDY to Ecuador, first to Quito and later to Guayaquil, which is a major city on the coast, we had an AID person stationed there. He was managing an AID project helping getting bank programs for small businesses established in Guayaquil. He took me out on a speedboat with him when I was there on TDY. He pointed to some Ecuadoran small warships docked in the distance and said these are the boats they use to capture our fishing vessels. So, it was clear he was reporting on what he saw as part of his job. But it was a big issue and went on for a few more years, though it was finally resolved.

The other issue with Ecuador was they had a lot of oil, about \$700 million a year in revenues as I recall. They didn't belong to the world cartel in the beginning but they did really have a lot of revenue from oil. AID decided as they are a wealthy country, we need to phase out the AID program. It turned out that the Ecuadorans really liked the AID program, we had good relationships in Quito with the government, and they wanted us to continue. I was visited several times by an Ecuadoran Embassy officer asking for an explanation why we were closing our program. We did phase it back a little. When I finally left my desk assignment, it was still questionable but the program did not close.

Q: Did you get any feel for the- compare and contrast what you saw in the Ecuadoran government and the Vietnamese government.

CHERNENKOFF: Ecuador was not on a wartime footing. For one thing, the Vietnamese people I worked with in Vietnam were largely military officers. Almost everybody was in the military; all the district chiefs, all the province chiefs were military. Only village and hamlet chiefs were civilian, and they were usually older men. Even civilian matters were directed by military officers. Sometimes in Saigon there would be some senior civilians in some positions. I had good relations with them and I found them to be quite capable. But that was the biggest difference with Ecuador; in Ecuador everybody was a civilian and they were very capable, too, especially at the senior level in Quito.

Q: How about with Peru? What were you seeing there?

CHERNENKOFF: A major USAID focus was helping with the aftermath of the massive 1970 earthquake that killed about 70,000 people and left about 800,000 homeless. I

visited coastal and mountain area where it happened. The damage was incredible. The entire sides of high mountains had simply broken off and buried entire villages under what must have been under 100 feet of large rocks. Thousands were displaced and in temporary living conditions. But our regular program continued apace though quite honestly, it's been over 40 years now, I don't remember much of the details of that program. We had a standard USAID program with agriculture, education, family planning, and democracy promotion.

Q: Well, did you find that the Peruvian authorities were responding in a competent manner?

CHERNENKOFF: I think they were competent but they were overwhelmed with the destruction caused by the earthquake and relied almost exclusively on international assistance. I think they were capable - I didn't have enough personal interaction there to quite honestly judge them fairly - but didn't hear of any corruption or anything that was significant.

My time in Washington had its moments but paled in comparison to my time in Vietnam

Q: Well, then what did you do?

CHERNENKOFF: After over four years in Washington, my "L" was dropped and I was ready for an overseas assignment. I picked El Salvador where I would be General Development Officer managing and designing a mixed bag of projects. I attended the Foreign Service Institute for just 16 weeks because I had a little bit of Spanish already. Unfortunately, I should have started from the beginning because my little Spanish was not so good. Yet they placed me in a class of very language-capable State Foreign Service Officers who had high MLAT (Modern Language Aptitude Test) scores. I struggled at the beginning and but more or less caught up with them.

Q: Were you married at the time?

CHERNENKOFF: I was, yes.

Q: Where'd your wife come from? What was her background?

CHERNENKOFF: Harriett was born in Oakland, California, to a Navy family. Her father was a Navy pilot and he was based in Alameda for a couple of years, I believe their next assignment was Pearl Harbor where she spent another two years. It was every two years everywhere, including Guantanamo, Cuba.

Q: Navy.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. She was also in Corpus Christi, Texas, Brunswick, Georgia, and Washington, DC. She attended high school for first two years in Guantanamo, which she absolutely loved, and her final two years at Herndon High School in Fairfax County,

Virginia, and then attended the University of Tennessee. I met her in Washington where she was working as a secretary for the Retired Officers Association. We were married in 1973 at my in-law's small farm near Waterford, Virginia. We have two daughters and four grandsons. Harriett passed away in March 2018 from a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

Q: Did she know any Spanish?

CHERNENKOFF: She knew some from her time in Guantanamo. But when we went to El Salvador, she picked it up quickly. It's interesting how cultures have changed. Most of the people working in the Embassy or the AID Mission were men and so most of the spouses were women. There was Mission wives' club and she immediately became vice president. She had to learn Spanish to be part of that group, as well as for doing various charitable things, and she learned it pretty well. So, it was a good experience for her and it was a nice experience for the family.

Let me tell you a funny story about El Salvador. When I was in Saigon, the Assistant Director for CORDS, a senior position, was a man named George Jacobson. I don't know if you knew him, but he was there a long time.

Q: No, but I know his name. He was very much involved in that.

CHERNENKOFF: I worked for him too. During the 1968 Tet offensive, he was living in the U.S. Embassy compound. Vietcong had breached the barriers and got into the compound; they were running around shooting people and the Marines were trying to find them, of course. He was the guy who was, you may have seen his story in Newsweek and Time, up in the second story with a VC soldier around the corner.

Q: I saw movies of it.

CHERNENKOFF: George Jacobson. Well, the Marines threw him a pistol, he caught it and he shot and killed a VC who was very near him. I worked for him and I knew him well.

Now, fast forward to El Salvador 1978. We heard our AID Mission Director would be getting a new secretary. Her husband is a dependent and was a senior person in Vietnam. It was George Jacobson. I welcomed him and we had him over for dinner and it was great to see him. At 35, I was still not certain about making AID a career, but he told me I was making history. He asked me would I "prefer to be the best used car salesman in Butte Montana or work in places like El Salvador?" He was right about me staying in AID, though I continued to have some doubts.

Shortly after we left post, security deteriorated in El Salvador. They had to evacuate the dependents. Well, he told embassy security people, I'm not your average dependent and I'd like to stay here and help. They said no, you're a dependent, you've got to go, it's

dangerous for dependents. And so, there he was down at the airport with all the women and children being evacuated for his own safety.

Q: You were in El Salvador for how long?

CHERNENKOFF: About two-and-a-half years.

Q: Okay, when you got there what was the situation?

CHERNENKOFF: Peaceful, at least in San Salvador it seemed. El Salvador is a beautiful country with near-perfect weather. During winter, there were a lot of tourists from the U.S. who stayed in the few but very nice hotels. It was mostly quiet except for crime and robberies in some areas. There was a very wealthy upper class (the Fourteen Families), a small middle-class and a very large lower class of both urban and rural poor. The latter remained poor at least in part to their high fertility rate - too many kids, too few jobs. Most houses like ours had bars on windows to protect against crime. There were increasing reports of unrest of one kind or another in some rural areas. Unlike Vietnam, our AID assistance levels were small and could not seriously address the problems facing the country.

A major issue El Salvador faced was what to do about higher world coffee prices that would benefit El Salvador. Coffee prices were at their all-time high for El Salvador, and they did grow quite a bit of very good coffee. But the issues were how to use the new revenues and do the people who basically do the growing and harvesting get a pay raise out of this boon? The rich landowners were making a fortune. Even our U.S. Department of Agriculture advisor at the Embassy said not to give the poor much of a raise because it would "ruin everything", which I didn't quite understand.

There was so little compromise apparent in that country and so little effort on the part of the wealthy to do anything to improve the condition of the vast majority of poor Salvadorans that eventually something had to snap. You could sense the country's tension changing little by little bit. But neither the Government of El Salvador nor the wealthy aristocracy did much. Tension built up, and we began to hear of people being shot here and there. One morning while driving to the Embassy, we saw a body. On another night, we heard some loud gun shots, rapid fire machine gun of some kind. We learned later that a rebel group had killed the Rector of the University. It wasn't making a lot of sense.

Q: What were you doing there?

CHERNENKOFF: I was the General Development officer for AID. AID had agriculture, education, family planning and a few other activities. I managed the projects that did not fit neatly into traditional categories, including a household sample survey, land cadaster, NGO activities and so on. The household sample survey project was implemented by a Department of Census resident staffer. The land cadaster project, which was aimed at determining exact ownership of land throughout the country with property lines and the

like was implemented by a USDA resident expert. Both these guys reported to me. I myself managed the programs with NGOs such as Catholic Relief Services. I designed a project for non-traditional export development, which was turned down, by the way, much to my chagrin. And I had some Peace Corps volunteers and a small cash fund. It was sometimes called the Ambassador's fund, but we were given the money, about \$100,000 each year. Volunteers would find micro-projects which we would fund. I worked closely with CRA which managed the U.S. food program and travelled to rural areas with them. When we travelled, the local head of CRS always took a pistol, a statement about the security in rural El Salvador.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CHERNENKOFF: James Campbell, a Nixon political appointee, was Ambassador when I arrived. But he left a few weeks later. After a gap, he was followed by Ignacio Lozano, a Carter political appointee, and finally Frank Devine, a career officer. Ambassador Devine was a great guy and very accessible. On one occasion there was a consultant doing an economic analysis in Morazán a far eastern Department, where there was some definite unrest. When he finished his study, I met with him about his trip and told him I think the Ambassador would be interested in hearing from you about the conditions out there, how they're deteriorating. So, we went directly to see if Ambassador Devine was in. He was, and we asked to see him without appointment. Ambassador Devine was gracious, appreciated the update, but said he too knew the situation there. With AID in the same building, it was a very nice, cooperative environment. We could access the ambassador or the DCM or pretty much anyone for that matter on a moment's notice. This was a case in point where having the AID Mission mainly located in the Embassy worked beautifully. We got to know everybody well without having to change buildings and/or drive across town.

Q: There had been a civil war there, hadn't there?

CHERNENKOFF: The civil war had not yet started but there had been a war with Honduras before we arrived – known as the soccer war. The fighting came to an end after a year or two but they basically sealed each other's border. There was no movement directly between El Salvador and Honduras at all during the time I was there. You couldn't drive into Honduras with an El Salvador license plate. But I still had my Virginia license plates so I loaned them to friends who wanted to drive directly to Honduras. I never went Honduras but my license plates did a few times.

Q: How did you find the El Salvadorans?

CHERNENKOFF: Great. They were nice people, smart. They were fun to work with. We could visit Ministers of the Interior or Economics and their staffs without any problem. They were very capable. The Minister of the Interior, an army general, was very accessible. He was in charge of urban-municipal affairs and I spent some time with him and his staff discussing a new project for municipal development USAID was considering. And upon my departure, he asked me to come by to see him.

Q: Well did this pay discrepancy in that coffee prices were high and wasn't trickling down to anything; was that- I mean, I'm not quite sure why it would ruin everything except maybe they would ruin the ruling elite or something.

CHERNENKOFF: That's right. The ruling elite was very uncompromising. They did not care about the poor. Though I think the coffee workers did get a small raise. The middle class was small and did not have much power.

I quickly learned how wealthy some people were. On one occasion, I was invited on a trip in-country by one of our local employees who wanted me to meet someone, a woman. He admitted he was an alcoholic and belonged to AA in San Salvador. He said we're going to have lunch with her on her farm. Well, this wasn't just your average farm. This was thousands of acres. It had a guarded gate, a long drive to the one level modern house, which included a huge outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, and their own private zoo with African lions. The family also had an airstrip and two airplanes capable of flying to Miami. These were really wealthy people. At lunch with her and her daughter, I sensed she herself was sympathetic to some social change, though perhaps her family did not. But it was painfully obvious how wealthy they were, exponentially more than average Salvadorans. There were acres of coffee beans trees, fruit trees, oranges; they grew everything. It was a phenomenal, self-sufficient plantation unto its own. On the way back, I saw that there were people living in shacks mile after mile on the highway right-of-way spaces. The contrast between rich and poor was really stark, and you could easily see the current situation was unsustainable.

Q: Within AID is this sort of something that normally one would try to do something about?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, exactly, but we lacked the money to do so with only a few million dollars a year. AID did bring down a University of Chicago professor whose name I forget to see what best to do about these increased oil revenues. He made some recommendations to the GOES. I do believe he was proactive in trying to do something with economic policy help develop the country including providing higher wages to the farmworkers. And that would be an AID priority to do that. But nothing happened as a result during the time I was there.

We left in the Fall of 1978. There was no danger pay, there was nothing that happened specifically to Americans but security began to deteriorate quite dramatically after that. My secretary's husband was killed, a Salvadoran acquaintance was kidnapped, held for ransom, and was later killed, and a local female activist whom I had worked with to develop a project for women was also killed. Things deteriorated very quickly.

Q: You left when?

CHERNENKOFF: Fall of 1978. First, I took the three-month AID Development Studies Program. Directly after, I took the Foreign Service Institute six-month intensive economics course.

Q: Very fine course.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, I'd had some economics training but this was a rigorous, comprehensive course. It consisted of 12 classes with graded Blue Book exams like you would have in at a university, and they were tough. There were about 25 of us, mostly State Department FSOs, three or four AID officers and two from the CIA. I guess it was kind of like going to Catholic school, I survived, finishing in the top half of the class.

Q: Why were you taking this?

CHERNENKOFF: This would raise my level of understanding of economic policy reform in development and which economic policy reforms could best impact developing countries. I also learned to understand International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank programs and how they related to USAID efforts.

Q: Well then, you took the course and then what did you do?

CHERNENKOFF: I was assigned to the Program Office for the Near East Bureau, where I worked on Egypt and other Near East countries program budgets. I was rather unhappy there, and to be honest with you. I didn't much like either my supervisor or the Office Director, both Civil Service employees. At this point in my life I'd been in AID about 14 or 15 years and I still wasn't certain I was going to stay with AID for a career. At 40 years old, I was still wondering what I would do with my life. I was having a miserable time working for a couple of very smart Harvard graduates but who were very indifferent to me and what I might do for them. We just basically pushed program numbers around, prepared budgets and annual Congressional Presentations, and tried to attend project reviews and see how they affected our budget. As I said, I didn't really care much for program work, a lot of it was just moving numbers and bureaucratic infighting: how much do you move here and when, where is the money coming from, this project needs money, this one doesn't. You kind of make judgements on projects a little bit to try to understand. It was day to day, up and down, back and forth. Then once a year we prepared a Congressional Presentation for our upcoming projects. I found that work more interesting.

