

**A COLLECTION OF
LITTLE STORIES
ABOUT
FOREIGN SERVICE LIVING**

VOLUME II

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YEAR 3

105: BUYING A BALAFON

At some point in 1979, I made a visit to Banjul in the Gambia to install a Class 6 vault door in our little storefront embassy. I borrowed a Seabee steel worker from Mark Stevens in Casablanca for this outing, meeting him in Dakar as recounted in an earlier story. The two of us then flew into Banjul, adjusted the masonry frame of a doorway to accept the vault door, drilled through the masonry to provide pathways for the door mounting bolts, installed the door and adjusted its hinges so that it would swing closed. This project took us, if I remember correctly, four days. On two of the evenings we were there, the local employees went down to the docks and bought two bushels of fresh oysters, which we cooked on a charcoal grill made of half a fifty-gallon drum. The oysters would steam in their own shells, opening enough that you could easily reach them with an oyster knife. The FSNs provided a dipping sauce that was made of fresh-squeezed lime with lots of hot pepper ground into it. All of us, embassy American employees and FSNs alike, ate oysters and drank beer until both were gone.

Our return path took us through Dakar again, but instead of a jet flight we were booked on a DC-3 that left Banjul for Kaolack, a little Senegalese coastal resort, and then went on to Dakar. The DC-3 brought back a lot of memories: instead of a wheel-up stair ramp, we entered an oval doorway near the tail of the aircraft on a shaky, hand-made wooden ladder that stayed aboard the plane when we left. For those of you have forgotten the experience, air conditioning on a DC-3 is provided by two nine-inch fans, one on each side of the cockpit bulkhead. The plane was full of Scandinavian tourists, who apparently were on a tour that included Banjul, Kaolack and Dakar. The distance from Banjul to Kaolack was short, just about forty minutes, and we landed without incident, again using the wooden ladder to disembark.

We had about an hour on the ground in Kaolack; there was a sort of snack bar at the airport and we were able to get omelets using Central African Francs. There was not much to buy in the airport, but I looked around anyway. As I looked, I spotted an African man holding a small balafon that he apparently wanted to sell.

A balafon is an interesting instrument. It looks like a curved xylophone made out of wood, with the various note-producing keys made from different types of wood cut to slightly different lengths and formed with different thicknesses and densities. Under each sounding key sits a resonator made out of a round gourd with the top open to the air, hanging under the keyboard on strings. The resonators give the instrument good volume, especially when you whack the keys with a leather-wrapped hammer. I was interested.

I watched the balafon salesman approach potential customers, apparently asking too much for the instrument in CFA to interest any buyers. I had a leftover 1,000 Dalasi bill from

Banjul with me, worth a little less than \$15 U.S., and I was pretty sure that I would not be able to retrieve its full value in Dakar or Abidjan. I walked over to the instrument vendor, took a look at the balafon and asked him how much he wanted. He asked for nearly \$50 U.S. in CFA. I took out my 1,000 Dalasi bill and showed it to him; he looked at it and shook his head.

At about this time, our flight was called. As I headed for the airplane, the balafon salesman came running up, willing to make the deal after all. We exchanged the money for the instrument and I quickly boarded the plane, delighted that I had obtained a real, working African instrument for \$15. What a room decoration! What a conversation starter! The instrument even came with two small leather-wrapped wooden hammers.

Once the plane was airborne, I tried out the balafon as quietly as I could. I discovered that it had one flat key on the keyboard, out of tune with the ones around it. I then discovered that the offending key was missing a resonator under the instrument. So, while I was offering a lot less money to the instrument vendor than he wanted, he was selling me something less than a perfect instrument: we were even.

After I retired from State, I used to use the balafon in science classes to get kids interested in alternate forms of music. It was usually a hit until someone noticed the false note and the missing gourd, which opened the door to discussions of percussion, wind instruments, reed instruments, strings, frequency, wavelength, resonance and volume.

106. TAKING A TAX DEDUCTION IN CARACAS

I have always enjoyed equipment installations, especially ones involving Security Interface Cabinets and Marine Booth wiring. When the Security Enhancement Program reached our two-building Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1985, I had two opportunities to wire in Marine Booths. By this time we were receiving contracted support from Dynelectron, which would typically send us four installers for each project. We sort of held these helpers at arm's length until we were convinced that they knew what they were doing, but they eventually became competent at supporting us.

We addressed the SEP improvements to the Embassy first. I will save that effort for another story. My friend Tim Fountain was the RSO in Caracas all through my tour; he gave us excellent support throughout all our visits there. (See Story Number 22, the Caracas Taco Stand.) I enjoyed Caracas a lot: it was an interesting, beautiful city set up in a Venezuelan mountain valley, with a subway system connecting the upper city where our Embassy was located (Altamira) to Old Caracas, which was lower on the mountain but full of atmosphere and interesting architecture.

The Annex building in Caracas also merited a Marine post during daylight hours, so we installed a second Marine Booth with a public access package in the out-building. We had previously set up controls in the Embassy SIC room that allowed Post One to take control of Post Two after working hours, and we were busy putting in a new SIC room in the Annex building, rerouting alarms and door locks, putting in voltage conditioners and power supplies and CCTV systems. I decided to wire in the Marine booth as my project. Dynelectron was using this installation to train a new employee, so I put one of their more experienced technicians in the SIC room with the new guy. Needing to lay out long runs of wire on the Annex Building floor, we thought that if we could complete the work over a weekend, we would have the least impact on operations in the Annex building.

Once the cables had been run, my work involved three Optima Cabinets full of wiring and a small mini-SIC that connected to the larger SIC room in the basement. By Saturday afternoon, I was able to install most of the equipment required in the Optima cabinets: TV monitors, the door control system, an AES alarm monitor, a connection to the WTMD, etc. On Sunday morning, I was ready for the mini-SIC. I found a stool to sit on, got my tools out and started to terminate wiring in the cabinet.

The morning wore on, and the weather turned grey. I found that I needed more light and looked around me. No lamps were in sight. I needed a table lamp that would sit on the floor next to me by itself, and I started looking around the Annex building. The Personnel section had

no lamps, but the next office on the Second Floor housed the local offices of the IRS. I went in, looked around and found a tall table lamp.

The moment I lifted the lamp with my hand, I realized what I was doing. *I was taking a deduction directly from the IRS, after all those years of paying taxes.* I cheerfully removed the shade, left it on the desk where the lamp usually sat, and went back to my wiring. I was in good spirits for the rest of the day, completing my project and returning the lamp Sunday evening.

107. CHASING A FIRE IN OUR EMBASSY IN SEOUL

During my last year in Seoul, I was busy with the travel agenda I had established and a similar (and sometimes conflicting) travel schedule that Washington requested of me. I was gathering firsthand material for evaluations, meeting with security representatives from the government of Australia, traveling to Hanoi to consider buildings for our new Embassy and traveling to Beijing to assist with an alarm installation in the tunnels there. Each weekend that I was home was a treat, a chance to watch my children swim and to go out for dinners as a family.

While I was on travel, FBO/FIRE had visited Seoul and had installed a building-wide fire alarm system. It included pull stations, smoke detectors, heat detectors, warning bells and flashing lights and the installation of two large control panels on the wall just outside and behind the Marine Booth. The Marine Detachment, the RSO, communicators and the GSO were all briefed on how the system worked, how to respond to alarms, how to report them and how to silence the system. It covered an eight-storey building and was very comprehensive.

One Sunday morning when I was in town, I received a call at home at about 8:00 in the morning. It was from Bud Collins, the RSO. One of the fire alarm zones in the Embassy on the floor beneath the Ambassador's office had gone into alarm and the Marine was unable to reset the system. The Marines and the RSO had looked for a fire and did not find one; they thought that the problem was probably a smoke detector. I said that I would finish breakfast and come in to help with the problem.

While I was eating, I received another call from Bud. A *second* alarm had gone off on the Ambassador's floor between the Executive Office and the Comm Center. It sounded (to all of us) as if there might be an actual fire in the building and that it might be beginning to spread. I hopped in my car and drove downtown as rapidly as Seoul traffic would allow.

In the Embassy on the fire panel, two zones were illuminated on different floors. Each zone was connected to several smoke detectors and several heat detectors. We had a map as to where each sensor was located but could not tell which specific sensor was in alarm. The heat sensors were placed in hard to reach areas such as equipment work rooms and overhead plenums where nearby equipment might get hot without initially generating smoke. I studied the maps for the two zones in alarm and tried to reset the zones. Both stayed in alarm. We made another check of the upper floors for smoke or flames: neither seemed to be present.

FBO/FIRE had left a number of extra smoke detectors and heat detectors at post. These were all plug-in units, but they did not leave enough equipment for us to entirely replace all of the sensors in a given zone. I suggested that we try to replace sensors one at a time in the alarmed zone on the lower floor, resetting that zone after each sensor swap to see if we had

isolated the problem. We started with the smoke detectors, which were the easiest sensors to reach. The lower zone had six smoke detectors on it. Using a radio to the Marine desk, I removed each smoke detector in the string in return and replaced it with a spare. Then I radioed the Marine to reset the zone. Sadly, the zone stayed in alarm, with lights flashing and bells ringing all over the building.

I then went after the heat detectors, of which there were two on the sensor string. Each detector was hard to get to, requiring the movement of furniture and a safe, a ladder, a climb into the ceiling, a drop light and some ill-advised reaching beyond the ladder to extract the old sensor and install the new one. After the final sensor in the string was replaced, the zone came out of alarm. It was a heat sensor that was causing the problem.

The zone on the upper floor, however, still indicated a fire.

We began the same diagnostic process on the upper floor. This zone was all smoke detectors, and there were eight of them in the string. The string went from hallway to office to office, and the FBO/FIRE map was a little iffy as to which offices contained sensors from a particular zone. Twice, we pulled out a sensor from a different zone, setting off the ground floor alarm panel ourselves. In time, however, all eight smoke alarms were replaced.

The offending alarm zone remained in alarm.

Baffled, I started to check the wiring associated with the zone. The circuit read “open”. I went to each sensor base in turn, looking for a detached wire. Each check involved moving the ladder, opening the sensor base so that I could see the connections and checking for loose or disconnected wires. The chances of this causing the problem were remote, but we went through the process anyway, without success. Each time we replaced a sensor or reconnected alarm wiring plugs, we would reset the system and it would go back into alarm, ringing the fire bells and flashing the strobe lights. No one had to tell the Marines that we had not yet found the problem.

At about 3:30 in the afternoon, I was getting to the point where I thought we might have to call FBO. At this juncture, I remembered the pull stations, which were also a part of the circuit. But what could go wrong with a pull station?

Just down the hallway from the door to the Ambassador’s office, there was a pull station mounted on the wall. The wiring to this pull station was run in half-inch EMT conduit. Above the pull station and connected to it by another run of conduit was a red alarm bell that was ten inches in diameter. I noticed that there was a set screw on the upper left side of the pull station. I also noticed that the pull bar appeared to have dropped a little less than a quarter of an inch. Touching the set screw, I found it to be loose.

The function of the set screw was to hold the pull bar in the pull station in place until someone pulled on the bar, which broke the circuit and set off the fire alarm. When the downstairs alarm zone reacted to a faulty sensor, fire bells throughout the building went off and rang for an extended period. The bell above the pull station vibrated strongly each time the fire alarm system announced a fire, transmitting those vibrations via the conduit to the set screw, which came loose and allowed the pull bar to drop “permanently”. This generated a continuous alarm for the zone that was independent of all the sensors we had been studying. Once I lifted the bar and tightened the set screw, all our fire problems went away.

108. DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ELECTRICITY?

On my third trip to Accra, I stopped by the Front Office to introduce myself to the Ambassador. I had met the Chargé on my second trip but had missed the Ambassador, who was away from post.

The Ambassador was in a meeting when I stopped in, and I found myself in an outer office with two elderly Foreign Service secretaries. The office was neat but dusty; all of the furnishings were old and had seen better days. The Ambassador's secretary was filing papers and the other lady was typing a telegram on an IBM Selectric. I looked around and made eye contact with the DCM's secretary. She seemed to want to talk to me, but she was hesitant: I smiled. She smiled back. She then asked: "Do you know anything about electricity?"

I owned up to knowing a little about electricity. She said: "Could you look at the wiring under my desk? I keep getting shocked from something down there." I moved her chair away from the desk and sat down on the floor.

"Welcome to Africa!" said the wiring. Ghana was a former British colony (The Gold Coast) and the electricity there was 220 V/50 Hz. Everything that the Embassy ordered (typewriters, radio chargers, lamps, everything) arrived from the U.S with U.S.-style two or three-prong plugs; these were cut off on arrival and replaced with big, clunky, British-style plugs, each massive prong of which was about an inch long. There were not many wall outlets in the old wooden Embassy, so GSO had fabricated dozens of outlet strips out of scrap wood, British electrical sockets, wire and wood screws. In general, the outlet strips were thrown together quickly and without a lot of attention to detail.

This particular strip was five outlets long and had seen a lot of use; it was centered under her desk. It supplied the typewriter, a radio charger, a floor lamp, a desk lamp and a tea kettle. It had been abused over the years and was steadily falling apart. There were wood screws on the floor; the wiring toward one end of the strip protruded from the wood base and had lost a wire nut. Next to the outlet strip were the secretary's shoes.

Each day, this elderly lady would dress for work, putting on a pair of shoes with heels. When she arrived at her desk, she would kick off her shoes to be comfortable as she worked. From time to time her foot would brush against the exposed wiring, giving her a memorable 220-volt shock. Rather than complain, she would adjust her seating position so as to point her legs away from the outlet strip, swiveling her body away from the offending outlet strip. She worked in this contorted position most of the day.

I opened my tool kit, found a new wire nut and a small screwdriver, unplugged everything and rebuilt the outlet strip. Where the wood screws had pulled out of the base, I inserted some broken-off toothpicks to give the screw threads some purchase, then re-assembled the wooden base to enclose the wiring. I felt that I had done my good deed for the day and went in to meet the Ambassador.

109. FINDING THE SIC ROOM IN EL SALVADOR

Note: Many of us have had similar experiences, whether escorting pouches, solving wiring problems or working with people. I find it very enjoyable to post a story and then to see others of you write about almost identical experiences. Today, it is Paul Tubbs' turn to see one of his stories generate one of mine.

Because of the civil war in El Salvador while I was in Panama, the size of the Marine Security Guard Detachment in El Salvador was roughly twice the size of any other detachment in our area. The Embassy, four stories in height, was protected by beveled plates of sheet steel and was surrounded by a high chain-link fence intended to detonate RPG grenades before they reached the building. It was pretty ugly. Post One was large in area but was crammed with equipment and was accordingly very warm inside. The Marines were focused on security and were not keeping the post clean. The interior of Post One contained empty coke cans thrown behind the equipment, sandwich wrappers, filthy carpeting, messy wiring and many other signs of neglect.

On my first visit to El Salvador, I was upset at how poorly the Marines were maintaining Post One. I complained to the RSO, who was not overly concerned about the trash on post. Wanting to get a better idea of how the post was laid out, what equipment was working or not working and what rewiring might be in order, I borrowed a vacuum cleaner from the GSO and thought I would start with a clean facility. There was no electrical outlet available in Post One for the vacuum, however, so I plugged the appliance into a wall socket just outside the Marine Booth. I then went into the booth and started to vacuum.

All went well until the metal casing of the vacuum cleaner touched one of the Optima equipment racks in Post One. There was a blue-white flash at the bottom of the cabinet and all of the power in Post One disappeared. Here we were in the middle of a war, and I had completely knocked out the Embassy control room.

I asked the Watchstander in Post One where the SIC room was located. ("SIC" stood for "Security Interface Cabinet".) The Marine just stared at me, then explained that he had no idea what I was talking about. I asked him to call the Gunnery Sergeant to Post One; when the Gunny arrived I asked him the same question, again receiving a blank stare. The Gunny was obviously upset at the complete loss of power and wanted to know what I was going to do about it. I told him that the power could be restored from the SIC room. The Gunny just walked away.

I commandeered the services of the Watchstander in an effort to find the location of the SIC cabinet and perhaps a key for the room. I asked about drawings of the building that might be used by Marines as they made their rounds of the building; I was shown a crude fire plan that

identified major areas on each floor. I concentrated on the ground floor but did not see any reference at all to the SIC room. By this time, Post One had been without power for fifteen minutes and the Marines were getting antsy. I did see a large area on the ground floor that was occupied by the Regional Medical Officer, but nothing on the fire plan jumped out at me and I was getting frustrated at the situation.

I asked to see the key log for the Embassy and started to identify each room for which there was a key. On the second page of the key log was an entry for the "Sick Room". I asked the Marine where that room was located, and he said it was in the Medical Unit. I signed out the key and went looking.

Entering the RMO (Regional Medical Officer) area, I was met by a nurse/receptionist. I identified myself, explained my problem and asked to see the Sick Room. She led me through an examination room, past a couple of offices and up to a door where she said they kept medical supplies. This was the Sick Room, which the key fit.

On opening the door to the Sick Room, I saw shelves of medical supplies on the near wall and all of our SIC room equipment on the far wall. The main breaker for Post One had been tripped and was easy to find. I restored power to the Marine Booth, thanked the nurse, went back to Post One and made some notes, then returned the vacuum cleaner to GSO. The following day, I had the RSO bring all the Marines in on shifts for a SIC room familiarization to show them how their facility was powered and what to do when the power went out.

110. MORTAL WOUNDS

I made many trips to China over the years that we were in Seoul, and I was able to see some (but not all) of the famous sites in and around Beijing. I visited the Forbidden City by myself, went to the Great Wall with the Coopers, visited the Temple of Heaven with a new Seabee and his wife and even found some out-of-the way treasures like the Chinese Bell Museum and the Chinese Museum of Geology and Mineralogy. It was hard getting out of the city without a guide and transportation, however, and there was much more to see.

On one of my later visits to Beijing, Field and Jenny Cooper had planned a picnic to the Summer Palace towards the end of my trip. It was summer, the skies were clear, and I had my SLR camera with me (a Nikon F Photomic Tn, for you film camera aficionados.) I got into Field's car with Field and Jenny and we set off on our trip.

It was sometimes tough to decide what clothing to take with you in your suitcase on extended trips. (Remember "Willie Dillo and the Checklist", Story Number 32.) I always tried to have a jacket with me, preferably one that would keep me warm *and* dry in the rain. For this trip, I brought along a rubberized yellow rain jacket with a hood that had a thin fleece lining.

The Summer Palace was a memorable visit. A group of lakes were surrounded by fabulous Chinese buildings, many built on hillsides to provide a view of the resort. There was a long bridge with carved and painted screens that zig-zagged across one area of the big lake, another bridge with a sequence of stone arches and a "Stone Boat" of carved marble that resembled a large, covered riverboat with paddlewheels butted against the shore. There was a Long Corridor of painted vistas and open views of the lake which stretched some 700 feet along the edge of the water. There were small temples, scenic pavilions and overlooks along the ridges around the lake, and some very large palaces to house the Emperor and his retinue along the lake shore. All of these buildings were constructed in strict adherence to Feng Shue, such as the angular bridge which was designed to keep demons away from the main entrance to the principal palace. I would refer all of you to the Wikipedia article on this World Heritage site, with its many pictures.

When we got to the Palace, we all wanted to see different things, so we agreed to set off independently and regroup at the Stone Boat at a specific time. I wanted to take pictures, so I decided to climb the Hill of Longevity, the central area of the Palace.

Most traditional Chinese buildings are constructed on interlocked wooden frames consisting of sturdy pillars supporting beams. The tallest pillars may support several sets of beams, which are notched into the pillars and locked there with a series of cross-ties. The main roof beam is usually the highest element of a hip roof, the lower edges of which traditionally end at each corner in an upward curve. The roof is generally tiled, with fired clay dragon heads facing each other along the main beam and a series of mystical beasts arrayed along the edges of

the rising corners on official and royal residences. Inside, the buildings are often beautifully painted with flowers, landscapes and geometric designs.

Many of the historic buildings in China feature red columns for good fortune. The pillars inside and outside the building were colored with a mixture of crushed cinnabar mixed with an adhesive, yielding a bright red finish. Over time, the “paint” on the pillars would oxidize, at which time they were lightly sanded and another coat of cinnabar was applied.

I climbed the hill on steps toward the magnificent Tower of Buddhist Incense, a major structure with great views of the lake and nearly all of the surrounding buildings. I climbed to the top of the hill, taking photos, noting that the opposite side of the hill was largely a garden area; I then descended to the lake by a different route.

When I met up with Field and Jenny, Jenny took one look at me and was seriously alarmed. “What happened?” she asked. “Are you all right?” I did not understand. Jenny walked behind me and looked at my jacket. It looked like I had been stabbed in the back several times and allowed to bleed freely. I was shooting a lot of pictures with a heavy camera, and I found that I could get a steadier picture if I just leaned against a column here and there, took a breath and then released the shutter. The cinnabar from the palace pillars had wiped off onto my yellow jacket, and my “wounds” could be seen from about twenty feet away.

111. DINNER IN SACHSENHAUSEN

About 1988, there was an OIC Conference held in Frankfurt. Lou Grob was OIC Frankfurt at that time he had arranged a number of social outings for the group. Coming out of Washington, I decided to take my wife along with me. On one of the nights that we had to ourselves, we took the subway into the main square of Frankfurt, then walked across the Main River on an old iron bridge into Sachsenhausen.

The weather was cold and there had been some snow. We were bundled up but were still cold as we walked briskly through this old suburb, looking for a place to have dinner. We spotted a number of restaurants that appeared along the main street, but nothing caught our fancy. After about half a mile on the main street, the wind picked up. We turned onto a side street and walked a little further, finally encountering what looked like a small stone castle to the side of the road. It was made of grey stone or of cement that looked like stone, had a short ramp of steps leading up to the door, and there was a lighted sign down at the curb identifying the facility as a restaurant and posting the bill of fare. By this time, we were pretty cold. The menu had a number of German dishes on it and the prices were reasonable, so we decided to go in.

On entry, we saw that we were the only patrons of the restaurant, and only one light in the eatery was illuminated. A man in an apron and two other men were sitting at a table, speaking in German. They jumped up as we came in, identified us as Americans by our greeting, and invited us in English to eat dinner there. It was almost as cold inside the building as outside, and the lack of other dinner guests suggested that the restaurant was struggling. There was a large stone fireplace near two of the tables, but the hearth was empty. More to the point, perhaps, there was no wood for a fire anywhere in sight. Both my wife and I were shivering at this point; I looked longingly at the fireplace as we started towards the door.

One of the waiters leaped into action. “Möchten Sie ein Feuer? Hier sitzen!” To our complete astonishment, he took a wooden chair from one of the tables, lifted it over his head and smashed it on the stone floor several times, breaking off the legs and a piece of the back. As we stared, he piled the day’s newspaper into the fireplace, put in some kindling from some of the smaller pieces of the chair and then put on a couple of legs. He lit the fire and in almost no time at all we had a little blaze near one of the tables. He indicated that we should sit. Realizing that one chair was not much in the way of fuel, he then broke up a second chair using the same technique and stacked that wood alongside the fireplace.

Embarrassed at the destruction of property required to get us to eat, we decided to stay. We started with a couple of beers, always a good bet in Germany. As I remember, I ordered schnitzel with red cabbage and potatoes, and it was good. Throughout our meal, the waiter came

by to put more of the two chairs on the fire and to check on our progress. We finished our dinner, had a small strudel with coffee, paid our bill and walked back to Frankfurt, warmer and delighted with the floor show.

112. AN ENTIRE EMBASSY IN A SINGLE ROOM

On my trip to Hanoi, described earlier in story number 33, we initially checked in with the “Embassy” personnel in residence in Hanoi. “Embassy” is in quotes here because we had not yet exchanged Ambassadors or selected a building for our Mission. Instead, there were four rather young Foreign Service Officers in Hanoi, working out of the U.S. Military’s Missing in Action compound outside the city. This facility was short on space and did not want its efforts to recover war dead upstaged by other activities, so our personnel were only allowed to share a single room in the MIA building.

There were four desks in the room, each facing a different wall. At one desk sat a young man serving as the Political Officer. At another sat a young woman who worked as the Economic Officer. A third young man served as the Consular Officer and the last desk was filled by an Administrative Officer. All of these young people were good friends who considered their situation temporary and humorous. It was a unique situation: for the first time in my experience, I was looking at an entire Embassy in a single room.

Just before we arrived in Hanoi, the U.S. Ambassador-designate arrived in the city with his wife and his little dog. The Ambassador-to-be began his activities with a number of polite calls on local government officials; his wife was busy looking over what would be their residence. Neither of these busy people could take the little dog with them, so they left their pet in the “Embassy” while they were moving around.

The dog didn’t bother anyone, it just walked up to each desk, smelled each FSO and then curled up in a corner. The four FSOs found this to be fun. The Admin Officer said “Now we have an official reason why our work can be late! We can say “The dog ate my Post Report!”” One by one, the other officers tried this out: “Hey! The dog ate my Political SitRep!” “This is great! The dog ate my Economics estimates!” and “The dog ate all my Visa applications!”

With the work of the Embassy well in hand and with the dog now given an official function, Peter Pham, Lance Putney and I went out to look for a suitable building to serve as our Chancery.

113. CORRUPTING AN INNOCENT

Note: In many cases, our work involved traveling with inexperienced technicians and engineers, showing them the ropes and then pushing them out of the nest to tackle life's challenges on their own. I think I was most aware of this process in the early days of our Dynalelectron contract, when we seemed to be the Security 101 course for a lot of young people. Here is a story from South America.

After African travel, visiting the cities of South and Central America was a real treat. The people were friendly, the food was great, our support was appreciated by our constituent posts and the cities were stunning. Caracas was one of my favorite places to visit.

To get to our Embassy in Caracas, you landed at Simeon Bolivar airport down on the beach at the Caribbean Sea. An Embassy car was waiting for us. We would get through customs, load up and head up into the mountains of Venezuela on a twelve-lane highway, six lanes on each side. The lower part of the road featured a few curves as the highway rose, but soon we were passing through a series of long tunnels. Traffic flowed uphill at a high rate of speed, but the tunnels were lengthy, dimly illuminated and filled with glazed tile like tunnels in the United States.

The city of Caracas is built in a mountain valley; you can see it in 3D on Google Maps. The city rises in a progression of skyscrapers from the point where you exit the last tunnel going uphill to a point about a mile below the crests of the mountains. All around the city, the mountain tops are national parks and are left green. The skyscrapers house offices, businesses, government buildings and are interspersed with other tall buildings, many of them stepped as they rise, where people live. The very extensive highway system winds around these buildings on a series of overpasses, underpasses, clover leafs and ramps. As roads exit the highway system, they reach toward the hillsides and begin to wind back and forth toward the mountain crests like mountain roads in other countries. Underlying this skyscraper and highway system is a buried subway system (rare for mountain settings) and in the middle of the city is Old Caracas, with elegant old hotels, walled compounds, royal palms and museums. Our Embassy (it's since been rebuilt in another location) used to be near the top of the highway system, and TDYers were housed in a hotel in the Alta Mira district.

During my tour in Panama, Caracas received two Security Enhancement Packages, one in the Chancery and one in the Annex building. I was involved in both installations, and the ESC was supported on both installations by some technicians from the Dynalelectron Corporation. On the Annex installation, some of that support arrived in the form of Arthur, who was bearded and

approaching fifty, and Terry. Terry was in his early twenties, was from Indiana and had never been out of the United States before.

Terry was pleasant but was visibly uncomfortable each time he left the security of the Embassy compound. Someone had impressed on him that he was taking his life in his hands every time he ate something of foreign origin. Still, we had to eat, and we had per diem for restaurants, and Caracas had a lot of restaurants. Terry had to tag along with us in hopes of finding a meal that would not cause him harm.

I introduced Arthur and Terry to an Italian restaurant that I liked: Il Padrino (“The Godfather” in Italian.) It featured a low vaulted ceiling that was hand-painted with frescoes of Italy, small tables covered with red and white-checked tablecloths, clean utensils and napkins and one of the most impressive antipasto tables I have ever seen, almost thirty feet long. The interior of the restaurant was redolent with the odors of good Italian dishes cooking. On our first visit there, Arthur and I ordered the antipasto and baked main dishes: Terry ordered a hamburger and bottled water. I tried to get Terry to try an olive stuffed with feta cheese and a pickled red bell pepper from the antipasto table, but he asked for catsup instead.

On our second evening out, I took Arthur and Terry to another Italian restaurant. This was the Alta Vista, a seafood restaurant. Fresh delicacies from the Caribbean were trucked up to this restaurant every day and were prepared with great skill. I ordered calamari as an appetizer and broiled grouper in a lemon and wine sauce as an entrée. Arthur ordered crab-stuffed mushrooms and baby eels. Terry just about left the table when Arthur ordered. He asked for a hamburger again, then settled reluctantly for spaghetti and meatballs on hearing that the restaurant did not serve hamburgers.

When our appetizers arrived, I gave Arthur one of my calamari rings to try and he gave me a mushroom. I then put a very small calamari ring on Terry’s plate. He asked what it was and I said “Calamari. Try it and see if it tastes good.” He did, and we went on with our dinner. Neither Arthur nor I explained what calamari was.

We ate at a number of other restaurants after that evening, with Terry getting progressively more daring in his choice of dinners. The next time we went to the Alta Vista, he ordered calamari all by himself and tried the fried red snapper that I suggested. Arthur again ordered the baby eels. He let Terry have a bite of Caesar salad for the first time in his life

On our final evening in Caracas, we returned to the Alta Vista. *Terry ordered calamari and the baby eels.* He ate everything served to him and said that the eels were delicious. As we left the restaurant, Terry walked out ahead of us as Arthur and I said goodbye to our waiter. Arthur looked at Terry standing outside the restaurant, looked at me and said: “Our work here is done.”