Q: This is concerning Egypt, was it?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. I was assigned primarily to monitor USAID Egypt's program but I also covered some smaller programs like Oman and a few other smaller activities.

About my third year, I was asked to go out for three weeks to prepare a country assistance strategy for Oman. Oman is a unique place. We didn't have a regular AID mission there, just a joint U.S-Omani joint office, co-chaired by an Omani junior minister

and an AID officer. Oman is a very wealthy country, didn't really need an AID assistance program so it wasn't much of a strategy. Our assistance was provided mostly due to Oman's strategic geographical location. We aimed our funds at participant training and assistance for fishermen. I completed the strategy and enjoyed the time there, but can't say I did anything earthshaking.

Q: Well, what was Oman like when you were there?

CHERNENKOFF: It was run by the same person who's in charge now, the Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said al Said. He attended the University of Southern California. Oman was governed with conservative Muslim principles including how women should dress, but there wasn't sharia. People seemed content. It was very safe. Alcohol was banned though available in restaurants and hotels. Omani men could be seen drinking in the bars. One afternoon we drove some miles out to a Saturday gun market. There were still parts of Oman that seemed to be in the 13th century. Each Saturday they had a market for guns, swords and other weapons. It was quite interesting to see what was for sale. You could buy pretty much anything you wanted in the way of rifles or automatic weapons. It was probably a nice place to serve but was very hot. The swimming pools had shades over them because the water got too hot to swim in.

Q: I spent two-and-a-half years in Bahrain? Dhahran.

CHERNENKOFF: Okay. You know.

Q: On the Gulf.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: It gets a bit warm.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, for sure, yes. So, I can't really say anything aside from this attempt to try to do a strategy for the amount of money we had. It was a political decision to have a program there, not based on need.

Q: Were you at that time using it as building it up into a strategic place to put our military?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, that's right. There was a U.S. Navy base that was going to be constructed somewhere in Oman and we were providing ESF (Economic Support Funds), which is political money, not development assistance. There were very few poor people in the country. There were some people who weren't rich but it wasn't like El Salvador where there were a lot of poor people.

After Oman, I passed through Egypt for about 10 days simply for orientation. USAID in Egypt was AID's largest program and mission with an extensive list of projects. I had field trips to view our activities for crop management and improvement, health, and

housing, visited the Suez Canal, and attended meetings on economic policy reform. Of course, I saw the impressive pyramids and the sphinx and visited the Egyptian museum where I saw King Tut. In a nutshell, it is a fascinating country. Some years later, I was twice offered the Deputy Mission Director's job in Cairo, which I declined but in retrospect perhaps should have taken.

Q: Well, then where'd you go?

CHERNENKOFF: A few months later, I escaped the Near East Bureau and became the Kenya desk officer, which became a much happier experience. The new assignment was a career turning point for me. Had I not acquired that job it's entirely possible I would have left AID. I considered joining my wife in the real estate business or even attending law school. But working on Kenya was fun. Over the next few years, I went out there on TDY three times, each for a month to serve as acting Program Officer, which in the field is a far different job than being a program officer in Washington. There, you can see the results of your decision-making.

There was a great variety of programs for Kenya. The Kenyans were very good to work with. They're smart, they were educated, often in England or the U.S. We had a full menu of assistance programs. There was an agriculture assessment aimed at revitalizing the agriculture sector and we supported Egerton Agriculture University as well. There were excellent family planning and nutrition programs too. We also had ESF (Economic Support Fund) assistance.

Q: ESF stands for what?

CHERNENKOFF: Economic Support Fund. This is usually cash provided for political reasons. The U.S. wanted access to the port at Mombasa so we provided assistance, provided budgetary support to the government of Kenya in return for agriculture reforms to stimulate agriculture production. It was a three-year program though I don't know how it turned out.

Q: Yes, it's supposed to be very good agricultural land.

CHERNENKOFF: It is, yes. And it was fun to go there because of the game parks. I remember that as much as the work. It was a terrific experience.

Q: Did they sell their cattle or I mean, I always think of the cattle is a sign of wealth.

CHERNENKOFF: Sure. For the Maasai tribe, cattle are their lives. They loved them. I didn't see it but I'm told they drink cattle blood for nourishment. Kenya is very tribal and it's always been an issue amongst Kenyans who should be president and lead the country. There were various tribes that were more politically active and more successful in the government but they weren't necessarily the largest tribes. There were a lot of white Kenyans too. The Brits were there in a big way.

Q: Did you live there at all?

CHERNENKOFF: No, I wish I had. But my TDYs were extensive, a month each time. I also went to several World Bank consultative group meetings in Paris with the U.S. delegation on Kenya. That was very rewarding because Kenya was a very good donor recipient and issues with international donors were manageable.

Q: Was there any concern about Islamic fundamentalism?

CHERNENKOFF: Not at that time. The only Kenyan Muslims were on the coast near Mombasa. There were no issues at the time that I knew of, none that I remember. Kenya is a democracy and does have elections, though issues of corruption often surface.

Q: Yes, they just had a presidential election which has been declared null and void.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, that's right, by the Supreme Court.

Q: It does show that there's real life there.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. It's probably the closest thing to democracy in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, except for South Africa, perhaps. But Kenya is a democracy and the core system was reasonably fair. A big problem, though, is the high fertility rate. Their population in the mid-1980s was something like 20 million. Well, now it is nearing 50 million. The population growth rate was around 3.4 percent per year, very high. Women averaged probably eight plus children. Multiple marriages were very common. There was one famous tribal chief whose name was Oletipitip. He had 64 children from eight wives, as I remember. And there were other chiefs who had 30 or more children. Fertility is much lower now but the population will continue to increase, putting pressure on the economy and the beautiful environment.

Q: What about crime there?

CHERNENKOFF: Street crime at night in Nairobi and home burglaries were prevalent, yes. There were lots of idle men in Nairobi who'd come in from the country looking for work. And failing to find it, by the dozens they'd just sit around the hotels or nearby parks. Some AID women had their purses snatched. Houses had safe rooms with a red police light on the roof. Private security guards would respond if there was a break-in or an attempted break-in. You shouldn't walk from the hotel to a restaurant at night, though we did. There weren't too many instances of gangs roughing up people. They wouldn't murder you but they would take everything, even your clothes I heard. Crime was and remains an issue.

In 1984, at the beginning of my Kenya Desk assignment, Ronald Reagan became President. Always, when Republicans come to office, one of the first things they would do was stop funding for family planning or curtail it through the so-called Mexico City Policy, which means AID can't provide funds to NGOs working overseas that provide

abortions or if they advocate for abortion, even with their own funds. It was pretty strong language. It cut off our program at the knees in a number of places.

Q: The reason it's called the Mexico City Policy, there had been a worldwide conference on family planning and we had stated our opposition to abortion.

CHERNENKOFF: That's right. The U.S. delegation was led by Senator Buckley from New York. And it had a severe negative impact on AID family planning efforts.

At this time, the Reagan administration also pushed the private sector and set up an entire bureau called AID/PRE focusing on private enterprise development. We began to do private enterprise strategy statements for every country to try to figure out how to facilitate and promote the private sector. On a TDY to Kenya, I went on a field trip with the Deputy Assistant Administrator for PRE to look at various AID-supported private sector activities. We also reviewed the private sector strategy for Kenya, which turned out to be rather skimpy to be quite honest.

In 1985, I was reassigned as Officer-in-Chief for Somalia and Sudan. I travelled to Somalia with three other people on a TDY to do an overall agriculture assessment. We spent three weeks in Somalia, quite a different place than neighboring Kenya. Somalia was visibly very poor everywhere. Everything seemed to be broken down. The airport was rundown, small, and chaotic. We stayed in decent housing created for TDY visitors. AID employees had modest housing but nothing compared to homes in Nairobi. There were very few nice neighborhoods. The Indian Ocean beach in Mogadishu was beautiful. But it was ruined by the rendering plant that the Soviet Union had built next to the beach which attracted sharks that thrived on the refuse. Nevertheless, Somalis would use the beach and were often attacked by sharks.

We also flew in small chartered aircraft to other places where working to agriculture outposts. In particular, I recall we had experts working to improve cattle and meat production by improving the health habits of cattle.

Q: Bananas too, weren't there?

CHERNENKOFF: Perhaps, but I don't recall that. I was, however, very depressed by the state of the country. It had some potential agricultural but just nothing seemed coordinated anywhere. We had a long interview with the Minister of Agriculture, but while he understood the problems, he was not optimistic. Everybody was for themselves and the country suffered. We debriefed the Ambassador with our dark views. He just shrugged and said "what can you do? You do the best you can but don't expect any miracles here." A USAID worker told me Somalia "isn't the end of the world, but you can see it from here!" When I got back on the plane to go to Kenya, I felt like I was going to a developed country, it was such a dramatic difference.

CHERNENKOFF: In April 1987, I was assigned to Khartoum, Sudan and spent over two years there on "separate maintenance", i.e., without my family. This was because there

was no high school. Being separated was a very stressful time for me. I made many friends but many colleagues had their wives and small children. I often felt like the fifth wheel, socially speaking. I was the Assistant Director for Program and Policy development. While I couldn't escape being in the program office, this time I had a Deputy program officer who handled the daily details of the program budget so I could focus on program strategy.

The USAID Mission was located on the four top floors in one of two fairly new commercial buildings called Kuwaiti Towers. Libyan Airlines occupied offices below, so we always joked that we would never be bombed by supporters of Muammar Qadhafi. In reality one day when I was acting Director, we did get a bomb threat. Embassy security left it to me to decide whether to evacuate and send everyone (over a hundred staff) home. I did not want to take any chances so I did, though no bomb was found.

Q: What was Sudan like at the time?

CHERNENKOFF: Sudan was the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, and was a democracy led by an elected President, Sadiq al-Mahdi. We had a large development program there which included ESF. The ESF was provided to allow U.S. Navy access to the Port of Sudan. There was also considerable strife and starvation in the far south where rebels were fighting for independence from Sudan. The AID Mission was located at the confluence of the Blue and White Nile rivers.

Khartoum was flat and laid out rather nicely with straight roads and traffic circles, though Sudanese sometimes drove in the wrong direction. Some buildings and houses from earlier times were quite attractive. But the infrastructure was completely run-down. Potholes exceeded pavement on many streets. Unlike Nairobi, it was safe to walk around. Since power was out frequently, though, it was difficult to go anywhere at night.

I lived in an oversized house with a large garden on the edge of the White Nile, a spectacular setting. It required a generator and bottled water, but it was located immediately next to the new Embassy Recreation Center with a large swimming pool and lighted tennis courts. The Recreation Center was also the site for the annual Marine Ball which was great fun. I played tennis often, not so much because I enjoyed it but rather that it provided for social gatherings. All U.S. mission houses had security guards. We did not have telephones but were connected to the Marine Guard on duty at the Embassy for security purposes. To call home, I had to order a call in-advance with the AID mission phone operator, and pay for it too.

Khartoum though a large city, was very isolated in those years. You had to fly to get there. Most of the year it got extremely hot as it was on the edge of the Sahara Desert, requiring air-conditioning almost all year. We would often get dust storms called haboobs. A windy storm would appear as if it were going to rain, but it did not rain and would instead just cover everything in dust outside and a fine powder inside. Haboobs were due to increasing desertification and there was no escaping them.

Let me also mention that it did in fact rain, and in 1988 there was a massive flood with water everywhere. It proved almost impossible to get anywhere in the city. The USAID mission was required to relocate as the Kuwaiti Towers lost power. Recovery took weeks as the water was not easily absorbed in the hard clay-like ground. I said to a TDY visitor that Sudan is not for everyone seeking a tour somewhere. She responded bleakly that it wasn't for anyone. Sudan also suffered from plagues of rats and waves of locusts during my time, an experience almost biblical in nature.

Q: What were you working on?

As Assistant Director for Program and Policy, I focused on preparing the very first country strategy ever for Sudan, one that AID/W required. This turned out to be very hard work not only assembling a Mission team to do it but also having them to produce written sections for their respective technical expertise. I very much enjoyed doing this as it helped clarify what needed to be done and how the Mission ought to do it. I also established management reviews for the non-emergency development portfolio. My staff included U.S. staff including a deputy Program Officer who was a whiz with the budget happily for me; an agricultural expert who was on temporary assignment from the USDA (Agriculture Department) and who had excellent Sudanese contacts; and an economist who had been at the World Bank and just rejoined AID, a remarkable employee who progressed later to the highest levels in AID. There were numerous local employees as well. The local Foreign Service Staff (FSN) were very capable, except one who was causing trouble for other local employees and whom I had to fire. I approved one exceptional FSN for long-term university training in the U.S. After a few months there, he dropped out and disappeared into Canada.

There were two parts to Sudan's program. One was the development part that was traditional economic assistance projects funded. It was ESF in payment for base access to the Port of Sudan for U.S. Navy ships. A big program - at one point, hundreds of millions of dollars. It was still a multi-million-dollar program when I was assigned there. And separately, and the part that got the most attention in the U.S., was the food relief program which was focused in southern Sudan. Food was needed because the fighting in the south had driven people north into camps set up by the UN and NGOs. Almost half of our AID mission was focused on relief for the displaced people in South Sudan, hundreds of miles from Khartoum.

I took as many field trips as possible to see what was happening in Sudan. My first trip was a long drive to Gezira, where decades earlier the British had set up a massive irrigated agricultural area largely for cotton production. With irrigation, they were growing all kinds of crops like wheat, cotton and vegetables. But it wasn't economic and had to be subsidized by the GOS. It only accounted for a fraction of crop production in Sudan. However, it did demonstrate agricultural potential.

Another important issue Sudan faced was oil, mainly in the south. AID was not directly involved in oil production, but clearly oil revenues were important to the Sudan. Shell, Chevron and some other companies had multi-million-dollar investment in infrastructure,

and some oil was being exported. As I recall, Sudan's oil was heavy and required importation of oil to remove the heavy oil and requiring expensive treatment to make it marketable. But it was very difficult because it was so close to the fighting.

Stuart, do you want to take a break?

Q: Let's continue.

CHERNENKOFF: Sure. In most places, since the oil companies could not come to agreement with the Sudanese government how to divide the revenues, most facilities, and they were massive, were simply abandoned. Only Chevron had any staff remaining. As my secretary's husband worked for Chevron, I became fairly friendly with the company's people and their plans.

On one occasion, I flew with AID's agriculture officer on a long in-country trip to visit agriculture research stations under construction in four or five different locations. They were quite large stations aimed at providing appropriate assistance to local farmers and to stabilize and promote sustainable agricultural development. We paid for the physical construction. You had to fly to each of these stations. One was in the far west in Darfur, for example. Sudan's so large we flew Nile Safari airways. AID had a standing charter with Nile Safari airline, and we could travel to the far reaches of the country, except the south where there was fighting.

I discovered, much to my surprise, that the Peoples Republic of China was constructing these agriculture stations. They had their own dormitories, cooks, equipment, and soccer fields. I was incredulous and asked how is that possible? Well, I was told, AID had open bidding and they won the bidding. The Chinese lived in dormitories and even brought their own chefs! One Chinese contractor told us "China's not interested in war; we're interested in business now so we're here trying to do what we can to increase business for China."

Q: What next?

After taking a number of trips to various regions of Sudan I began to finalize the USAID strategy. That effort took much of my time, organizing it, getting technical offices to write up various sectors, drafting an overview, working with the Embassy to agree on where we were going to go with Sudan.

Given the considerable size of our resources, we were ordered by Washington to prepare this strategy. Our strategy had three options: Sudan would undertake all recommended economic reforms and receive the maximum assistance we could provide; or it would undertake some reforms and get a proportionate amount of assistance; or it would undertake no reforms and therefore get no aid assistance (except humanitarian) in which case we would consider phasing the program down and out. We shared this with the Ministry of Planning and with the Embassy who both agreed to it. So, we finished the strategy, sent it to Washington and it was easily approved, a bit to my surprise.

Just to clarify, I was the third-ranking person in the AID mission, the Assistant Director for Program and Economic Policy. So, in that position by the end of my first year, we finished the strategy. For most of my second year, I was acting Deputy Mission Director and for several weeks now and then I was also acting AID Mission Director. In that position, the Ambassador and I had to meet with the Prime Minister about our food assistance (PL-480 Title II) being provided to Sudan. Washington believed there was some corruption associated with food distribution and that food was disappearing. So, we met the Prime Minister and basically read to him our instructions from Washington which said they said the Government of Sudan has to clean up act or face cut off of the food program entirely. Sadiq al-Mahdi was the Prime Minister and it was the first time I'd ever met him, but he was very a nice person. However, he wasn't particularly happy about the message and the way we delivered it. It was a strong message. Nevertheless, things reportedly straightened up a little bit later after that.

Q: A question I should have asked, were there problems in Darfur? Because later that became a center of international interest because of the horrors that the Sudanese government was going after the villagers.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, that is true.

Q: But what was happening then?

CHERNENKOFF: In 1987-89, there wasn't an issue, or at least it wasn't apparent. I did fly to Darfur once with our agricultural advisor, and we had lunch with the senior government official in Darfur. But we talked to him generally about the agriculture station under construction and other agricultural issues. As far as I know, there was no major violence at that time.

I must add that upon arrival, we were in the middle of nowhere but landed upon a solid, well-paved asphalt runway. I had expected that it would be a rundown airport but it wasn't. I asked the Sudanese why is the tarmac so good? They said this runway was built by the American Army during World War II. They used it to supply British and American forces fighting in the north of Africa. And it is so dry out there plus it is not used much that they've never had to repair the runway at all. It was in almost exactly the same condition as it was 45 years ago.

We had lunch and talked about agriculture and the agriculture station that was being built there by the Chinese, oddly enough. And it was a general conversation that was so long ago I don't remember much about the details except that it was a pleasant conversation and informing in most ways. We had lunch with him outside and I learned the use of the round decorative straw mats seen everywhere, and I realized that they were to cover food to keep the flies off. That was the first time I saw them in active use. The flies were so numerous we would grab a bite and then cover it up right away before the flies could land.

Q: Okay. Well then-

CHERNENKOFF: On another trip, I flew south to Al-Fasher where there were refugees streaming up from southern Sudan to escape the constant fighting in the south. We didn't have an AID mission in the south of Sudan; we did have a couple of local FSNs who just monitored a few projects from the past and worked the radio back and forth with the main number in Khartoum to provide updates. But we flew most of the way down to judge the refugee situation. USAID-funded NGOs such as Save the Children, Irish aid and the Adventists built a large fenced-off tented camp. USAID's NGO coordinator and I walked into the camp where we were immediately met by smiling refugees, very happy to see us. Children grabbed our fingers and we walked around with four or five small children holding fingers on each hand. Then some ladies came up and started singing. It was really kind of remarkable. They were just happy to be out of the fighting, with shelter and getting food on a regular basis. Their lives had improved so much. This was a moving experience for both of us.

After we finished looking around, we walked across the road to a gate for the NGO compound. I don't remember which NGO but they were running the camp for the refugees. Inside the entrance, the first thing you see there is a big sign that simply "Wash your hands now!" There was a huge sink with soap and water to wash your hands, and we did because we'd been walking around holding hands with refugees.

NGO officials said that more and more refugees were coming, and faster than the food could be delivered. Due to distances, food had to be flown in, a very inefficient process. I saw this on another occasion where a large plane would arrive with USAID food and immediately workers would rush the aircraft, unload it and redistribute it to smaller planes. There were for sure hundreds of thousands of refugees scattered all over southern Sudan and most without adequate food. It was such a large problem and it could not be easily dealt with. In 1988-89, starvation was common. USAID was criticized from Washington for not doing enough although I saw first-hand that we doing the absolute best we could, getting the food delivered as fast as possible. It was just that our ability to deliver food on a timely basis was exceeded by the vast number of refugees in locations so far apart.

Q: Did you have any problems as we had in Somalia of essentially warlords grabbing the supplies?

CHERNENKOFF: I heard further south there were some issues like that but I don't think it was like Somalia. No, I'm not aware that it was as big a problem. There was certainly some theft and there was corruption.

As acting Deputy Director, food provision was under my direct purview though I needed to know more about it. President Carter came out in 1989. He was a frequent visitor to Sudan in those days and we met him and briefly talked to him. The Embassy held a reception where everybody got to meet him. Rosalyn came out as well. I was introduced to him as AID Mission Deputy Director even though I was just acting. As I mentioned,

for the most part I managed the traditional AID programs, not the relief program. But he immediately asked me to explain how well the food programs were working. I had not expected this and was not fully prepared to provide a detailed answer about the food program to the Ex-President of the United States. But I kind of stumbled through a response describing how flying food in was inefficient. Luckily someone else got his attention on something else.

As a parting event, a colleague and I drove around Khartoum taking a video for me to have so I could recall my time there. A very nice gesture, but near the Ambassador's residence, we were pulled over by undercover Sudanese police. Apparently, no video photography was allowed anywhere in Khartoum. When I showed him my Embassy ID, the officer attempted to grab it, but I pulled it away from him, picked up my radio and called the Marine guard. Another car pulled in front of us and a more senior police official intervened and let us go.

I felt good about my time in Sudan, especially my role in the preparation and approval of the Country Strategy and also as a Mission manager while acting as Deputy Mission Director. I made some life-long friends among the USAID and Embassy community. Then, in May 1989, I left. Perhaps three weeks later, the military took over Sudan's government placing Sadiq under house arrest. By U.S. law, because the military had taken over a democratically-elected government, we had to close the AID program. I had left the country, but all the strategy work we did was for naught. However, the relief program remained and still continues to this day. That was pretty much Sudan experience.

Q: Today is the 12th of September 2017 with Sid Chernenkoff. And you've just left Sudan in 1989?

I came back to Washington about June 1989 to begin the year-long LEGIS Fellows Program, where I would find an assignment with a Member of Congress. I wanted to spend some time on Capitol Hill. I know State has a similar program to send people to Capitol Hill.

Q: Pearson.

CHERNENKOFF: Pearson, yes. Congress was so deeply involved in AID's programs it was crazy not to have its own program like Pearson. But I was able to get into a program that was actually run by OPM (Officer of Personnel Management). Participating agencies included the Forestry Department and HHS (Health and Human Services) and other agencies. After a two-week orientation, we were supposed to find our own assignment. We had to prepare a resume, walk the halls on either the Senate side or the House side, and find a Member who would take us on for a year, free of cost. Well, that's easier said than done. Turns out even if you're free they may not hire you.

Q: Room is the problem.

CHERNENKOFF: It's partly that. And it's also that Hill staffers are very protective and defensive of their jobs because they come and go at a moment's notice just because the Member decides he no longer wants them. There's almost no career path up for the staffers. And we show up worrying staffers that we are going to take their jobs, which actually was not the case. For example, I showed up at a Senator's office, don't recall which one, to meet a specific staffer whom I had met in Khartoum while she was with the Congressional Delegation. A rude receptionist said she was in, but she would not even come out to say hello or say she was busy, nothing. This scene especially on the Senate side repeated itself for me with other offices as well.

After going around in circles for about a month I was offered four or five jobs. One was working in Senator John Glenn's office. But they wanted me to work only on Great Lakes shipping so I declined that offer because I wasn't interested in Great Lakes shipping. With some advice from AID's Congressional Affairs office, I was able to get a position with Congressman Matt McHugh a Democrat representing the 27th district of New York. This district covered the lower slice of the state stretching from Ithaca from Binghamton to Kingston, New York.

McHugh was on the House Foreign Operations Subcommittee (HFOSC) and was directly involved with AID. A few years later he nearly became the AID Administrator. He had one staffer, Gary Bombardier who worked primarily on the foreign aid bill and other foreign affairs issues as well. They thought my experience with El Salvador especially useful. They said sure, and I was elated and given a tiny desk but with my own personal computer.

Basically, I was there to learn. Matt said to report to him directly and I saw him every day. I followed the progress of the Foreign Aid Bill and attended hearings and specialized meetings on related subjects. Usually, I usually didn't have to respond to letters from constituents though I did if it was related to what I knew. I also worked on a number of specific things as they came in. And one of the things I worked on was dealing with orphans in Romania. This was a big issue for a while.

Q: Oh, yes.

CHERNENKOFF: On that issue, I wrote a letter for Matt's signature to the AID administrator, and I got the 38 members of Congress on an ad hoc committee dealing with refugees to sign it. Matt was a very well-liked congressman, well-respected. So, his letter prompted a few meetings with the Administrator and it was resolved. This is the problem with doing these things 25 years later. So, I'm sorry I can't remember the exact details on how it played out.

Q: I interviewed the consular officer who was in Bucharest at the time. This is after the fall of Ceausescu. He had this crazy program of making the women have babies and then not really take care of them believing somehow or another it would increase the wealth of the country.

CHERNENKOFF: Well, yes. It backfired and Romania was unable to take care of them.

But I did some other things for Matt. I wrote a couple of speeches about Africa that needed to be heavily edited because there were parts of Africa, I wasn't all that familiar with. I represented his office at meetings such as on El Salvador and health. Constituents from Matt's district, AID people, and even Salvadorans would come in and want to talk to someone on the staff. Often, they would talk to me if it was vaguely related to what I did in AID or what I learned about on the Hill. Sometimes I would interact with House Appropriations Committee staff on budget issues. On one occasion, Elliot Richardson came in to meet the Committee staff, and I sat in on his briefing. He had just been named the President's Special Representative for the Multilateral Aid Initiative (MAI) for the Philippines. I enjoyed my time and asked if I could stay on for another six months, They and AID said sure and so I did for a total of 18 months on the Hill, a very valuable experience.

Also, I got to know our Congressional people on the AID side well. In those days USAID had to notify Congress on every single project. If we increased funding by even a dollar or changed the purpose in some way, we had to notify the Congress. They wanted a full explanation. So, I was constantly looking at what AID sent over, reading the annual Congressional Presentation and reading certain Congressional Notifications (CN) they would send up in the middle of the year to try to get changes approved. I put a hold on a CN from our India Mission as they asked to use an incorrect funding source and had some other issues. They fixed it and re-notified, not knowing that someone from AID on the Hill had put the hold on their project.

Q: How did you find the AID people back in your office, their response to Congress? Because there's been this complaint. I haven't heard it on the AID side but on the regular State Department side that State doesn't do a very good job of liaising.

CHERNENKOFF: Congress feels that way?

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: I did not hear that about State. Matt's superior on the Subcommittee was Chairman Rep. Dave Obey, a powerful Democrat from Wisconsin. I met him once and he told me he had a State person on a Pearson Fellowship who became Ambassador. He seemed to respect the Pearson folks. I got to know the staffers at a personal level, and a few of them remained in touch with me after I returned to AID. AID in general was always kind of afraid that Congress would might turn down specific ideas or projects we've invested time and effort into. They weren't afraid of us, though. But when I returned to AID, I did not have that fear, so my time on the Hill paid off for AID.

Q: Well then, after 18 months where did you go?