114. THIS ALWAYS HAPPENS WHEN YOU'RE ON TRAVEL

When I first arrived in Abidjan, we were fully staffed, but we had far too few people for the territory we covered. There were six of us in the Office, three SEOs, two Seabees and a secretary: we covered twenty-eight posts. Many of our flights used Dakar as a travel hub, a few other posts were reached through Yaounde in Cameroon, but most of the time we traveled on milk runs that went up and down the coast, stopping at each city along the way to discharge and pick up passengers. Not all of these airlines were approved by the FAA with regard to their maintenance schedules and pilot training: we tried to avoid those flights, for which we commonly had nicknames, like "Air Maybe" for "Air Mali". At any rate, there was a lot of travel for all of us, reaching 70% of our available time in some months, and we were usually glad to get home. That this very frequent travel was hard on our families goes without saying.

I returned from a trip to Dakar and Nouakchott, Mauritania to find my wife waiting for me on the porch. Her body language indicated that she was angry about something, and I thought it was probably the long trip. I asked what the trouble might be and she laughed.

During my absence, the City of Abidjan decided to re-wire the power lines that went down the street by our house. My wife was sitting in our dining room on the day the linemen came. First, power was shut off to every house on the community circuit. This was a bit disconcerting as we received our food in frozen condition from either Denmark or Texas, and we had nearly a thousand dollars of frozen meat in our freezer. Further, with the power off there was no music or radio available. We had good natural light in the living room, however, so my wife moved to the sofa and was reading.

Most of a day without power went by. Then, abruptly, the electricity came back on. Somehow, when they connected the new power lines at the substation, 220 volts in our house went to 440 volts. Some of the fuses in our fuse box opened; others did not. The overhead fan in the dining room began to rotate at alarming speed, came loose from the ceiling and dropped a couple of inches. The bulbs of table lamps that were on when the power went off exploded. Several small transformers around the house that were connected to outlets began to overheat, filling the house with acrid smoke. Worst of all, the wiring in the wall leading to a large transformer on the dining room floor began to smoke and then burn, with smoke and sparks emerging from a couple of outlets in the wall.

My wife called GSO on the radio and reached our General Services Officer, a former Seabee Master Chief. He notified the City of Abidjan about the wiring error and sent a crew to our house immediately to put out the fire and check for appliance damage. Gail took our children out of the house to wait for GSO, whose crew arrived very quickly after her call. The

crew first shut off our power at the main disconnect switch (in a neighbor's yard). They then put out the wall fire and provided us with a new transformer for the freezer. They counted the other damaged transformers and brought us replacements within a day or two. Then, with a great deal of labor, they removed several damaged outlets, disconnected the burnt and fused wiring in the dining room wall, pulled new wiring to the fuse panel using the old, burnt wires as pull wires and replaced the outlets. Finally, they replaced the ceiling fan and checked the appliances for damage, all while I was out of town.

After relating all of this to me, my wife said: "This always happens when you're on travel." I realized that our intensive travel schedule was wearing down our family members and decided to pare back our travel schedule for two months.



The author's wife at the beach in Abidjan.

Photo taken by the author in 1979.

115. KYLE ARMSTRONG AND THE MISSING FRONT DOOR

I don't know how New Embassy architects are chosen today, but when I came aboard the State Department in 1975, the Office of Foreign Buildings had arranged for the Deans of three prominent Architectural Schools in the United States to evaluate new Embassy designs for the Department. The Deans would also suggest to the Department which new architects of their acquaintance might be good choices to compete on New Embassy Building contracts. The established procedure, as I understood it through a friend in A/FBO, was for a Request for a Proposal to be sent to a number of recommended architects along with some site plans. The architects would reply with a set of sketches on what they thought the new building should look like, and the Dean Pool would evaluate those sketches, inviting two or three promising architects to develop their ideas further.

From these pre-selections, the architects would build models of their proposal. A number of these models are now on permanent display in the Overseas Buildings Office. Cost estimates would be prepared, and the Department would pick a designer for that Embassy. The effort here was to introduce the world to American architecture, to give talented new architects an opportunity to compete against established firms, and to reward good artistry with valuable and interesting assignments.

Sometime before 1978, I was over in FBO when I saw a model of the new Embassy that the Department was about to build in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. One of the challenges for American architects in building our Embassies was to make the modern new buildings capture some of the style elements that were traditional in the host country. The model I saw was beautiful: a white building with a tiled red roof, with tile-faced steps leading up to an imposing entrance. Like other buildings in Malaysia, our new building was going to have long, covered balconies so that employees could walk from office to office *outside* the Embassy walls, even on rainy days. If you Google "U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur" you can see this facility as it looks today.

The front entrance to this interesting building was unusual. You walked up the imposing tiered staircase, opened a metal lattice door that let fresh air into the lobby area, and encountered the Marine Guard behind a window in the lobby, who would admit you to the appropriate office area through control doors. At that time, we had not yet developed a walk-through metal detector program, and guests were "wanded" as they came in. Essentially, our Embassy in Kuala Lumpur did not have a Front Door.

Terrorism raised its ugly head, and design ideas that seemed graceful and appropriate in 1978 required re-evaluation in the 1990's. The covered balcony walkways became a security

liability: someone with a rifle could easily pick off employees walking from office to office outside the building's walls. The ground-level metal lattice door and lattice side panels were no obstacle to bullets. The Marine Guard could not see the front approach to the Embassy directly because of the mesh barrier and because the front steps dropped so dramatically. There was enough space in the lobby for a walk-through metal detector and a small table, but power was not available out there and ugly extension cords were in use.

Into this building, sometime in the 1980's, came a new Security Engineering Office. The second OIC was Kyle Armstrong, who was surprised at the absence of a front door and who sat down with the RSO to plan something better. Kyle first planned a SIC room, then proposed installing some CCTV cameras, moving the Marine Booth forward slightly, replacing the exterior metal grilles with ballistic panels, improving the ballistic barriers in front of the watchstander and extending door controls to new ballistic entrance and exit doors under the front porch canopy. He retained two control doors which admitted visitors to either the Embassy office areas or the Consulate.

To better show the Embassy and FBO what he had in mind, Kyle drew up all the plans himself.

To do this, Kyle acquired a version of "Turbo-CAD" and got familiar with it. Working with scale drawings of the original building from FBO, he entered the measurements of the Embassy lobby area, covered balcony and front porch and steps into his computer, then brought in (to scale) the dimensions of our ballistic doors, electronic cabinets and ballistic windows. A new location for the WTMD and the local guard was established, with all the required wiring to couple the new MSG booth to the SIC room and to the WTMD area recessed into the concrete slab and neatly covered. Using the features of Turbo-CAD, Kyle prepared both plans and elevations and, since the drawing package was capable of color, he used the existing colors of the wire lattice area (a dark blue) on the steel used to frame his own improvements. His presentation looked very much like the building the Embassy was used to seeing, although it was suddenly protected from rifle fire and was more functional.

Because his plans were to scale and were based around materials which could be ordered through DS or acquired and fabricated locally, the Embassy was able to obtain funding for the project and get started on it immediately. Kyle was deeply involved with the new construction and installation work, but he accomplished it quickly and without a lot of fuss.

When I first arrived in KL to visit Kyle, I could not tell that the new MSG booth and control doors had not been designed by FBO. Everything fit, everything worked, everything was much more secure and yet the appearance of the Embassy had hardly changed.

116. LEARNING THE COLONEL BOGIE MARCH

Here and there, as we traveled around our African posts, we would encounter some really interesting buildings. I have already described the gold market in Bamako (Story Number 37). There was another unusual building in Conakry, Guinea: it was our DCM's residence, built to resemble an African Chief's hut.

On my first visit to Conakry, the DCM was a distinguished-looking single man in his late fifties or early sixties. The Embassy housed him in a strange residence. The base of the house was a circle with the outer walls going up about twelve feet. A conical roof rose from the edges of the outer wall to a point perhaps thirty feet above the ground. The radius of the outer wall was about forty-five feet; the various rooms of the interior had flat inner walls which formed a hexagonal pattern. Inner walls like spokes connected the hexagon to the outer circle to form bedrooms, baths, a study, a kitchen and some public rooms. The center of the house above the hexagon opened to the high conical ceiling, which was covered with thatch on the outside. The entire house seemed to be made of concrete-filled clay blocks, and all of the electrical wiring was channeled into these walls in flexible plastic conduit and then plastered over.

The building was designed for entertaining. Large double French doors opened onto an immense flagstone patio which descended in two levels to a landscaped swimming pool. There was a tennis court on the property and a large circular driveway leading up to the front door. As with many official residences in Africa, the gardens around the house (and the residence itself) were filled with exotic African Plants like the elephant-ear shaped *Monstera*. The patio and the residence main room (under the cone) could comfortably hold about a hundred and fifty guests, although many of those guests sat on card table chairs which could be folded up and put into storage when the invitees were gone.

The DCM was a gracious host who tried to feed and entertain each group of TDY gypsies that came his way. This was greatly appreciated because the pickings in the Embassy Commissary were mighty lean from time to time: ships headed for Conakry with cargoes sometimes just passed the port and took their cargos elsewhere. Invited to dinner at the DCM's house, we would step into an Embassy van that he sent for us and occasionally find ourselves at a diplomatic dinner involving representatives from other Embassies.

On the patio outside the house, the DCM had a large bird cage in which lived an African Grey parrot. In the avian world, there are a number of birds that can mimic human voices, like Mynah birds in India. The very best mimic, however, is reportedly the African Grey. The DCM was trying to teach this bird to speak in his spare time. One of his major efforts was to get the bird to whistle the "Colonel Bogie March" from the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Our

envoy would pull up one of those folding chairs, sit by the cage with some soda crackers and a beer, and whistle at the parrot. The bird watched him closely, but did not say a thing, even when bribed with something to eat.

When the DCM left, if the rest of us sat very still, the parrot would whistle the march beautifully.

As many of you will appreciate, we were surprised to be invited to a diplomatic party while on TDY. Imagine our additional surprise when, on the same trip, we were invited to *another* party at the Residence of the Indian Ambassador. We left work a bit early, walked to our apartment to clean up, and were picked up by the same van. This time, we went to another country's official residence, where we enjoyed a curry dinner. Many of the diplomats at the Indian residence were people we had met at the DCM's residence. We realized quickly that this inter-embassy dinner hosting went on all year long: it gave the diplomats an opportunity to meet each other socially, it helped each Embassy deal with food shortages by spreading the available food around the diplomatic community, and representatives of the Government of Guinea were always invited to help the diplomats understand what was going on in the country and justify the entertaining expenses. By sharing access to the local government officials, each Embassy was able to boost its reporting while splitting the expenses of hosting parties.

117. A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

In 1976 or thereabouts, I was in the R&D section of SY/T. The Office was full of new people who were assigned to Washington for a couple of years or who were just passing through on their way to overseas assignments. Our division had a bit of money and was looking at some new equipment purchases.

One of the firms whose equipment we liked was the Watkins-Johnson Company in Gaithersburg, Maryland. They made a lot of equipment for the Federal Government, including equipment for the U.S. Military, and their products were beautifully built, very sensitive and durable. In those simpler times before government/private industry ethics came under a giant microscope, the company saw nothing wrong with having a factory night for its customers, a once-a-year occasion when they could show off their products not only on the desks of a customer, but in the plant where the products were made. So, one Spring night, they invited all of their Government customers to come visit their factory. Surprisingly, for that time, wives were also welcome. Because the military was already feeling the effects of the above microscope, Watkins-Johnson announced that all military personnel and their wives attending the factory night would have to pay an admittance fee: \$10 per guest. Almost our entire office attended the event; I thought the guest list might have included about eighty people.

Each arriving group of government customers first met up with their sales and support representatives on the upper floor of the WJ factory building, across the street from the (then) National Bureau of Standards. Representative equipment in our field of endeavor was on display and was working in a small upstairs office. Other customers were similarly welcomed in other rooms. Each sales or support representative latched onto two or three incoming couples and led them to a staircase at the end of the upper floor.

At this point, we encountered a full bar and a raw bar, with an apron-clad caterer in a tall white hat shucking oysters and arranging chilled shrimp for fingertip consumption. My wife and I each had a glass of champagne and we joined the Lechevets on the tour.

We walked down the stairs and ran into a huge NCR computerized and motorized hydraulic punch. This gadget could take a large sheet of aluminum and cut and punch a series of radio receiver chassis blanks out of it, getting the most out of each sheet. The equipment took its instructions from a CAD program and featured a motorized turret with several different-sized punches. This allowed the machine to progress from large holes to smaller holes on the chassis without taking the sheet off of the motorized punch table. The product being showcased that evening was a RS-111 radio receiver.

From the punch, the chassis was folded, spot-welded as required and was then put through an aluminum anodizing process right in the factory. There were several anodizing baths in front of us and a dry anodized chassis to inspect at the end of the line. We walked out of the anodizing room and into the main factory floor, where we ran into a buffet table. At this location, caterers were slicing up turkey and prime rib and making little sliders for WJ guests. Formally dressed waiters came by to replenish our drinks.

The WJ factory floor normally had a variety of production lines in motion at the same time, but for this factory night only the RS-111 line was working. Drinks in hand, we walked down the line station by station, with our guide encouraging us to ask questions of the workers.

Most of the workers were middle-aged ladies in jeans and sneakers. Our guide explained (citing knitting as an example) that women were better than men at repetitive jobs that required a fair amount of hand-eye coordination.

The first station we encountered featured a wooden board set with lines of nails. The lady working this station took wire after pre-cut colored wire from a cart next to her and bent each wire among the nails in a particular pattern to form a wiring harness for the receiver. She used a tie-wrap gun to pull the harness together. The worker put each harness in a tray on another cart. At the second station, another lady was busy installing chassis-mounted connectors and tuning devices onto an anodized radio chassis. The third station merged the harness and the chassis-mounted hardware, with expert soldering work. Gradually, the radio receiver came together before our eyes, with the end of the line producing a completed product.

At that point, we emerged from the production line and encountered *another* buffet table, with pheasant being carved for the sliders and some more finger food to explore. Waiters again came around to offer beverages.

The completed receiver was then taken into a testing room where its circuits were rung out and calibrated. If everything was in working order, the receiver was set aside to receive an identifying plaque with company nomenclature and a serial number. It was then sent to shipping for packaging and delivery to a waiting customer.

This completed our tour. We went back upstairs, where we were offered coffee and cookies for dessert. We reclaimed our coats, thanked our host and headed home, wiser and a little heavier.

118. CHATS WITH THE RUSSIAN CONSUL

The Mas-Hamilton combination lock began to appear in our world after I left Panama in 1986. At first there were a series of videos about the lock, then samples of the lock appeared for us to try out, and then they started to arrive on containers. In the early 1990s, GSA still had stocks of Mosler safes with S&G locks on them, but these were quickly supplanted by Mosler safes with the new electronic lock and the new items began to make their way into the field through the regular GSA replacement process.

There was a lot going on in the world at that time, especially in Russia, where the Soviet Union came apart with astonishing speed right after 1991. Boris Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev as the leader of the new Russia, and many things began to change.

Our ESO in Moscow had always taken care of security needs at our Consulate in Vladivostok. It was a long way between the two cities, but the cost of flying that distance on the stabilized fares of Aeroflot in USSR days was not prohibitive. I was in Korea in 1994, however, when Aeroflot suddenly raised its prices to reflect the higher costs of aviation gas. A flight to Vladivostok from Moscow became prohibitively expensive. At about the same time, the first Mosler/Mas-Hamilton safes reached our Consulate in Vladivostok and (of course) they had a lockout on the new safe almost immediately.

ESO Moscow looked at a map and saw that there was a SEO in Korea. The distance between Seoul and Vladivostok looked an awful lot shorter than the space between Moscow and Vladivostok, and I received a telegram: Would I go to Vladivostok and open the locked-out container? ESO Moscow would supply the travel funds.

I had just completed a round of visits to my constituent posts and I thought I had the time to go. ESO Tokyo, which was closer than Seoul to Vladivostok, was pretty busy. Never having been to Russia, I was interested in the trip, especially since Vladivostok is a port facility used by the Russian Navy and I thought I might see a Russian destroyer or cruiser while visiting the city. ESO Tokyo sent me a skill saw kit with abrasive disks, and all that I really needed was a ticket and a Russian Visa. I went down to our Consulate, obtained Visa forms for a trip to Russia, completed the forms and sent them to the Russian Embassy in Seoul with a passport and two pictures.

Two days later, I received a telephone call at my desk in Seoul:

“Mr. Herrmann, I am Dimitri Solokov, Russian Consul in Korea.” I greeted Mr. Solokov and asked how I could help him.

“You have asked for Russian Visa. What will you do in Vladivostok?” I had put “Administrative Assistant” on my Visa form, so I explained that I needed to provide administrative assistance to our Consulate. Mr. Solokov wanted to know what that was, so I explained that administrative support could be personnel assistance, financial records assistance, communications assistance or management assistance: whatever the Consulate needed. He said he would call me back.

The next day, I received another call:

“Mr. Herrmann, Dimitri Solokov, Russian Consul. I see you have many visas in your passport. I also look at diplomatic list. You are on list. You are not Administrative Officer for Seoul Embassy. What will you do in Vladivostok?” I explained that I was a regional officer who traveled to help many Embassies and Consulates, and that I had been asked to help our Consulate in Russia because of the rising cost of Aeroflot tickets from Moscow. He said he would call me back.

After two more days, I received a third call:

Mr. Herrmann, Dimitri Solokov. I have spoke to Moscow. They want you write letter and explain trip to Vladivostok from Seoul.” I told him that I would call *him* back.

At this time, I was looking at a February trip to the tip of Siberia by myself, probably traveling non-pro with a pouched Skil Saw in the belly of an Aeroflot aircraft. I sat down at my Wang computer and began to compose a letter to Mr. Solokov when another telegram arrived from Moscow. The Consulate *really needed* the safe to be opened, and there was additional work to be done in Vladivostok, so ESO Moscow was going to make the trip after all. They thanked me for my efforts to get there. I sent the saw back to Tokyo and called the Russian Embassy.

“Mr. Solokov, George Herrmann at the American Embassy. How are you?” I told him while waiting to receive my Russian Visa, other more important work in my region had come up, and I needed to travel to other countries. I asked for the return of my passport and thanked him for all his help in getting me to Vladivostok. The passport arrived the next day.

119. ETIQUETTE

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

Note: When I started writing these stories, I thought I would try to capture the Foreign Service experience. For me, that means going back into time a bit, and recounting some of my experiences as a Foreign Service dependent. I will present some of those FS Dependent stories in time. I will try not to bore you, but you will see that things were different then, especially where passenger liners were the preferred route to overseas posts.

My mother grew up in Indiana during the Depression, one of five children born to a young photographer who had set up a studio across the street from the entrance to Indiana University. My grandfather died shortly after the birth of my uncle, the youngest of the five children, and the circumstances of the family changed dramatically, with the family taking in boarders and the older children working hard for low wages to help make ends meet.

With this background, my mother was not prepared for Foreign Service assignments where it was expected that diplomats would hire servants to help run their households. This was not such a problem in Poland, where my father engaged a cook/housekeeper to help my mother with her (then) four children, but it became an issue in Bombay in 1956. In Indian society in the 1950's (and perhaps today) it was customary for a well-off family to hire four servants. These were a Bearer (which we would call a Butler), a cook, an Ayah (a nurse for the children) and a Hamal (a Sweeper and the person who took out the garbage, cleaned toilets and floors and did the heavy lifting). The idea of a crew of servants working for her was foreign to both my mother's experience and personality. She especially disliked the common practice (in India) of using a bell to ring for her servants.

Hiring a household staff was expected in Bombay, however, and my mother was expecting her fifth child with the oldest of four others not yet a teenager. The Ayah was especially welcome, as were the cook and the Hamal. No one likes to clean toilets: in Hindu practice, where castes still prevailed, the work of the Hamal would not be done by anyone else. The Bearer, however, seemed unnecessary to my mother. The caste system again worked against her here: it was a bearer's job to answer the door, to receive mail and to coordinate the work of the three other servants. The cook did not feel it was his job to manage the others, the Ayah was too busy to manage and neither employee would accept directions from the Hamal. Mom was stuck: in India, she needed a Bearer. So, after a short search, she hired John.

John was a large, somewhat pompous man with a big ego. He relished giving directions to the other servants, who quickly resented his presence. Most of our mail came through the Consulate, so John's visits to the downstairs mailbox were seldom productive. My parents

entertained infrequently, so there were seldom extensive menus to plan (and the cook took care of those). John's primary job was to serve us meals at the table and to bring out snacks when my mother had guests in the house, which was often.

At first, Mom would call for John by name when she had guests in, asking him to coordinate a service of tea or coffee and some sandwiches. She noticed, however, that he often did not show up right away, and she sometimes had to go looking for him in our flat, even though she knew he could hear her. She would then explain what she wanted him to do and he would set the tea service in motion after telling the cook what to do. This incensed my mother: she felt the cook was perfectly capable of preparing and serving the tea, and wondered why John, who had little to do for the highest salary among the four servants, was being so difficult.

One day, about six months after we arrived in Bombay, my mother walked into the living room to discover a small brass bell on the coffee table. She asked John where it came from, and he said he had purchased it. John was embarrassed to have my mother call for him by name: in India, it was not dignified to be called by a raised voice. John was used to responding discretely to a small bell, which he could hear clearly throughout the flat, so he bought one for my mother and he expected her to use it.

To my mother, this seemed very much like snobbery. She would far rather have called to John in a friendly way and asked for his help. Instead, she was asked to shake the little bell any time she needed something. Swallowing her own pride, she began to use the bell, remembering to carry it with her from room to room so that it could be used at the table during meals.

The enmity between John and the cook grew rapidly during our second year in Bombay. One afternoon, there was a very loud argument in Hindi in our kitchen, followed by shouts and screams. John and the cook were fighting, and each of them had grabbed a kitchen knife during the argument. John, who began the argument, was seriously cut with a big, serrated bread knife. The fight might have been worse, but the unarmed Hamal came into the kitchen, separated the two fighters and ended the argument.

When my father returned that evening, he made some staffing changes. Both John and the cook were fired. Nanum, the Hamal (to his astonishment) was promoted to bearer and was taken to a tailor by my father to be outfitted with a Bearer's uniform. The Ayah remained in service with us and we hired a new cook and a new Hamal. Our domestic tranquility was restored, and the bell was put away.

120. NARITA AIRPORT, TOKYO

Somewhere around 1993, I needed to visit ESO Manila from Seoul. The three Korean flight attendants in the Embassy who took turns arranging my travels decided that the best travel deal could be obtained by flying to Tokyo, taking a long break between arriving and departing aircraft, and then leaving for Manila on the following day. The overlay was a long one: over twelve hours. On previous transits, I had found Narita to be a grim and restrictive airport. I asked the stewardesses if there was an inexpensive hotel that I could stay at while in Tokyo. They looked at each other, laughed behind their hands in the Korean manner and said there *was* such a hotel. I asked them to make me a hotel reservation as well as aircraft reservations, and I got my wish.

I came into Narita, went through the line for diplomats and showed a customs officer my hotel reservation. He nodded and sent me over to a shuttle bus stop. The bus took me a short distance away to what was then an experimental hotel, but which is now called the Narita Nine Hour Airport Hotel, which I invite all of you to look up on Google.

The idea behind the nine-hour airport hotel is simple. Travelers who must stay in airports for long periods of time want a place to sleep, to store a few belongings safely, to take a shower and shave and perhaps get a meal between flights. Land is valuable in Japan: those travelers don't all need king size beds or queen size beds or even double beds. If they are traveling by themselves, all they need is a twin bed with a storage locker and sinks and shower facilities that they can share. Those travelers don't want to spend a lot of money for their stopover: if the hotel charges too much, travelers will simply sleep on couches in the airport proper. But a hotel *can* charge a reasonable amount of money for a very small room with clean sheets and the above amenities. Architecturally, those little rooms don't have to all be on the same level: you can stagger them at different heights so long as the travelers can reach their beds. The sleeping areas of the Nine Hour Airport Hotel looked very much like the inside of a big honeycomb, and I felt a little like a larva when I opened the door to my room.

My room looked just a little different than the ones seen on the current hotel website. There was a walk space beside my bed in which I could put my suitcase, and a small night table built into the back wall at the end of the walkway on which I could put my alarm clock and shaving kit. The doorway, however, was the same rounded rectangle that you see in the pictures. The room came with some amenities: there was a white terry cloth bathrobe with the hotel logo lying on the bed. On top of the robe, there was a pair of Japanese woven sandals in a bag, along with a tiny toothbrush, Japanese toothpaste, a tiny bar of soap and little squeeze bottles of shampoo and conditioner. There was also a bath towel, a hand towel and a washcloth. Signs

fastened to the wall indicated the way to the toilets, sinks and showers in a variety of languages. It was clean and utilitarian, but I have had a lot more room in military transit barracks.

I opened my suitcase, took out my shaving kit and alarm clock, changed into the slippers and bath robe. Then I wandered down the hallway to the shower and cleaned up. There was lots of hot water and there were six other travelers in the shower area. I dried off, retraced my steps and set my alarm clock. The rooms were quite soundproof and I slept soundly until the alarm went off.

In the morning, I scooted to the rest room to shave, then repacked my suitcase, turned in my key, paid for my room and caught the shuttle back to the airport. I checked in for my afternoon flight to Manila and checked my suitcase to be free of it. I then left the airport by bus again, went to a different hotel on the airport grounds and found a restaurant serving American breakfasts. The cost of my breakfast in Tokyo was about half the price of my room on the previous night.

After breakfast, I wandered around the ground floor of the hotel and stumbled onto a bridal shop. In the front window were three white Western style bridal dresses made of different fabrics like satin and organdy. Two dresses were offered with lace and veils and the other was more revealing with simpler lines. Each of these dresses cost several thousand dollars, as seen by printed signs on the floor in front of them.

I walked into the shop and saw a red silk Japanese wedding kimono on a wooden Tee frame. It was beautifully embroidered with large white cranes, golden pagodas, long-leaved pine trees and an exquisite waterfall, with the embroidered patterns meeting each other perfectly down the front. The back of the kimono was splayed carefully so that visitors could see the elegant embroidery by walking around the frame. It was easily the most beautiful kimono I have ever seen. Unlike the Western bridal gowns, however, this one had no price tag.

I went back to the airport, caught my flight to Manila, then returned to Seoul. The reservation flight attendants, giggling, all asked me how I had enjoyed the hotel.

121. SILVER FERNS

One of the significant joys of working for the Foreign Service is the chance to have members of your family travel to your post of residence and stay with you for a while, getting to see the life you are living and another country at the same time. When we were assigned to New Zealand, we had a rush of visit offers from our relatives, but most of them were stunned by the round-trip cost to Wellington from the Washington Area. In 2005, however, my mother decided to come out for a visit. She was 86 years old at that time and thought it would be a good idea to travel with a companion. My cousin's wife Laura, from Connecticut, immediately offered to visit us with her. I might add here that Laura is a professional opera singer.

I drove up to Auckland to meet our guests and we drove down the spine of North Island through the Rotorua volcanic region, which is a center of the Maori culture in the country. We stopped at some national parks along the way. One of these parks had a large number of Silver Ferns, a national symbol for New Zealand.

Before European settlers reached New Zealand, the Maori who lived there would take Silver Ferns, which have a reflective underside to their fronds, and place them along pathways with the reflective side up. At night, moonlight and even starlight would illuminate these paths, helping people to find their way home after dark.

While in the park, my mother and Laura posed for me on a small bridge under some large fern fronds. There was not a lot of light in this heavily wooded area and I was concerned that my picture might not come out. The ferns, however, were Silver Ferns, and they acted exactly like the umbrella reflector in a photographer's studio, reflecting light from my camera flash and softening the faces of my subjects. My picture had excellent color tone and facial color balance, all by accident.

Laura and Grammy enjoyed Wellington. We took them to the fabulous national museum in the capital city, out to dinner at several restaurants, to parks, to a pub and to other parts of the city. Ambitious, they then left us and took the ferry to South Island, where they continued their trip by train and bus all the way to Milford Sound at the Southern end of the island. They then returned by train and bus up the East Coast of South Island, reaching a point along the coastline where it was possible to swim with porpoises. Laura, an adventuress, promptly went out in a small boat with other swimmers and hopped into the Pacific Ocean as dozens and dozens of bottle-nosed dolphins swam by.

After their return from South Island, the travelers left us to travel back to Auckland by bus and train. Along the way, they stopped in Waitomo to see the Glow Worm Caves. These are a string of underground caves in limestone with a river at the bottom; tourists can put on wet

suits and inner tubes and ride the river, which I have done, or get into an inflatable boat, which Grammy and Laura did. The ceilings of these caves are covered with phosphorescent worms that make the roof of the cave look like the night sky with stars once the lights are turned off.

Per my mother, once the lights were off for their group, the guide mentioned that the acoustics in the cave were nearly perfect. He asked his tour group if anyone would like to sing. Laura said she would try, cleared her throat, and sang an Aria from Verdi in the dark.



The author's mother and cousin under a Silver Fern.

Photo taken by the author in a forest on North Island, New Zealand, 2004

122. THE MAN I THOUGHT I KNEW

I joined the State Department in March of 1975. As I remember, John Perdew took me around the building on the first day, showing me the different SY offices, the Credit Union, the Cafeteria and the Lock Shop. I was keen on learning about locks and safes and vaults, and I caught Russ Waller in an expansive and friendly frame of mind, so we talked for about an hour. I remained in the Department until 1978, and I had a lot of interaction with both Russ and with Whitey Franchot, the former Seabee and principal lock shop instructor.

On my tour in Africa, I spent a lot of time at our new Embassy in Lagos, which I have described in earlier stories. After the FBO-designed front entry package failed completely (story number 23), I suggested that Russ come out to Lagos to see the situation for himself, as he normally compiled and reviewed the lock schedules for new buildings at that time and as other Embassies were due to receive the same package that had failed in Nigeria. He reluctantly traveled to Lagos, looked over the locks installed and decided on the spot to change to Von Duprin crash bars and mag locks, with which most of you are familiar. Russ accompanied us back to Abidjan, stayed a couple of days, lost his wallet to a pickpocket and then headed home.

Over the next twenty years, I usually stopped in to see Russ each time I came back to the Department. Almost always, I found him focused on his projects, but willing to take the time to talk to me. It was always good to see him and I thought I knew him well.

When Russ died in ____, I elected to go to his funeral. It was on a winter day: we had had several inches of snow that year followed by an ice storm, and the snow had a glazed crust on it that reflected sunlight like a mirror. There was a strong wind outside that day, and people were worried that the burial might have to be postponed.

The church holding his funeral was completely filled, with mourners standing at the back. I recognized only a few of the people present. There were four different speakers at the memorial service: each speaker talked about Mr. Waller using a different first name.

- His family members called him “Russell” and spoke at length about his many activities at the head of a large family and his work with the Boy Scouts. He did so much in this capacity that it was hard for me to understand how he could have been so active in that activity and yet have been a busy man at the State Department.
- A representative from his Lodge in the Masons organization called him “Rusty”, and talked for quite a while about his service to the Lodge. He was valued for his work as a Mason, as a Master and as a Grand Master in that organization. Again, it seemed like there wasn’t enough time in anyone’s life to have done all of that.

- The State Department speaker remembered him as “Russ” and traced his working life from Fort Holabird to the Department, focusing on Russ’s support for the Pentagon during a major fire there in the early 1970’s and on the hundreds of security personnel trained in his Lock Shop.
- Finally, his church, referring to him as “Deacon”, expressed their appreciation for his years of work on their behalf. His efforts for the church were again extensive and laudable, indicating that he spent many hours on community support.

So. Four separate but individually important pursuits in life, each pursued vigorously, and each activity addressed with a different *nom de guerre*. By this time, I was thinking that I did not know Russ Waller very well at all.

After the eulogies, we drove over to the burial site, where Russ’s coffin was positioned above an open grave under a willow tree. The leaves of the tree were coated with ice, which gradually melted during the graveside service. Shards of icicles fell a branch at a time to shatter on the ice-coated snow below. The wind moaned through the willow branches and the tombstones around us, making the burial orations hard to hear, mighty cold and yet very memorable.

123. AMERICAN KNOW-HOW

Note: This is more of a Foreign Service story than an SEO story, as it deals with the marketing of American-made goods overseas. It's a true story, however, and I hope it fits in among my other recollections.

In 1903, an American inventor and entrepreneur named King C. Gillette designed the first safety razor. Where most men shaved with a long and sometimes dull blade of steel, the Gillette razor was made of very thin steel and had two sharpened edges that were encased in a protective cover so that it was difficult to cut yourself on either blade. The cover was secured by a screw that went through the blade cover and a hole in the blade and then threaded into the handle. The tool was inexpensive, selling for about a dollar, and the razor blades were disposable: you used one for three or four shaves, then tossed it away.

When World War One came around, the U.S. military issued a Gillette razor to most service personnel. This created a strong brand affiliation for the product that kept it the world's most popular razor long after the war was over.

In 1921, the original patents for the Gillette razor expired and Mr. Gillette introduced a new razor that used the same blades. Instead of a central fastening screw, this gadget had "wings" on the top which were opened by twisting a knob at the bottom of the razor. The principal problem with the safety razor was corrosion of the blades; in 1924, the Gillette Company addressed this issue to some degree by coating their blades with blue lacquer, producing the famous Gillette Blue Blade. In the United States, these blades were marketed in a packet with Mr. Gillette's face on it and individual wrappers for each blade. Several other companies, such as Wilkinson Sword and Solingen, also made razor blades that would fit into the Gillette razors, but the Gillette brand dominated the industry all over the world. The Company expanded overseas, and began producing their product in several overseas locations, sometimes under different names. In the Middle East and Africa, the brand name was Nacet.

In the 1960's, some of Gillette's competitors turned to stainless steel for their blades. These blades did not rust, and stayed very sharp, and manufacturers could ask a higher price for them. Gillette then produced a "Platinum" stainless steel blade to compete. In the Middle East and in Africa, to help get the idea of a better blade over to the clientele, the Nacet package featured a picture of a crocodile being cut in half by a stainless steel razor blade. The picture said it all, and the new product rapidly outsold the less expensive Blue Blade.

In the early 1970's, Gillette and their suppliers developed a better steel for razor blades that retained an edge very well. This was billed as the "Platinum Plus" blade in the United States, and Gillette gradually stopped making the regular Platinum blade. Overseas, however,

there was something of a dilemma. The two stainless steel blades looked identical: how could the improvement be characterized to Arabs and Africans, for example, without a great deal of explanation in multiple languages on a tiny package?

Not to worry. The advertising agency supporting Gillette in the Middle East and Africa redesigned the Nacet package to show the new stainless steel razor blade cutting through *two* crocodiles. The new blade was an immediate hit, and (although Nacet currently shows just one crocodile on their package) the blades are still available today.

124. A PICNIC IN PANAMA

During the third year of our tour in Panama, in 1985, my parents accepted an invitation to come stay with us for several weeks. My father had been a Naval Officer during World War II and was very interested in seeing the Panama Canal. Our small apartment had a balcony that overlooked the approach to the Canal, and it was possible to sit on the balcony, sip something cool and watch ships line up for their turn across the Isthmus. We could also watch flights of brown pelicans fly by in perfect formation many times each day and split-tailed frigate birds soaring by overhead.

At this particular time, the Panama Canal was undergoing renovations. The three locks at Gatun on the Atlantic side were in need of repair. To affect the needed improvements, one entire side of the Gatun locks was shut down for nearly a year. Ships could still transit the Canal, but only on one side of the Atlantic locks, so an arrangement was set up whereby ships would travel through the Canal in one direction during the early hours of the morning up until noon, and in the other direction during the afternoon and the late hours of the night.

To prepare my folks for their visit, I had each of them read a copy of The Path Between the Seas, by David McCullough. This is a fascinating story of the development of both the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal by a noted historical writer. The book is illustrated with dozens of photographs and is recommended to any of you who have not yet read it. While reading the book, it is not hard to visualize the country as it must have looked while the canal was being dug.

During their visit, we engaged in a number of activities we thought my parents would enjoy. We arranged to join a tour of the Canal control room for the Miraflores locks on the Pacific side. We went to dinner at the Officers' Clubs, of which there were several. We took in Sunday brunch at the Albrook AFB Officers club and returned there on a different evening for Mongolian barbeque. During the rest of the time, between shopping trips to Panamanian art galleries and exploring Cuña Indian molas in Old Panama, my parents sat out on the balcony, read their books and watched the world pass by.

Shortly before their departure, my wife arranged for me and my parents to visit the renovation work over at the Gatun Locks. She packed us a picnic lunch and drove us down to the train station, where we caught a little train to Gatun. We left the station area, found a place to spread out a quilt, ate lunch and headed back to the station where we caught a van for the locks. On arrival, we received a safety lecture from the Panama Canal Commission safety officer, were issued hard hats and safety glasses and were walked over to a large construction elevator at the edge of the lock undergoing reconstruction.

I had never seen either of my parents, who were 66 at that time, in hard hats before.

The elevator took us down to the bottom of the empty lock. The Canal Commission had removed the four inner doors of the three-step lock for cleaning and repair, and the space left exposed was immense. Each step of the Panama locks will accommodate a battleship of the size of the *New Jersey*, which is 888 feet in length. The empty lock with its gates removed was well over three times that size, perhaps 2,700 feet in length when the space occupied by the control gates is considered. The entire lock was formed of thick reinforced concrete.

At the bottom of each lock were a series of huge holes. The Panama Canal uses a gravity-feed lock system: water from Lake Gatun at the highest point of the Isthmus is piped downhill in each direction to operate the locks: no pumps are involved. Water comes into each lock through some of those holes in the concrete and is emptied through other holes. We were allowed to walk into two of the huge water tunnels and see the work in progress.

The bottom of the lock and the hinge areas for the gates were filled with construction workers engaged in cleaning and metal preservation tasks. There were a number of welding rigs in use, with showers of sparks descending to the concrete floor and jack hammers removing flaking concrete that was scheduled for repair.

In our tour group of about twenty people was a very attractive young Latina woman wearing a summer outfit consisting of a hot pink blouse and white shorts with wedge-heeled sandals matching her blouse. She also wore a white hat with a wide brim for sun protection. Once we reached the floor of the lock, as she walked around and looked at the construction process, work on the canal gradually came to a halt as worker after worker caught sight of this long-legged woman and stared. After half an hour of inactivity, a supervisor came over to check on the lack of progress. He quickly spotted the problem and asked our tour group to leave the area. As we rode up in the elevator, the eyes of every construction worker present followed the young woman from the floor of the lock to its upper rim.

125. JULES BEAUDOIN AND THE MORALE OFFICER

I only visited Nairobi twice while I worked for the Foreign Service, once while I was stationed in Abidjan and a second time during an inspection trip of our overseas engineering centers. On the second trip, Jules Beaudoin was assigned to Nairobi as our Officer in Charge, and I was coming in from Frankfurt.

I had always wanted to see a famous hotel in Kenya named “Treetops”. It was the first hotel built above the ground in a grove of trees near a water hole in a game park, and I had heard interesting things about it. I wrote Jules to see if I could get into Treetops over a weekend, but he told me that the facility was booked up for many months to come. Just before my flight to Nairobi, however, Jules informed me that there was a cancellation at the hotel if I still wanted to go. I did, so he made reservations for me at the hotel and on the connecting tour bus and four-wheel-drive vehicles necessary to reach the game park.

The inspection trip started like many others. I used a checklist that reviewed most facets of ESC and ESO operations and then rooted through the shop areas to learn what equipment the Center used for installations, repairs, alignments and inspections. (I learned a lot during these visits, seeing how eight different engineering centers addressed common problems. Jules, for example, was using a computer to schedule travel to his constituent posts and the reporting such trips engendered at a time when most other offices were addressing this scheduling by hand.) I met with the ESC staff, worked on a statement of work requirements with Jules and asked if his wife was working in the Embassy. He stated that she was working as the Morale Officer. I was surprised: I knew that a number of Embassies had established Community Liaison Officer positions for spouses, but I had not previously heard of a Morale Officer.

Around the noon hour, we walked through the Embassy to pick up his wife for lunch. Claudette managed the Embassy’s liquor locker.

Early on a Saturday morning, a small bus picked me up in Nairobi at my hotel. I did not want to haul a big piece of luggage on an overnight trip, so I borrowed a leather shoulder bag from the RSO (Steve Jacobs, who had done my background inspection as a Special Agent). It was a backpack-sized bag of fine Moroccan leather, finished in red. I put in my shaving gear and a change of clothes and largely filled the bag. We drove North for about an hour and a half to a midway point at which we were to eat lunch and change vehicles. I noticed a curb decoration of flowers which resembled a Boy Scout insignia. It had been planted at the entrance to this restaurant/hotel, but I did not think anything of it at the time.

After lunch, those of us who were going to Treetops hopped into two Land Rovers and drove for another hour and a half to the edge of a game park. We were met in the parking lot by

a Park Ranger with a large caliber rifle and an African porter with a large wheelbarrow. The porter roughly grabbed our bags from the top and the rear of the Land Rover, ripping off the handle and part of the zipper of the expensive bag that I had borrowed in the process. We then walked to the hotel behind the Ranger and the porter without further incident.

Treetops turned out to be a long, ell-shaped two-storey hotel built about twenty feet above the ground in a grove of trees over a water hole. The trees were alive and grew up through the upper storey of the hotel. Where these limbs were likely to whack someone on the head as they turned around, they were wrapped with layers of cotton held in place by twine. We were shown to our rooms, which were very small and fitted with little windows covered by very sturdy grids of barbed wire stapled all the way around the window frames. This was necessary to keep out baboons that would otherwise reach into the windows and steal cameras and other objects.

All of us met for high tea on the roof of the hotel, looking across the water hole at the game park. A few gazelles were visible at this time, and a couple of baboons had climbed up on the roof in search of a crumpet or two. We were advised not to feed the animals: all it took was one peek at the teeth of a medium-sized baboon to convince us that this was good advice. We drank tea, listened to a hotel employee describe the hotel and our dinner arrangements, then became very silent as a herd of some twelve wild elephants of different ages and sizes walked quietly beneath us on their way to the water hole. The elephants waded into the water, splashed each other and rolled around at the water's edge, then wandered back under the hotel to their previous stamping grounds. During the afternoon, a number of peaceful game park animals came down to the water to drink, emerging from brush on one side of the water hole or from the trees near us to reach the pond.

There was a tunnel in place that connected the hotel to a windowed underground bunker at the water's edge. Several guests wandered down the tunnel while the sun was still up and brought back tales of elands at close quarters. The rest of us talked to each other, explored the hotel and especially the hotel library.

Since its erection, Treetops has supported an interesting tradition. One guest each evening volunteers to serve as a scribe for what the group sees, documenting the wildlife that was seen from the hotel on that day. Treetops is famous as the hotel that Queen Elizabeth stayed in the night her father died. As the papers reported it, she "ascended the hotel stairs as a Princess and came down a Queen". The report from the evening this event occurred appears in the hotel logbook just like the other nights.

Dinner in Treetops was an event. The shape of the hotel's shorter arm meant that the enclosed dining room was long and narrow, with the backs of one row of diners pressed against an outside wall. There being no room for waiters back there, the hotel had created four long

dining room tables with a four-inch groove down the middle in which were inserted little platforms that looked like skateboards. Trays of food were placed on these boards by the waiters, and diners rolled the food down the table from person to person, with the waiters picking up the empty trays at the end. About twenty guests were in evidence this evening, and diners at each table took turns buying bottles of wine to accompany dinner.

After dinner, I wandered down to the bunker near the water hole. I did not hear any noises (roaring lions, for example) but could occasionally see the eyes of animals as they reflected lights from the hotel.

On Sunday morning, we breakfasted in the hotel, repacked and joined the porter and the Ranger on the ground. We went back to the Land Rovers and drove back to our midway point. We had lunch there with about an hour to explore the hotel after lunch before our bus arrived. I noticed a bronze plaque on the side of the hotel near a window and walked over to read it.

It turned out that this hotel in Kenya was the last residence of Lord Bayden-Powell, the founder of the International Boy Scout Movement. Looking around, I now noticed that there were *several* floral displays celebrating the Boy Scouts. According to the plaque, the room I was looking into was the place in which Lord Bayden-Powell had lived for perhaps the last decade of his life. It was filled with scouting memorabilia, gifts from the scouting organizations of many countries, and was decorated with a scout uniform, neck kerchief and suitable backpacks for hikes. Entranced, I leaned against the window and cupped my hands around my eyes to block the glare from the sun as I studied the room.

While I was thus peering at the interior of the room, a Japanese man who had evidently rented this famous room for a night walked out of the shower in his birthday suit and noticed me at the window staring in at him. He yelled at me; I ducked away from the window quickly, slinking back to the hotel lobby to wait for the bus. I gathered that the hotel charged a premium to visitors who wanted to stay in Bayden-Powell's actual quarters. Envisioning an ugly international incident ("Voyeur American Diplomat Arrested in Kenya") I sat behind a plant in the lobby until it was time to board.

I took me two years to find a suitable leatherworker to repair the overnight bag. Even with the rather expensive repair, the bag looked pretty sorry when I returned it to Steve.

126. THE FRANKFURT PX LIMO SERVICE

Sometime around 1981, the technical security side of Diplomatic Security was given responsibility for both the Fully-Armored Chief of Mission Vehicle program and the Vehicle Light Armoring program. Following in the footsteps of the U.S. Secret Service, we would purchase Cadillac vehicles from a vendor in Springfield, Virginia. These vehicles were turned over to a custom body shop that strengthened the suspension systems of the car and then installed steel and transparent armor in the cars to meet our ballistics specifications. Once the cars were complete, they were shipped to overseas locations as Fully-Armored Vehicles, or FAVs. These were shipped out in concordance with a threat list developed by the Department to ensure that the most dangerous posts for Ambassadors received their cars first.

Cars carrying body armor are much heavier than regular cars, and the high cost of these specially-procured vehicles dictated that they be examined by mechanics on a regular basis. Our Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Navy was modified slightly to allow us to borrow trained vehicle mechanics from their Seabee program to work on the FAVs. These men were sent to the armoring firm for special training and were then assigned to overseas locations that had a number of cars to service.

All State Department vehicles are replaced after a set period, and the FAVs were no exception. Due to the high cost of the armored vehicles and the availability of trained mechanics to care for them, their replacement interval was stretched a bit, but soon we had some armored cars to spare. Initially, we sent the older cars to posts that did not already have an armored vehicle, but in time many posts had several FAVs and not enough space to park them. This gave rise to a problem: unlike other Embassy cars, the FAVs could not be sold to overseas customers. Several solutions were proposed: crushing the cars so that their protective characteristics could not be studied, dumping the cars at sea to create coral reefs, giving the cars to the U.S. Military to use as targets, etc. All of these solutions appeared to have unwanted political repercussions, and none of them were pursued.

In Europe, where the extra older FAVs were concentrated, a decision was made to ship the older vehicles to ESC Frankfurt, where they could be held in reserve as a fleet of armored cars for events like NATO meetings or SecState visits where several armored cars might be required. This resulted in a slew of older (but shiny) Cadillacs parked by the ESC.

The Seabee car mechanics in Frankfurt advised the ESC Officer in Charge that idle vehicles were likely to corrode or fail when they were needed, and they suggested that these spare cars be used from time to time. There were too many cars for the Seabee car mechanics to drive around, however, especially since they were on the road so much of the time.

The OIC of our Frankfurt center came up with what seemed to be a good idea. All Security Engineers and Seabees assigned to the ESC were encouraged to use the cars for small trips around Frankfurt: picking up their children from school, making support runs to the Consulate and making shopping trips to the PX. Our OIC thought that routine use of the cars would help keep them running and, for a while, this idea worked.

Other military and Consulate personnel, however, squawked as they saw this system in operation. A Seabee and his wife would show up at the Commissary or the PX in a gleaming black Cadillac equipped with flagstaffs on the front fenders. They would go inside, do their shopping, then fill the deep trunks of the FAV with purchases and drive away. People at the Consulate started asking why they couldn't drive the excess FAVs. Insurance concerns, the fact that the vehicles were fueled at the Consulate at government expense, worries about handling these heavy vehicles and an inability to equitably regulate the loan of FAVs to other Consulate personnel conspired to change this policy, and the vehicles became bound to the parking lot.

127. A FLOOD OF PROBLEMS

Air conditioning, while nice to have and while certainly necessary to keep electronic equipment cool, always had a little problem. As the cold air hit metal surfaces, it tended to condense and to drip water. Generally, a condensate drain was installed near the actual condenser to channel water away from the A/C equipment, but the effect of cold air on metal surfaces at some distance from the equipment generating the cold air could also cause condensation.

The second time that I held down ESO Beijing (in between Field Cooper and Steve Klein), I was working in the Marine Booth one morning when I noticed a bulge in the suspended ceiling of the booth surrounded by a spreading rusty stain. I knew that there was a drip pan for the A/C system above the ceiling that collected condensate water from cold surfaces and ran it out of the building somewhere. The Marine on duty did not know where the drain came out, but I could see a short length of clear plastic tubing leaving the ceiling, entering the back wall of the booth and apparently heading for the rear of the Embassy. I went out to the back of the building to see if I could find the drain, guessing that it might be blocked with rust or algae.

While I was out, the Marine on duty looked up at the bulge over his head and wondered about it. He apparently took out his night stick and poked the bulge. The stick went through the weakened ceiling tile, covering him in a deluge of rusty water. It also disturbed the balance of the drip pan, which was suspended by baling wires from pipes above the ceiling. This caused about two gallons of rusty water in the pan to run down the back wall of the Marine Booth.

Like many of our older Embassies, our Chancery in Beijing contained several alarm systems, both new and old. Before our presence, it had served as the Embassy of Pakistan. A/FBO had installed a modern fire alarm system in the Embassy in the late 1980's, but there was an older fire alarm system in place that had carried over from the former Pakistani Embassy and which was still active. This system rang large fire alarm bells all over the building but had not been used for years. Its control panel consisted of a button labeled "FIRE". This panel, of course, was on the wall at the back of the Marine Booth.

The flood of rusty water activated this never-used older fire system and rang bells everywhere. Used to Selectone warnings as to what they should do in emergencies, the Embassy was unprepared for the bells, and no one knew quite what to do, including the RSO. Many US schools used fire bells for evacuations, however, so people began to leave their desks and head for the exits. There were no lights on the old fire alarm system to say where the signals originated, and the Marine was too caught up in getting soaked on duty to be aware of what had generated the alarm. No one knew where the sound was coming from.

I was out in back of the Embassy, looking for the condensate drain. I did not know what I was listening to when I heard the bells, but I thought it might be a fire alarm and I headed for the Marine Booth. I encountered RSO Tim Fountain at that location. Looking around the booth, I spotted the hole in the ceiling and the wet Marine, and then the wet wall at the back of the booth. No amount of playing with the fire button would shut off the bells, however, and Embassy employees were starting to call the Marine to ask what they should do. Tim attempted to make an announcement over the Selectone System, but the bells were too loud for anyone to hear him.

I took out some tools and opened up the old fire alarm panel. It was on 220 volts AC, it was live and it was very wet inside. All of the wires were beginning to lose their insulation and it was not possible to determine colors, if any existed. I decided to remove one side of the power circuit, using an insulated screwdriver and a pair of insulated pliers to hold the wire as I disconnected it. This stopped the bells. I put a wire nut on the disconnected wire and taped it in place, then went to look for some paper towels. Looking out a window to the rear of the Embassy, I noticed that a lot of employees had treated the bells as an actual fire alarm and had moved out onto the basketball court in orderly lines. We brought them back in with the Selectone System.

128. ABDULAI AND THE FETISH FIGURE

During our tour in Abidjan, most of the FSN employees at the Embassy warehouse were French-speaking African personnel who came from poorer countries around the Ivory Coast, such as Upper Volta and Mali. An exception to this was Abdulai, a native of Ghana who spoke English, good French and several tribal dialects. Abdulai was tall, perhaps six foot three; he had a sunny disposition and liked to talk to Embassy personnel when he got the chance. He was in charge of bringing the household effects of arriving personnel to their homes and also charged with helping those same personnel to pack out. When he was not involved in packing activities, the Warehouse used him as a floating supervisor, overseeing small but needed jobs like checking all of the fire extinguishers in the Embassy for their correct charge. Nothing seemed to bother Abdulai, and he was good company.

At our house on the outskirts of the city, we received our share of “antiquity” vendors. These were traders who came to our front gate carrying burlap bags that contained “antique” masks and other African artifacts. It was not hard to tell that many of these offerings had been *recently* aged and were seldom authentic.

After turning away several of these vendors, we began to receive visits from a salesman who had better stock to offer. He wanted more for the artifacts he brought by, but they were often quite unusual, such as the bronze Senufo mask that I bought from him one day. In a country famous for wooden masks, a metal mask was unique: it was attached to a worn head covering that concealed the person wearing the mask, it had been dropped and damaged but was repaired, and it was evidently produced by the lost wax casting method. This vendor only came by when he had something exciting for us to look at, and we began to look forward to his visits.

About three-quarters of the way through our tour, this vendor arrived with several interesting masks and a statue. This last item, carved from wood, looked like an Arab trader from North Africa. The statuette (it was about a foot high) was bearded, wore Arab clothing and did not have African features. There was a colored lanyard around its neck made of rag, into which several cowrie shells were woven. Finally, it was evident that the statue had been used as an idol, because it had a number of offerings of egg on top of its head, with bits of eggshell there to help us see how the statue had been venerated.

There is a tradition in the countries that are a part of the former Empire of Mali: the history of its people was maintained by *griots*, who were wandering storytellers. These men and women were an amalgam of tale-spinners and musicians, who would visit villages and share stories of the world with village residents. I could see a griot using small statues like the one we were looking at to help tell tales, much as shadow puppets are used in Indonesia. Later, perhaps,

one of these statues might have become an object of veneration in a village, receiving offerings of food in hopes of favors. I bought the statue.

As we were leaving Abidjan, the warehouse sent its pack-out crew over to our house, led by Abdulai. He came in, looked around, estimated the number of boxes that would be needed to pack us out and asked some questions about our preferences for air freight and surface shipments. Then he spotted the statue.

Abdulai's whole sunny countenance changed. He appeared ill at ease and did not look at the statue directly. His body shook visibly and he could not quite force words from his throat. This lasted about a minute and a half while the man pulled himself together. Then he whispered to me: "Mr. Herrmann, may I see that statue?" I walked over, picked it up and walked towards him. His hands shook as he held them out for the statue, then calmed as he again got control of himself. Looking at me with glistening eyes, he said: "Oh, my! We had one of these in our village when I was a boy."

"But I was *never* allowed to touch it!"

When we returned to the States and were reunited with our household effects, I put the statue on our fireplace mantle downstairs. When football games were in progress, I would bring the statue out to sit on our coffee table facing the screen during the game, to the delight of my children. At first, this seemed to help win games, but some of the credit probably went to Coach Joe Gibbs. I never broke an egg over the statue's head prior to a game, however, which might have assured us of several winning seasons.

129. HOME LEAVE

As some of you know, I spent the last two years of high school in Beirut, Lebanon. While there, I acted in drama club productions and participated in debates. During two debates, my partner was a girl named Karen Basil, who lived in an apartment in the “Pigeon Rocks” area of the city. We lived in an old villa up the hill from Karen, and I used to walk down a long flight of steps to practice at her place. Her father was a consulting engineer for the Middle East oil industry and was doing very well in Beirut. Sometimes, as Karen and I practiced in her opulent apartment, her best friend Judy Sparshott would be at Karen’s house. Judy’s father worked for the Embassy, but I did not know what he did there.

After high school, I went on to college, into the Army, into private industry for a while and then joined the State Department in 1975. On the day I signed in, I was asked to select a Home Leave address. I was tempted to put down “Seattle, Washington” but all of my family and my wife’s family lived in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. The intake personnel told me that I would be allowed to change my address one time after joining the Department, so I put down “Bethesda, Maryland” with the intent to alter it to a more distant location later on.

On our first overseas tour to Abidjan, it looked as if we might have a second overseas assignment after our African tour. We started thinking about a different Home Leave address, but did not spend a lot of time on it. About halfway through our tour, however, RSO Mark Mulvey went off to become the RSO in Paris, leaving his position vacant for about a month. Abidjan wanted an RSO in residence during the gap, so SY sent Gary Marvin, the RSO from Kinshasa, up to manage the RSO office until a replacement arrived. I offered to sponsor Gary during his visit, and we had him over for dinner the night he came in.

Gary was a congenial, flamboyant guy. He had been a Marine Security Guard and had actually married Karen Basil’s friend Judy Sparshott, whose dad turned out to be a Technical Security Officer. Gary and Judy had settled in the Snake River valley of Idaho, where he became a Deputy Sheriff for several years. Gary had a luxurious handlebar moustache which he tended to flick up with his finger as he was thinking about things or as he told stories. We found him to be good company as he told us about leaving Idaho for the Foreign Service.

At some point in our discussion that evening, our talk turned to Home Leave. We explained our concern at getting minimum Home Leave funding by having Bethesda as our Home Leave address. Gary reflected for a moment or two, flicked his moustache and said:

“Well, I know a place. There’s a resort in the mountains of the Idaho panhandle called Coeur d’Alene. It’s a ski resort on a lake with lots of sports amenities: hiking, canoeing, hunting and so forth. It’s a beautiful area and it would be a good Home Leave address because you can’t

fly there directly from D.C. You have to fly all the way across the States to Seattle or Spokane, then *backtrack* to Idaho on a puddle-jumper.”

After a pause, he reflected: “The property values in Coeur d’Alene have been rising regularly. It’s a resort area, and hotels there are expensive all year around. You could buy a property, but you might find it costly. If you were to travel uphill from the town, however, there’s a relatively pristine area that overlooks the resort and which is surrounded on the other three sides by State and National parks. You could put up an A-frame or another prefabricated home for a song and then rent out the property through an agent when you weren’t using it. That might be a perfect Home Leave address.”

Then he stopped. “There’s one problem, however. You have to be careful how you pronounce the name of the place.”

“It’s Athol. Athol, Idaho.”

We thought that might be an excellent Home Leave address.

130. THE CHICKEN MAN OF ABIDJAN

In the United States, if your wife sends you to the store for chicken, you usually find it at the back of the store on a refrigerated shelf, in a Styrofoam dish covered with a clear plastic wrap. In the States, we often forget where our food comes from: in other countries, the process is a little more primitive.

When we settled down in Abidjan, we found it hard to find a reliable source of fresh chicken from sources we knew to be healthy. We imported our beef from either Denmark or Texas, reducing the cost of shipping by buying in bulk with other members of the Embassy, but found that frozen chicken shipped from Texas was almost the same price as beef.

We then learned that an Ivorian had established a well-managed chicken farm outside of Abidjan. This man sold to the French Embassy and was gradually reaching out to other Embassies as well. He would take orders in the Embassy lobby early in the week; later, he would return towards the end of the week with the number of birds you ordered. You paid him when you picked up the chickens. The product, however, did not arrive dismembered and packaged in plastic: these birds were beheaded and plucked, but were otherwise warm, whole and still had their feet.

Once this system got established, it became almost regimented. On Monday or Tuesday morning, the Selectone system would come on. The Marine Guard would announce: "Attention in the Embassy. The Chicken Man is here." Armed with shopping directions from my spouse, I would head down to the lobby with many of the other employees of the Embassy, stand in line and subsequently complete a line on the Chicken Man's order form with my name and the number of birds I wanted. Later in the week the same announcement would be made, and all of us who had ordered chickens would zip downstairs to pay for our orders and acquire our chickens.

Initially, these birds arrived in a large box, and the Chicken Man would hand them out using the legs of the birds as handles. It was not unusual to find yourself in the Embassy elevator towards the end of the day with five other employees, all of whom had purchased several chickens and were holding them by the feet. It would have made a great picture.