CHERNENKOFF: In early 1991, I was assigned for six months to the Asia Bureau as Deputy Director for East Asia. My focus was primarily on the Philippines. The USAID

Philippines program was huge and a World Bank Consultative Group meeting was scheduled for in Hong Kong in a few months. In addition to our regular Development Program, there was an additional effort called the Multilateral Assistance Initiative (MAI), a billion-dollar program over five years. It was the U.S. contribution of a massive World Bank and other donors' efforts to ensure democracy begun under new President Corazon Aquino. The U.S. was especially motivated by keeping naval and air bases in the Philippines. The U.S. head of the MAI was Elliot Richardson, and he was also the head of the U.S. delegation. I was responsible for preparing, in close collaboration with Richardson's office, the U.S. presentation, and I went with him to Hong Kong the Bank meeting.

On the way to Hong Kong, in Seattle, I was upgraded to first class to be seated next to Mr. Richardson. The airline staff, except for one person, did not know who we were. As soon as you get away from Washington D.C., nobody knows the difference between Chernenkoff and Richardson. In Washington they would. As we boarded, I switched passes with his State special assistant, John Forbes, who had been the Political Officer at the Embassy in Manila. As he and I had a great relationship, I said John, just take my pass, you should sit next to him. And then about an hour into the flight, John came back and said Elliot wants you to discuss the briefing book for the meeting. I moved up, much to the chagrin of the flight attendants, and we started to discuss the briefing book my staff had prepared. But the food came almost immediately, and he said let's eat. We had lunch, drank some wine, and even talked about the impending war in Iraq. Then as the lights dimmed, the movie (Ghost) began and he said let's just watch the movie. After the movie ended, I went back and Forbes returned. Though it had little to do with the upcoming meeting, this was a remarkable personal experience with a great American historical figure for me.

The meeting in Hong Kong proved successful as donor pledges in the millions of dollars were made to support the MAI. After the meeting, we all flew to Manila.

Q: Well, what about the Philippines? What was your experience of the capabilities of the country and how things were working there?

CHERNENKOFF: That's a good question because I always admired the Filipinos. They're very capable, cheerful and hardworking. We generally had good working relationships with them especially in WWII. Though USAID had long begun our contribution to the MAI, we ran into opposition by many Philippine Senators who really didn't want the bases to remain, no matter how much money the U.S. would provide. We never did provide the entire billion dollars, much less than half. Our big bases, such as Subic Naval and Clark Air, were eventually closed. Their Senate refused to ratify the new base rights agreement, wanting to end the years of actual or perceived U.S colonial rule. Our Embassy and regular USAID development program continued, however.

Q: Had Mount Pinatubo or however you pronounce it, had that erupted at the time?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. But I was in Washington at the time it erupted. And I'd been to Clark Air Base maybe six months earlier and had noticed Mount Pinatubo. It was very prominent, but we had no expectation it would blow up like it did. The explosion caused a huge ash over much of the Philippines including Manila. Half the USAID mission was evacuated.

Q: Well, that pretty much settled it for us, didn't it?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, the MAI issue was later, but after it the GOP Senate rejected a new base rights agreement, that greatly reduced our program budget. The MAI money we had already obligated for projects was still being spent. Our DA assistance continued onward but was much less than the MAI.

Q: Were there problems in Mindanao with the Muslim uprising?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, in some parts of Mindanao. I visited Mindanao a couple of times where MAI funds were spent on massive infrastructure such as roads, schools and a major airport. For security reasons, USAID worked only in the far south. Further north and up the coast there were some areas that we were advised not to visit because they were considered less secure. General Santos City was starting to boom and MAI was a visually successful activity. How it is today I don't know. But at the time Filipinos were reasonably content with what we were doing.

In Palawan, USAID supported a nursing school. We paid for construction and technical assistance for training. The nursing school had several hundred Filipino nurses. And upon graduation almost all of the nurses immediately emigrated to the U.S.

Q: I know, I'm in a retirement home and we have a nursing section and a good percentage of them have Philippine backgrounds. And after that?

About September 1991, I was named Director of the Office for South Asian Affairs and flew to India and Pakistan where for orientation tours and briefings. I had also been promoted to Counselor, Senior Foreign Service and was also in AID's senior Management Group (SMG).

It was a very interesting time to be in India. With the Deputy AID Mission Director, I was given an in-country tour. We flew from New Delhi to what was then called Bombay and looked at some AID activities. One evening we walked around the red-light district of Bombay. The very beginning of HIV/AIDS was starting to appear in India. A local Indian doctor named Ishmar Gilada who worked for a local NGO, guided us around the port and the red-light district of Bombay. This was an incredible, almost indescribable scene. It's not like anything you would ever imagine.

First, we went to the port, where the source of the HIV/AIDS was located. The disease and heroin were brought in by sailors. Sailors would come off ships, themselves already infected with HIV, and they would have intercourse or homosexual sex with Indians

onshore who in turn became infected. At the port, a dozen or so men, mostly not Indians, were injecting themselves right in front of us. They told us where to stand because certain areas were marked where they defecated. They were startled to see us but they knew Dr. Gilada well as he brought clean needles for them. Yet the disease had already spread beyond the port to the red-light district as well. Moreover, because many of the men who frequented the red-light district were truck drivers, and they would in turn get infected, drive across the country and infect others. They were all willing to talk to us. Dr. Gilada said the Indian government denied that this is happening.

Q: That's how it spread through Africa particularly.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. Next, we went to the red-light district where there were thousands of prostitutes scattered over many city blocks. It was remarkably well-organized by price for services, though dimly lit and very dirty. Higher-priced prostitutes worked in decent houses. Lower priced prostitutes were located in rundown buildings. And there were women who stayed in tiny but neatly lined up shack in rows along the gutters. Men knew exactly where to go depending on how much money they wanted to spend - it was a shopping area and quite unique. There was even an area exclusively for gays and transvestites.

Dr. Gilada said the Indian government did not help at this point; HIV/AIDS just doesn't exist as far as they were concerned. We talked to a person who was a transvestite or perhaps transsexual. That person said he or she was infected with HIV/AIDS and didn't expect to live long. He then introduced us to someone nearby who was clearly dying; she was sitting, could not stand up and wasn't able to talk to us. I'm certain she had no more than a few days or a week to live. It made a huge impression on us. And there was but a single Indian doctor trying to sound the alarm in India.

One other scene left a deep impression on me. Dr. Gilada took us to a primary school located down a very dim alley. In a single room, school-age children of prostitutes were being taught by a volunteer teacher. She had them sing a song for us. It was very touching and truly a special moment.

Q: Where stood the gay HIV situation at this time in the States?

CHERNENKOFF: This was 1991. HIV/AIDS was not yet well-known. I'm not the right person to talk about the history of HIV/AIDS but there was a belief in India that this was only a gay disease that existed elsewhere, in Africa or the United States, but not in India. However, Indians were starting to get sick from HIV/AIDS.

Coincidentally, when I returned to Washington, I happened to fly back on the very same airplane with Dr. Gilada who was travelling to Washington to talk to some people on Capitol Hill. I asked him to speak to our AID Washington staff. So, I organized a meeting in the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Asia's office. There were half a dozen other people from AID. And I have to admit, much to my chagrin, there was very lukewarm

interest in the subject. We had the meeting and that was it. There were few questions and no acknowledgement that this is an important issue, none at all.

Q: This is before sort of America had geared up on this?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, long before George W. Bush decided to do the (U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) PEPFAR in the 2000's. I was surprised at the lack of interest. Some years later at the weekly meeting of the Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, I raised the issue of HIV/AIDS in India. The response by the Interagency folks was pretty much ho hum - let's move on and talk about the Secretary's visit to somewhere. I found that quite remarkable.

A few years later, we did have we did attempt at providing new money, \$10 million, to Pakistan notwithstanding the Pressler Amendment which Congress had authorized to close the AID program. We asked the acting AID administrator to include a portion for HIV/AIDS as well. But he struck it out. AID too did not have much interest, to put it mildly.

Q: I might point out that at this stage, correct me if I'm wrong, but today there are drugs and all that you can take, that cannot cure the people, but keep them from in other words from dying.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: But early on there was nothing.

CHERNENKOFF: Nothing. Well, this was 1991 and most people didn't even have a clue what HIV/AIDS was. Or if they did, they assumed it was limited to homosexuals. Well, in this case it wasn't at all. There might have been- I won't say there were none but it was primarily heterosexual transmission from drugs and from heterosexual sex.

Q: Needles and all that.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, dirty needles. As I mentioned, Dr. Gilada brought a bunch of clean needles there and left them for the guys at the port. That was part of his small program, to give them clean needles and collect the old ones. The problem was going to be way bigger than what he could do with his little efforts.

Next, we took a train from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Pune, about 150 miles from the coast. And it was a pretty sizeable city, probably under a million people. AID had a project helping start small businesses. One such business started by a couple of locals was to develop robots, build them, test them so they could begin sell them in India to other businesses that could use them. It was quite impressive; they showed us a robot that was doing some repetitive motions. It was a small facility that built them and tested them and they were going to be selling them soon. So, I asked what I thought was an obvious question: why would you build robots in a country with so much cheap labor? The

businessman explained that there are many items produced that require specific, exact measurements. They have to be produced with exactly the same measurements, time after time after time. Human beings can't do that kind of precise work. If businesses need sophisticated measurements of any kind it's better to have robots do it than humans. He convinced me it was a good idea. India's come a long way since then.

After a week, I flew to Pakistan. You could not fly directly from Delhi to Islamabad because the Indians and the Pakistanis weren't getting along. And so, I flew to Lahore from Delhi and I had to change planes and then fly to Islamabad. It was kind of silly but they just didn't get along in those days, still don't.

In Islamabad, I stayed in the Holiday Inn hotel. When I arrived, I was too late for dinner so I just ordered room service, including two bottles of beer. I was a little surprised because you can't get beer as a rule in a temperate state like Pakistan. Room service delivered my food and beer. You can drink beer, brewed in Pakistan, in a hotel, but you have to sign a registry stating that you're an alcoholic admitting you need to have alcohol in order to function. I signed this book, though I'm not an alcoholic, and looked at the other names. I didn't see anybody's name I recognized but there were Koreans, Americans, Germans, and others who had signed this stupid book. This kind of reflected the kind of society Pakistan was, loopholes for behavior.

At this time, Pakistan had the largest AID program, outside of Egypt, in the world. But due to Senator Pressler's amendment to the foreign aid bill, the program was required to phase out. This was because the president could not certify that Pakistan did not have a nuclear weapon. The same standard was not applied to India which I never quite understood. There was some convoluted explanation why it wasn't. But it was clear that the program in Pakistan had to be phased down.

AID over the years had spent a fortune in Pakistan. I visited programs that were huge. For example, we built an entire agriculture university near Peshawar. We built substations for electricity. AID even had a large crop substitution program for opium. We were trying to convince farmers and help them grow something other than poppies and some of them did. We were spending a fortune around the country. Later in my time, not on that trip, I ended up going back as acting Mission Director as we were phasing the AID program down. Even then the pipeline (obligated but not expended funds) was \$700 million.

This was a billion-dollar plus program at one point. And it would continue to occupy my time for years. The main issue I worked on for three years was the phase-out of the program in Pakistan. To make matters worse with our relationship with Pakistan, there was an Agency-wide budget rescission whereby we were taking money back that we had already obligated but not yet expended, which we could do legally pursuant to the fine print in the obligating document.

In 1994, I flew out to Islamabad, and with the Ambassador met to with the top special assistant to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. We explained to him that not only are we phasing out we're going to accelerate it and take back money we have already obligated.

He accepted it very well I must say. I also spent some time with General Electric folks who were involved in such a project. But they too accepted the reality without objection.

The Pressler Amendment was a mistake. It is good we have resumed aid. Pakistan is a very large, complex country, and the Pakistanis are capable people. It's quite a different from India, but it is in our security interest to have good relations with them. We have to take them seriously. They have a nuclear weapon, they have a huge, growing population, and in the years past we've had very successful programs there.

Q: Well, I frankly can't recall why there was this double standard.

CHERNENKOFF: I don't either. Pakistan was a program large in its own right not only due to its poverty but also because of the concerns about instability in the region.

When I was acting Director in Islamabad, USAID projects were still being implemented from the \$700 million pipeline. But as they ended, staff were leaving. Every week, there was a good-bye party for an American direct-hire employee or a Foreign Service national. It was sad and depressing.

Q: Well, were you able to take a look at what we had done in Pakistan? Can you talk a bit about what had been accomplished?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. There was a lot going on. We had been spending money on construction a lot because the program was so large and that's an easy and visible way to spend money. We built an entire agriculture university outside of Peshawar, for example, which was quite large, a very successful project I'm told, even now running well. We financed electrification and road construction too. We even had a crop substitution program with heavy subsidies that was aimed at trying to convince Pakistani farmers to grow crops that were profitable but not poppies for heroin.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: That's a tough sell. But we did visit farmers who were participating. Some of them were motivated by profit and a few of them were motivated by doing the right thing because they knew what heroin did, what the final outcome of producing heroin is. So, that was fairly impressive but unsustainable without our subsidies.

We also built some electricity substations to expand electrification. And there were activities that provided technical assistance in agriculture, health and education. We didn't have much family planning although Pakistan desperately needed that.

Anyway, the budget rescission fallout continued for some time. After my return from Pakistan, along with an AID legislative affairs officer, I had to go to Capitol Hill to debrief a senior Senate Appropriations Committee staffer, named Jim Bond. He was notorious for being a bully, a screamer, shouter, who slammed his fist on the table and tried to intimidate people. An AID legislative liaison and I tried to explain what had

happened in Pakistan about the budget rescission and to confirm that we had talked to General Electric. He asked firmly did you talk to General Electric? I said yes, I did. Doubting me, he picked up the phone and immediately called General Electric. They said yes, I had, it's okay with them, so he hung up. He was sort of deflated because he thought he caught us, but he didn't because we had done our job correctly. I think we earned his respect and the debrief went fairly well after that.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: So, the budget rescission was a two-year effort on top of the Pressler phase-out. There was still money that had not been spent.