Like most other ESCs and ESOs at the time, we had a large refrigerator for batteries in our shop area. We had a smaller fridge upstairs for the same purpose. We sanitized and lined a shelf in each refrigerator for bird storage. On delivery days, those shelves were stuffed with dead chickens, whose feet pointed out of the refrigerator so that we could grab them by the "handles". The effect was bizarre.

Gradually, we convinced the Chicken Man to come a little later on delivery days and to package the chickens in paper bags with our names on them. Instead of packing our refrigerators with chickens, we would swing by the lobby on our way home and pick up a warm bag of beheaded birds. It was something of an improvement, but we still felt like primitive foragers providing for our families as we brought our chickens home.

131. HUNTING FOR BANDAJI

In each country that we were assigned to, there was something to collect. In Africa, it was masks. In Panama, it was molas produced by the Cuña Indians. Korea had a lot of collectable artwork, but it took a while to appreciate what we were looking at.

In Seoul, if you followed the main street through Itewan to the point where it turned a corner and tipped slightly uphill, you ran into a series of stores selling antique Korean furniture. After my family joined me in Seoul, we made a few visits to these stores during the summer of 1990. Almost immediately, we began to focus on the many bureau-sized chests we saw. The wood used to prepare these chests and the metal decorations placed on them were interesting, and we began to research what we were looking at.

In a traditional Korean home, the house was “L”-shaped. The shorter leg of the L was where the men’s quarters were sited. The kitchen, dining and storage areas of the house were placed at the juncture of the long and short axes, and the longer side of the house held the women’s quarters. The house was often built with clay pipes set into a concrete floor, through which heated air was circulated during the winters. Koreans slept on a form of padded coverlet; in winters, they might sleep on one and cover themselves with another. They referred to this bedding as “blankets”. Korean sleeping areas did not have closets. Instead, clothing was ironed flat and placed in showy chests, and the bedding used for sleep was neatly folded and placed on top of these chests. In Korean, they are called “*Bandaji*” – blanket chests.

Furniture for the men’s quarters of a Korean home was conservative in design and decoration. Often made of dense red pine, bandajis for the men were usually fitted with hinges, locks, carrying handles and decorations of beaten iron painted black. In the women’s quarters, however, the chests were made of beautifully matched and often rare woods. These were fitted with decorations in brass (or sometimes nickel brass, giving a silver appearance). The art objects on the chests were sometimes derived from Chinese traditions, but Koreans had traditions of their own, with interesting results. Some decorations were specific to certain Korean provinces, and often helped a buyer understand where a chest had been made.

When a Korean homeowner went into town to order a blanket chest, his hopes for the future were often worked into the furniture. Hinges in the form of cranes expressed a wish for long life, as did handles shaped like long-needled pine trees. Gourds, full of seeds, represented a wish for male heirs: if a buyer wanted four sons, there might be four hinges on the chest, each shaped like a gourd. Swallow tails represented the quick fulfillment of the buyer’s wishes. Other common decorations were engraved “four seasons” panels or hinges, handles or hinges

shaped like butterflies or bats, gateways modeled after the entrance gates to Korean cities, and Buddhist religious imagery.

After about a year at post, we were out looking through antique shops when we encountered a spectacular women's quarters bandaji. This furniture item was made in the style traditional to the carpenters of Seoul. It featured five gourd hinges, ten swallow tails (one used for the traditional latch at the top of the chest), two crane handles, a fish (fecundity: lots of eggs) and round, polished brass covers for nail heads. The chest was made of red pine, cut at an angle to the grain to bring out natural patterns in the wood. You bargained for these chests in stores, and we possibly could have received a lower price if we had been persistent, but we really liked this item and we acquired it for about \$500.

Once we bought *one* chest, however, we immediately realized that we needed *more*. About once a month after the first chest, we went back to a collection of three or four stores and looked around. Nothing cropped up for several months. In the fall, however, we entered a store and discovered a different kind of ornamental chest: a *Morijang*. This was a dresser or vanity with central doors and a row of drawers on the top. Known in Korea as a "Headside Chest", this item was made of elm wood burl on the front and sides, panels of which were framed in regular elm. Super-lightweight Paulownia wood was used on the back and bottom. Despite its large size, one person could easily lift the empty chest with their fingertips. It was finished with nickel brass hardware in the shape of butterflies (seven butterflies) and four nickel brass drawer pulls shaped like bats. This was probably the most beautiful chest we encountered on our tour, and although we negotiated a price, we did not fight too hard for the bottom line.

After the vanity, we went through a dry spell for about a year. I then found a red pine blanket chest that was almost five feet thigh, finished in the style of Pyongyang, the northern capital of Korea. This included a central gate hinge, "four seasons" hinges on either side of the center, deer and peach longevity symbols, all in nickel brass, along with lots of nickel brass nail covers. We bargained successfully for this heavy monster because its upper door was slightly warped.

During our last year in Seoul, we wandered back to the antique store we had first visited. At the back of the store, I found a blanket chest in light yellow pine intended for the men's quarters of a Korean home. Made in Chejudo, it had black iron butterfly handles, four *patakaji* hinges shaped like crayfish (fecundity), flying swallows and a small gate. This was the only blonde wood Korean chest I had ever seen, so we negotiated for the chest and currently use it to store blankets. All of these items were shipped home with our household goods.

What no one told us is that the forced air heating used in American homes eventually warps the doors and tops of nearly every Korean chest. The Pyongyang chest, in particular, began to curl almost as soon as we unpacked it. The other three chests have held up, but I am

beginning to see some warpage on the first chest we bought. Still, they are unique symbols of Korea, of the Korean way of life and are great conversation pieces in our home.

132. EARNING MERIT AT THE SHWEDAGONPAGODA

Somewhere around 1992, I took a trip to Bangkok to visit Tim Daly. Before my departure from Seoul, I expressed an interest in making a constituent post trip with him and wondered which of his posts we might beneficially visit. He indicated that he had work to do in Burma (Myanmar) so I obtained a visa for that country and we scheduled a trip.

We came into Rangoon (Yangon) in the evening, were met by an Embassy vehicle and were taken to the Embassy Guest House as our place to stay. Two members of the Guest House staff were standing by as we entered, and they firmly requested that we sign the Guest Book.

Signing the Guest Book was like a trip down Memory Lane. Apparently, the Embassy did not get a lot of visitors, and those who came tended to be Security Officers, Seabees and Couriers. I saw Jules Beaudoin's name several times and several other people from DS. We signed in, were shown to our rooms and we hit the sack.

In the morning, another car appeared after breakfast to take us to work. Myanmar was under a military dictatorship at the time and driving through the city streets was an alarming experience. There were frequent checkpoints along the roads, usually made of sandbags and sawhorses and staffed with very young and often officious soldiers. These youngsters had not had a lot of training: armed with AK-47's, some of them would point their rifles at you as you drove by (with fingers inside the trigger guards), following the car with their weapons. I felt very vulnerable in Yangon, but I could see gold-plated Buddhist pagodas everywhere and it looked like an interesting place.

We arrived at the Embassy, a former bank building in the middle of the downtown area. Most of the architecture in the capital appeared to be British Colonial in design, with lots of mildew on the walls of formerly white buildings. I remember that the massive building we used for our Mission had an actual bank vault in the basement, with a big Chubb vault door set with a forgotten combination that no one seemed to know.

I have forgotten the activities we engaged in at post, but we were occupied for about two days. On Saturday, Tim suggested that we visit the Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the largest Buddhist structures in the world. We took a taxi over to the temple.

The Shwedagon Pagoda is perched high on a hill overlooking the city of Yangon. It extends 325 feet above its lofty perch, and its central stupa and 96 miniature stupas are all gilded with real gold leaf. The central stupa was being re-gilded during our visit, and there was bamboo scaffolding all around the dome, which looked something like a gigantic upside-down gold turnip. There were armed soldiers all around the small trailer in which the gold leaf was kept,

and a little pulley-operated trolley car was sent up and down pair of wires to move the gold leaf up to the plating artisans. The soldiers may also have been tasked with protecting the top of the stupa from pilferage by the artisans: the pagoda crown is encrusted with diamonds and rubies, and a 76-carat diamond sits at its tip. Tradition says that the temple is 2,600 years old.

Buddhist devotees are urged to earn merit in life through hard work. One way to achieve merit in Yangon was to climb the many steps up the hill to reach the actual temple. There were four entrance stairways leading to the temple. I believe Tim and I took the most difficult one, from the bus parking area up to the temple deck. We were not alone on this journey: busloads of other visitors made the climb along with us. I cannot remember how many steps were required to reach the temple deck, but it took us about twenty minutes of serious uphill walking on stone steps to reach our objective. I felt that we earned a *lot* of merit.

On the temple deck, we were in company with many Burmese pilgrims, Buddhist monks, other visitors and the above soldiers. We began to walk around the deck in a clockwise direction, encountering small stupas with sitting Buddhas and recumbent Buddhas. These smaller shrines seemed to be made mostly of whitewashed concrete with gold leaf spires. They varied in size from little shrines the size of a shed to larger shrines about the size of a courthouse. Each shrine seemed to have offerings of flowers, fruit and food placed on a table inside it; alms boxes were distributed around the temple for monetary contributions. We were not allowed to enter the temple proper because of the construction activity then under way.

Walking to the Northwest edge of the temple deck, we could look down the side of the hill toward the Yangon River. The river meandered widely through its valley, flanked by dozens of other stupas and pagodas. I had never seen so many Buddhist pagodas at one time and was impressed.

After our visit, we earned considerably *more* merit by walking back down the steps to the taxi area. This took a little longer than twenty minutes: descending was hard on the knees.

If you did not have a chance to visit Burma (Myanmar) during your working years, I invite you to look up the Shwedagon Pagoda using Google Images.

133. WHAT'S FOR DINNER? (Guinea-Bissau)

On a trip to Guinea-Bissau in 1978, I was traveling with a Seabee Electrician. We planned to conduct an inspection at post and service all of the locks and safes installed there. (

This trip was the first visit to post for both of us, and we asked the Administrative Officer about good places to eat in town. He clearly wrinkled up his nose and commented that there were not a lot of good eateries known to him. He said that we might try a small restaurant near our hotel that was considered reasonable by Embassy staffers.

We missed lunch on our first day at post, and were hungry by the time evening rolled around. Armed with a small map and directions to the restaurant, we set out on foot to find dinner, locating the suggested eatery about a quarter-mile from the Embassy. We walked in and found ourselves in a modest third-world restaurant, with square wooden tables and chairs for customers, vinyl table-covers, salt and pepper shakers on each table together with a small vase of artificial flowers. The restaurant was small (holding about eight tables) and there were other customers in the restaurant who were already eating. We sat down and a waiter brought us two menus and two glasses of water.

The menu was entirely in Portuguese.

At that point in my illustrious career, my languages were limited to English, French and a little German. None of these languages helped at all with the menu in front of me. I could not order for myself, nor advise the Seabee as to what was available to eat. The waiter did not speak any of my languages as he came over to take our order. We were at an impasse.

One of the other customers noticed our distress and walked over to help. He said "I can help?" "I show you". He pointed to one item on the menu and said "This is Cow. Cow." "Moo". He pointed to another item lower down. He said "This is Pig. Pig." and he made a sound that had to be an "Oink". Finally, near the bottom of the menu, he spotted a third entry. He said, with his fists on his chest and his elbows moving up and down: "This is Chicken. Chicken." "Baawk". We were delighted with the menu explanation and the floor show, and we thanked him. We told him that we would like chicken with rice and a couple of beers. He passed our order to the waiter and went back to his seat.

Shortly thereafter our dinners arrived. They consisted of two plates of rice filled with finely-chopped fried chicken livers.

134. JERK CHICKEN

On my tour in Panama, there were so many posts to support that I decided to prioritize. While I found the Caribbean posts enticing, there was much more to be done at the large Embassies in Central and South America. I decided to send newer SEOs to the Caribbean posts with Seabees and to focus my activities on the continental missions.

We did have some problems in Kingston, Jamaica, however, and I decided to take a trip there to see what the Caribbean posts were like. I had met the RSO, Gary Marvin, during my trip to Africa (Story Number 129), so I called him ahead of time to ask what needed to be repaired or surveyed at post. He mentioned an alarm problem in the Consulate and a CCTV problem with a roof camera at the mission. Since I had invited him over for dinner in Abidjan, he wanted to reciprocate. He said “We’ll do Jerk Chicken when you get here.” That sounded indecent to me. I wasn’t sure what he meant, and I reminded Gary that I was married. For some reason, he started laughing.

Kingston was a real eyesore. Jamaica is famous for its beach resorts, but they are all on the pristine North Coast of the island. The country’s capital was squalid, dirty and characterized by garbage to the side of the road, blown newspapers clinging to muddy lawns, abandoned cars and lots of clutter. Our Embassy in Kingston was housed in a T-shaped high-rise building in the downtown area, with the Embassy proper located on the two upper floors and the Consulate sitting on the ground floor. I decided to work on the alarm system in the Consulate, which was an 8-zone AES box. Several of the alarms connected to this were not working, and I found all the security wiring behind the box to be messy. To re-do all the wiring, I needed to lay on my back on the floor under the Consular interview windows. The Consulate was open as I did this, and I had an opportunity to listen to visa interviews with a young male Consular Officer while I was working. (English is spoken in Jamaica.)

With a lobby area full of visa applicants in front of him, the young man called out: “Miss Baldwin? Jenny Baldwin? Please come to window 1.” I could not see the woman who responded, but I could hear the exchange. He said “Miss Baldwin, I am sorry to inform you that you do not qualify for a visa to the United States.” She said: “Howcum?” He said: “During your last stay in the United States, you were arrested for prostitution in New Orleans and were deported. This makes you ineligible for a visa.” Using some foul language, she cursed the young officer and left.

The young man picked up the next folder. “Mister Joseph Reliant? Joseph Reliant? Please come to window 1.” When the next applicant arrived, he said: “Mr. Reliant, I am sorry to inform you that you do not qualify for a visa to the United States.” “Why the hell not?”

“Because, while using your last visa to the U.S., you were arrested for dealing heroin in Chicago and were sent back to Jamaica.” Again, a burst of foul language, and the man left.

This went on for the entire time I worked on the wiring. There was a shoplifter, another drug dealer and a car thief among the applicants. No one got a visa: some of the epithets directed at the Consular Officer were memorable. As I got up, I asked the young man if it was like that every day at his window. He nodded and said “all year long”.

Above the Embassy, the CCTV camera on the Northwest corner of the roof needed to be replaced. These were the RCA cameras in the nitrogen-filled tubular aluminum housings, sitting on top of Pelco Pan and Tilt units. The roof of the building was formed of reinforced concrete with a concrete parapet around it to which our cameras were mounted, one on each corner. The distance from the edge of the actual building to the edge of the roof was about twenty feet in each direction. For drainage, each side of the extended concrete roof had a number of 12” holes in it about ten feet from the building in a line, almost like a perforation. Water that accumulated on the roof was allowed to drain directly through these openings to the pavement far below. As you walked by these holes, perhaps four on each side of the building, you found yourself looking down twelve stories at the ground. Then you walked *past* the holes and progressed to the edge of the (weakened) roof. I found that this produced a strong feeling of unease and vertigo. On Friday, I replaced the camera with one we had sent and came back down.

Gary and his wife had invited me to a picnic at the beach on Saturday. Gary was driving an old Caprice FAV with the steering wheel on the wrong side for Jamaica, where they drive on the left. Jamaica is mountainous, and the trip to the beach was a gripping adventure for the person riding shotgun. The passenger had a full-time job: you had to be the eyes for the driver as you came around each curve, often encountering unexpected big trucks or buses traveling toward you at speed.

For lunch, Judy had acquired Jerk Chicken, which she purchased from a Jamaican vendor. Jerk Chicken starts with a fire of slightly green pimento wood, which smokes and gives the meat a special flavor. She brought along six chickens which had been cleaned and then sectioned with a machete. Cooked by Jamaicans, the chicken pieces were arrayed on a sheet of corrugated iron laid over the fire. The birds were doused with a marinade of garlic, pepper, pimento, onions and balsamic vinegar. Another sheet of corrugated iron was laid over the chicken; the meat was allowed to cook and absorb the smoke. After about eight minutes, the entire two-piece iron griddle was flipped once, like a pancake. The Marvins liked their Jerk Chicken refrigerated overnight, and it was mighty tasty with cold beer.

135. LAGON AND LAGON DEUX

During my tour in Abidjan, I traveled to some very primitive spots. They included Mali, and Guinea, and the Cape Verde Islands, and Ghana and Mauritania. (I could go on.) Here and there you might encounter a new hotel or an airport terminal that looked somewhat modern, but the accommodations in a lot of places in our territory were poor. Contrasting this situation were the trips we made to Dakar, a cool, vibrant city with high-rise buildings, interesting restaurants, elegant gardens here and there and even little Paris-like patisseries in which you could get a good cup of coffee and a fresh croissant.

When I stayed in Dakar, I tried to book a room at the Hotel Lagon. This was a very modern structure that looked like a bright flying saucer had crashed on the side of a low cliff over the Atlantic Ocean. The pod-shaped hotel was built out over the water on steel struts which were cross-braced, and the hotel room windows were round, like large portholes. It was a modern facility, clean with modern plumbing and nice amenities. The rooms were not large, but when you hit the sack at night you could hear the waves coming in and crashing on the shore just beneath your room.

The Embassy was only a short walk up the hill past a large Baobab tree. These are fabulous: they are thick, tall, massive plants that look for all the world as if they were trees that had been uprooted and stuck back in the ground upside down. The one closest to the Hotel Lagon emerged from the middle of a road which split to pass by the tree. You would not want to drive down that street in the dark without seeing it first during daylight.

You reached the hotel by a road that wound back and forth towards the water as it descended from the top of the hill where the city stood. Most of the rock on the cliff face was basalt, giving the area a dark and craggy appearance where the road cut through it. If you continued along the road past the hotel, you ran into a restaurant that was under the same management as Hotel Lagon. This was Lagon Deux, which I considered the best place to eat in my territory.

Lagon Deux was built onto a pier-like structure that, like the hotel, was supported on steel struts that were set in concrete on the sea floor, then cross-braced. The restaurant dropped toward the ocean in three steps. There were small round tables on the first two steps and a sunbathing area set up on the lowest step, from which it was possible to descend into the water. As a number of buildings dumped wastewater into the sea near this facility, no one swam there very much, but the sun-worshipping spot was popular with airline crews. It did feature a fresh-water outdoor shower.

When you came over to the restaurant, the maître de greeted you almost immediately. He looked a bit like the lead singer of Kool and the Gang;; he was usually dressed casually but well in slacks and an open white shirt. He spoke several languages: French, English, German and several African languages. He was pleasant and funny: he would show you to your table, talk with you for a couple of minutes and send a waiter over. All of the waiters were formally turned out in white trousers and white jackets with Chinese collars buttoned up to their chins.

The tables you sat at were small, round and were usually covered with red and white-checkered cloths and white napkins folded into standing triangles. All of the tables were set for four, but if you were by yourself they removed the three other settings. In the center of each table was a small, electrified lamp built out of a white twisted rope with a small red shade. These were turned on during the evening, making the pier look as if little fires were built on it.

The maître de stopped by your table to take your order, telling you about the special offerings for that day, and then disappeared. The food was uniformly excellent: ripe avocados stuffed with chunks of shrimp salad for lunch, let's say, or a Salade Nicoise with fresh tuna. The bread was freshly-made and cold Perrier was available. (If this sounds rather normal, you should try asking for a salad in Mali.)

During the day, at lunch, hawks circled around the restaurant in the air. To keep them away from the food on the plates of patrons, the cook would emerge from time to time with a bowl holding strips of meat, which he would toss into the air one by one. The hawks would vie for the meat, stooping and pirouetting in the air to catch a piece.

In the evenings, the specialty of the restaurant was rock lobster, brought live to your table in sets of two. The waiter would drop the lobsters on the wooden deck of the pier, at which time both critters would make a dash for the edge of the pier and the water. This was especially entertaining when the lobsters took off in different directions. The waiter would scoop them up one by one, bring them to your table, and would head back to the kitchen with your choice. In about twenty minutes, a beautifully prepared and presented Lobster Thermidor would arrive at your table, usually with haricots verts and pommes frites.

Dessert included pastries and several varieties of ice cream, usually accompanied by French coffee, dark and strong. The tab for these dinners was within per diem if you ate breakfast up on the hill.

136. A GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

In 1994, my parents had been married for 50 years. I was overseas in Seoul and wanted to get back to the States in June to celebrate their anniversary along with my brother and sisters, but the cost of a round-trip flight from Seoul to Washington and back was prohibitive.

I discussed this dilemma with Ralph, our Commercial Attache in Seoul. Ralph said: “Why don’t you take an orphan back?”

He went on to describe an interesting system of which he was aware. Childless couples all across the United States are reaching out to foreign countries to adopt orphan children; one of the countries with a number of children to adopt is Korea. There are a couple of well-established orphanages in Seoul that deal primarily with Western adoption agencies. Couples in search of children travel to Seoul to meet with prospective family members, who are often very young. After very thorough medical workups on the babies, a healthy monetary deposit and the completion of a lot of paperwork, the parents-to-be return to the United States. A few months later, when the babies are old enough to travel, they are ferried by plane to a central travel hub in the United States, where they are passed to their new parents by the adoption agency.

The adoption agencies want the infants to be accompanied by someone substantial. For each of the countries they support, they have made offers to the Embassy of the country involved. If a diplomat from that Embassy is willing to accompany an adopted baby back to their country, the adoption agency is willing to pay for a round-trip ticket that can be adjusted to get the diplomat anywhere they want to go in their country at no additional cost. This sounded like the program I was looking for, so I contacted the premier adoption agency in February and enquired about the program, specifying that I needed to get to the States early in June.

Time passed. In late April, I was contacted by the adoption agency. They had a baby to go to Los Angeles, they said, in mid-June and were willing to work with me on the date. I was delighted, and called my brother, sisters and mother-in-law to inform them that I was coming back. I asked them to keep knowledge of my visit away from my parents.

In early May, I was informed that the adoption of the child I was supposed to accompany had fallen through. The adoption agency told me that they were still trying to set something up. In the middle of May, they called me again. Would I be willing to accompany not one, but two babies to Detroit? I said I would.

June arrived. On the appointed day, I presented myself at the adoption agency with a suitcase, my passport and my shot record. I was introduced to the children I would be escorting. One was eight months old, the other had just passed his one-year birthday. Both children were in

small bassinets that clipped into holes in the forward bulkhead of a 747 in the tourist seating session. The agency had purchased two tickets to Detroit, one round trip and the other for the two babies adjacent to that bulkhead. They handed me a cloth bag containing lots of diapers, plastic bottles, two boxes of powdered milk, a couple of pacifiers and two bags of what seemed to be cheese doodles. They told me that the older baby liked the doodles. Then they drove the three of us to the airport and helped me get on the plane.

After we took off, both babies fell asleep. I put one baby on the floor and clipped the other's bassinet to the bulkhead; I then zipped out to make up bottles of milk. When I returned, the older child was stirring, so I took him to the bathroom and changed his diaper, then brought him back to our seats and fed him. I got up with a towel over my shoulder to burp him in the aisle when a Korean stewardess spotted me and offered to help out. She took the baby on a walk around the aisle while I made up another bottle of milk. When she returned with the baby, I put him down in the bassinet on the floor and moved the other baby, who was waking up, to the upper bin. I repeated the actions I had taken with the first baby and returned to my seat.

There were a number of Korean passengers travelling first class, on the other side of a curtain by my seat. As I was holding the younger baby on my lap, a beautiful and well-dressed Korean woman slipped through the curtain, spotted me with the baby and asked if she could help by holding the child for a minute or two. As with the stewardess, she took the baby on a hike around the plane while I prepared more milk.

This pattern was repeated several times between Seoul and Detroit. As we flew over the Rockies, the older baby was more awake, so I held him on my lap and let him have a cheese doodle or two. I was wearing a white shirt, but no tie. The cheese doodles turned out to be squid cheese doodles, which emitted a strong fish odor as the baby gummed them. The older infant looked something like a miniature Sumo wrestler and managed to eat a lot of the squid doodles, drooling about a third of the bag onto the front of my shirt.

As we neared Detroit, I changed the diapers on both babies, strapped them into their bassinets, filled out my landing card and otherwise got ready to disembark. In the airport, I met with officials from the U.S. side of the adoption agency, who identified themselves to me, showed me their paperwork for the infants, then whooshed away with both tots to change them again and probably pinch their cheeks to restore vitality. Then they, and not I, went off to meet the parents and present them with their new family members.

I transferred at Detroit to a Washington National flight, landed and took a taxi to my mother-in-law's house. It was three days before my parents' anniversary; they lived across the street from my mother-in-law. She was appalled at the condition of my shirt, so I threw it away and took a shower. (I have not touched a squid doodle since 1994, by the way.)

I had previously written my folks to say I was coming into town for a conference, and they were puzzled as to why I opted to stay with my mother-in-law rather than at their house. I reminded them that I had stayed with them the last time I was in town and expressed a desire to spend some quality time with my mother-in-law. During the next two days, my father noticed that I did not go into the Department for my “conference”, and he wondered if I was really back on orders.

On the day of my parents’ anniversary, I arrived at their house at 0800, letting myself in with my key. I set the table and covered it with a handful of gold sequins, then put on an apron and began to prepare an elaborate breakfast of omelets, Danish pastries, fresh fruit and, as they sat down, champagne. I did not say anything about the trip back or about the conference. I sat with them for a while after breakfast, talking about our tour in Korea, then cleaned up the dishes and got ready to depart.

At noon, as I was leaving, my brother arrived with lunch and more champagne: it was like a TV wrestling tag team. He set up the table, set out their lunch, poured fresh bubbly for my parents and then chatted with them about his work for the Department of Commerce and an impending trip to Japan.

At about five o’clock, as my brother was leaving, my sister arrived with an elaborate curry dinner that she had prepared and more champagne. She duplicated the actions taken by me and my brother, then cleaned up, talked to my parents for a while and left them to enjoy the rest of their anniversary.

The next day, we had a barbeque to celebrate their anniversary and I told my folks how I had managed to get to the States for their big day.

137. A PIGEON FOR GUATEMALA

I like to play poker once in a while, and I have had opportunities to join poker games here and there as I traveled. I played some poker during my tours in Vietnam and enjoyed the experience, so I kept my ear open for poker opportunities as I visited posts. In Central America, John Swafford was the RSO in Guatemala, and on one of my visits there he asked me if I was interested in playing a little poker. I was delighted.

John's poker game was held on Wednesday nights. Players met at the home of an American expatriate who had a beautiful apartment in Guatemala City. Our host put out a variety of cold drinks, cheeses, sliced meat and fixings for sandwiches, a small variety of potato chips and a couple of sour cream-based dips. In attendance was John, the Embassy Admin Officer, our host, the Embassy Political Officer and, usually, one guest.

The poker game was a low-stake nickel, dime and quarter affair. We all bought chips, made ourselves sandwiches, picked up something to drink and sat down to play. The conversation at the table focused on people at the Embassy, almost always positive comments about new initiatives, intended new programs, successful efforts to meet with Foreign Office personnel in Guatemala and so forth. Our host had a lot to say about both Americans and foreigners in private businesses in the country, initiatives by the local government to improve conditions and interesting things to see and do around the country. As the conversation went on, we were playing cards, making bets, winning and losing hands while listening to each other.

After about two hours of playing cards, with a workday ahead of us, we ended the game and cashed in our chips. I found that I did not have much in the way of winnings: in fact, I had lost about twenty dollars in the course of two hours, a dollar or two at a time.

The next time I went through Guatemala, John again invited me to join his group for poker. I had enjoyed the first session, so I gladly accepted the offer. The pattern was repeated: twenty dollars' worth of poker chips, good food, cold drinks, great conversation and a very small pile of chips at the end of the night. I mentioned to the group that I felt something like a sacrificial lamb each time I came to play, getting a gentle but smug smile from our host and appreciative nods from the Embassy officers.

138. LOOKING FOR A CHOP HOUSE IN SEOUL

In story number 52, I related my experience with Asian red stamp paste. Truth be told, I was interested in both Chinese calligraphy and chops from the time I heard about them in the Asian Studies course. Part of the allure was that all students in the Korean Language course were given Korean names. With a name in hand that could be converted to Chinese characters, I was ready to order a chop of my very own.

It sounds easy, but there's a lot that goes in to buying a chop. It's kind of like a car. You are going to use it frequently, and you expect it to be hardy and serviceable, but the quality of the chop you pick says a bit about you and your taste and personality. I was looking for the Maserati of chops, something that oozed quality without being ostentatious.

You would think, perhaps, that a fine chop would be carved out of jade. It turns out that jade is so hard to carve that jade chops cost a fortune to produce. They also do not hold stamp paste very well. What you need is a softer but very fine-grained stone that allows a maker of chops to fabricate the marks of your name so that they look like brush strokes or, with a little nostalgia, the linear characters of ancient China.

Chinese calligraphy is thought to have begun as a series of pictorial marks on the shoulder bones of animals. They called it "Oracle Bone" script. In a time long before paper, these stick-like characters gradually evolved into a written language that could be sent from one person to another and understood. While calligraphy has evolved massively since those early origins, chop-makers appreciate the traditions of producing modern signets with scapula bone characters.

I was in Beijing on a trip in 1993 when I wandered into a store that sold blank stones for use as chops. As I looked through the small stone offerings, each presented on a setting of cotton within a little white cardboard box, I spotted a Chicken Blood Stone. The stone I found was a four-sided column with a square face at one end and a slightly rounded face at the other end, about two and a half inches long. It was mostly grey, but about one inch from the rounded end the stone gradually turned into a bright red color almost the shade of blood.

These stones are famous throughout Asia for their color and the quality of stamp imagery they can produce. They are valuable: Chinese Emperors used to give them to high-ranking ministers on special occasions. When the governments of China and Japan resumed diplomatic relations in 1972, Chou En-Lai presented two square-column Chicken Blood chop stones to the people of Japan. The red color denotes Good Fortune in the Far East.

These stones are made from “jixue shi”, a mixture of several different materials. The base is a pair of clay minerals, kaolinite and dickite: these are soft materials that carve easily. There is also a quantity of cryptocrystalline quartz in the mixture: this is transparent, but gives the stone durability. Finally, there is bright red cinnabar (Mercury Sulfide) in the stone that gives it its brilliant color.

I bought the stone and took it back to Korea with me. Then I started looking for a chop house that could carve it properly.

Near our former Embassy in Seoul, there was an ancient part of the city known to Europeans as “Mary’s Alley”. This winding street, filled with old tile-roofed Korean houses, catered to scholars and artists who preserved traditional Korean ways. In the store windows were racks of calligraphy brushes, ink stones, ink sticks, samples of calligraphy and, in a few of them, prepared chops. I walked along this street until I found a maker of chops who put his wares proudly on display. I took my prize stone into that shop to get it cut.

The chop maker was impressed with the stone. He knew its value and how to work with it. He wanted to know what name I wanted on the stone, so I wrote my Korean name for him in Hangul and then handed him a picture of a chop face done in scapula bone writing. He was delighted; we discussed a price (ouch!) and he asked me to return in two days. I thought that might be rushing things a bit, but he told me not to worry. When I came back, he had cut the design I wanted onto a small wooden chop so that I could try it out and see if I liked it. It was sort of like getting fitted for a suit.

I gave him the okay, and he asked for two weeks in which to finish the stone. When I returned the second time, the flat face of my chop had been beautifully carved. The uncarved sections of the face were very finely stippled, so as to hold chop paste well and produce an authoritative stamp. There was a little mark on one of the long faces of the chop which guided its proper orientation when applying your seal. I paid the man, was given my stone chop in a presentation box and my (free) wooden chop in a leather case with a zipper, and I was ready to do business in Asia.

139. THE COURIER'S TALE

To date, all the stories I have posted here have been my own. Like all of you, however, I have heard some fabulous stories from other State Department employees on their overseas experiences, not a few of which are worth retelling so that they are not lost. I actually heard this story firsthand from the Diplomatic Courier involved in the experience. Is it worth relating? I think so, especially since many of us have served as non-professional Couriers from time to time.

In 1979, I was working in our Engineering Services Office in Abidjan, the capital of the Ivory Coast. Like Embassies everywhere, our facility was regularly visited by Diplomatic Couriers, who arrived with a collection of orange pouch bags, were met at the airport by an Embassy Communicator with a Diplomatic Passport and usually an Embassy expediter and a driver. Arrangements had been made with the host government to allow our Embassy van to drive out onto the airport tarmac with the right credentials, and the van would pull up to the side of the incoming plane after it had taxied to its parking area. The Courier would be the first man off the plane; he would be met at the bottom of the ramp by the Communicator. The expediter, who also had airport credentials, would take the Courier's passport into the Customs area for processing. The baggage compartment would be opened, and the pouch would be the first baggage off the plane.

The Courier would stay with his pouch, which was generally unloaded from the plane by baggage handlers, who were entitled to a small tip for each bag. The bag fees were an allowable expense on the Courier's expense report; the tips helped to ensure that Couriers everywhere were welcomed by the baggage crews and even protected by them from time to time. When the van was fully loaded and the expediter returned, all the Embassy employees and the Courier piled in to the vehicle and drove back to the Embassy.

Abidjan was a hub for Diplomatic Couriers. Our embassy had the vault space to retain large pouches and the airport was serviced by several small airlines that made "milk runs" to the surrounding countries. A Courier would arrive with a large collection of pouch bags, leave most of them in Abidjan, then set off for several nearby capitals with a smaller pouch load. At these locations, he was often met on the airport tarmac by a communicator from that country, who would take the incoming pouch for their Embassy and hand the Courier an outgoing bag. This was generally called a "planeside transfer".

There were twenty-eight Embassies and Consulates in our territory in 1979. In February of that month, a Courier came out from Washington with a large pouch to make his way through our region. Couriers came in all shapes and sizes, but this man (let's call him "Jim") was a big bear of an individual who was funny, upbeat and very popular wherever he went.

In February of 1979, a civil war had begun in N'Djamena, Chad. This city was a small inland capital on a major river: the country shared borders with Libya and Cameroon. There was disagreement in the country between the President and the Prime Minister, and between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. Each of these potentates had accumulated a small army and intended to push their rivals out of the country.

On the 22nd of February, 1979, fighting broke out overnight between facets of the armies located in the capital of Chad. The fighting was most intense in the downtown area where our Embassy was located. Our Embassy staff was trapped in the city and could not safely get to the Embassy to destroy anything or make arrangements to evacuate the Embassy staff. All of our employees basically hunkered down at home as the fighting raged around them.

Unaware of this situation, big Jim arrived in N'Djamena on the morning of February 23 with a small pouch. The plane landed, taxied down the tarmac and turned around. It stopped on the tarmac with the engines running. The Captain came back to talk to Jim. He said there was trouble in the city; he advised Jim to just stay aboard and get off at the next stop. Jim felt honor bound to deliver his pouch and asked to be dropped off. The pilot lowered the internal staircase at the back of the plane to the ground; Jim and a crewmember walked to the cargo hold and extracted his pouch. The crewmember got back on the plane and it took off, leaving Jim by himself out on the tarmac.

No one came to greet him. Looking around, Jim saw a flatbed baggage cart on a nearby parking area. He walked over to the cart, pulled it to the pouch and loaded his suitcase and two orange bags on the cart. Then, by himself, he walked slowly towards the airport terminal, pulling the cart like a wagon. In the distance, he could hear artillery fire and occasional bursts of small arms fire. He could see big clouds of smoke where shells were exploding.

Arriving at the terminal, Jim found it completely deserted. No porters. No police. No Customs or Immigration Officers. No passengers. Still pulling the wagon, Jim walked through the airport and emerged on the city side of the facility. The streets were almost completely deserted except for a white sedan near the curb, which seemed to be empty. As he looked at the car, however, a hand and arm slowly emerged from below the driver's windowsill and beckoned him towards the car. Towing the wagon, Jim walked up to the sedan to find an Embassy communicator hunched down inside it. The driver said: "Get in, quick, and get down." Jim tossed his bag and pouches into the back seat and walked to the passenger seat. With both men keeping their heads down in the car like a Low Rider in Los Angeles, the driver piloted the vehicle through back streets and alley ways to his Embassy-assigned residence.

At the house, it was possible to hear artillery fire (much louder here) and small arms fire, both single shots and automatic weapons fire. Occasionally, clouds of dust and smoke from exploding artillery shells would blow by the house, smelling of cordite. The communicator

advised Jim to stay on the floor so as not to be visible through the windows and offered him lunch. Lunch was made by crawling over to the refrigerator, taking out sandwich makings, putting sandwiches together and eating on the floor.

For two days, Jim and the communicator crawled around in the house. At times, the fighting seemed to come their way. At other times, the intensity of the fighting lessened and even seemed to stop. On the third day, realizing that aircraft might not be landing in N'Djamena for a while, Jim and the communicator put the pouches and Jim's suitcase back in the car and drove across a small bridge into Kousseri, a town in Cameroon.

I am not sure how Jim was able to reach the capital of Cameroon. My guess is that he took a local bus from Kousseri to Ngaundere, where he transferred to a train that took him to Yaounde. In Yaounde, he entered the Embassy, briefing personnel there regarding the conditions in Chad and the need for an Embassy evacuation. Then he caught a plane through Douala to return to Abidjan.

Along with a number of other people, I heard this story from Jim on his return to Abidjan.

140. A PORTABLE ALARM SYSTEM

Not too long after my arrival in Africa, it became apparent that we had two types of Embassies overseas: those with Marine Security Guards and those without. Security at the posts without Marines was iffy: at the end of the day, the Embassy locked its doors and went home, with no way of determining whether or not someone had been inside the building after all the employees left. Usually, as today, there was a Duty Officer assigned after hours and on weekends each week, but there was nothing to call him in in the event someone broke into the Embassy. About the closest thing we had to such a system was the beeper carried by the Duty Communicator, who could be called in by high precedence traffic.

I suggested to Washington that we explore a similar beeper system for the Duty Officer, something we could reasonably couple to an alarm system that would send a signal to the beeper if we experienced a contact closure within our building. We were told that the Department was already working on it. I volunteered to test the system in Africa, mentioning the tropical jungle conditions in Abidjan and the desert conditions in Mali and Niger. After about six months, we were informed that the system was ready to field test and that, following our offer, Abidjan would be one of the test posts. The alarm system arrived a couple of weeks after that.

The system consisted of a spread-spectrum transmitter to which five discrete alarm zones could be attached (all by hard wiring), a fifteen-foot fiberglass antenna with a variety of means to attach it, and a leather briefcase containing a five-zone spread spectrum receiver, an instruction booklet and a plug-in power supply to recharge the nicad batteries within the receiver with a six-foot cord.

There were a couple of problems. The little power supply was designed to plug into an American 110 volt wall socket with a ground. Most of our posts used 220 volt power. The battery life of the receiver was only good for about six hours unless you kept it on charge.

I decided to test the system at my home before taking it to the field. I installed the antenna outside my kitchen, put a "Big Red" passive IR unit inside the kitchen aimed at the door, and wired the alarm to the transmitter. I had to use a large transformer that accepted grounded plugs. I then took the receiver to work, plugged it into a similar transformer at my desk and watched the system perform. I showed my wife how to set up the system when she left the house, which registered on the receiver as a green light for Zone 1, and I could clearly see when my wife returned from outings as the receiver would go into alarm and Zone 1 would show a red light. We tried the system on several bright sunny days and on two days in which tropical rainstorms came over the city. My wife was not keen on going out into monsoon rain just to test

the alarm system, but we compromised by having her walk onto the porch. The alarm system worked fine in rainy weather, even heavy rain.

Our next stop was in Niamey, Niger. I wrote to the Post Security Officer and to RSO Dakar, explaining the new system and asking if we could try it out under desert conditions in Niger. I stated that we wanted to see how the system worked in real life, with the Duty Officer picking up the new receiver along with the Duty Radio when he or she started their watch. I went up to Niamey with a Seabee and we put up the Antenna, installed the transmitter, installed three simple alarms on the ground floor of the Embassy and tested the receiver. All three zones worked fine. We had agreed to stay at post for a few days to see how everything worked before leaving the country.

The Duty Officer started his shift on a Friday evening and picked up the receiver. I showed him how the receiver worked and how to set up the alarm zones before leaving the Embassy. The Duty Officer was troubled by the concept that he would need to carry a briefcase around with him, although he understood that he would need to plug it in to a transformer when he reached his house. The young man, an Economics Officer, then put the receiver into the trunk of his car and went off to play tennis.

On Sunday, with the Post Security Officer in tow, we went into the Embassy and set off all three alarm zones, then waited for the Duty Officer to call or show up. Nothing happened. We went by the Duty Officer's house and found that he had forgotten to plug the receiver into a transformer when he got home, and the batteries were dead. We recharged the batteries, re-explained the importance of keeping the receiver charged, and left post so that the Embassy could try out the new equipment without our constant presence.

Four weeks later, we received a telegram which informed us that the new alarm system did not work. We scheduled a trip to Niamey, and again found that the batteries were dead. We also found that Duty Officers were reluctant to enter an Embassy with zones in alarm by themselves, having no weapons or security training, that they loathed carrying the briefcase around with them and regularly left it in their cars and not on charge. They also had difficulty in coupling the batteries' power supply to most Embassy transformers and often skipped that step, with the early death of the nicad batteries a predictable result. We suggested to Washington that the unit be revised to house a 110/220 volt supply and be supplied with a number of wall adapters like the ones in airport travel kits, but we never saw the alarm system again.

141. A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO MONROVIA

Here's another "Clash of Cultures" story:

BACKGROUND:

(I learned about all this later on...)

In the region of Africa between the Ivory Coast and Liberia, there are a number of tribal traditions that have been in existence for hundreds of years. When boys reach puberty, for example, they undergo training as men. In some villages they are required to find a guiding spirit (as in some native American cultures) and carve a mask to encapsulate that spirit for later ceremonies. After traditional rites, which may include facial scarification, the young man is accepted as a man of the tribe and may begin to think about marriage.

In that same region, when a girl reaches puberty, she also must earn the respect of the tribe to become a recognized adult. When a young woman begins to develop breasts, she is directed by a tribal counselor to cover her exposed body from her waist to the top of her head with a white paste that is somewhat like whitewash in consistency. She applies the same solution to her legs. With her body so coated, she becomes a "ghost" and no one in her village or in neighboring villages can "see" her. She visits the sick, cleans huts for the elderly and watches children as they play. She carries water, finds firewood, prepares meals, babysits for working adults and otherwise demonstrates that she cares about her village and can be of use to it.

When a year has elapsed, if the "ghost's" performance is acceptable to the counselor, a tribal meeting is held in which the activities of the specter are recounted and considered by elders. Only when the ghost's activities have earned a great deal of merit can the young woman be considered an adult. When the elders so agree, the girl may wash her body, put on the clothes of an adult, become a member of the village and look for potential husbands.

During the ghost period, it is *unlucky* for either men or women in that geographic region to visually notice or speak of the young woman. It is considered *very bad form* to stare at her partially naked body, to meet her eyes or to discuss her presence openly.

MY FIRST TRIP TO MONROVIA:

I went to Monrovia, Liberia on a post familiarization and lockwork trip in 1978. I was met at the airport by a van and an Embassy driver named Dorley. We loaded my tool case and suitcase into the van and I sat up front with him. English is spoken in Liberia, and I had no difficulty in speaking to Dorley or in understanding his responses. Having never been to Liberia before, I had many questions about the country, its people, conditions at the Embassy and things

to do in Monrovia while I was there. Dorley was pleasant and he laughed a lot. He said I could buy embroidered African dresses for women on Gurley Street, that there were many beautiful baskets available in town, and that many American employees in the Embassy liked to go sport fishing off the coast in power boats.

The road from the airport into Monrovia was two lanes wide and was long and empty. Following Embassy policy, Dorley drove at a sedate pace for an open highway, perhaps 45 mph. We met almost no traffic all the way into town. Long stretches of the road ran alongside fairly wild jungle areas; other areas were somewhat cultivated and we did see a hut or two.

On one of the along-the-jungle stretches, as I looked far down the road, I saw an apparition emerge from the bush. This was a young African girl, about fourteen, naked from the waist up and painted white. I stared. Dorley kept his eyes straight on the road. His jaw tightened, but he did not speed up or slow down at all. As we came up to the girl, I saw that she was carrying a small basket of fruit on her head, with both arms swinging leisurely by her sides. She showed almost perfect posture. Astounded, I tracked her with my eyes and head as we came up next to her, and then turned around to watch her from behind as we passed by.

As she faded into the road behind us, I turned incredulously to my driver. I asked what we had just seen, and where she might be going.

Dorley said: "I didn't see anything".

142. CHRISTMAS AT FSI

Until the time we returned from Panama in 1986, the Foreign Service Institute was located a block North of the Rosslyn Metro Station. It was a large building, but it was overcrowded and some of the longer language programs had been relocated to SA-15 down the hill. I was lucky enough to wiggle into two of the FSI language programs between 1975 and 1983 due to Department efforts to make Romance languages more available to Foreign Service personnel. I took the Early Morning French classes from 1975 until 1978, going in for an hour of instruction each day during the semester, and I took a 10-week Spanish immersion course just before my tour in Panama.

In 1999, my scheduled tour to Manila went up in smoke when Mount Pinatubo erupted. The ESC in the Philippines was down-sized, and DS had a difficult time finding me a base of operations. Many alternate locations were proposed: Seattle, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur and Guam. Each of these sites initially looked promising, but one after another they were rejected. Guam was especially scary because it was an American Territory, and housing might not be provided by the government: would you buy a house there? (Wally Gilliam suggested that I hold out for Kwajalein.)

After several months of indecision, it began to look as if I was headed for Korea. I was told that it would be several months before the position could be formally established: possibly six months to a year. I expressed interest in attending the East Asian Area Studies course at FSI, followed by the formal Korean Language program they offered. I must have hit Greg Bujac on a good day: he approved the request and I began to see a light at the end of the assignments tunnel.

FSI was a fun place to attend. Each language area decorated its offices and classroom spaces throughout the year with travel posters, pictures of the countries where that language was spoken and small artifacts from the region. Teachers sometimes showed up in native dress or wearing jewelry from their country of origin. (I was particularly impressed by a teacher in the French course wearing a necklace of *Mastodon* ivory.) Coming in for coffee before class, you were surrounded by students learning different languages who were trying to converse with each other and with instructors to get the day started. It was literally a Tower of Babel.

Each Christmas, FSI became a showplace. Christmas decorations from all over the world proliferated through the hallways, classrooms and offices. Doors were decorated with pictures, dried plants, colored ribbons and seasonal artifacts. There were Santa Lucia posters from Sweden, blown glass ornaments and paper cutouts from Poland, ceramic crèche scenes from

Guatemala, wax candles in the shape of crosses from Jerusalem and foreign Christmas cards in every language I could think of.

As Christmas approached, FSI held an annual Christmas banquet that was not to be missed. Language teachers from all over the world prepared large dishes of ethnic food to be sampled on long, common buffet tables. There were perhaps twelve big buffet tables set out the year that I attended the feast, with pots and plates of food on both sides of each table. There were appetizers, main dishes and many desserts. There were many kinds and shapes of bread; there were brownies and galletas. Lebanese food, Greek food, Italian food, Arab food, Chinese spring rolls and Malaysian satay sat side-by-side as hungry students moved up and down the tables.

Many teachers attended this banquet in Native Dress. There were saris and huipils, embroidered Arab dresses, African robes and Panamanian dresses with billowing skirts. Men wore guayaberas and dishdashas. The dining area looked a bit like a convention at the United Nations.

Everyone ate. A few of us students went back for seconds, then moseyed on over to the dessert table for Indian pistachio Ras Malai and a little American Apple Pie. The variety of food, color, costumes, food odors and mingling foreign languages made for an unforgettable experience.

143. LUNCH AT THE ROYAL CANBERRA YACHT CLUB

I believe that the last of the Pacific ESOs that I visited after arriving in Seoul was ESO Canberra. I flew from Seoul to Bangkok first, then continued on down to Sydney on Qantas, taking a connecting shuttle flight into Canberra. I was met at the Airport by Jim Frank.

At that point in time, our relationship with our government counterparts in Canberra was very much in flower. We had agreed to exchange engineers and were participating with the Aussies in a five-nation round-robin meeting exchange, where each country in the group took turns in hosting the annual meeting. On the way into the Embassy, Jim indicated that the Australian security engineering personnel wanted to invite us to lunch during my visit in order to meet me and to discuss our programs. The luncheon site was to be the Royal Canberra Yacht Club at Lake Burley Griffin. This was a man-made lake that was formed when Canberra itself, a created capital, was constructed.

Midweek during my visit, we locked up the shop and headed over to the Yacht Club. This was an imposing facility perched on a bank of the big lake. We entered a large room which I took to be the holding area for the dining room. It had a bar, windows that looked out on to the lake, but no chairs at all. Instead, there were small chest-high circular tables around the room on pedestals, evidently to hold drinks while people were talking and waiting to be called into another room for lunch.

In the anteroom were some eight Australians, members of the country's countermeasures organization. I met their chief, his deputy and several section chiefs as well as some of their field engineers. The introductions went smoothly and we were invited to join them in a drink. It was a bit early for cocktails, but I am fond of bitter beers and I asked for a Victoria Bitter. All the other attendees likewise ordered beers. In a few minutes, we were all chatting as we sipped and waited to be called in for our meal.

The call to eat did not come right away, and we were offered another beer. The bitter beer, on draft, went down smoothly and one of our hosts ordered a third round. As we finished the third beer, plates of French fries ("chips" in Australia) appeared from the kitchen, served with ketchup on the side. There were a couple of plates on every table. We nibbled on the French fries, downed our beverages and continued to talk. Over an hour went by. Our glasses empty, the Chief of the Australian service ordered beer for all of us. We were served, we toasted each other, and downed our beers. Then the Aussies said that they needed to get back to work.

Our ride arrived outside. We waddled out of the Yacht Club and sat down in the van, still hungry but rather flushed. We went back to the Embassy and reflected on Aussie hospitality, our developing partnership and where we might go for dinner that night.

144. THE GOLD MAN

In the 1970's, overseas employment opportunities for spouses were quite rare. We did not have Family Liaison Officers at that time, and most businesses in Abidjan wanted their employees to speak fluent French. This situation was frustrating for spouses like mine who had held down important jobs before going out on overseas assignments.

On the last year of our tour, my wife found employment at a Teacher's Aide at the International School. She was not paid much in this position, but she had a *job*. She was working with children, she could interact with teachers and other adults, and she felt like a wage earner again, boosting her self-respect. As with many businesses, employees of the school were paid once a month.

Somehow, an independent Ivorian jeweler learned which days the teachers and school staff members were paid. This man would show up at the school after the school employees received their money; he would have a number of small but beautifully-made gold jewelry items for sale in a leather pouch. The jewelry was priced just right: the more attractive items were for sale at just about the price that a teacher's aide earned for a month on the job.

The wandering jeweler's wares were a great attraction on a Friday afternoon after a month of work. Teachers and aides would surround the jeweler, look at his offerings and could buy what they liked on the spot, without having to drive or park anywhere.

My wife came home one payday with a beautiful gold necklace resembling interlocked riding stirrups. It looked good with her clothing and was very well made. The next month she brought home a matching bracelet. She subsequently toned down her buying, but she would come home from time to time with additional trinkets, all gold, and all bought on payday.

145. THE KIWI-FEATHER CAPE

In 2005, we were living in New Zealand. While there, we were exposed to the Maori culture in many different ways. The Kiwi National Anthem, for example, is always sung in two languages, with the verses in Maori traditionally sung first.

Shortly after we arrived, personnel from our Embassy were invited to attend a short three-day course on the Maori language at Victoria University in Wellington. As a retired spouse, I had lots of time for that, and signed up for the program. Our classes met in a Marae (tribal meeting house) on the campus of VU, with the interior filled with carved pillars painted red, each of which explained the lineage of a distinguished member of the tribe. We spent some time in Rotorua, the Maori homeland set among volcanoes and geysers on the North Island. I became interested in Greenstone (Maori *Pounamu*) a form of nephrite jade which comes from the South Island. In an environment without metals, this stone was used for weapons and jewelry before the Europeans arrived. Finally, I studied the traditional shapes into which the Maori laboriously carved their Pounamu to form necklace pendants and earrings.

Near the Ambassador's residence in Wellington, there was a local tribe of Maori that had set up an art gallery to show off the work of native artists. There was often something new to see there, and Gail and I went by the gallery every two or three months. Painting, sculpture, new jewelry designs in nephrite and carvings in whale ivory, bone and Abalone shells were usually on display.

In November of 2005, we brought our two children out to New Zealand to spend Christmas with us. We took our kids (young adults, by that time) around the city, showed them the fabulous Te Papa national museum, sent them down by ferry to South Island to see Milford Sound at the Southern tip of the island, and brought them back through Christchurch and the vineyards of Marlborough. One afternoon in December, I was running some errands with my son when I decided to show him a little Maori culture. We had become friends with the Maori lady who ran the gallery, and I wanted to show Andy the art work.

When we reached the Marae, they were preparing an exhibit on the Maori way of life, with oars from war canoes, wooden spears and clubs, ropes made of bark strips and Maori clothing made in traditional styles. A former Marine, my son sports a number of tattoos, including a "sleeve" on his left arm. Maoris of past years were heavily tattooed, and those in recent times are often inked as well. The lady in charge of the gallery looked at Andy's tattoos appreciatively, and invited us into a back room. There, she invited my son to try on a Kiwi feather cape.

If you look at old sketches and pictures of the Maori, you will see that the tribal chiefs and their wives are nearly always shown wearing rough-looking capes. These were traditionally made out of the feathers of the Kiwi, New Zealand's national bird. A Kiwi is about the size of a big duck; they are nocturnal animals that don't fly and depend on running and hiding for protection. When the Europeans came, they brought a number of invasive species with them, primarily cats and rats. Ground-based Kiwis stood little chance against these animals, and many of New Zealand's native birds were decimated by the feral animals. Today, it is a crime in New Zealand to shoot a Kiwi, but birds that die naturally belong to the Maori and their feathers can be used for cloaks.

We looked at the cape, which was beautifully made, and were surprised at its very light weight. It was made of a thin cloth to which overlapping layers of Kiwi feathers had been tightly sewn, forming a garment that was strong, warm and waterproof. Its color was a light greyish brown. The cape did not fit me, but it was a good fit for Andy, and a rare opportunity to experience firsthand an important native garment from the times before Europeans arrived.

To restore their avian populations, the Government of New Zealand has been gradually acquiring uninhabited islets around the two main islands of the country. They trap and poison any feral animals remaining on these islets, then gradually restore bird colonies when they are free from predation. Visiting these islets is a hoot: check out "Kapiti Island Nature Tours" on the web. You leave the North Island in a strange ferry on wheels, zip out to the islet and receive a briefing near the beach. Then you climb a small mountain. Different birds seem to populate different elevations of the islet; they are waiting for handouts as tourists climb through their respective areas. When you get to the top, the views are memorable, as is the trip back down the mountain on aging knees.

146. TAIPEI LAUNDRY SERVICES

On a trip I have previously discussed (See “Jawsah”, story number 40) a number of SEOs and Seabees from the EAP region came together for a construction project. Our combined efforts produced a nicely-engineered facility for the American Institute in Taipei. We had a regional mini-conference while we were there, and we were able to visit the National Palace Museum.

We were staying in the Howard Plaza Hotel, the first hotel I had ever stayed in that featured a central atrium over an open building center. About fifteen stories high, the rooms all opened to interior hallways with low railings that looked down on the reception area. It was an interesting hotel and, although we received a negotiated AIT rate, was an expensive place to eat. Hotel support such as laundry service was also pretty expensive. Each individual sock cost over a dollar to get washed; laundering a shirt cost eight dollars.

When the Nationalist Chinese left China for Taiwan, they took a great many of Chinas’ treasures with them. While this might seem high-handed, history proved this decision to be a valid one: Mao’s Cultural Revolution saw the destruction of many historical artifacts and national treasures remaining on the mainland. There were more than 700,000 items taken from China, which were subsequently housed in a massive museum built outside of Taipei. There was such a huge quantity of museum exhibits that they could not all be shown at once. Instead, there were rotating exhibits each year in different parts of the museum. Embroidered Chinese court dresses might appear in the Fabrics area, vases in cloisonné might appear in the artworks area: both exhibits might last six months, only to be replaced with new exhibits.

During our visit, I was particularly impressed with Chinese treasure boxes. In a time before portable video games or even comic books, these magnificent artworks were used to keep children of the wealthy amused on outings. Each box, which might be carved with dragons or inlaid with mother-of-pearl or rare woods or brass fittings, had a secret means of opening it. Once opened, each box was full of exquisite little treasures: carved animals in jade or ivory or wood, dried fruit or candy placed in the box before the outing, tiaras with electric blue kingfisher feathers or child-sized necklaces of pearls. One cabinet in the museum held eight of these boxes, all different and all opened up so that we could see their contents.

As we were checking out of the hotel, I noticed that my laundry bill for our two-week stay came to nearly fifty dollars. One of the Seabees left the hotel, walked around the corner from the hotel entrance and came back in a short while with a big pile of freshly washed and pressed laundry. He paid \$10 for the bundle. He was the only one of us to realize that a Chinese laundry might be available in Taiwan.

147. A NEW OFFICE FOR THE COMMERCIAL ATTACHE

This is not a “Clash of Cultures” story so much as a “Blending of Cultures” story:

While we were stationed in Seoul, our neighbor Ralph served as the Commercial Attaché. Ralph was an earnest advocate for American Businesses who chafed often at the presence of his office in the Chancery. He felt that many Korean businessmen would not come in to see him simply because of where he was located. Ralph wanted a secure office, but he wanted it *outside* the Embassy in a Korean office building.

Ralph’s opinion was shared by the American Chamber of Commerce in Seoul. They successfully lobbied the Ambassador and Diplomatic Security to allow the construction of a Forced-Entry/Bullet Resistant office in a building near the Embassy, using local guards. The office was to be equipped with a guard desk and a screening area with a metal detector and an X-ray machine much like the ones used in Embassies. Used Insulgard doors and windows were obtained economically from ESO Tokyo, which also developed a floor plan and a wiring layout for the new facility. I offered to install the door control system when the construction phase was over.

An office midway up a tall building was selected for the new Commercial Office. For four weeks, a Korean construction crew worked on the lobby area, putting in supports for the ballistic material and conduit to hold the wiring. When they were finished, Ralph asked me to come over, look over the work and connect the small AES door control system shipped to us from Tokyo. I scheduled a ride to the building because I was taking my toolbox and did not fancy a four-block walk with that big gray Jensen case.

When I arrived at the new office, everything looked good. I started with a coin test: I tapped on each side of the ballistic windows with a coin to see if they had been installed correctly. The principal window in front of the guard booth was in backwards. Working through a translator, I explained the reason for flipping the window around to the Korean foreman. His crew started to loosen the window immediately, and in about an hour had removed it, flipped it, reinserted the mounting bolts and added the trim. For some reason, I found that Korean workers always seemed to like working very closely together, and this was the case on this outing. One man would be kneeling on the floor while two other men on short ladders would be working over his head. Still, they worked quickly and got the job done.

I set my toolbox on the floor, then knelt down and opened it up. My box had two removable tool pallets that kept the other tools in place, and several small tackle box-like containers for screws, wire nuts, anchor mounts and so forth. It weighed about thirty-five

pounds. Just about every loop in the kit had something in it. I removed the two tool pallets and propped them up to get at my meter.