Q: Yes, but basically you were able to continue those things that really had to be continued.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, absolutely. Congress agreed we could have four years to phase-out. We tried to complete the programs all the way to their scheduled completion date.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: We tried to protect as best we could notwithstanding the budget rescission to carry them to the end. We were careful in taking funds back that were, we felt, from projects that were less productive than those that were succeeding, kind of a balancing act. It irritated some technical folks because they felt their projects were successful.

Q: Oh, of course.

CHERNENKOFF: Meanwhile, and contrary to the Pressler phase-out, Congress allowed providing up to \$10 million in new money to Pakistan for NGOs, i.e., to work with local organizations that were really doing good work. The \$10 million would be scattered through many organizations. But the GOP (Government of Pakistan) did not trust the NGOs, saying we don't know who they are and may be face groups for terrorist organizations. And so, we dropped the effort.

There was a later attempt on our part to try to address an unfilled demand for family planning and that effort too died in Washington on the House side particularly, among Congressman Dave Obey and his staff. They never really explained why they didn't want family planning but my suspicion was that they didn't think family planning was a high priority and as Catholics they weren't interested in it. They never said that but I always suspected that because it was a harmless proposal.

Q: Well, I mean, it's always, I mean, it's a terribly political issue.

CHERNENKOFF: Right.

Q: Has nothing- it has to do with faith.

CHERNENKOFF: That's entirely right. Family planning is a development activity in my mind but some people think it's not. I think the family planning effort lost its way in AID when Bill Clinton became president. It shifted to a focus on women's reproductive rights away from reducing population growth. It had much higher development priority in the 1970s, under George H.W. Bush and even with Reagan to a certain extent. But under Clinton, it became more of a women's health issue than a development issue. Family planning is a way of keeping development problems under control in terms of how big they are. And many women desperately want the option of determining how many children they have. Even in developing countries, I think it's fair to say that most women have more children than they want. Anyway, that's a very sensitive issue and I guess that's enough said on that.

Though the AID program was being phased out, in Spring 1997 I was asked to be the Head of the U.S. delegation to the World Bank Consultative Group meeting for Pakistan in Paris. To be fully honest, I was the only member of the delegation since we were not pledging any new money and were phasing out because of the Pressler Amendment. But I did make an oral statement, largely drafted by the Embassy in Islamabad, to which I added a few sentences that stated the United States had provided over \$6 billion in all forms of non-military assistance. My official presence also confirmed that Pakistan was still highly important to us.

Q: Even today some people call it the equivalent of a failed state.

CHERNENKOFF: True. But if Britain hadn't colonized South Asia there would have been multiple states there, perhaps 10-20 countries, and we'd have had an embassy and AID programs in every one of them. But forcing them into these artificial boxes and to try to deal with the aggregate is very difficult. The Pakistani and Indian governments are juggling all these competing nationalist pressures, from Kashmir to Punjab to the Northwest Territories, they think of themselves pretty much as their own countries.

CHERNENKOFF: Going back a bit, when I first got the job as Director for South Asian Affairs there was a USAID Asia Mission Director's conference, our first under the Bush administration. There would be considerable change in the political dynamic pretty much everywhere. In planning the conference, I said I think it might be useful to have a panel discussion for what the end of the Cold War means for AID missions in East and South Asia. I organized a panel of four experts on the region to make a presentation and answer questions. I wanted to get someone from the Hill, someone from private sector, somebody from the press, somebody from elsewhere. So, my first thought was to maybe I could ask William Colby, the former director of the CIA, whom I knew in Vietnam and worked indirectly for him. I knew him on a personal level. So, I picked up the phone, I didn't know his phone number; I got the phonebook out, looked up his name, there it is. Called him, he picked up the phone. I said we're having a panel discussion on Asia; would you like to come and speak? He said sure.

Then I called “The Washington Post” foreign affairs correspondent. They had someone who covered the State Department for “The Washington Post” and I’m afraid I don’t remember his name now. I called him and he too agreed.

Q: It wasn’t Don Oberdorfer, was it?

CHERNENKOFF: No, but did I meet Oberdorfer in Vietnam. He visited my district and I drove him around Tuy Phuoc a bit.

Then I called head of the staff of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He too accepted. I didn’t know him when working on Capitol Hill but I thought he’s a Democrat and would accept. Finally, someone from private sector who was a vice president of a corporation that worked in Asia also accepted. I am sorry I cannot remember their names but it all worked out fine. We had a very interesting discussion and I got a lot of kudos for that. I might add. It was surprisingly easy to put together, and at no cost. It proved very informative for our Mission directors working in the field to hear other perspectives about changes in Asia.

Q: What else was going on?

CHERNENKOFF: A big difficulty facing AID staff in the Clinton era was with the efforts of the Assistant Administrator for Management, Larry Byrne. He was the Administrator’s key aide for reorganizing, called “right-sizing.” Over time, most of AID’s career staff thought that he was destroying the AID program. Even though he was a Democratic appointee, and most of AID career staff voted for Clinton, his approach was brutal. He aimed to cut out entire AID missions, he wanted to reduce the number of AID missions in countries abroad, he wanted to cut staff, and he generally mistreated people in the sense that his approach seemed arbitrary. He did not pick on individuals but rather cut wide swaths across Missions, staff, and programs, but without input from the folks in the field. Consequently, he really angered many Mission Directors in AID.

An all Asia USAID Mission Directors conference was held about that time. It was interesting how people would talk privately and complain vociferously about Byrne but not publicly. The Directors came in from South and East Asia, and there were probably 15 or 20 other senior officers. Larry Byrne was invited and gave a speech. He was very intimidating in some ways. After, he opened it up for questions but there it was just a long silence at first. Nobody raised their hand. Eventually, a few people made some mild statements, but it was clear they were intimidated by him. It was very disappointing, and nothing much changed as a result. if you have a problem and you’ve been complaining about these problems privately that is affecting your programs, that is negatively affecting your staff and your ability to get the job done then say it to the man.

Q: Well, it might be that you don’t stand up in a meeting like that, you don’t want to- the feeling was you wouldn’t want to draw attention to your mission or yourself.

CHERNENKOFF: Maybe that was it. But I think a little bit of courage might have paid off. I expected more from them as he impacted their programs and staff negatively.

Moreover, about 1994, AID Administrator Brian Atwood had insisted at an all-Agency meeting that despite pressures to reduce the size of AID staff, there would not be a Reduction-in-Force (RIF). But by 1996, he was forced to backtrack his comments and conduct a RIF anyway. A point system was used. Points were used based on years in the Agency, years in hardship posts, any awards received, and professional back stop. If you were in agriculture, engineering or education you were in trouble because AID was cutting staff in those programs. If you were in health, or program and project development areas you were in less trouble. It was a very unfair for those technical folks especially many of whom had many successful years in the Agency.

I had accumulated a lot of points and was not at risk. But I did have to take part in firing people. I say with the Bureau Executive Officer while she informed officers they were being separated from the Agency. That was not a pleasant task.

Q: No, of course not! Were there other trips to the region?

I visited Sri Lanka twice, once as acting Mission Director for month in 1995. At the time, Sri Lanka was another interesting, much better developed country than others in South Asia. They had had a socialist government for some time and had high health and education standards but low economic growth. More recently, Sri Lanka became more capitalistic and western-oriented as well as a tourist destination. AID supported that movement, providing training and technical assistance. Literacy and health standards were high. The family planning program with our help in particular was working very well, resulting in a very low fertility rate. And people were economically better off than in most other parts of South Asia.

But the main issue was the separatist movement in the north. Separatists called Tigers were seeking regional independence and they caused some serious damage and civilian deaths. I could not travel to the northern area. But Sri Lanka was a very interesting place to visit and I learned a lot about what can be done in developing countries. It was a good model. But my time there was spent on program orientation and general management – nothing exciting happened.

In 1996, there was a huge USAID personnel issue in Nepal. The Assistant Administrator (AA), I and another office director went to Nepal to deal with it. We ended up firing both the Mission Director and the Deputy Mission Director. It was made worse because they were both black Americans. So, it was really sensitive issue. But the AID mission staff, both direct hire and local employees, was in an uproar about Mission management or lack of it. Many Staff were threatening to resign, local employees said they were embarrassed to work for USAID. It was necessary to find out what was going on. We spent 10 days there and while we did see some impressive AID programs, the main issue was to figure out what to do about the Mission and Deputy Directors. The AA finally decided that she would tell them both that they were being fired and then someone else would be brought

in temporarily to act. They were both relieved of their duties. The Director left first and then the Deputy later. But the Deputy was not happy about it and she tried to file some sort of an action of which I was not a part, luckily.

Q: Well, what was the problem? I mean, what had you seen?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, it was hard for me to see. Staff claimed the Director didn't have a strategic approach to anything didn't know what he was doing, was favoring some people over others in the distribution of resources, and totally neglecting others. Dissatisfaction was felt uniformly across Mission staff. It wasn't just AID direct-hire employees, the Foreign Service Nationals (FSN) felt the same. In fact, they told us - we met with many FSN's separately - that they were embarrassed to attend meetings around Kathmandu representing the AID mission because of the Director. Now, I won't swear there was no racial bias involved but nobody said that. I was a little surprised the AA decided to fire them both. I thought perhaps at least one of them, probably the Deputy, should have stayed but it wasn't for me to decide. The AA decided that was the route we'd take.

Q: This was more personality?

CHERNENKOFF: I think it was poor management and technical decisions that didn't make sense.

There were some very good programs in Nepal. One was called Social Forestry. Forests were protected and saved from deforestation by local farmers who were basically subsidized to protect those areas and keep them from being deforested for crops. We visited that area, near India. A highlight of that trip was that we rode on elephants through the forests. I had never ridden an elephant before or since, but after an hour it was plenty for me. We were going through bushes and shrubs and I was literally getting grass stains on my pants because we were going so fast, crushing through trees on these elephants. Yale University was implementing the project. I didn't even know Yale had a forestry school.

Q: Well, what was going on in Washington?

As part of my job as Director for South Asian Affairs, I attended the weekly inter-Agency staff meeting of the Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia (AS/SA), who at that time was Robin Raphael. State, USIS, AID, Arms Control and Disarmament person (ACDA), Pentagon, and some other Agencies usually attended. Most of the time and though polite, they usually were not very interested when I talked about AID issues, including when I mentioned HIV/AIDS. But when the RIF was announced, to her credit, AS/SA asked me to make a statement about it to her full staff. She said that AID people were our friends and colleagues with families and this was a serious matter.

Shortly thereafter, the Office of South Asian Affairs and Office of East Asian Affairs were merged and I became the Director for both East and South Asian Affairs. And I began to attend the AS for East Asia weekly meetings as well.

With these new responsibilities, in 1996 I went on TDY to the Philippines and Cambodia. I'd been only to Cambodia once in 1970 on an R&R (Rest and Recreation) from Vietnam when Prince Sihanouk had just been deposed. Anyway, in 1996, Cambodia was still recovering from its horrible experience with the Khmer Rouge. For six months or so before the Khmer Rouge (KR) took over, travel was unrestricted. With an AID colleague, I visited Angkor Wat and other spectacular temples. Such a beautiful place covering a wide area, and with very few tourists at that time. Air France was building an airport at Siem Reap for direct flight from Paris. We were lucky to visit just in that window of time, and it was really impressive.

By 1996, Cambodia had changed quite a bit. It's a beautiful country, well worth visiting. In Phnom Penh there was considerable construction of hotels and businesses. I stayed in the Holiday Inn. Other hotels were going up. The center of town has colonial French architecture with tree-lined, wide streets and French-style homes. Like central Saigon but a smaller version.

But evidence of the brutal KR regime was everywhere. We went to northwestern Cambodia where there was an AID and other donor demining project. The KR had mined the area extensively. The project was quite remarkable. Dogs were being trained to sniff out explosives and areas still not demined were clearly marked. It was a never-ending problem. I'm sure it's going on today in some form because there were many millions of mines. Later, I visited a specialized workshop in Phnom Penh where prosthetic devices were being constructed. AID had provided a grant to Vietnam Veterans of America who were running a project building prosthetic devices for wounded Cambodians, including children, who had stepped on mines. Many Cambodians had only one leg or arm, or worse. It was a huge success because of this demand and we were able to fill some of that demand. It was a small but impressive program.

Q: Very worthwhile.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, for sure.

I took the standard tour in Phnom Penh and visited the high school where thousands of Cambodians were taken by the Khmer Rouge. They were photographed, tortured, made to confess and then taken away to be killed. It was like a funneling point for people in the Phnom Penh area who were, as you know, professionals, teachers, anybody who spoke another language and so on. For some reason the KR displayed many of these photographs which lined the walls of the high school, a very macabre scene.

Q: People who wore glasses.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, anyone who had any education at all was taken there. They had no idea why they were selected. And these poor souls' photos lined the walls. You could see their fear as they know what's happening, that they're going to die soon. They were put in trucks, taken to a location outside of town to gravesites where they probably dug their own graves. They had to kill the person in front and then lay down to be killed. I visited the killing field where there's a tower memorializing the killings. It's maybe two-stories high. The center part has a glass partition there with skulls piled up all the way to the top. And there are graves all around. It's very uneven, like the graves are very rapidly dug and then kind of poorly covered. In fact, I saw bones sticking out of the ground there. There was a film about that time in the 1990s that was done about this, a true story actually about a "New York Times" reporter and a Cambodian who escaped. I don't recall the name of the film.

Q: Was it "The Killing Fields"?

CHERNENKOFF: It was, yes. They showed that tower at the end of the film and that's exactly where I went. It's an unforgettable experience to go there.

Q: What was the next trip?