Then I looked over my shoulder. Five Korean workers had formed a half-circle behind me to get a look at the inside of my toolbox. Two of them sort of gasped when they saw the array of tools most of us carried around: a hammer, meters, screwdrivers, nut drivers, files, cutting tools, a flashlight, RF connectors, a couple of chisels, a miniature socket set, taps, an electric screwdriver, wire strippers and so forth.

The Korean foreman was excited. He exclaimed in Korean:

“Noon Kun Yo! MacGyver Kit im ni dah!”
 (“Holy Cow! That’s MacGyver's kit!”)

I proceeded to connect the control door to the AES control unit, brought in 24 vdc power from the AES supply, powered up the assembly and tested the doors. The mag lock needed adjustment, but otherwise the used doors and windows had survived the trip from Tokyo and the Korean installation in very good shape. Using the translator, I thanked the installers for doing such a good job with unfamiliar equipment. I then explained to the local guard how to use the door control unit and promised Ralph to come back when the X-ray and the Metal Detector came in. Then I caught a ride back to the Embassy with my tools.

148. ON AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE

During our tour in Seoul, my children were active on the post swimming team. The team needed adults to set up at meets and to arrange off-post meets with teams on other military bases in Korea and in Japan. I offered to help. I could not be there all of the time, so an Army Major offered to share the President's office with me. He was the Operations Officer for an aircraft maintenance battalion; we managed to arrange our schedules so that one of us was generally in Seoul while the other person was traveling. Both of us tried to be there for meets.

At our first home meet, we arrived several hours ahead of the swimmers to set up the timing pads, an electronic scoreboard and public address systems for the pool. The post pool in Seoul had a strange lip around it that did not fit the timing pad support brackets very well, and they kept tipping over into the pool. Frustrated, the Major whipped out his phone and called a colleague. In about ten minutes an Army Sergeant First Class drove up with a box containing about ten big rolls of what looked like olive drab duct tape. With the Sergeant's assistance, we began to tape the timing pad supports directly to the concrete pool deck. I was astonished at how well the tape held, even when it was splashed with water from the pool. Although it *looked* like duct tape, it was much stronger and stickier.

We taped down the timing brackets, the wires leading to the speakers, and the power cords that allowed everything to run. The pool deck looked like a hotel hallway during a SecState visit, only olive green instead of silver. When everything was ready for the meet, I went over to thank the Sergeant. I said "That's great tape. I've never seen tape so strong."

He smiled and held up a roll and looked at it. He said "Why, this is *Hurricane Tape*. It's extremely durable, impervious to moisture and UV light does not bother it much. I've used it for a lot of things." "Hell," he said: "you can even use this tape to fix the main rotor on a Black Hawk helicopter."

Then he paused and looked at me. "The *pilots* don't like it when you do that, but it'll work."

149. THE ACCRA SECURITY ENHANCEMENT SURVEY

In 1981, the Security Enhancement Program materialized out of nowhere, replacing the Minimum Standards for Public Access Control program that all of us in West Africa had been working to implement. We were given some very guarded information about what equipment would be needed when SEP began, and were told to get out and get started on surveys for the new program. I sent in a telegram asking for more information on the program, especially on any new standards we might have to meet, and did not receive a response for about a week. I was then informed that SEO John Wolf, who had been my previous boss in Nairobi, would be conducting a Security Enhancement Survey in Accra, Ghana, and I was welcome to join him at post and learn about the new program. I put in for a visa and tickets.

Like many other Embassies, our mission in Ghana was scattered among several buildings, all of which needed to be surveyed. At that point in time, the Embassy had moved out of its former wooden building and was shoe-horned into the USAID building. John reached Accra a couple of days before I did and had some initial briefings with personnel at post. When I came in, we went over to the Embassy warehouse to start our survey.

Our objective at the Embassy's GSO warehouse to determine what protection would be needed to protect the personnel who worked there. (They had *no* protection on our arrival.) I had a spiral notebook, a pencil and a small 35mm camera. John carried a huge loose-leaf binder with data sheets on all the new equipment that the SEP would require. Rare for Africa (where we usually worked with hand-drawn fire escape plans removed from corridor walls and copied) we actually had a set of formal plans for the warehouse.

John was specifying EMT conduit runs just about everywhere. I pointed out that EMT conduit and conduit fittings were not available in our part of Africa. John told me that the conduit and fittings would be shipped to post with the new security equipment, and he persevered. He went on to specify Insulgard Ballistic Doors for every exterior door location. I had never seen such a door and none of my 28 African posts had one. The doors came with built-in magnetic contacts, magnetic locks, EL-33 panic bars and Rotron hinges. Most of this material was new to me. It sounded great, but I did not know if it would work or not.

In short, John was specifying many new systems we had never seen or heard of before. These included Mardex Systems with duress cameras, modular rack-mounted door control systems, rack-mounted alarm monitors, DC power supplies with big Sola voltage regulators and RCA Cameras in nitrogen-filled housings. It was like receiving instructions from a superior civilization or, since I knew John from Nairobi, like receiving instructions from someone who had been transported to their ship by Aliens and then returned to us with new knowledge.

I asked to copy John's new standards for our use in Abidjan. I did not realize it at the time, but John was still in the process of *developing* those standards and data sheets, and he was reluctant to share detailed information on his specifications until everything was approved. Accordingly, John would not let me copy anything. He kept his big binder close to his chest. Each type of door required certain locks, each fire door required a fire alarm module, each generator door required an alarm, control doors needed mag contacts and mag locks. All of this information was in the notebook. In designating a specific door for a particular spot, John would look at the book quickly, make a note or two, then close the book and hold it next to his chest. I tried to look over his shoulder at the new standards every time I thought I could get away with it. The costs of providing and shipping the new equipment, the conduit and the wiring were all supposedly addressed by the new program. It was a bizarre survey trip.

The rest of our visit went much the same way. We briefed personnel at the post (who also did not understand any of the equipment John was talking about), said goodbye and went our different ways. I did not see any of the SEP equipment John was specifying until I got to Panama two years later on.

150. ON LANGUAGES

Children babble. They experiment with making different sounds. They hear you talking and see your lips moving, and they try to make the same sounds. Eventually, they find that they can form a word that you have been using and associate it with an object (such as “shoe”) that they recognize. When this achievement is rewarded by compliments from their parents, they are on their way. In a day or two they will have two or three words; in a week or two they may have a dozen and will start linking the words together to form thoughts and ask questions. In a year they will be speaking clearly and participating in conversations.

I studied French in high school. I learned verbs, adjectives and some vocabulary, as well as correct endings for different tenses. I really did not speak French. In college, I took German for a language, and again studied verbs, tenses, adjectives and acquired some vocabulary. I enjoyed my courses, but I learned far more German from my junior year roommate, an exchange student from the University of Hamburg, than I did in class. Leaving college, I really did not speak German.

When I joined the State Department, I spent the first three years of my career in Washington. Technical Security Officers who hired in from the Washington D.C. region were kept at home in those days, while recruits who came in from out of State went directly through training and out to an overseas post. Our Office was pursuing language training for security personnel, but the only language-designated posts in our Division in those days were in the Soviet Union.

After my first year, FSI introduced a new program, which they called Early Morning Language Training. Anyone in the Department who was willing to go to FSI every day for an hour before work began could take courses in one of the Romance Languages. You took the regular FSI course, but you only took it for an hour each day. Still, it was something, and I decided to take French and try to get assigned to a post in Francophone Africa. I really liked the classes, and I progressed through three semesters of Early Morning French before leaving for Abidjan. I was getting better, but leaving Washington, I still did not speak French.

When I was in the Army, I thought it might be easier to find my duffle bag if I put some reflective tape on the bottom. When I went to Vietnam, our plane unloaded at night and several hundred identical duffle bags were unloaded onto the tarmac in the dark. My bag had two white pieces of tape on the bottom and I walked over, picked it up and processed in before anyone else on the aircraft. I resolved to color-code all my bags from that point on.

When I joined the Department, I bought a Samsonite two-suiter for trips. There was an indented band on either side of the lock that was perfect for a strip of yellow vinyl adhesive tape. I applied the tape and was ready for travel.

On my first trip in Africa (to Gabon) my suitcase did not arrive when I did. I asked the Embassy Admin office for assistance and they arranged to take me out to the airport the next day to look for it. They sent a young woman from the office out to the airport with me to help.

I walked over to the Lost and Found area and tried my French on the man running the luggage area. I explained I was a Diplomat. I tried to tell him what I was looking for and he did not understand me. Frustrated, I looked through the wood and chicken wire enclosure surrounding the storage area and spotted my yellow-banded suitcase. I got excited and first pointed at it. He still did not understand me. Getting angry, I suddenly shouted in French: “LA-BAS! CA C’EST MA VALISE LA-BAS! LA BRUNE AVEC LA BANDE JAUNE!”

Astonished, the porter jumped up and brought me my suitcase in a hurry. I was delighted: I had not thought in English and translated it into French, but had thought directly in French. I was feeling *righteous*. This was probably the way I felt when I said my first word as a baby. Within a week, I was spouting French. In a month, I was using the correct tenses and word endings, remembering many vocabulary words and learning new ones.

Some barrier in my mind had been bypassed. I started to remember German words and expressions, thinking in German. When I took the FSI Spanish Course before heading to Panama, acquisition of that language was easy and I was thinking in Spanish almost as soon as I started.

151. SPELUNKING IN WAITOMO

My son, after graduating from high school, decided that he was not ready for college, and enlisted in the Marine Corps. He did well at Parris Island, emerging as the Battalion Iron Man for his class. His mother could not identify him among the other Marines in formation, and only recognized him when he walked over after graduation.

The Marines initially turned Andy into a Scout Swimmer, a job specialty sent out in front of an amphibious assault to map beaches and identify barriers beneath the surface and on the actual beaches. After this school, Andy went on two Mediterranean “floats”, traveling on amphibious transport ships. They put into a number of European ports, did some training exercises with mountain troops from the newly liberated Ukraine, and helped to evacuate the American Embassy in Albania.

After his first two years in the Marines, Andy applied for Marine Recon training. Recon Marines get into hazardous stuff, like parachute drops into the ocean and abseiling out of helicopters at night. This course took a lot of time and we did not hear from him for a while. We attended his graduation at Camp Lejeune, however, where the commanding General giving the Commencement Address called Recon troops the “tip of the military spear” and reminded them that they had to be “harder than the lips on a woodpecker”.

Our son was out of the Marines in 2005, at college in Colorado. We were in Wellington at that time; we decided to bring both our children out to see New Zealand. My daughter and her friend from college arrived first, with Andy coming out a few days later. We sent the three of them down to South Island together, then made slightly different arrangements for their return trips. Andy had not seen the North Island, so I elected to drive him to Auckland for his trip back. I thought he might like spelunking through the limestone caves at Waitomo, so we headed North toward that area.

There are basically two ways to explore the Glow Worm Caves at Waitomo. One way is to walk down to the underground river via a low cave entrance, get into a rubber boat and float down the stream to a lower cave entrance which serves as your departure point. The other way is to rappel into the caves from an upstream point, hop into an inner tube and float down to a faulted area with chimneys flooded from an upper stream. You then climb the chimneys to get out. Having done the raft trip earlier with my wife, I thought we would try the inner tubes.

On the day we arrived, there were about eleven people in our tour group. Some were New Zealanders, one was French, some were Japanese and we were the only Americans. At the

store supporting the tour, I bought an inexpensive underwater camera that worked with film, thinking that we might get some pictures underground.

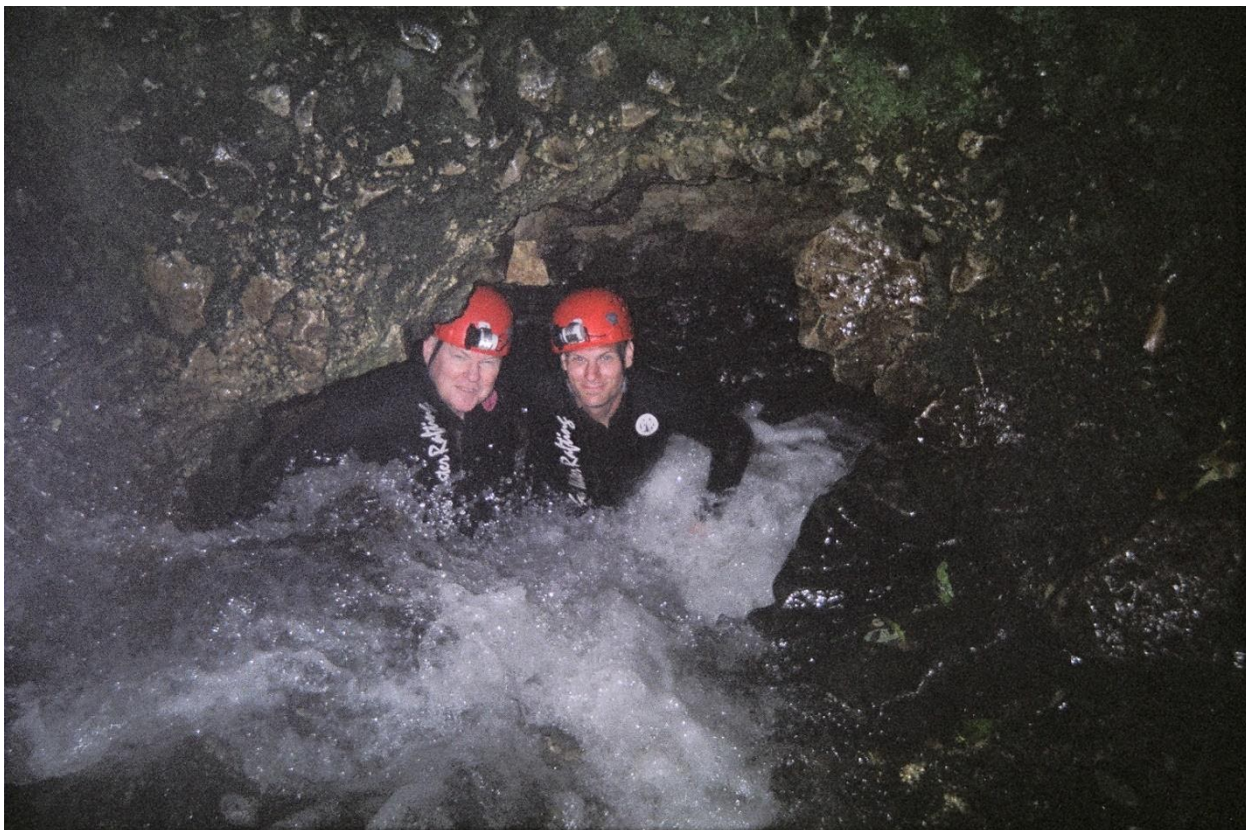
We started by getting fitted for wet suits. The tour facility had a large locker with different sized neoprene trousers and jackets; we tried on several to find our size. We donned white rubber boots and red helmets. Then we attended a mandatory course in rappelling down a medium slope set up outside the caves. Each of us made several descents down the slope, requiring no time at all for Andy and quite some time for me to complete. When we were done, we walked over to a hole in the ground as a group and, one by one, got on a rope to rappel thirty feet down into a limestone cave. I was hesitant as I came down, braking often, and I looked a lot like a yo-yo during my descent. Most of the other tourists came down after me, with Andy bringing up the rear. Andy dropped like a spider in a single fall, stopping just above the stone floor and walking out of his harness as if it wasn't there.

We walked down a slippery slope and stepped into large truck tire inner tubes. Each tube was partially wrapped with rope grips so that we could stay together on the underground river. When everyone was in place and comfortable, our guide began to discuss the formation of the cave complex and (as our eyes became accustomed to the dark) he talked about the glow worms that studded the ceiling of the cave, looking like stars from our level some forty feet below. As he was talking, we floated down the river in relative comfort.

As the bottom end of the river, we reached the faulted area. Water was streaming down to join the river from other streams above us, looking like the output from a fire hose. There were several visible chimneys to our right and an easier exit off to our left. We elected to take a chimney out of the cave, and started up in very dim light, with a heavy stream of water descending the chimney all around us as we climbed up the forty feet towards ground level.

Andy was behind me. At several points in the climb, I was either slipping off the rocks or was a bit too pudgy to fit easily through the overhead openings. At such points, after pausing, I would feel Andy's hand pushing me up out of the cave through the descending water as he climbed with his other hand and his feet. About two-thirds of the way up, we encountered a flat surface in the chimney where the rock was wide enough for several people: I asked one of the Japanese tourists to take a picture of the two of us.

We then continued the climb, reached ground level, got into a small bus and returned to our starting point to turn in our spelunking gear. Both of us enjoyed the experience and the picture we took in the chimney was impressive.



The author and his son in a New Zealand rock chimney, Waitomo, New Zealand.

Photo taken with our waterproof camera by another group member, 2005.

152. THE DAKAR DOORBELL

When I first arrived in Abidjan, the nicest post in our entire territory was Dakar, Senegal. Compared to cities like Bamako, Dakar was a modern, beautiful place. Its position on a low plateau right at the point where Africa most protruded into the Atlantic created a great climate; it was usually sunny, but breezy and cool, unlike all of our other posts. The Senegalese people were tall, elegant, generally good-humored, and tended to have men on stilts at parties and festivals, giving a carnival air to the place. The food was good, there was a large French expatriate presence there and you could find a cup of excellent French coffee and a fresh croissant or a *pain chocolate* almost anywhere.

Our embassy was an imposing new structure of dark brick, designed by an architect with a steel gate, a small circular brick driveway around a fountain also made of dark brick, and some outlying buildings that were neatly hidden from sight. The flag pole stood in a brick circle off to the left of the front door, and the building looked purposeful, neat and fashionable. In those days there were no Delta Barriers to block the entrance of cars. To enter the Embassy after hours or early in the morning, you showed up at the gate, showed your passport to a local guard and then walked up to the front door.

Often, this was as far as you got. *There was no doorbell at the front of the embassy*, nor any signaling device that would let the Marine on duty know that you were outside. On a weekend, it was not uncommon to wait an hour and a half for the Marine to notice that you were there. All internal communications between the Marines were by radio, and when the mid-shift watchstander went out to perform his rounds in the building, he was *incommunicado*.

After a couple of visits with long waits, we added “install a doorbell in Dakar” somewhere near the top of our to-do list. The only problem was that our embassy in Senegal was largely constructed of reinforced concrete on the inside, and there were not many ways to neatly get a set of wires from the front door of the building to the point at which Post One was located. We were trying hard by that time to get away from tie-wrapping wires to the outside of installed FBO conduit, so we began looking for a route to the Marine Booth from the front door that was up to FBO standards. The way to go was to install a neat run of small-diameter conduit, but there was a problem: they did not use metal conduit in West Africa.

What we discovered was liquid-tight conduit, which we could buy through the McMasters catalog. This was flexible metal conduit in various diameters that came to us in 50-foot lengths and which, when coupled properly with admittedly expensive fittings, allowed us to install decent-looking runs of metallic conduit anywhere. Liquid-tight conduit was covered with a plastic sheath that made it look neat, and we could even turn gentle 90-degree corners

with the material without the use of a conduit bender. Best of all, perhaps, we could pouch several bags of conduit and fittings from post to post easily in the cardboard boxes in which it arrived.

The trouble was, in Dakar, we needed to get from the front door to a vertical cable drop area at the back of the first floor, install a run of liquid-tight down a twenty-foot wall with no ladder or stairwell nearby, punch a hole into the frame room at the bottom of that wall and then connect our doorbell to the Marine Booth through an empty conduit that was meant for telephone wiring. The hard parts were the THICK wall down which we needed to drop the conduit, and the process of fishing the liquid-tight and the wiring into the frame room. In those days our drilling tools were rudimentary. We had a hammer drill, but the bits only went about halfway through the wall.

Nevertheless, we arrived one Friday night to start the installation, planning to work over the weekend so as not to disturb Embassy personnel as we hammered and drilled. With me was a Seabee on loan from Mark Stevens in Casablanca and a Marine from Dakar who offered to help. The steel worker, I should add, had long, thin arms which were really useful on this job.

We began by drilling as far as possible into the concrete wall from within the frame room. While this was underway, the conduit run from the front door to the drop wall proceeded smoothly and professionally. We even put an aluminum termination box by the front door and put a good-looking heavy duty doorbell switch on it. Once we reached the end of our power drill's bit length, the steel worker began to use what is gracefully called a "Star Drill" but which in reality is a long steel chisel with a star-shaped head. Using a heavy hand sledge, the steel worker pounded on the star drill for about forty minutes until he forced a small hole through the concrete wall. Once the wall was penetrated, I dropped a long length of liquid-tight conduit down the twenty-foot back wall as if we were fishing. The Seabee had constructed a metallic hook out of heavy copper wire. I swung the conduit back and forth until (magically) the hook caught the conduit. And then we were stuck. There was no way to turn the rather stiff flexible conduit into the hole.

The steelworker enlarged the hole a little more and we re-fished the conduit. Then he stuck his *entire arm* into the wall, extended his fingers as far as they would go and managed to get his index finger into the liquid-tight conduit. Working very gently, he pulled the conduit into the frame room, where we terminated it into a box, provided a power supply and then connected it to a bell in Post One. We secured the lengthy drop of liquid tight at the top and a little way down, the only two areas we could reach. Then we patched the hole in the wall. This job took most of a Saturday to complete, but it solved the problem.

On Monday, we dropped in to say hello to the RSO. We showed up early, got through the gate, and walked up to the front door, where we rang the bell. After about three minutes a

Marine showed up at the door, astonished that we had been able to get his attention. Thereafter, throughout our tour, the doorbell was entirely taken for granted, but no one needed to wait an hour and a half to see the Marine.

153. THE ANTARCTIC RESEARCH CENTER

During our tour in New Zealand, the RSO (Bill Leverett) had not worked with SEOs before and seemed uncertain about the abilities we might bring to his support. He was content to let me (as a retired WAE employee) change combinations, service control doors, swap CCTVs, add new people to our access control system and delete departing personnel, but he seemed reluctant to send me on trips to his constituent posts even though ESO Canberra had offered to fund any travel he might assign to me.

This situation changed in 2004. The Department expressed concern for *all* facilities for which Embassies were responsible. They directed overseas offices to bring those facilities up to our current access control standards. Our Consulate in Auckland was already fitted with a FEBR entryway, but the Embassy was also responsible for the National Science Foundation's Antarctic Research Center in Christchurch. Our new Ambassador read the instructions from the Department, called in the RSO to ask about Christchurch, and told him to go down to South Island and conduct a survey for any electronic equipment and forced-entry protection that facility needed. Suddenly, Bill needed some help: I asked Canberra for travel funds.

The airport at Christchurch was co-located with a New Zealand Air Force Base. The United States Air Force supported scientific research in Antarctica and served as the ferry service between New Zealand and the South Pole. On the tarmac at the air base were several C-130s and a couple of C-141s. The C-130s looked a little different to me from ones I had traveled on during my time in the Army: specifically, the undercarriages looked bulky and different.

Our Research Center in Christchurch was basically a staging facility for scientists traveling South. There was an office area on the second floor of a long masonry building. Directly beneath us were the New Zealand Antarctic Mission's office and the Italian Consulate. We went in to discuss our marching orders with the Director of the Center. He was strongly opposed to giving up any space in his facility for a security screening area, noting that none of the other facilities in the building had such protection and that they had never been necessary before. Bill wanted me to try and put the screening area on the little landing outside the door on the second floor.

Much of the space occupied by our facility was simply open, empty and carpeted office space. There was a long conference table in the open bay. I explained the nature of ballistic control doors to the Director, noting that there needed to be some space between the moving metal doors and the metal detector. I talked about how crowded the landing would be with an X-ray system and a metal detector sitting on it and how it might be preferable to New Zealanders and visiting scientists from other countries to encounter our security controls *inside* the front

door. After a bit of thought, he agreed to let us poach a bit of his lobby area for the needed screening facility.

I began to collect information on the Center and stumbled on a nice drawing, apparently to scale, of the floor we occupied: it showed the building's pillars, windows and most of the office areas. There had been some changes to the floor plan since the drawing was done. I asked about a digital copy of the file used to create the drawing, but no one knew its origin. I felt I could re-create the drawing with the DS/ST CAD package when we got back to Wellington, so I copied it.

Looking for a little space to use for a SIC room, I opened the electrical closet on our floor of the Antarctic Center. I was immediately transported back to Africa and the wiring I encountered in Monrovia and Guinea-Bissau. There was a small power panel in the closet, but the little room was chock-full of the wiring needed to set up a Local Area Network, several in-use extension cords, telephone wiring and spare computer equipment. There was no suspended ceiling in this area, so I borrowed a ladder to look above the ceiling of the rest of the facility from inside the closet, seeing wires running everywhere on top of the ceiling tiles. I also reached up to touch the roof, which turned out to be a warm layer of corrugated iron. I made some notes, made a number of measurements and drew a couple of sketches. We went back to the Director; I suggested that the new screening area might be distracting for some of the Center's activities and that we should probably incorporate an enclosed conference room for the Center in our plans if he liked the idea. Since funding for these improvements would come from the Department, he began to warm up to our visit, and he invited us to visit the actual staging area for scientific trips to the Antarctic over by the Air Force Base.

The USAF APO facility for New Zealand was located at the Christchurch Air Force Base. Mail came in from the States or from Asia by way of the C-141 flights, was sorted between military personnel, the Embassy and Consulate and the scientists, and was then re-bagged for onward shipment on the smaller cargo planes. The holding area in the APO was constructed of wooden 2X2 strips to which chicken wire had been stapled; the wood-and-wire door was secured with a hasp and a Master padlock.

While we were in the APO, I met a Major from the USAF who piloted the C-130s. I asked about the strange undercarriage; he said that those were LC-130s, which can land either on wheels or on skis, depending on the weather. I found it fascinating to consider that something so massive could come in and land on skis, but he said that ski landings were stable (even in cross-winds) and that passengers were often unaware of the unusual landing apparatus.

At the airfield, there was another building set up by the government of New Zealand to help its citizens understand what it was like to live and work at the South Pole. The exhibit side offered a strongly refrigerated area in which a variety of penguins lived; you went through this

area in a moving cupola, almost like a ride at Walt Disney World in Orlando. There were outdoor rides available on the type of tracked vehicles used for exploring the Antarctic, and videos on the history of South Pole Exploration, global warming, the lives of penguins, etc.

On the other side of this facility was the Quartermaster area for our Research Center. Scientists would report into the office area I discussed, then go over to the Quartermaster to be issued their survival gear. This included down parkas with wolf fur-trimmed hoods, double hull rubber boots, down pants, down gloves, winter goggles, watch hats, thermal underwear and so forth. There were shelves and shelves of this gear for both men and women in most sizes along with forklifts, cargo nets, polymer pallets and the like.

When we returned to Wellington, I gave Bill a written report with my recommendations, an equipment inventory and a sketch of how the screening area might be laid out. I then started to re-create the drawing using AutoCAD LT. Almost as soon as I started, I found important differences between the “scale” plans and the measurements I took. Every CAD system I have worked with seems to have a steep initial learning curve: I plugged away at it, but it took me quite a while to finish the digital reconstruction of the plan. While I was working on the drawing, Bill transferred to Bangkok and the project was given to OBO to fund and complete. They sent a new survey team out; those personnel had read the first report and asked to meet with me. As they were about to leave, wanting to be of *some* assistance, I asked the architect if an AutoCAD-compatible plan for the Christchurch building might be useful to him. (He got a CD with the file.)

154. THERE'LL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND

In 1988, our office in Washington was invited to a conference in England which would include some other English-speaking countries. Greg Bujac, who had just been promoted and named the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Countermeasures, decided that he would accept the invitation and asked me (at that time, the Division Chief for Countermeasures) to attend the conference with him. I was delighted: I had stopped through Heathrow airport several times before but had never actually been to England.

My mother-in-law had given me a Samsonite briefcase in 1981. The briefcase was dark reddish-brown, very durable, held everything I needed for business travel, and just happened to be identical to the briefcase used by the DS firing range to transport Israeli-made Uzi submachine guns. Occasionally, on entering the Department, I would get a knowing nod from a Special Agent who recognized the case and thought I was packing heat.

Usually, when I traveled, I would fold my shot record inside my Diplomatic Passport and then put my tickets inside the passport in a new white #10 envelope. I used the surface of the envelope to record my start time, the cost of taxis, the places I stayed on travel, any incidental expenses, my flight number and my stop time, all of which I used in completing travel vouchers. Since Greg and I were leaving on a Sunday, I assembled my travel documents on Friday, put my tickets in my briefcase and took the briefcase home with me.

On Sunday morning, I packed my suitcase for the trip and just happened to check my briefcase for my travel documents. To my consternation, my passport was not inside the briefcase: I needed it to make the trip! I drove to the Metro station, hopped onto a subway train and walked down to my office from Foggy Bottom: at that time, we were in a new annex building across from the Department on 21st Street. I went up to my office, opened my safe and went through all four drawers without finding my passport. Now very anxious about making my ongoing flight, I rushed back home by Metro and my car and looked through the briefcase again. I was confused: my tickets and the envelope were in my briefcase, but not the passport or shot record.

Really furious with myself, I went *back* into the Department to look for the passport. I called Greg to say I would possibly be late, and to go on without me if I was not at the airport to go with him. I reached the office a second time and was about to open my safe when my wife called: my passport *was* in my briefcase. It had slipped into one of the two fan-fold compartments in the lid of the briefcase and had gotten caught under a row of paper clips I kept on the edge of the compartment to connect notes. You had to turn the briefcase upside down to see the passport.

I rushed home, checked my passport, called for a taxi and headed for Dulles Airport. It was late in the afternoon; I had missed the flight with Greg. I got a ticket for a later flight and headed for England, with a London ETA of midnight.

When my plane arrived in London, I picked up my suitcase, cleared customs and headed for a rental car office. I rented a Vauxhall sedan and obtained a map to get me to the Milton-Keynes region where our conference was to take place. I had never before driven a car with the steering wheel on the right side: I had some initial issues with turning on the windshield wipers when I meant to signal for a turn. I was concerned because I was going to take this unfamiliar vehicle out on the A5 Expressway to Newport Pagnell in the middle of the night. Still learning about the car, I found myself very disoriented in backing up the sedan while holding the steering wheel with the wrong hand and turning my body in the wrong direction to see out the back.

I started out driving on the right hand side of the road, which you don't do in England. I was brought to my senses by English drivers with flashing headlights, honking horns and heavily accented shouts: "**Bloody Idiot!**" Frightened, I quickly moved over on the other side of the road and began to settle down as the new driving situation sunk into me. Driving at a good rate of speed on the expressway, I reached my hotel ("The Swan Revived") at about two o'clock in the morning.

The next morning, I was up at six to have breakfast with Greg and meet our ride to the conference.

Newport Pagnell turned out to be an English market town that is mentioned in the Domesday Book prepared for William the Conqueror after the Norman Invasion of England. The original Swan Hotel, at the same location as the present building, had twice previously been burned to the ground. The adjective "Revived" was added to the Hotel name the third time it was rebuilt. The hotel was in an old wooden frame building with huge hand-carved wooden beams. Each floor was slightly canted in a different direction as you went up the stairs. The staircase was creaky, there was a small pub on the ground floor and a tiny restaurant with an English menu (Kippers, cold toast and scrambled eggs for breakfast, e.g.)

Two blocks away was the factory in which Aston-Martin vehicles were made. As a car nut, I made a small pilgrimage to this factory after the conference to look into the windows and dream.

155. COLUMBIAN COFFEE

My wife and I enjoy coffee: we have experimented with different brands over the years. When we reached Panama, we were able to acquire pure Columbian coffee once in a while, and we liked it. You may remember the “Juan Valdez” coffee commercials, where a coffee buyer by that name visits little villages until he finds the perfect beans for coffee worthy of the name “Columbian”: there is something to that sentiment.

Bogota, Columbia, was one of our posts at ESC Panama. The Embassy in Columbia was large, and it had a very nice commissary inside the building, with an Army Post Office right across the hallway from the commissary entry door. The APO System in South America let authorized users with the same two first digits in their APO Numbers send letters and packages between those two APOs free of charge. You wrote “free” on your letter or package where the stamp would normally go.

The Bogota commissary sold excellent vacuum-packed “bricks” of Columbian coffee inexpensively by the case. You could show your Embassy ID, buy a case or two of coffee, walk across the hallway to the APO and mail the coffee to your home address for free.

It was too easy. Every visitor to our Embassy in Bogota from a South American post with the same two initial APO digits would buy a case or two of coffee while they were in town. Visitors from Washington or other cities in the United States would happily pay the postage for the excellent coffee. So many cases were shipped out that the APO personnel considered themselves to be in the “coffee business”. The commissary was making a lot of money from the coffee sales but their personnel, too, were weary of fetching case after case of coffee from the back of the store so frequently during the workday. When some visitors bought eight to ten cases of coffee at a time and sent them all out for free, the two Embassy sections complained. The Embassy then imposed a one-case limit per trip on TDY personnel.

The commissary also sold beautifully made stuffed birds made of cloth filled with cotton. Primarily toucans, macaws, cockatoos and parrots, these brightly colored works of art sat on wooden dowel perches which could be hung from a hook in the ceiling to brighten up a kitchen or an apartment. The legal Attaché in Panama needed to visit Bogota frequently, and some of his friends at his post of residence would ask him to bring back a bird or two for them. Being a nice guy, he complied when he had the time. As more and more people saw the birds, the number of requests skyrocketed. These artifacts were again sent back through the APO free of charge. The APO personnel now considered themselves to be in the “bird business” and again worked with their commissary colleagues to bring the situation to the Embassy’s attention. Conferring with the commissary, the Embassy again set a reasonable limit: one bird per TDY visitor per trip.

156. DON GLORCH AND THE SWING

You've all seen it: a cartoon that shows how a swing is modified from its initial, simple design by designers, engineers, the manufacturing process and the installment process to become an unrecognizable hodgepodge, when what the customer wanted was a tire on a rope.

Towards the end of my tour in Abidjan, our two Seabees were replaced. The Builder's slot was not filled immediately, but a new Electrician arrived in the form of Don Glorch. Where his predecessor had been urbane, polished, neatly attired and a perfectionist, Don was a bit rough. He was a smoker with a mussy appearance: he always seemed to need both a shave and a haircut. His cigarettes drooped from the corner of his mouth and he let the ashes grow until they dropped on the floor. Don took all the tools he needed on trips; however, he tended to just toss them in a tool kit and sort them out again when he reached his destination. Don was good company and saw the humor in things, but he wasn't prepared for Africa and its shortages.

On our first trip together, we went to Ghana to help our Embassy move out of a dry wooden building designed by FBO years earlier into a larger masonry building occupied by USAID. We were asked to effect this change by the Regional Security Supervisor in Nairobi, who requested that our services be provided as soon as possible. The old Embassy was a real fire trap and we welcomed the move. However, the Minimum Standards for Access Control were in force by that time and the building required some significant modifications to bring it up to spec. The first of these installations was a Selectone System for the multi-storey USAID building.

Like many buildings in our West African region, the AID building was made of a reinforced concrete frame with outer walls of brick and concrete and inner walls of brick and plaster. There were no vertical chases for floor-to-floor wiring. To run the Selectone system through the building, we elected to drop our wiring down the side of a staircase with landings between each floor. We had to drill a series of holes through various walls and each landing for power and signal wiring. The ESO in Abidjan did not have a core drill for this purpose, but we did have a couple of large hammer drills that we thought were up to the task.

We were wrong. A core drill cuts through internal obstacles like reinforcing bar: a hammer drill encounters a piece of rebar and deflects. I would be drilling and Don would be on the floor below, watching for the emergence of the drill bit: it often would not come out where we thought it would protrude. Some holes had to be drilled twice, making lots of noise.

We wanted to run our wiring in conduit, but EMT conduit was nowhere to be found on the African economy in our area. We had started using liquid-tight flexible conduit, which we could order in 50' rolls and form easily without a conduit bender, but the fittings were expensive

and we went through a lot of them. This meant, for the Accra Selectone job, that all we had left in the ESO were *angular* liquid-tight fittings. Since we were asked to do the installation right away, we took what we had available in the shop and went to Ghana.

The Selectone system, you will remember, consisted of a power supply, a control console in the Marine Booth with a microphone and tone modules and a series of small slave amplifiers placed around the building with strings of speakers connected to each amplifier. For the Accra installation, we also brought along a wall-mounted parallel control unit that allowed the system to be used from the location of the system cabinet as well as from the Marine booth. We brought an AC circuit into a corner of the basement to power the system, and Don got to work on the basement equipment installation as I began to install amplifiers and speakers on the upper floors.

I came downstairs after about two hours and found that Don had mounted the power supply and auxiliary control unit on the basement wall. Loops of liquid-tight conduit swirled out of 45-degree connectors pointed UP on the power supply, connecting power and signal circuits to other 45-degree connectors pointed DOWN on the control unit and looping out of the control unit through similar connectors pointed UP. Two hanging lengths of liquid-tight conduit emerged from ragged holes in the ceiling and dropped to meet the angled connectors on top of the control unit. It looked awful.

Don was not pleased with his work or the materials he had to work with. He said so. He asked what I thought about it. I said: "It looks like a swing." And then (I couldn't help it) I said: "THE swing".

Don had seen the cartoon. He glared at me, threw his cigarette on the floor, stepped on it and stomped upstairs. He spent twenty minutes talking to the AID Admin Officer, then walked over to the AID warehouse with their foreman and spent an hour there. He returned with the foreman and some new installation material: a hundred and fifty feet of EMT conduit, three boxes of compression fittings, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch pennies and a conduit bender. From his toolbox, he took a conical leather Sargent Greenleaf knockout kit. He took everything apart and began to punch a different set of holes in the power supply, control unit and system cabinet. He refitted the hardware with compression connectors. He coupled the three units to each other and to city power neatly in conduit. Then he expertly bent conduit to merge the system cabinet with the ceiling holes. Finally, he sealed the former holes in the equipment cabinets with the pennies.

The rest of the installation was uneventful. All the amplifiers were connected to the downstairs hardware through conduit, while the speakers were mounted facing downward on ceiling tiles with their wiring out of sight above the tiles. We were done in four days.

That Friday was Saint Patrick's Day, and the USAID Admin Officer was of Irish descent. She had invited the entire Embassy to her house to celebrate. We received engraved Diplomatic

invitations. She had personally made all the food for her guests (there was a *lot* of food) and her table was decorated with Irish Lace and shamrocks. She had Irish music playing in the house. There was only one detail that escaped her: the Embassy's commissary was out of Jameson's Irish Whisky. She had wanted to offer Irish coffee; instead, she set up a little cart with coffee and liqueurs, with a little blackboard suggesting some alternatives for guests to try. After eating, I wandered back to the cart and tried a coffee with Kahlua, which tasted good. I encountered Don at the same cart, having a similar beverage. We wandered away, talked to other people, and found ourselves back at the cart a second time. This time, we tried coffee and Cointreau. We walked away again, met other guests, and returned to the cart for a coffee and Grand Marnier. Both of us liked this concoction. We gradually realized that we were the only people drinking Irish coffee at the party. I commended Don on the quality of his installation, on his ability to scrounge needed material on his very first trip, and we agreed to call it an evening.

YEAR FOUR

157. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Another airport story...

In 1986, our tour in Panama had come to an end, and it was time to return to Washington. We had somehow acquired two cats during our Panama tour, and we had been frequenting the excellent military-run animal hospital at Howard AFB to keep the animals up with their shots. The record-keeping system at Howard was very professional, and when we informed them that we needed the correct paperwork to take our pets back to the States on a commercial aircraft they knew exactly what we needed from the standpoint of the health laws in both Panama and the United States. They were even helpful in identifying cat hotels in the Washington area that we might send the animals to while our family took a vacation in Disney World.

The deal was that we would take the cats with us to the Panama airport in approved carrying cases, present our paperwork at a special desk in the luggage area, and then pick up the cats ourselves in Miami and move the cages to another desk; show *them* the paperwork and send the animals up to Washington by themselves, where the cat hotel personnel would pick them up and their required period of quarantine would start.

We packed up our household belongings and sent them on their way, packed a suitcase for each of us (four suitcases by this time) and put the cats into their cages. The cages had always previously been used only to take the cats to the vet for shots, so this encapsulation raised their anxiety level substantially; they began to make rather pitiful crying sounds. An Embassy van arrived and we loaded up, zipping out to the airport to first check in the cats (no problem at all) and then check in ourselves. We were on a nice Eastern flight for the comparatively short trip to Miami, and all was well. We had allowed enough time between our arrival in Florida and our on-going flight to Orlando to be able to transfer the cats and see a little of the airport.

When we reached Miami, Gail took our two children into a lounge area to wait for me while I took care of our pets. I was directed to the pet counter, where I showed my passport and the cats' records. *They told me that the ongoing window was clear on the other side of the huge Miami International airport!* The flight had traumatized the cats, who were both actively squalling at this point, and their cages were literally awash with cat urine, in which the two unhappy animals sat. I looked around for a luggage cart: they were also at the other end of the airport. Reluctantly, I lifted a cage in each hand, holding the paperwork under my right arm as I walked, and headed for the other side.

In the summer months, Miami International is full of passengers, many of whom, like us, were in town to go visit Orlando. Each of the lounges I transited was stuffed with bored children who got excited when they saw someone carrying pets. In lounge after lounge, they would run

up to me and try to look into the cages, frightening the cats and usually bumping the cages, spilling a little urine on one or the other of my legs. At times I actually had to push my way through these groups of children, who occasionally would stick their fingers through a side vent in a cage to try and touch a cat. The “oooh, he’s really wet” comments when they did this were somehow rewarding.

By this time I was balancing the cat records on the top of one of the cages as I held them each as far away from me as possible. This is an uncomfortable position to hold for any length of time, and I was getting tired. I began to set the cats down on the moving walkways instead of carrying them, which helped a lot but sort of encouraged children to stop and ask about the animals. That was all right. As I got closer to the cat window, I spotted an idle luggage cart and glommed onto it, making the rest of the trip a lot easier. I reached the window, presented my paperwork and was free of the cats. Then I had to return to the other side of the airport to rejoin my family.

Although it was summer, Orlando was in the midst of an unusual cold snap. We had not packed anything in the way of winter clothing in our suitcases, so we decided to pick up some jackets in Orlando. There was a problem with our luggage when we deplaned in Orlando (it did not travel with us, somehow) and we were told by Eastern airlines personnel that they would bring it to our hotel when it arrived. This was the first time that either of my children had experienced a loss of luggage (each suitcase containing favorite toys) and they were very apprehensive about their stuff. I was eager to change my clothing at this point, but we used the wait time to buy everyone in the family a jacket.

At about six in the evening, everyone’s suitcase showed up at our door *except* the suitcase of my youngest child. Andy was seven at that time and was despondent at the loss of his luggage. “Oh, what am I gonna *do*?” and similar sentiments were voiced. I asked the Eastern personnel to try and send the suitcase to us even if it came in late that evening. We went out to eat, returned to our room, put the kids to bed and heard a knock on the door at about 11:00 at night. The missing suitcase had arrived, and my son’s enjoyment of airline travel was restored.

158. MISSISSIPPI TWO

One of my favorite stories:

In 1978, I made my first trip to Accra, Ghana. I was traveling with Bill, a Navy Seabee Builder, and this was a post familiarization/CCTV swap/lockwork trip to learn about posts in our territory. Accra was a short flight from Abidjan, and we arrived in Ghana early on a Monday morning.

We were met at the airport by an Embassy driver in a white panel van. We loaded equipment and tools into the van and took our seats. The driver picked up a microphone clipped to his dashboard and called in: "Base, this is Mobile Six". There was a pause, and then an American male voice answered: "Base". The Driver said: "At the airport. Heading for InterCon Hotel, then Embassy with passengers." The radio answered: "Roger. Base Out." Bill explained that "Base" was Post One: they were expecting us.

In those years before cellular phones, communications between an Embassy and its personnel were often tenuous. Like many other countries in Africa, the wired telephone system in Ghana was antiquated and often did not work at all. In 1978, in Ghana, the Embassy had a single radio network called the Admin Net that connected the Embassy to the Warehouse and the USAID Mission. To be able to reliably reach Embassy personnel during non-working hours, most Embassy officers also had a small radio and a charger in their homes. Lacking reliable means of communication like telephones, Facebook and Twitter, this Admin Net also became the defacto communications system for the families of Embassy officers.

Bill explained to me that arriving personnel in Accra were assigned a Call Sign based on where they came from. It was usually either a City or a State. If someone at post was already from Kansas, and someone new from Kansas arrived, their Call Sign might be "Abilene". The Officer was "Abilene One"; his wife would be "Abilene Two". Children were not supposed to use the Admin Net, but in the absence of telephones, this rule was often violated. As we drove from the airport to our hotel, a number of calls came in on the radio:

"Michigan One, this is Base"

"Go, Base"

"Michigan, our duty vehicle needs an oil change. You asked us to remind you."

"Roger, Base. It's scheduled for this afternoon"

"Thanks. Base out"

We drove a little further and the radio came on again:

“Portland One, this is Boston Two”

(a pause)

“Boston Two, go”

“Portland, our dinner tonight is on for 7:30. You were going to bring the wine. Over”

“Roger, Boston. I have two whites and two reds”

“Thanks. Boston Two out”

This was followed immediately by a child’s voice:

“Virginia Three, this is Vegas Four”

“Virginia Three, this is Vegas Four”

(A pause. Then another child’s voice)

“This is Virginia Three”

“Cindy, do you want to go swimming with us? My Mom’s going to drive.”

“Let me ask my Mother”

(another pause)

“Sally, I can go. Please pick me up. I’ll be ready. And Oh! Virginia Three out”

At this point we reached the Intercontinental Hotel. We left our tools in the van, checked in, were handed heavy metal room keys attached with baling wire to big wooden blocks to insure they were not carried away, and got back into the van. We headed for the Embassy. On the way there, the radio crackled again with a Southern voice:

“Mississippi Two, this is Nashville Two hiah”

“Go on, Nashville Two”

“Remember what you wanted?”

“Yep”

“OK. Brownie Recipe follows. You need 2 ½ cups of granulated sugar, 1 ¼ cups of unsalted butter, and 1 ¾ cups of unsweetened cocoa powder. You need ½ a teaspoon of kosher salt and 4 eggs. Also one cup of Gold Medal flour and I teaspoon of vanilla extract. I put walnuts in mine; I think the Commissary still has some. Heat the oven to...”

An angry male voice interrupted the call:

“Nashville Two, this is Albany 1. Albany 1. Cease your transmission immediately. If you ladies need to swap recipes, please write them out on paper and exchange them by hand. This radio is for official use. We just can’t go on like this”

(after a deep silence)

“Nashville Two. Understood. Sorry.”

“Mississippi Two. Ah got it, too. Sorry”

Bill told me that “Albany One” was the DCM, who was acting as the Chargé that week. No further radio calls were heard, and we arrived at the Embassy to start work. We heard from the Marines that the DCM came on to the net about three or four times a week to chase off serious offenders, but he was generally tolerant toward short social calls.

159. BUTTON ALLEY

South Korea is a prolific manufacturer of clothing for the United States. The country imports raw materials, makes fabrics and zippers and coat linings, contracts with brands like Columbia to produce hats and jackets and ski gloves, then ships those garments to the U.S. for distribution and sale. The country also serves as a supplier of finished materials with which to make clothing, shipping that material to Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia and other countries that produce garments for the United States.

The old city of Seoul used to be surrounded by a wall which allowed access to the town through four massive gates, each opening toward a different cardinal point of the compass. One of these gates, the Great South Gate or *Nam Dae Mun*, burned down several years ago. A lesser gate, the Great East Gate or *Tong Dae Mun*, still exists; this gate is located in the part of the city where clothing products are produced.

Within the Tong Dae Mun market area is a long, two-story building that features material and seamstresses for traditional Korean women's clothing, *Han Bok*. The upper floor of this building is often crowded with mothers and daughters picking out bridal trousseaus and matching dresses for bridesmaids.

The floor below is an adventure. Clothing designers need fasteners, especially buttons, in order to make garments. In Seoul, most buttons were sold along a long, snaky passageway on the first floor of the Tong Dae Mun market. During our tour, we called this Button Alley.

Imagine a rather shady space about the size of half a football field, filled with desks and cabinets and bulletin boards and trays and tables so as to create a long, winding maze of little corridors. Some of these reached halfway into the maze and dead-ended. Other corridors wound back and forth, ran straight for a while, then turned sharply before joining some other corridor. Vendors along one corridor had their backs to vendors in other corridors. There were lights in this area: one shopkeeper would plug a cord from an electric iron into a crowded multiple outlet above a ceiling light in a neighbor's booth, and bring power over into their area for another light and perhaps a fan. Winding iron cords filled the ceiling for as far as you could see.

In every little booth, a different kind of button was for sale. There were pearlescent buttons, leather buttons, shiny metal buttons, plastic buttons, horn buttons, sequined buttons, cast pewter buttons and buttons coated with rhinestones. A typical booth might have fifty varieties of pearlescent buttons for sale, with buttons of the same style but different sizes shown to customers in trays. In the cabinets behind the trays, there were bags and bags of each type and size of

buttons. If you were tailoring a line of blazers in Seoul and needed brass buttons, you went to the lady selling polished brass metal buttons and looked through her stock.

Walking through Button Alley opened your eyes to the immense variety of available buttons and to the process of manufacturing while selling in Seoul. Many of the buttons for sale were actually made right in the little booths of Button Alley: Korean women and girls sat in front of a desk with a hot glue gun, expertly gluing plastic pieces like colored jewels onto large buttons. The final products caught the light like rings in a jewelry store, making the hike through the market even more memorable. Buttons on the walls, buttons displayed on bulletin boards, buttons on sale, buttons shaped like sticks for toggle coats, buttons carved like cameos, buttons in plastic to resemble jade or agate or onyx. Added to the buttons were buckles for belts, hook and eye clasps for blouses, and a variety of eyelets for lacing.

Because the electrical capacity of the market building was already strained, electric heaters and hot plates were not permitted. In the cold Korean winter, small kerosene heaters were used: these required fuel. This normally arrived by motorbike, with the rear fender of the bike carrying a saddle bag-like wire frame in which there were three jerry cans of kerosene on each side. Each jerry can was fitted with a flexible pink hose. These six hoses bounced up and down as the bike moved around, with the bikes looking very much like strange caterpillars as they made their rounds.

Entrepreneurs need to eat, and the ladies of Button Alley were served by other vendors on motorcycles and scooters who brought them covered hot lunches in metal tins. Kimchee and baked spareribs, chickens cooked in small clay pots, rice and pickled cabbage shared pans with seaweed salad, dried and smoked octopus, whole garlic cloves and scallions. Food-sellers intertwined with beverage sellers, offering hot tea, cold drinks, bottled water and beverages laced with ginseng. The vista of Button Alley was matched by its aroma, chiefly garlic but touched with savory whiffs of grilled meats.

Although prices for each variety of button were posted in each stall, it is Korean nature to bargain for lower costs. The air was full of ladies politely asking for deals or raising their voices slightly to protest button costs that seemed too high. Most of the deals were achieved by customers who purchased buttons in quantity.

160. A CHANGE OF GARB

In 1988, I was on an inspection trip that took me all the way around the world. That spring, Diplomatic Security had recalled its overseas Regional Security Supervisors, leaving us with a significant problem. Where the RSS officers had previously been the rating officers for our ESC Officers-In-Charge, our officers were now bereft of knowledgeable rating officers who could evaluate their programs and abilities. Worse, the RSS Officers had served as the reviewing officers for all of our ESC personnel and for the independent Officers-In-Charge of our ESOs. I offered to serve as the rating officer for our ESC OICs. This resulted in me rating eight overseas OICs, twelve officers in my own Division in Washington, and reviewing thirty-two other personnel at home and abroad. A portion of this workload could not be completed in the time allocated for evaluations, and I received a letter of censure from that year's Promotion Board.

When it came time to start writing employee efficiency reports, I decided to gather the needed first-hand material for each OIC Chief by making two overseas inspection tours. The first took me to Manila, New Delhi, Athens and Frankfurt. The second trip took me to Abidjan, Nairobi, Casablanca and Panama.

So, on the first trip, I left Casper Pelczynski in New Delhi to head for Ken Crosher in Athens. New Delhi did not have an APO, so Casper asked at the last minute if I would mind taking a big brass Indian tabletop on the plane with me and mailing it from Athens. I agreed to do so. At the airport, I was given an upgrade to First Class, and the brass tabletop was stored behind the seats just inside the First Class curtain.

This was a Saudia Airlines flight, my first on that carrier. My first impressions were very favorable: this was a brand-new aircraft, with a friendly flight crew and a very attractive staff of Saudi Arabian and foreign stewardesses; the menu would have done credit to a fine restaurant. The stewardesses' uniforms had been designed by Hermes; they fit beautifully and included colorful scarves with a rich pattern that was lightly repeated on their hats. We left New Delhi at the crack of dawn because the high summer temperatures made it difficult for heavy planes to get off the ground during the day.

Once aloft, I started talking to one of the Saudi stewardesses. I had never met a woman from Saudi Arabia before, and I was impressed with the beauty, carriage and evident knowledge of this young lady. In her early twenties, she was vivacious, smart, and had seen a lot of the world. She was surprised to learn that I had lived in Beirut as a high school student, a city she liked a lot. Soon other stewardesses came by to listen to us and I met several other Saudis. For Saudi women, the airline job was a dream: they could wear Western clothing openly, reside in cities like Paris and London and even drive cars while overseas!

I had a very enjoyable meal and then we descended to land in Dhahran. The flight attendants gave me Casper's tray and said goodbye: this was their home base. I walked into Passport Control and Customs, cleared the border formalities and stepped into the First Class lounge.

The flight crew disembarked and walked through Customs behind me. At that point the male attendants went one way and the well-attired female stewardesses walked down a staircase to an enclosed room that looked something like a plywood hut inside the airport.

After about fifteen minutes had elapsed, a door on the far side of the "hut" opened and a number of women dressed in black burkhas walked out into the airport, where they blended in with other women whose forbearers had been wearing similar clothing for centuries. The well-attired flight crew had disappeared: the hut was something like a time machine.

After several hours in the beautiful Dhahran airport (in the duty-free area, you could buy only prayer beads for the pilgrimage to Mecca or boxes of dates, which were superb) I caught a second flight for Athens. Each of my flights lasted about six hours with three hours on the ground in Saudi Arabia. I was traveling West through five time zones, however, so I had to keep setting my watch back to an earlier time along the way. In Athens, I was met at the airport by Ken Crosher, who took me by my hotel and then whisked me off to a dinner at his house.

Ken lived high on a mountain above Athens, with a beautiful view of the city. It took us about an hour to reach his home from the hotel. The entire ESC staff had come up to the mountain top for the dinner in my honor. Sadly, at this point in time I had been up for nearly twenty hours across five time zones. I met the office personnel, had a couple of beers, sat down to dinner and fell sound asleep at the dinner table. One of the Seabees drove me into town and put me to bed.

161. PRESIDENTIAL DEMEANOR

During my last two years in Korea, we received a new Ambassador at Post. His name was James T. Laney, and he was something of a catch for an Ambassador to Seoul. He was a student at Yale University: he interrupted those studies to join the Army and serve in the Korean War. He returned to Yale, completed his degree became an ordained minister. He served as the Chaplain for the Choate School, then headed for Korea as a missionary. He became fluent in Korean, giving lectures at Seoul's Yonsei University. He returned to America, acquired a Doctorate in Christian Ethics at Yale and became a University professor, first at Vanderbilt and then at Emory. He eventually became the President of Emory University. When President Jimmy Carter left office, he founded the Carter Center in Georgia, placing it on the campus of Emory University. Dr. Laney became a Trustee of the Board managing the Carter Center, and he and the former President became friends.

After President Carter left office, he established the Carter Center in Atlanta in cooperation with Emory University. Dr. Laney became a Trustee of the Carter Center.

During President Clinton's Administration, former President Carter was asked to travel to North Korea to discuss its nuclear program with Kim Il-sung. He accepted the assignment and slipped through Seoul on his way to Pyongyang. While there, he negotiated an agreement that froze the North Korean nuclear program, placed it under international inspection and promised summit talks between the leaders of North and South Korea.

Then he slipped back into Seoul to brief Ambassador Laney and the government of South Korea on the results of his trip.

Late one afternoon, the Embassy Selectone System was used to notify our personnel that former President Carter would meet with interested parties in the Embassy cafeteria to discuss the results of his trip. Most of us had not had an opportunity to hear an American President speak directly to us, so the cafeteria was quickly packed. President Carter came down with Ambassador Laney, who introduced him. In turn, Carter explained that Ambassador Laney continued to serve as a Trustee at the Carter Center, and was in fact "his boss".

Speaking without notes and with a lot of humor, the former President described his trip to the North, the way that his small entourage had been squired around Pyongyang so as to see big impressive buildings and none of the squalor of block apartments, how their guides had moved them in in a tight pack to prevent anyone wandering off. He gave us his impressions of the North Korean leader, expressed hope that the agreement he had negotiated might lead to an

actual treaty, a reduction in tension on the Korean peninsula and even reconciliation between the two Koreas. Then he offered to answer questions from the Embassy staff.

Questions from the Political and Economic sections poured in. Here was a chance for those personnel to obtain first-hand knowledge about a very cryptic country they were focused on every day, and in some cases direct answers to their questions were presented. No one compelled this former President to talk to personnel at the Embassy, but he appreciated the work of the Embassy staff and tried to help them understand what he had seen and discussed. All of this was done in a friendly, relaxed setting at which the former President showed both humor and patience.

The big nuclear button was never mentioned. Instead, an official framework was established in October of 1994 between the U.S. and North Korea, which halted the production of plutonium in North Korea for eight years.

162. THE FRUIT BASKET

In June of 1984, there was a Presidential Inauguration in El Salvador. As President Regan's representative, Secretary George Shultz came down to attend the affair on behalf of the United States. Washington asked ESC Panama to support the visit, and I opted to take the trip.

The U.S. entourage supporting the Secretary was housed in the Presidential Hotel in El Salvador. Most of the trip was focused on the actual inauguration, on meetings with other Latin American leaders who had flown in for the affair, with evening dinners and balls. My support for those activities, which all occurred in Salvadoran government buildings, was not required. I was to stay in the hotel with other support personnel from communications and from the Secretary's staff. Usually, we were housed somewhere in the hotel that the Secretary was staying in: exactly where we roomed depended on circumstances, on the available rooms, etc. RSO John Swafford, who was the lead Agent on this trip, had a slight problem. The hotel had *two* luxury suites on the second floor, overlooking beautiful hotel grounds. One was billed as the "Presidential Suite", and Secretary Shultz was placed there. An identical suite was right next to the Secretary's rooms, and someone from our group had to occupy that space for security reasons. John decided to park me in the adjoining suite. From that location, I was in a good spot to look over the many gifts that a visiting dignitary receives from the host country.

Almost as soon as I reached my suite, gifts for the Secretary began to arrive. John wanted me to examine everything that came in for Secretary Shultz, so I went to work. Not knowing if my presence would be needed elsewhere, I wore a suit that day, although I was basically confined to the hotel.