Well, in 1997, I returned to India on another trip to participate on a family planning program evaluation. This was my last official trip as a Foreign Service Officer. I went with a family planning expert from Washington who was a physician. We flew to Uttar Pradesh (UP) where Lucknow is located. Other experts from the AID mission joined us. USAID had financed a program with a large Indian NGO to try to increase family planning services in UP, a massive effort to make contraceptives available in drug stores, provide information that women could use in terms of health care, pregnancies, post-partum and so on. It was a full court press and we were spending quite a bit of money. At the time, UP had 139 million people. It was the largest state in India in population and if it were a country it would have been the seventh largest country in the world. And yet, they had little family planning and a high fertility rate. The population growth rate was well over three percent, which means it would double every 20 years, and UP is about the size of the state of Wisconsin,

CHERNENKOFF: We did a lot of walking and back down in rice paddies, drove to the far areas, met with many local people. We talked to the people who were running it. We created and largely funded a public/private organization specifically for UP. It was a non-profit organization running it but they had funding largely from the U.S. But it was run by a woman from the Indian government was picked to run the organization.

We visited mostly rural places, into the farthest reaches from roads you could imagine and talked to many Indian women. We learned that most Indian women would prefer to have fewer children and they would like to be able to determine this themselves. We heard this repeatedly. But women who get pregnant are usually not the ones who decide how many children they should have; it's their husbands or the mothers-in-law who decide, especially if they haven't had a son yet. In fact, they should have at least two

sons. The old saying was that you need an heir and one to spare so a son could light the funeral pyre. So, there were uphill battles in fighting this practice

We completed the evaluation and I guess we decided that as the program was only about two years old, it was on the right track but perhaps premature to come to firm conclusions; the program was not completed by any means.

Q: How was the Indian government, was it a strong supporter?

CHERNENKOFF: Not at this point. They were, for political reasons, rather hesitant. Under Indira Gandhi, they had a very pro-active family planning program. They were forcing men to get sterilized. The effort was mismanaged and there was a such backlash that program was ended. I think the Indian government was very cautiously supportive. Again, it's been over 20 years now and I can't remember exactly what they said. At least, the Indian government did not object to USAID efforts.

Q: Were you doing anything in Indochina?

CHERNENKOFF: Not much. We were considering opening an AID Mission and I was keenly interested because of my own experience. In 1997, I did attend the swearing in of the first Ambassador to Vietnam, Pete Peterson. I remember John McCain attended too. But my time ended with AID shortly thereafter. I would have loved to work on the new program. I did meet with a few Vietnamese-Americans who were planning to help Vietnam but I had to retire.

Q: Why did you not go overseas to another post?

CHERNENKOFF: That's a good question. In the mid-90s I was offered several Mission Directorships including the Philippines, Sri Lanka and India, as well as Deputy Director in Egypt and Bosnia. My mother had a stroke and was in a nursing home for years. My sister had early on-set Alzheimer's disease leaving me as the only family caregiver for my mother. The Agency granted me compassionate extended time in Washington. As my time-in-grade was nearly up, I simply let it run out. Perhaps that was a mistake. Anyway, I retired officially in January 1998 and attended the FSI Retirement Seminar. I declined to provide my oral history at that time, something I later regretted.

Q: Well, how did you find the retirement seminar?

CHERNENKOFF: Excellent. I learned a lot. Most participants were State folks but there were a few AID people. Speakers described their second careers. Some were related to work that they did in their Foreign Service careers, some were totally unrelated. One former Ambassador became a computer geek and advised us what kind of computers we should consider buying. Others presented on what to do about Social Security, investments, health insurance, long-term care insurance, job possibilities and how to fill your extra time and new found freedom. It was quite good. I'm glad I attended.

After completing the retirement program, I took a stab at finding some jobs with NGOs based in Washington. I had few possibilities but nothing that really excited me. I ran into Jim Bond again. He had retired, and to my surprise he asked me to come over for an interview, which I did. But nothing developed there.

Q: Okay. Well then, let's move on. Today is the 20th of September 2017 with Sid Chernenkoff. And okay, I'll let you have at it. So, we'll pick this up with your new work as a contractor.

CHERNENKOFF: I worked for AID for 12 years as a Personal Services Contractor (PSC) with the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (E&E). This was akin to being a “consultant” though I carried a Diplomatic Passport and worked as if I were a direct-hire. I helped our Missions in Europe and Eurasia conduct certain project designs sometimes in the field and sometimes in Washington. Occasionally, I would just fill in for USAID Mission staff on leave as appropriate.

Q: Okay. Well, we'll talk about your time after you retired. Because this is all one story, basically.

CHERNENKOFF: Right, it is. And I will just cover the more interesting places as a lot of my work was very routine. First, I accepted a short-term, six-week PSC contract in Almaty Kazakhstan to fill in for the AID Program Officer for our Regional Mission in Almaty in the summer of 1998.

At that time, there were a few private hotels, but private restaurants and small shops were popping up here and there. Almaty's setting is among beautiful snow-capped mountains and rivers. At that time the city consisted of huge blocks of run-down, grey Soviet-style offices and apartments. Parks were plentiful and beautiful. But there was considerable crime. It was not safe to walk after dark. Before I arrived, the petite wife of the colleague for whom I was substituting was brutally robbed of her purse and suffered a broken jaw and had to be med-evacuated to London. Their apartment was also burglarized during the time I was there. During a daytime walk on the main street, I was approached by two off-duty policemen in uniforms who, until I showed them my Embassy ID, were prepared to take me to the police station and hold me for a \$100 ransom, a common practice at the time. Remnants and practices of the Soviet Union were still evident. Hammer and sickles adorned many buildings. Soviet Ladas were plentiful. While shopping in a new but small grocery, I left my briefcase for safekeeping in the front of the store. The lady who checked my briefcase sternly refused to take a tip, presumably clinging to Soviet manners. More interesting was that the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was previously the First Secretary of the Communist Party. He is still President in 2019.

Kazakhstan had barely exited the Soviet Union and the private sector was in its infancy. AID's program was regional covering the other countries in the immediate region like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. My work was primarily doing routine AID program reviews and overseeing budget work. The local FSNs were so capable my presence was mostly limited to signing and approving documents and

conducting portfolio reviews. I did attend a few country staff meetings held by Ambassador Elizabeth Jones. She was very open and easy to work with. She remembered my name from her time in Pakistan. These meetings proved useful for me about the political and security situation to round out my understanding of the context of the USAID program. But most of my work was routine.

While in Almaty, I applied for a permanent long-term contract based in Washington. I would be working in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in AID's Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (E&E). I was accepted, and as a result over the next 12 years would travel often to Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia in particular but also to Albania, Georgia, Romania, Cyprus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and frequently to the Budapest Hungary where the USAID Regional Mission was located. As I took about 35 trips, I won't relate all my history therein, just those visits of certain importance to me.

In the fall of 1998 and just after signing my long-term contract, I travelled to Tbilisi, Georgia for a few weeks. Like Kazakhstan, Georgia too appeared visually stuck in the Soviet era. The Embassy motor pool did not pick me up on time at the airport to take me to the Sheraton because, I learned later, Kazakhstan had just changed back to standard time. I waited until the flight crew got into their van and saw everyone was gone, so I accepted a ride offer from a middle-aged Georgian man who said he had a car. After my suitcase was in the trunk, I got in the car and noticed there was a driver already seated. I asked the guy who he was and he said he was his brother. This made me rather nervous, particularly when, as we started driving, I saw the flight crew van, which I assumed was also going to the Sheraton Hotel, turn right while we continued straight. Finally, we looped around and arrived at the Sheraton where the flight crew van was parked. He asked for \$40 but I only had \$20 in cash. The hotel would not cash my American Express travelers check even though I could pay my bill with them, so I offered only the \$20, which the driver accepted. Local currency was only available at the Embassy. There were no ATMs yet.

The Sheraton Hotel was the only modern, non-Soviet hotel in Tbilisi and was the site a few years earlier of a mafia-style shoot up in the atrium. No one was killed. Two days after my arrival, the entire AID Mission moved to the Sheraton's adjacent office wing. I literally travelled from my room to the office on an elevator and did not have to go outside unless I specifically made an effort to do so. The work was very routine during my three weeks in Georgia, mostly helping the program office get started.

There were still gaudy Soviet restaurants with plentiful, tasty meals that were remarkably cheap, but a few private stores and restaurants were starting to open. On weekends by the river, there was a flea market. Among the pots and pans and useless junk, there were tables where older men were selling their Soviet military and other medals, I guess indicative of how desperate they were for cash. I bought a few medals. I had dinner at one AID officer's house which was located directly across the street from a location where Stalin printed revolutionary material. Stalin was still revered in Georgia.

Q: Yes, he is. And where next?

In December 1999 and just as the fighting with Serbia ended, I flew to Pristina, Kosovo for my first of many trips there covering almost every year from 1999 to 2009. I spent a lot of time in Kosovo and felt as if I were posted there. There was a Department of State Office and FSO's but no Embassy yet as Kosovo was still not an independent country. The USAID Mission was located on a high hill over-looking downtown Pristina in two adjacent and renovated three-story homes. Buildings in downtown Pristina such as the Serbian Police Headquarter were clearly visible and severely damaged by remarkably accurate Cruise missiles launched from naval ships that were ordered to do so by President Clinton. An FSN said when they heard the missiles first strike, instead of hiding, Kosovars ran outside and cheered. This meant the Serb army and police had left.

My first assignment in Kosovo was to lead a USAID team to design a municipal re-development project. This was an effort to restore electricity, water and improve roads in the small municipalities around Kosovo, but outside Pristina, that were damaged or otherwise affected by the fighting. On one field trip, we drove to a municipality to meet with new local officials who were former Kosovo Liberation Front fighters. The entire front of the municipal building formerly occupied by Serb officials had been blown away. But the second-floor office where we held out meeting was functional, just very cold as there was no wall at all on one side, just open space. Nevertheless, these officials were working hard, as if everything was normal, very cooperative, and clearly proud to begin working towards an independent Kosovo.

NATO peacekeeping troops, known as KFOR (Kosovo Force) were everywhere. Coming from a multitude of countries wearing a variety of uniforms. This presented a colorful almost Star-Wars bar scene image, with soldiers and officers in Sikh-headwear, feathers in Alpine hats, night scopes, and a variety of camouflaged uniforms.

The Serb army was brutal. Serbs had blasted Kosovar homes as their tanks retreated shooting right and left as they backed up the roads. You could usually walk safely anywhere at night, but it was very dark since there was not much city power, necessitating generators. Security was good, but I recall one time walking back to my TDY apartment in the dark and seeing three small lights coming towards me. I couldn't figure out what in the world it was. It turned out - we were in the British zone of occupation - that there were three British soldiers with night-scopes on their helmets walking towards me with their guns in a ready-to-fire position. Around Pristina, there were wrecked cars and piles of trash. One USAID official walking at night fell into an open manhole because the metal covers were often stolen to be sold for their metal. He separated his shoulder but had to crawl around in the muck for his cell phone. Another official jogged daily on a gravel road behind the USAID mission. It was soon discovered that though the road was supposedly cleared, there were still a few mines.

Q: Very nasty.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, very nasty indeed. It's such an ancient struggle. Even years after the fighting ended, many still refused to talk to any Serbs.

Q: When I was in Yugoslavia in the '60s they were known as apparently a pejorative term, but known as Shqiptars. These are people essentially of Albanian stock as opposed to Serb stock. And for example, we had several men of that area, they were from Sofia, actually, hired by our commissary and we needed to get them a license so they could ferry food back and forth and do errands for us. And we had to send them down to Sofia to get the license because they couldn't pass the exam in Belgrade. The Yugoslavs- I mean-

CHERNENKOFF: The Serbs wouldn't let them pass.

Q: Yes. I mean, they discriminated.

CHERNENKOFF: Right.

Q: Well, I mean, I hate to say it but it was probably very much the equivalent to the way in the deep South blacks were treated.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. It's interesting too that in Kosovo in the decade prior to the war, the Serbs denied entry for Kosovars into universities, into professional organizations, prevented access to health, and basically segregated the Kosovars. But to their credit, Kosovars established their own universities with their own professors, some of whom had doctorates. Kosovars were able to access education in many fields despite the Serb oppression.

But good paying jobs in Kosovo were impossible to find even for educated people. Especially in the early days after the fighting ended, we would ask the motor pool driver what he was doing before the war. One of them said he was an architect. Another was an engineer. But the pay for USAID FSNs was much better than they might earn in the Kosovo government or fledgling private sector. A USAID FSN in the program office was a physician but he couldn't find meaningful work either. They were thrilled to have a job with USAID and we were fortunate to have them.

I never made it to Belgrade so I don't exactly know exactly what makes them tick on this issue, but there was a battle in the 1300s near Pristina. And though the Serbs lost that battle, they celebrate as if it were a victory. I could never grasp what that meant to them.

Q: I think the leader of the Ottoman Empire who was there was assassinated by a Serb nationalist. And this is sort of considered the birthplace of Serbdom. I mean, it's been turned into that.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. It was located near Pristina at a site I never visited. There's not much there, he said, it's just a field I was told.

Q: Well, when I was there, it was just a small tower.

CHERNENKOFF: By the time I arrived most of the Serbs had left Pristina. I'm told there were a handful left in a few villages where elderly people stayed behind because they couldn't leave. Most of the Serb population, which was only in the 10 percent range anyway, pretty much left Kosovo, except for one area in the northwest.

Q: Mitrovica?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, Mitrovica. I never went there but drove by it. You could visit only with advance permission. There was very little contact with these Serbs even though it is within Kosovo. Strong tension remains because they still identify themselves as Serbs. Even so, I think they did eventually have a representative or two in the Kosovar parliament but it was very difficult to get them to cooperate.

For several years, there were no direct flights to Pristina. The airport in Kosovo was destroyed, so all flights were to Skopje, Macedonia, and we were driven to Pristina. When Pristina Airport first re-opened about 2004, it was occupied by the Russian soldiers who controlled access, checked passports and exits. But the next year, Kosovar officials had taken over.

I went back again in 2007 and helped put together very small activity. Money was still being thrown at Kosovo. State wanted to do something on trafficking-in-persons (TIP). At the time TIP wasn't an issue in Kosovo. There may have been some transiting of victims from adjacent countries but there were very few Kosovar women known to be trafficked. A TIP expert and I designed an activity that was more preventive in nature, tried to address trafficking across borders, and raise awareness of the trafficking issue in Kosovo. I'm not sure how well that worked out but it was a case where we had the money and AID/W instructed us to obligate the money, so we designed the activity. There was an all hands party including FSN Kosovars at the end of this TDY. The Mission Director thanked a number of people for their help over the years. When my name was mentioned, there was a long, genuine applause for me. This meant as much to me as any award I ever received from AID.

On my return trips to Kosovo, I was well-known enough with the USAID motor pool drivers that they would pick me up at the airport just based on facial recognition, not a sign. And when I entered Pristina on my last trip in 2009, the top four or five floors on the side of a tall building were covered with a painting of Bill Clinton's face. Quite amazing. They also named a street after him.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: In 2008, while Kosovo was still seeking independence from Serbia, the acting Government of Kosovo was cash poor. State decided we should provide them a large budget cash transfer. In Washington, I took the lead to design the activity, prepare the approval documentation and coordinate the effort with the other U.S. agencies and the World Bank. It was a large amount -- \$125 million. I attended numerous meetings in Washington with the World Bank, Treasury Department, AID controllers and State and AID lawyers. We were in endless meetings about how to move the money from AID into

bank accounts that the Government of Kosovo (GOK) could access. We also had to wait until Serbia accepted such a financial transfer to a region that was still technically part of Serbia. There was some very tricky language inserted into the approval document about Serbia accepting the existence of Kosovo as a sovereign country. We had to work closely with Congress as well. Finally, I got the signatures of all USAID folks and we were able to obligate these funds well before the end of the Fiscal Year. I also got the World Bank to sign the document. They didn't actually have to sign to obligate the funds, but they signed it just to demonstrate their approval of our transfer. I felt very good and got a lot of kudos for this transaction. And it was an especially good feeling that we were helping Kosovo get off to a good start. The next year, we provided another \$25 million for a total of \$150 million.

Q: Were you able to observe later on maybe, how were the Kosovars responding to these projects? Were they doing any good?

CHERNENKOFF: Well, yes, they were. There were no serious issues that I'm aware of. My understanding is that most project implementations went well. Kosovars are capable, hardworking people, very easy to work with, and intent on doing the right thing. I think there was always the concern about corruption but there was nothing obvious during my 10 years of involvement affecting USAID projects there.

Several of my trips are not worth mentioning in detail. While useful to USAID, it included filling in as Mission program officer a couple of times - just day-to-day work. But even these trips allowed me to get to know the country and the people better. On one occasion, FSN Kosovar ladies asked me out to lunch, which was very nice. In the conversation, I asked them if they fasted for Ramadan. They told me "only if we want to lose weight!" My sense throughout was that while Kosovo is a Muslim country, it is very secular.

By 2009, Pristina was more attractive. Roads were paved, garbage cleaned up, bridges repaired, and buildings rehabilitated. More restaurants and shops had opened up, including a restaurant street where people could sit safely outside. One had huge flat screen TVs outside, and people were watching -- don't ask me why -- "The Jerry Springer Show."

It was good to see such progress and I like to think I contributed to it.

Q: Did you get a chance to visit any of the monasteries there? Because that area is known for some really historic monasteries.

CHERNENKOFF: Not in Kosovo but a few historic churches in Macedonia.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: I worked in Macedonia on TDY's four times, 2000-02. On one weekend we visited an ancient but small Orthodox church, perhaps a thousand years old – small but beautiful with faded murals that needed some attention.

Q: Yes. Well, in Macedonia there were, what, two groups, basically, the Macedonians as one called them, and then the Albanians?

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. And they're geographically segregated by history primarily but perhaps by some discrimination. Albanians are about a third of the population, located mostly in the western part of the country where the mainly Albanian city of Tetovo is located.

Q: I thought that it was sort of the equivalent of a little civil war there.

CHERNENKOFF: There were issues, yes. There was some fighting near the planned university in Tetovo. It wasn't common but it did happen. There was danger pay for everybody in the Embassy but the fighting was nothing like it was in Kosovo. Ethnic tensions were much less of a problem.

Macedonia is famous for a couple things. First, it is the birthplace of the Cyrillic alphabet. They were proud of that and they always mentioned it when we travelled around. The main university is called Saint Cyril and Methodius. Secondly, it's the birthplace of Mother Teresa. In the large downtown open-air plaza in Skopje there are brass markings outlining where the location of the house she grew up in. There is also a statue of her in a major square downtown. Mother Teresa is well-respected by all Macedonians, though she was both Albanian and Catholic, which is especially odd because there are very few Catholics in primarily Orthodox and Muslim Macedonia.

Q: I've been in Macedonia fairly frequently. I remember there was a town called _____. I'll never forget it. It's down in the south. But these peasants would keep coming up to the embassy in Belgrade where I was the chief of the consular section to get visas to go to the United States. And essentially, they had contacts in Gary, Indiana and I think Lackawanna, New York.

CHERNENKOFF: Really?

Q: And we would basically turn them down all the time. But then they started appearing because they were having this big expo in Toronto, Canada. It was the World's Fair and all and here these peasants were coming out to see the-

CHERNENKOFF: World's Fair.

Q: -World's Fair. You know, they'd never been to Belgrade and the point was that they were- Air Canada was giving special low-rate flights from Europe there and they were taking one-

CHERNENKOFF: One-way trips.

Q: And we were shooting them down right and left. Why do you want to go there? They didn't even know where Canada was located.

CHERNENKOFF: Clearly their intent was just to get to Canada or the U.S. and stay.

On my first trip in 2000, I was on a four-person AID team asked to prepare the U.S. dollar contribution for a new University in Tetovo, intended mainly for the ethnic Albanians who lived in the far western part of Macedonia. USAID would work with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other donors including the Netherlands and the Open Society Foundation (Soros). It would be not exclusively for Muslims but probably would be because of its location in Tetovo. The idea was to elevate the educational level of the Muslim young people who due to discrimination had difficulty in gaining admission to Macedonia's higher education institutions in Skopje. and maybe reduce ethnic tensions in Macedonia as well.

The project was initiated by the OSCE. It would involve construction to which USAID would contribute cash and finance technical assistance from the University of Indiana. USAID had a full Mission in Skopje but not enough staff to undertake a project of this size. I was asked to take the USAID lead for that effort and traveled with three U.S. university professors. Our first meeting was with the OSCE senior official in charge of the project, Max van der Stoel. He had been Foreign Minister (FM) of the Netherlands. We emphasized to him that while we would contribute, we would not directly finance construction. We would have to co-mingle our funds with other donors or risk involving a plethora of AID engineering and environmental requirements and regulations. He was not happy to hear this as it complicated his efforts, but eventually we worked this out.

Due to its political sensitivity in Macedonia, we met with Government of Macedonia (GOM) officials, NGOs, politicians, celebrities, university staff, and practically everybody who might have a role or whose views were critical. We didn't speak the Macedonian language but as one of our professors did speak Russian, she understood what they were saying. He kept asking why, through his aide, do we "care only about minorities, all they want to do is build something to help the Albanians in Tetovo." We were mindful of the sensitivity of the issues and even met with political party leaders who gave us support. We met with Soros' local group, the Open Society Foundation in Skopje, headed by a Macedonian.

The severity of the hatred that existed between the Serbs and the Kosovars was much stronger than that between Albanian Muslims and the Macedonian Christians. The latter groups were more tolerant of each other, let's say. In fact, the most popular actor in Macedonia was an Albanian. We talked to him too. He was a movie star and well-respected.

On one occasion, van der Stoel organized a meeting of all the donors, except that he hadn't asked the Open Society Foundation, even though they were going to contribute

several million dollars. I inadvertently discovered this when we met with the Open Society head, told him about the meeting and invited him myself. At the meeting when FM van der Stoel began to talk about various plans and how we were going to get this project underway, this person raised his hand and said he found it very interesting that all the foreign donors are present making decisions about his country but he's the only Macedonian attending. He made a very good point and I was happy that I invited him because it was quite true and very important. It was essential that we received backing of the Macedonian government and people. The OSCE should have known that. In my time with USAID, I learned early on the unless there is local involvement and approval, foreign aid projects are likely to fail.

USAID contributed about \$15 million upfront for construction. We also financed the participation of the University of Indiana (IU) which came out and provided technical assistance to help organize SEEU, develop its curricula, and provide a few instructors. IU was very easy to work with. They were motivated and took their work very seriously. I believe later even the GOM provided the land for the new university.

So, the university was built and classes began about 2002. It was named South East Europe University (SEEU) and I attended its inauguration. That was a colorful event. The new university officials and professors wore their multi-colored caps and gowns and streamed in to classical music. It was a very impressive opening of the first university in western Macedonia. I understand now that SEEU is very successful. And some non-Albanian Macedonian students do attend this university. I am proud of my participation in its construction and the credit accrued to USAID and the United States.

Q: Oh yes.

CHERNENKOFF: In 2000 and 2002, I worked for a few weeks in Romania, just filling in for USAID staff on leave, but I did not do anything notable from a work standpoint, just day-to-day budget drudgery. As other former communist countries, there were large residential towers and the huge and overbearing Palace of the Parliament. Nice neighborhoods were torn down to build what was then I believe the largest office building in the world. I stayed in serviced apartments and also the Hilton Hotel when my wife joined me for a trip afterwards to Budapest, Prague and Vienna. The Hilton was near where Ceausescu gave his last speech before running for his life. Bucharest was once compared to Paris as the tree-lined streets were nicely laid out with many traffic circles. We were also able to visit the former King of Romania's Peles Castle, drive by Ploesti oil-fields that Hitler coveted, and go to Bran Castle of Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler) also known as Dracula near Brasov.

Separately, I visited Albania in 2003 where again I simply filled in as acting USAID program officer. As in Romania, I didn't do anything remarkable, just day-to-day work with the program budget. It was an interesting but strange place as it had been so isolated for so long under dictator Enver Hoxha. Around the country, there were many small bunkers, now abandoned, that were supposed to protect the communist regime. Organized crime was powerful. And here too manhole covers were mostly non-existent,

requiring a flashlight wherever you walked at night. Auto theft by Albanians elsewhere in Europe meant that there were Mercedes-Benz and other luxury cars everywhere, a strange sight in such a poor country. A joke going around elsewhere in Europe was “visit Albania, your car is already there!” One weekend, I did join an Embassy group for a long drive from Tirana to visit some well-kept and fascinating ruins, such as Apollina which was first Greek then Roman.

I should mention also that in 2003, I worked for a couple of weeks in Baku, Azerbaijan helping train USAID office staff develop its office procedures, work too boring to mention here. I saw the Caspian Sea for the first time. The country was an interesting middle eastern remnant of the Soviet Union. It was blessed with large oil reserves and many foreign workers who frequented Irish pubs and fancy hotels, one of which I stayed in. Old communists retained authority and corruption was endemic. Outside Baku, it was very underdeveloped. I took an overnight trip with Embassy tourists to a small city several hundred kilometers from Baku on a horribly bumpy road. I believe it was Ganja, where there was a beautiful walled fort and large mosque. Our hotel room did not even have hot water though the food was good. But in Baku, while not everyone benefitted, the economy was strong. New skyscrapers and hotels were going up and a variety of restaurants were opening. It was becoming a rather comfortable place to live, according to USAID staff.

Q: Where else in the region did you work?

I worked in Bosnia four times from 2002-2004. While my time there was mostly filling in for program staff on leave, my visual impressions were quite strong. The USAID mission was located away from the embassy in an old building more or less the center of Sarajevo. As I was driven into Sarajevo the first time I was struck by the massive urban damage from the fighting. Most buildings, some of them 15 stories or taller, were completely shredded and blasted by gunfire, artillery or whatever - they were total wrecks. The visual destruction was incredible. It wasn't dangerous per se but it was not a particularly happy place. Most Serbs and Croats had left Sarajevo. People were starting to come out a bit and become more accustomed to walking around especially on weekends. The peace accords, which set the basis for a shared government, had just started to be implemented and there was some semblance of order.

Q: The Dayton Accords, I think.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. The three sides had more or less come to accommodation but there were very few Serbs left in Sarajevo. But on the northern upper edge of town there was still a Serb community that was untouched by war. You could plainly see the Cyrillic language on store fronts that this was a Serb area. During the war, it was also the area where Serb snipers would fire down into the city and shoot people in the Saturday market or going to and from home. The fighting was brutal.

Nevertheless, the city was an historically interesting place to visit, of course, because of its place in history regarding the start of World War I. I saw the location where Archduke Ferdinand was shot. You probably saw this too.

Q: Yes. Princip Museum.

CHERNENKOFF: Gavrilo Princip.

Q: Had sort of footprints in the sidewalk, supposedly where he stood and fired the shots.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes. And as you drive out west, there's a huge graveyard. Gavrilo Princip is buried in large tomb with his name in large print easily seen from the road. I thought that was kind of interesting as it still stood all these years. I'm surprised the Muslims or others hadn't destroyed that monument by then.

Q: Yes. When I went there the Yugoslavs had just acquired streetcars. They put a streetcar line right along that area and they got them from Washington, D.C. And they still had the original markings and some of the destinations. I saw a streetcar go past that said Cabin John on it, which is a suburb of Washington.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, of course. That's wonderful.

As you drove into the city from the airport, but before you entered the main part of downtown, there was a large, severely damaged building with entire walls missing and open to the air. It was livable in parts of it and was occupied exclusively by Roma. If you stopped at the red light, Roma children would come near and beg. The driver would tell them to go away and say they're just Roma. It's interesting how people who themselves might be victims don't necessarily treat other victims with respect. Even Kosovars who were treated so badly by the Serbs, and they were, would make disparaging comments about the Roma. So, there was a clear victim hierarchy.

Q: Yes, I remember in Belgrade I would buy Christmas trees, go down with my kids to a marketplace, and the Serbs being Orthodox, kids celebrate on Christmas. But the Roma would sell Christmas trees so I think of them as Christmas tree suppliers.

CHERNENKOFF: Well, the trees were probably fairly decent, I would think.

Q: Yes. What were we doing- what were you-?

CHERNENKOFF: Well again, I was not doing things that were, what you might call flashy or showy as in Kosovo or Macedonia, basically just filling in at the AID mission, working and doing day-to-day things in the USAID program office, while filling in as program officer. On one trip I did draft a process for the USAID Mission laying out the procedures to approve and fund projects. It meant taking the project concept and devising the bureaucratic path that it had follow through to final approval and funding. This is critical because all the USAID activities have to go through a lot of hoops before you can

approve and fund them. This included confirming a Congressional Notification, funds availability, environmental regulations, impact on women, and other legal requirements that may have been specific for the country. In some cases, countries had to have certain guarantees of security. All of these items on what is called a pre-obligation checklist, had to be addressed. So, I designed a path for Mission, helped them conceptualize it, and then document it. Once approved, funds could be obligated by the U.S. government. Funds could be obligated in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was a grant to the government, sometimes it was a grant to a local NGO, and sometimes it led to competitive bidding for a contract. One of ways it could be finally undertaken. Then, the project could begin.

Sarajevo must have been beautiful in the past, with its Austrian, Ottoman, Serbian and other eclectic architecture. And of course, Sarajevo was the site of the 1964 Winter Olympics. One ski slope I was told was still mined. On weekends I saw young people wearing sweaters or shirts blazoned with the American flag. There was still evidence of fighting everywhere you went, bullet holes in practically all of the buildings. I often stayed in the Holiday Inn which was built for the 1964 Winter Olympics, and which remained unchanged since then as if it were in a time warp.

Q: Yes.

CHERNENKOFF: The USAID mission moved from its downtown location into a building that had been completely destroyed except for its metal framework. It was reconstructed rather quickly for USAID and the Administration section of the Embassy. You could see things were beginning to change, reconstruction starting here and there, but I didn't go back after 2004. That was pretty much my time in Bosnia. These trips were memorable experiences to see such devastation and killing among supposedly civilized societies and cultures.

Q: Yes, agreed. Where else did you work?

I worked in Cyprus twice in 2004. Cyprus isn't in Eastern Europe of course but the program was assigned to the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia Bureau. The program was not based on need but because the Congress provided an earmark. The Greek lobby pressured the Congress to provide \$10 million a year to Cyprus to be used only on the Greek part of the island. The northern part was Turkish.

The first time I visited was to draft a strategy for our small USAID office on how to spend the \$10 million that we'd be getting for several years. Well, it wasn't easy because Cyprus is very well developed, Nicosia is beautiful, it's a tourist destination, and the average income there is higher than in some states in the U.S. It was with some difficulty we could find things to spend money on such as protecting antiquities, protecting the tourist potential, trying to find ways that small groups of Turks and Greeks in Cyprus might work together.

A young lady on our team related that her grandfather had been the U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus some years before. He was still alive and told her before she came out how

difficult a problem Cyprus was. His picture was on the wall in the embassy. And the USAID office – it was only an office, not a mission - was located in the embassy; it was a very small facility.

Anyway, though it wasn't easy to spend the money but we had to design the strategy. It had to be carefully worded because the Greeks were very sensitive about how we referred to the northern part of the island. But we did do it and we met our requirement for a strategy, though minimally. Frankly, as an earmark, I did not think a strategy was even needed.

Q: I might add that I suspect, probably next to the Israeli lobby influence in politics, particularly in the House, it's the Greek one.

CHERNENKOFF: For sure.

Q: And the Greeks were sort of adamant to show their support for the Greek section of Cyprus.

CHERNENKOFF: Right.

Q: And so that was probably behind it.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes, it was. I became a bit of an accidental expert in Washington because few Washington staff had much knowledge of the program. State and AID had Cyprus desk officers, but it wasn't an especially high priority in State or AID. Once, I was asked to go to Capitol Hill with the State desk to brief Congressional staff. There was quite a large turn-out reflecting, I think, the political importance of the program.

I visited Cyprus a second time a few months later to assist our USAID office with a Washington program reporting assignment. On my own time I took a trip to the northern part of the island controlled by Turkey. I walked through the demilitarized zone, though I forget now exactly what it was called.

Q: The Green Line.

CHERNENKOFF: Green Line. Thank you. I took my passport and left it on the Greek side, was given a receipt, and walked about 75 yards to the Turkish side. Walking through the Green Line was eerie. There were quite nice homes, some in good shape others shot up but all abandoned since the 1974 fighting. Another senseless war. Upon reaching the Turkish side, the receipt was stamped. Immediately, a cab driver met me and asked if I would like a tour of the island. I accepted. He was driving a large, black Mercedes. He was Turkish of course, and had lived a long time in the north. I sat in front with him. We drove around and saw various ruins, some of which dated back thousands of years. Many ruins were Greek but there were no Greeks living in the northern side.

The driver and I talked about the conflict and we agreed it was ridiculous but acknowledged it's very hard to resolve. Turkey and Greece have not gotten along for centuries and at that time a solution was not at hand. He said that Turkey doesn't have as many people in the north as the Greeks do on the southern part of the island so Turkish migrants from eastern Turkey were being brought in. To my surprise, he said they're just farmers, low-class people and spoke disparagingly of them despite being a Turk himself.

The port city Kyrenia, where I had a nice lunch, was quite beautiful. Generally, housing didn't look as nice as it did on the Greek side though there were some upscale homes near the port. But it was a beautiful region and it was well worth the day trip.

Q: After that trip?

In 2005, I led a four-person team from AID/W to draft a \$40 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Threshold Program (TP) for Ukraine. The TP was the first step in a longer relationship with Ukraine to improve its rule-of-law and civil society in order to receive additional funds of several hundred million dollars in exchange for policy and other changes by the Ukrainians. President Bush was keen on the MCC and even was on TV explaining its importance.

The TP would identify the problems and areas where help was needed in civil society, the judiciary, NGOs, dealing with corruption in universities. We spent about three weeks there and worked collaboratively with two Ukrainians and the USAID mission staff to produce a final document. Corruption was widespread and was one of our main concerns. We expected the Ukrainians to address corruption before we could provide the additional funds.

But I felt the Ukrainian side was just going through the motions - whatever you want, we'll do it. Just write it up and we'll accept it. They wanted the additional money which was likely to come anyway. The two Ukrainians were not, I believe, necessarily the best choices. One actually lived in Arlington, Virginia and the other had been fired from USAID Kiev.

The NGO portion was largely designed by a very capable person from AID/W who had previously worked in Ukraine and spoke good Russian. But some Ukrainian NGOs complained that they should have been involved in the design. We did make some changes, but it reinforced my view that unless we involve the locals to the greatest extent possible in program design, such programs could fail.

As I am half Ukrainian, it was keenly interesting in visiting Kiev. On weekends, we visited several quite beautiful monasteries. One mausoleum contained dead Ukrainian Orthodox priests who had been buried for centuries. You had to go far down inside an ancient cave and lean over awkwardly to see these dead priests, some of whom were just skeletal. I don't know if you've been to Kiev or not.

Q: No.

CHERNENKOFF: It's quite interesting. I knew before, and learned again that the Ukrainians don't necessarily like the Russians. There's a long history of struggle with Russia. While Russian was the language they used for years, they were switching to Ukrainian as the official language. I do understand a little Russian but not enough that I could tell the difference between the two languages.

At the time, Kiev in many areas was in pretty sad shape with dingy, dim apartment blocks, packs of stray dogs, and even rats in some areas. Grocery stores were reasonably well-stocked but rather run-down. There was one street that was starting to develop with some new restaurants. The street was closed on weekends and in evenings so that people could walk freely and enjoy themselves. There were very few western-caliber hotels. We stayed in quarters at the USAID mission. Unfortunately, I didn't get outside of Kiev.

Corruption was visually evident when we took a walk one evening. We'd come to a park situated among apartment towers. A private developer had apparently bribed the city government to give them about a quarter of a park so he could build a high rise on it. And it already had been fenced off. While we were walking by, a large number of angry residents of the nearby apartments were out demonstrating against this. They were ripping down the fencing that the private developer had erected. The residents were determined, and a TV camera from one of the local stations was recording it. We were witnessing a very real example of corruption and actual resistance to it.

I don't know how well the full MCC program played out but I learned that Ukraine did, in fact, meet the threshold criteria and obtain the additional assistance.

Q: What did you do next?

Entirely in Washington in late-2008 after Russia invaded Georgia, I prepared the U.S. aid response to support Georgia. Senator John McCain was the driving force for this effort. I coordinated and drafted the paperwork for a \$250 million cash transfer to offset the tremendous costs Georgia had to incur. This was budget support for the Government of Georgia (GOE). It was similar to the cash transfer for Kosovo. But in this case, it was for reconstruction of infrastructure damaged from the fighting in western Georgia along its border with Russia. Like in Macedonia, we aimed to avoid getting ourselves entangled directly with actual construction projects because we'd be faced with endless engineering and environmental requirements. As a result, we donated our funds into a pool of money from the EU and other donors that was given to Georgia. I helped facilitate that with our lawyers in Washington, and staff in Brussels, and the USAID Mission. We did obligate the funds on a timely a basis and I was praised for my role.

I went back to Georgia in the fall of 1998, ten years after I first visited and shortly after the brief war with Russia. This time was to help the mission work on internal reporting documentation. Change everywhere was evident. Traffic was congested and drivers were very aggressive. The first thing I noticed that the streets were repaired, downtown had become quite nice with modern lighting, newly opened stores, and Christmas decorations.

This time I stayed in the Hyatt Hotel. Now, along with cable TV, you could connect your laptop in your room to work. Some things changed not for the better. For security purposes, a new U.S. Embassy compound, much like a fortress, was constructed far away from the center of Tbilisi next to a massive used-car lot. The compound contained its own impressive USAID mission building. While secure and first-rate internally, it was both isolated and not easily accessible, and U.S. staff said it discouraged Georgians and others from visiting. This edifice was characteristic of Embassy compounds going up elsewhere as a result of the 9/11 attacks. Not a well-thought out policy.

In May 2009, I went to Kosovo on my very last TDY to work closely with a highly competent USAID FSN, a female lawyer. She had helped Kosovar officials draft Kosovo's first constitution. Still technically part of Serbia, Kosovo was still relying on existing law but there were efforts to develop a new legal system. Change was slow. Cases waiting to be heard and those already adjudicated were backed-up for many months. USAID was trying to help streamline the process. We met with a senior official in the Pristina Municipal Court. Stacked on the floor in his office along one side were huge piles of case files that needed attention, actual evidence of the back-up. There was only one thing on his walls - a photo of President Clinton! He described his problems and possible solutions became evident.

Next, the FSN arranged lunch for us with the Minister of Justice (MOJ), Nekibe Kelmendi, Kosovo's first female MOJ. She was profoundly thankful for the kind of activity we were designing. It wasn't a huge activity, probably less than \$10 million as I recall, but it was important to them. We talked about the backlog of cases and difficulties in trying to help further the rule of law in Kosovo. Ultimately, USAID contracted an organization of retired judges to carry out this project. I was on the contract selection team in Budapest that chose that group.

Driving back to USAID after lunch, the FSN told me that during the time the Serbs departed, they were very bitter and were taking vengeance on the Kosovars, particularly those they believed might have been actively opposing them. She said one-night Serb soldiers came to the Minister of Justice's house and knocked on the door. Her husband answered. Serb soldiers took her husband and one of her sons outside and shot them dead in front of the house. Tragic. And now she was Minister of Justice for Kosovo, an ironic but sad story.

On my way to the airport I told the driver the Minister's story. He said on their departure, the Serbs randomly fired artillery into his small village of just a few hundred people, with no advance notice and for no apparent reason, killing dozens of people. It was a total surprise. No one had left because they didn't know it was going to happen. There were many similar cases that caused the deaths of Kosovars that are not well-known.

So that, in summary, were the places I went to and the work I did of any note in the 12 years as a PSC. I retired for good at the very end of 2010.

Q: Sid, you dealt with the remnants of the Soviet Union in a number of places. The thing that has always struck me is the Russian people, and this includes Georgians, Ukrainians, are very talented people and all and yet today if you wanted to buy something Russian you can't think of anything.

CHERNENKOFF: Not much.

Q: I mean, here you might say is almost a sleeping monster. Did you get any feel for why- I mean, was it that the socialist, the communist system had so denuded the populace of talents or something? I mean, what was-

CHERNENKOFF: I think that has a lot to do with it. If I read correctly somewhere, Russia was becoming an industrial power before the First World War, was starting to develop industrially and was building things. I think the revolution killed the capitalist industrialization. And communism, harsh socialism, is not by design designed to reward ingenuity or creativity. I think they'd always had a creative side culturally, and still do. But in terms of the modernization of building or making things it was the one-two punch of WWI and the revolution. Had that war let Russia to another capitalist kind of country there probably would be more things that you could point to, but that didn't happen. The communist system was focused on forced egalitarianism and shooting or chasing out the people who could make something.

Q: Yes. When you think about China, they have this, basically kind of the same situation. And somebody pushed a button and all of a sudden, they turned into a capitalist power. And they are still maintaining it. For Russia, I mean, it's remarkable - the degradation of a proud, intelligent people is just astounding when you think about it.

CHERNENKOFF: And Russia had a long history of authoritarian government, except briefly under Boris Yeltsin. Serfs were only freed in the 1860's. When you're bring something home from Russia, it might be chocolates or wine or some artifacts but you wouldn't bring home an Apple computer.

Q: Military equipment and all that.

CHERNENKOFF: Yes.

Q: Well Sid, I want to thank you very much. This has been very good. It's opened a whole different world for me.

CHERNENKOFF: Well, I'm glad. Thank you for helping me with my oral history. It's been a real pleasure meeting you.

End of interview