A porter and an Assistant Manager from the hotel would be escorted to my suite by one of the Agents on the Detail. Dressed in the suit, I welcomed these personnel at the door to my room, and thanked them each time they arrived. Usually, the presents were loaded on a baggage cart, which would be wheeled into my rooms and left in my hands. I would close the door, examine each package that arrived, give it my blessing and call the Agent back when my job was complete. There were Salvadoran art objects of all shapes and sizes: woven tapestries, vases, statues, commemorative plaques and other goodies. There was also an amazing basket of fresh tropical fruit for the Secretary. It was almost three feet in diameter and two feet high, filled with fresh pineapple, mangos, citrus fruits, bananas, star fruits, lychees and other exotic eats. Each piece of fruit was hand-picked for the basket: nothing was bruised or past its prime. I went through the basket very carefully, then called the Detail and asked them to move the fruit into the Secretary's suite.

The hotel, from whence the fruit basket originated, did not know who was staying in the *other* Presidential Suite. Not wanting to cause an international incident, or neglect someone who was obviously of nearly equal importance to the American representative, they sent up a *second* basket of perfect fruit for me, with my name and room number on it. I again checked it carefully, selected enough fruit items to last me two days, then called the Detail. Not knowing who might be listening on the phone, I told them that it would take the Deputy Secretary at least three weeks to eat so much fruit, but that I would share if they picked up the basket. It disappeared almost immediately.

Needing to stay at my assigned post, I ordered all my meals from the hotel restaurant during the two days in El Salvador. Most of these meals were consumed on my room's shaded veranda overlooking the gardens and a pool area. The gardens were filled with tropical birds in bright colors and swaying palm trees, and there was enough of a breeze that the porch stayed cool. At the end of the assignment, I packed up my stuff, got a lift to the airport in an Embassy van, and slipped back into Panama.

163. THE FIRST ARCHITECT

In the late 1970's, those of us in Africa were struggling with the new Minimum Standards for Public Access Control. The objective was to strengthen every facility in our region, bringing each mission up to the same standard with the materials available to us. An important factor in our struggle was that no two buildings looked alike, or had the same desk area, or had the same power or lighting. We specified what we wanted installed, and in most cases came back and installed it ourselves. While our personnel were slightly better-protected, our designs were mighty ugly.

Not a few Foreign Service Officers complained to their posts about the lack of aesthetics in security installations. Our RSO, Mark Mulvey, took the heat for our noxious designs but realized that we needed some guidance in how to install security and make it appealing at the same time. He petitioned the Department to send us an Architect as an experiment. SY worked up a deal with FBO to send us two architects, one young and one of middle age, from (as I remember) Skidmore, Owens and Merrill, a major U.S. Architectural firm. We were asked to select a couple of posts at which the architects would work with us.

These men arrived in Abidjan in 1979. Mark thought it would be instructive for each of the SEOs to travel with an architect, to spread the wealth around. I was asked to travel with the younger man (whose name I have sadly forgotten: let's call him Josh.) Josh had a degree in Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design. I picked Conakry and Nouakchott as the posts that I thought most needed help. John Keys travelled with the older man and Glen Habenicht, an SEO who was planning to leave the Government, held down the fort in Abidjan.

Our Embassy in Conakry, Guinea was an exciting place (see the Conakry Playboy Club, Story Number 40). We were situated in an old Peugeot dealership which still had a car showroom on the ground floor as USIS space; the Embassy was on the second floor which you reached via an open spiral metal stairway with a control door at the top secured by an electric Cypher Lock. The showroom, meant to show off French cars to the populace of Conakry, had a number of tall, regular glass windows at ground level that let in excessive light and heat and took up wall space that might otherwise have been used for travel posters of the United States. The ground floor windows represented a serious security problem: you could get into our Embassy with a brick. You could watch from across the street to see where people went inside the building and you could certainly shoot through any of the windows with ease.

Both the Embassy and USIS viewed our visit with misgivings. Usually, our surveys took away space from their facilities and used that space to create ugly areas that slowed down their

interaction with visitors. We met with officials from both areas, explained our intentions and asked for some time to do a little survey work.

The architect was easy to work with and only needed a little information from me. He wanted to know where electricity was available, what type of voltage and line frequency we were working with (it varied: this was Africa) and what I saw as critical security failings. Then he shut himself up in a conference room for a couple of hours to put some sketches together. In those pre-PC days, all of his work was done by hand, using a little Faber portable drafting board and a mechanical pencil.

The following day, we met again with Embassy officials. Josh first addressed the ground floor windows. He proposed building floor-to-ceiling ells of concrete-filled masonry block finished with plaster around each window. Each ell would be closed off by a solid core wooden door that could be locked from the inside of the building and which swung inward. This provided a forced entry and ballistic solution for all the windows. It was inexpensive and could be done locally. At the same time, the design gave USIS many times the exhibit space it formerly enjoyed. Each of the windows became a storefront window, accessible only from the inside and fitted with lighting to illuminate displays. The car showroom suddenly became an attractive exhibit and reception area with lots of interior wall space. Josh's drawings featured a split air conditioning system and better exhibit lighting, funded by SY. USIS was delighted.

Where we had a local guard sitting at a table in the lobby next to a metal detector, Josh designed an attractive guard booth to hold a door control guard and a receptionist behind a ballistic barrier. The ballistic windows featured thick polycarbonate plastic discs protruding from both sides of the main windows to create air passages for conversations while keeping the ballistic barrier intact. A Great Seal device was centered beneath the window and flags of the U.S. and Guinea were shown to the sides. A new ballistic wall was shown between the outer door and the new control booth, with a controlled entry door for both the Embassy and USIS set in the wall. The metal detector stayed in the lobby with a smaller table and another guard. At a post without Marines, this gave the Embassy a lot more protection. The Embassy also liked the plans. An endorsement telegram went back to Abidjan and to the Department.

The next day, we went on to Nouakchott. That building was basically a flat-roofed ell-shaped structure with a fairly high ceiling, in which you entered the building through the short leg of the ell, went through screening just inside the door and wandered down a hallway to other doors that helped (somewhat) to keep sand out of the rest of the Embassy.

We went through the same process that we had followed in Conakry. Josh looked around, thought a while, closeted himself in a conference area and produced some sketches. We drove

into town for dinner and looked around a bit at one of the souks. Josh saw a small camel caravan and some of the local trade goods.

The next day, we called in the Embassy Administrative staff. In his design, Josh took a little of the end of the ell closest to the main part of the Embassy and dropped a wall halfway down from the ceiling. He recessed a new booth for a guard and a receptionist under this overhang, with lighting to illuminate visitors. He proposed a ballistic wall with a new control door where the ell met the Embassy proper, with the metal detector and a second guard again out in front with a metal detector and a table. A large Great Seal was to hang on the half wall from the ceiling, and the walls along both sides of the shorter leg of the ell were to be hung with local Berber-like carpets, (sketched by Josh, based on carpets he had seen in the bazaar), suggesting that the Embassy was appreciative of both local culture and aesthetics. Lighting, air conditioning and a better door were all part of the package, again funded by Security.

Nouakchott liked their designs, too. Another endorsing cable went to Abidjan and to the Department.

Sadly, I do not know if either of those designs was ever brought to fulfillment. They were both subject to approval and funding by SY and FBO just about the time that the Security Enhancement Program was emerging. That program would have had a strong impact on the guard booth designs, the equipment specified for the guard booth, the placement of personnel and the routing of security wiring; the plans may have been scrapped. For me, however, the trip was a useful lesson on how important an architect could be to a security survey, and how easily an Embassy could be persuaded to endorse a good design.

164. BREAKFAST IN NEW DELHI

As I may have mentioned from time to time, I am a breakfast person. Especially when traveling, I like to start the day with a good breakfast because (in our line of work) lunch was frequently uncertain. Usually, I tried to eat breakfast at my hotel and then explore the town I was visiting at dinner time.

My father was the son of a Methodist Missionary. His father worked in both the Philippines and in India, and my dad grew up in Northern India before the India/Pakistan separation, living in a missionary's home and attending school at Woodstock in Mussoorie near the Himalayas. My father learned to love Indian food. As I was growing up, we had tours in Lahore and Bombay, and my family also acquired a taste for Northern Indian food, as perhaps served in the Punjab.

On one of my trips out of Operations, I came through New Delhi to visit Casper Pelczynski at the ESC there. The Embassy had arranged to put its TDY personnel up at the Hilton Hotel at a within-per diem rate, and I was taken to a building that looked both modern and Moghul in its appearance. The hotel was beautiful, with lots of marble and attractive landscaping; several small stores were located off the lobby area. I checked in, went up to my room and settled in.

The next morning, I went downstairs for breakfast. The dining room in the Hilton was on the floor below the lobby, and you reached it by descending a broad staircase that fanned out as it went down. This venturi-shaped opening funneled all the odors of a fancy hotel's breakfast room right up to the lobby, and the meal that was waiting for me announced itself in an olfactory format as I stepped out of the elevator.

In the dining room, there were two lines of buffet tables. European food was arrayed to the left as you descended the staircase, and Indian food was laid out on the right. The odors of bacon, French Toast, kippers and sausage links merged with the perfume of poori paratha, chapatis, Tandoori chicken, cloves, cinnamon and garam masala. I ordered the buffet, took a plate and began to work my way through the Indian table, taking a spoonful of most of the dishes I encountered. I sat down, feasted on the Indian breakfast fare and then went to the omelet station for a little European chaser.

The Embassy in New Delhi looks very much like a smaller version of the Kennedy Center in Washington, not surprising since both buildings were designed by the same architect. There is a reflecting pool in the center of the Embassy that is fairly shallow. Birds can fly into this area through openings in the mesh screen that surrounds the pool, and it is traditional for Embassy personnel and their families who are leaving New Delhi to enter the pool in their work

clothing at the end of their tour and wade to the opposite side, announcing their imminent departure.

As you might expect, our ESC in New Delhi is *under* the pool. On several occasions, leaks in the pool liner have caused the ESC to flood, usually to a level just above a person's knee. Because of this recurrent problem, there is actually a water line that runs through the office and shop areas of the ESC, and local policy forbids the storage of anything expensive or hard to replace below this very visible landmark.

165. I ALWAYS USE MY OWN TOOLS

In 1985, we had a turnover of Seabees at ESC Panama. We received a steel worker, two new car mechanics, a builder and a Senior Chief electrician, Gary Cadle. Gary was a very positive influence on the ESC: he knew his job very well, kept his men motivated, looked after their welfare and generally raised morale throughout the shop. His Panama assignment was his first with the Naval Support Unit, and he was looking forward to traveling in Latin America.

About a week into Gary's assignment to Panama, I took him aside and suggested that he sit down with some of our catalogs and order himself some tools. I was partial to Xcelite hand tools and I gave him their catalog as well as the big McMaster-Carr tool encyclopedia. I told him that Jensen Tools had some complete tool kits that he could supplement with other tools that he thought he might need.

Gary seemed somewhat appreciative, but he told me he did not need the catalogs. He told me that he always used his own tools, which he had been gathering for years. He opened his toolbox to show me a beautifully packed set of electrician's tools, primarily Klein tools with a Fluke meter and lots of time-saving accessories like stepped drill bits and a magnetic level. All of the hand tools were lightly oiled and were organized so that he could find the screwdriver he wanted from his case in the dark.

I told Gary that international travel with a toolbox was something of a crap shoot. Unless you routinely put your tools in an unclassified pouch bag, they were likely to wander away from you as you crossed international borders, especially on milk run flights where the plane stopped in a number of cities. Gary did not think he would have a problem, but he thanked me for the tool offer.

Gary's very first trip was to Barbados. He made it to post, helped to make some electrical renovations in the SIC room, then packed his stuff up for the return trip. His plane hit a couple of other Caribbean posts before returning to Panama.

His suitcase rolled off the ramp in Panama. The tool case did not. Despite many checks with the airline, the tools were gone forever and Gary had to file a claim for the tool box.

On his return to the ESC, Gary resignedly sat down with the Jensen catalog, and began to order some new tools.

166. THE GREY GHOST

When I first arrived in Abidjan in 1978, John Keys was the OIC of the ESO. John was an interesting man, very self-contained but smart and often very funny. He was an Electrical Engineer who had served at a religious mission in Cameroon with his wife Margaret, a medical doctor. His French was fluid with a pronounced Indiana accent, and he knew and loved West Africa. John was most interested in countermeasures, and he focused strongly on slipping into countries in a non-alerting manner. This caused him to become rather secretive at times, even with his co-workers. He was also very interested in helping our Embassies in Africa get decent-sized emergency generators for use by the Embassy rather than the Communications Center, and he often extended a trip to provide engineering guidance on power systems to our constituent posts.

John was light-skinned and freckled with light-grey hair, and he had a ghost-like quality of just disappearing when you thought he was in the same room or office with you. Then, with equal stealth, he would suddenly reappear at your elbow.

This was obviously before 9/11 and its subsequent impact on the airlines industry. At that time, airlines were much looser where security was concerned, especially in Africa. Relatives would come into the departure lounge at airports to see their families off, and if you were on a “milk run” that stopped in many cities, as a lot of African flights did at that time, you could disembark the aircraft at any stop, get a visitor pass at the door, use the restroom or the snack bar in the terminal and get back on the plane to continue your voyage. Sometimes the airport security personnel would not even *ask* for the visitor passes, but would just let you return to your seat.

John Keys would often *keep* his visitor pass if he could get away with it. Over time, he amassed quite a collection of visitor passes in his briefcase. When he was in a transit hub, he would sometimes use one of these passes to walk aboard a plane he was *not* traveling on, and visit with State, USAID and USIS personnel that he knew. After the conversation, he would exit the plane, obtain a new visitors’ pass and put it back in his briefcase.

The first time I encountered John on the road, I was headed for Gabon on an Air Afrique milk run with a Seabee. Our flight stopped for an hour in Yaounde, Cameroon. Neither of us needed to deplane, and we were talking to each other when John Keys walked up and asked how our trip was going. Both of us were astonished to see John on our flight, because he was expected back in Abidjan. And we were right: he *wasn’t* on our flight. He had just used one of his Visitor Passes to step aboard and say Hi.

Over the time I spent with John, his secretive nature became legendary. One morning his wife Margaret stopped into the office to ask “Has anyone seen John? He didn’t come home last night.” We were all astonished: John was on a countermeasures trip, and he had not told his family he was going in order to avoid speaking about his trip and his destination outside the Embassy. I might mention here that John always performed countermeasures inspections without shoes, wearing only his socks.

During our tour, the USS *Dewey* (a guided missile frigate) put into Abidjan on a short visit. John had previously sent a set of countermeasures equipment to one of our constituent posts that was also on the *Dewey*’s schedule. Our entire office met the ship at Abidjan’s port because our senior Seabee had made Chief and was indoctrinated aboard the warship between Dakar and Abidjan. As we were welcoming Chief Crowley back to his home office with a big sign, we noticed John slipping aboard the *Dewey*’s gangplank. Without saying anything to us, he had arranged to travel on the warship to the post he planned to inspect.

John lived for unusual ways to enter foreign countries on inspection trips. There was a primitive diesel-engine train connecting Abidjan to Ouagadougou, for example: John used the train. My favorite example, however, concerned a trip to Congo-Brazzaville. John flew to Kinshasa in Zaire, took a bus to the Congo River, crossed the Congo on a primitive ferry and (on the other side of the river) took another local bus to the Embassy.

167. HOLE-Y MOLE-Y

During my first month on the job in SY/T, I met Wally Gilliam. Wally was passing through Washington on his way to another overseas assignment at the time. Newbie that I was, I had lots of questions for him. What was the job like? What important lessons could he share with me? What did I really need to buy or provide in order to do the job well?

Wally took me into the lab and opened up the suitcase he had with him. It was made of heavy fiberglass and was all scuffed up. It looked like it might have once been purchased by NASA to survive the rigors of a moon shot. Wally said: “The first thing you need is an indestructible suitcase.” I took that very much to heart and started looking for one.

I settled on Samsonite luggage, first a two-suiter for Africa, and then a three-suiter with built-in wheels for South America. Even the Samsonite was not invulnerable: on my first trip with the larger suitcase, the folding handle facilitating the use of the wheels broke off. Disappointed, I continued using the bag for the three years I was in Latin America.

I used to travel with several sets of work clothes and a single suit. I never knew when I was going to be asked to brief a Principal Officer, meet with local police personnel or survey an Ambassador’s Residence, so I came prepared to change clothes. Usually, after a trip, I would wash my work clothes and send my suit out for dry cleaning.

On my third trip through Central America, I noticed a small tag on my suit jacket when it came back from the cleaners. The tag said: “Damage did not occur in our cleaning facility.” Next to the tag was a hole in the lapel that went all the way through the lapel and the fabric behind the lapel: you could see the hole in the lining when you looked inside the jacket. I thought I might be able to get the suit coat repaired. As I started to transfer the suit onto a wooden hanger, I spotted a second tag with the same wording on the suit pants. Another hole of the same size was located on the seat of my trousers.

Perplexed, I thought I might have left a tool in my work clothes. I opened my suitcase to check for something that might have caused a hole. Looking carefully at the heavy plastic sides of the suitcase, I noticed a hole in the suitcase about the same diameter as the one in my lapel.

In a piece of hard-cover Samsonite, you laid your suit pants sideways across the open suitcase. You “hung” your suit jacket face down on a peg inside half of the clamshell, then folded your suit pants over the jacket and closed that half of the suitcase with a flap. This tended to keep your suit and pants looking pressed. It was apparent to me that some sharp tool or piece of wire had been jabbed into my suitcase, and the wire had first penetrated the seat of my pants and

then passed through the pants into the suit jacket. I had no idea what could have caused the hole. I sent my suit out for repair(s).

A year later, I was on my way out of Managua, Nicaragua. I had appeared at the airport, checked my luggage, cleared customs and immigration formalities and was seated on the plane; we were waiting for our luggage to be loaded. A small tractor pulled four luggage carts up to the side of the plane. It was a beautiful, sunny day and I wondered why the luggage was not being loaded.

After about a five-minute wait, two soldiers walked out to the luggage cart. One of the soldiers held what I first took to be a submachine gun; the other had an ice pick in his hand. Approaching each suitcase on the cart, the soldier with the ice pick stabbed the luggage while the second soldier held what I now understood to be an explosives sniffer next to the hole. Detecting no hydrocarbons, the soldiers moved on to the next piece of luggage until they were satisfied that no bombs were on the plane.

I was not happy with this approach to good security, but I reflected a bit and decided that I would rather have a hole in my suitcase than a bomb on the plane. Lost in thought, and wondering what garment *now* had a hole in it, I watched the luggage being loaded and we took off.

168. THE SECOND ARCHITECT

Mark Stevens has a great story about this same Embassy building, which he should consider sharing with the list:

By about 1980, our Embassy in Accra, Ghana had outgrown the Chancery building. This particular edifice was very interesting: it had initially been designed as the U.S. Consulate for the Gold Coast, a British Colony in Africa. The architect who designed the building based its layout on a Ghanaian Chief's Hut: it was a building up on concrete stilts with four sides and an open interior, with a wrap-around veranda connecting offices on the inside of the building. All of the construction above the concrete stilts was wooden, and the Embassy had been drying out in the tropical sun for several decades. It was a serious firetrap.

To get into the Embassy, you walked underneath it and ascended a staircase leading up to a landing. From the landing, you turned back toward the building you had just passed under and walked up another set of stairs to reach a door controlled by the Marine Guard. The building won an award for design shortly after its construction was complete, but that was years in the past and the condition of the building had declined.

The State Department's Foreign Buildings Office was not sure about their options. With an award-winning building in hand, they were reluctant to scrap the place and build something new. They thought it might be possible to put another storey above the existing building if the concrete stiling and flooring was sturdy enough to take the strain. To study this idea, FBO sent two young Structural Engineers to Accra in 1980 to determine the strength of the columns and to calculate what another floor might weigh, with its load of flooring, people, furniture and four-drawer safes. To be able to further follow up on the idea if the study suggested that a second floor was feasible, FBO brought the original architect aboard as a part of the study and sent him to Africa, too.

Mark Mulvey was the RSO in Abidjan at the time, and he wanted to improve the security of the Embassy compound in Accra. At that time, reflecting America's previous policy of having Open Embassies around the world, it was possible to walk onto the Embassy compound from any direction and march right up to the front door. We talked about putting a fence around the building and I offered to design one. I had never designed a fence before, but it seemed like an easy prospect.

We did not use SY-distributed CAD packages at that time, so I took out my Faber plastic drawing board and developed a scale drawing for a steel fence that would have stood about twelve feet high. I went for modular construction, with large square steel pillars going up on

concrete footings first. Each pillar had four spurs on it, two near the top and two lower down. The sections of fence fit between these pillars, which were a standard distance apart, dropped over the spurs on steel tongues and were to be welded in place where they touched. Mark approved my drawing and I headed for Accra to try and sell it to the post.

The Architect, at that time in history, was an elderly man with a pronounced florid complexion. We all were invited to a conference by the DCM, and we met in the Embassy's conference room. I was sitting next to the Architect, who seemed to have a headache and who smelled strongly of alcohol. After introductions, I brought out my drawing of the fence and passed it around. Everyone liked it except the Architect. He said "That's horrible. You won't be able to see the Embassy through that fence." I agreed that my fence would block the view, but I maintained that the Embassy badly needed stronger physical protection. The Architect picked up my drawing with shaking hands, frowned, and said "Besides, it will never work!"

I was taken aback at the assault on my drawing from such a distinguished source. I asked him what he meant.

The Architect reached for a sheet of typewriter paper and took a fountain pen out of his pocket. His shaking hands stabilized completely and he began to draw another fence, freehand, in front of all of us. He did a detail showing my fence with a triangular outrigger brace attached to one of the pillars. It led down to a second concrete footing about five feet back from the pillar and ended in an artistic curlicue. Where all of the steel elements of my fence had touched the ground, his fence had each slat terminate two inches above the soil. It only took him a minute or two to create an elegant drawing.

I said: "That's beautiful. I need to take fencing lessons." The architect softened a little and said "Your fence would fall over without the support struts. And the fence would rust quickly if its staves touched the ground. If you supported it and trimmed it, though, your design would work."

With the fence now part of the package we would present to FBO, the Structural Engineers went back to work, armed with fancy HP calculators (no portable computers back then.) On the work table they were using, there were a lot of sheets of paper with numbers, measurements and some serious calculus equations. I had not previously seen an integral anywhere close to Ghana, and was impressed.

Later that afternoon, the Engineers called us back in. It would be possible, they said, to construct a second deck on the Embassy, but they advised against it because of the wooden construction of the building, which was already of great concern to the Embassy. After considerable discussion, post sent a telegram back to the Department suggesting that they share

the building used by the USAID mission for a while until a new building could be either built or leased. I never met the Architect or the Engineers again

169. IM DER STADT

Another favorite story:

From 1954 to 1956, my family resided in Warsaw, Poland where my father worked for the American Embassy. With WWII recently over and the Cold War under way, all of Poland was in recovery mode. Large areas of Warsaw had been reduced to rubble, and the few new buildings were Stalinist in design, with the Palace of Culture looming over the city and most buildings constructed of concrete. There was not much on the economy for children; the one local department store focused on home goods like bedding and clothes lines. I remember that it had a wooden escalator that never worked.

From time to time, we would be allowed an R&R in Berlin. The British Royal Air Force regularly sent DC-3s into Warsaw from Tempelhof, and there were usually a few seats available for Americans on the planes. Coffee and tea were served aboard the planes from thermoses carried up and down the aisle by a British NCO.

In Berlin, we had the run of U.S. military facilities, including the PX. Movies cost a dime on the Army Base, and everyone stood for the national anthem (ours) before the show started. After Warsaw, the very wide range of available toys in the PX was astonishing. In those days, boys played with cap pistols, and there were many models available. Some were modeled after weapons carried by comic book heroes, like the Lone Ranger; others were styled after the weapons carried by famous military personnel. I can remember seeing several pistol sets modeled on the ivory-handled guns worn by General Patton.

Modeling was big at the PX, especially military modeling. There were aircraft kits on sale, lots of Testor paint sets to decorate those models, models of tanks and jeeps and military trucks and complete sets of toy soldiers with which kids could reenact battles. The more expensive soldier kits had figures carrying recognizable weapons, like M-1 Garands or bazookas or machine guns, and these could be painted. I got into aircraft modeling for a while, and had a MIG-15, a YAK-25 and a Sabre jet in my room at home.

When I arrived in Panama in 1983, my first trip was a visit to Lima, Peru where a major Security Enhancement Project was going in. There were several buildings on the Embassy compound, and each of them was being brought up to SEP standards in sequence. On this particular trip, we were installing a new door control system for the Marines, complete with the first Norshield ballistic doors I had ever seen. These were among the first doors sent to South America, and Norshield had factory representatives on hand to oversee the door installation and glazing processes. Peter Stella had designed what eventually came to be called the AES door

control system, and we had built-in mag contacts, mag locks and EL-33's to recon with for the first time in our territory.

With a lot of construction going on, the Embassy had engaged the Dean of the local architectural college to act as a quality control inspector for the renovations. The man chosen for this job was a German who had immigrated to Peru several years before, and he spoke fluent Spanish and English with a heavy German accent. As we were to be the installation crew for the security packages in each of the buildings, the Dean (who had a simple German name: let's call him Herr Schmidt) invited all of my team over to his home to meet him and to discuss the installation process. It seemed like a good idea, so we cleaned up a bit and arranged for transport.

Herr Schmidt was a big, jovial man who seemed genuinely glad to meet us. He guided us through his spacious home to a large office area with a central desk for viewing plans. The office was cheerful, with a lot of light coming in through a big picture window, probably specified by the architect. The window looked out the back of his home onto a long, narrow sidewalk that ended at the bottom of a set of stairs leading up to the second floor of his house. Beyond that there was a street, a wall and the garden of the building next door. We stood around the central desk and started to discuss our current project.

After a little while, Herr Schmidt went off to get us some beverages. I looked around the studio. In a large octagonal glass cabinet in the corner were a number of models. I walked over to look at them, and I was immediately transported back to Warsaw.

In the cabinet were models of a Stuka attack aircraft, a Messerschmitt, and a Heinkel bomber. Most of the cabinet, however, was filled with military surface vehicles and equipment. There were German panzer tanks, half-tracks with German army insignia, a motorcycle with a side car and many toy soldier figures, all to scale. Each of the soldiers had been lovingly hand-painted in *Feldgrau*, German army gray-green. The insignia on the models and the troops was authentic, and the little toy soldiers all wore German army helmets from WWII and carried German weapons like Mausers, Schmeissers and Panzerfausts. Whoever collected the models and painted them (presumably our host) had an eye for both detail and beauty. It was apparent to me that Herr Schmidt might have spent some of his formative years in the Wehrmacht; he might have immigrated to Peru right at the end of the Second World War.

Herr Schmidt returned, passed out drinks, and we began to talk. As we discussed the project, we were distracted by the sound of young girls' voices outside the office window.

We found ourselves on the edge of a beauty pageant with front-row seats. Looking out, we saw a procession of about fifteen pretty Peruvian girls in their mid-to-late teens walking up the sidewalk in twos and threes. They were excited and were laughing as they walked. Each of

the girls was tall and graceful, with fine posture: models, if you will. They were wearing tights and long-sleeved tops with short skirts; most wore their hair formed into chignon knots at the top of their heads or sported ponytails. Each girl carried a small bag or a pair of ballet toe shoes slung over her shoulder. They walked up the sidewalk toward the steps, went up the staircase and disappeared into a door at the top of the stairs.

We watched this impressive parade until all of the girls were out of site. Then all of us turned toward Herr Schmidt at the same time with expressions of inquiry on our faces. He smiled and actually blushed a bit. He said “Oh, doze girls are the schtudents of my vife. Dey kommt three times a week. She hass a ballet schtudio up the schtairs.”

He paused. Then he raised an eyebrow and said: “It’s nice, no?”

170. TOO MANY SMOKES

Yet another Nigeria Story...

I believe I mentioned in earlier stories that I had made eight trips to Lagos, Nigeria while our Embassy was under construction there. Towards the end of my tour in Abidjan, the crime rate in Lagos had continued to rise until the RSO decided to help protect the houses and apartments of Embassy personnel who traveled by placing visitors in these residences. On trip number seven, I went into Lagos to install an intrusion alarm in one of the Embassy sections, traveling with a Navy Seabee electrician.

Our plane was late leaving Abidjan, took longer than expected on the ground in Douala, and finally reached Lagos at about noon. It was a Sunday and the Embassy van which came to meet us was directed to drop us off at the RSO's house and then return for us after dinner to take us to the Embassy apartment in which we would be staying.

We arrived at RSO Ben Schaumburg's house at about 1:00 in the afternoon. Ben and his wife were in the living room as we arrived and Ben offered us a beer. He explained our living quarters situation, telling us that we would be staying in the apartment of a Political Section secretary who had returned to the States for leave. Ben's wife Mary brought out some potato chips and dip and we had just started talking when the power went out.

This was Lagos in a nutshell. The city power was not dependable. Living in Lagos was characterized by rolling brownouts that distributed the loss of power from neighborhood to neighborhood so that no single section of the city had commercial power all of the time.

Many residences, including Ben's, addressed this problem with house-sized generators. Ben's was in an enclosure in his front yard, and it started up by itself when the city power failed. All through the neighborhood around his home, we could hear other generators starting up, many with very rudimentary mufflers, and the noise level was pretty high.

Ben was a very capable RSO and he knew he had to stay on top of things in Lagos. He had two radios in his house, one tuned to the Admin net and the other tuned to the Security net, and they were both on with the volume turned up all of the time. The volume was needed to overcome the sound of the generators in the neighborhood. As we sipped our beer, we could hear traffic on both Embassy nets, quite a bit for a Sunday morning. Ben got up and fixed himself and his wife martinis.

At about two o'clock, the city power went back on. Ben went out and transferred his house back on to city power and turned off the generator. Gradually, the other generators in

homes around us also quieted, and Sunday became peaceful again. We were chatting with our host and hostess when Ben's watchman came to the door. He paused, not wanting to interrupt, but then said: "Mr. Ben. I see too many smokes."

We all got up and walked to the door. Across the street and a half block down the road was an Embassy apartment building; a trail of smoke was coming out of one of the windows on the upper story. We offered to go with Ben, but he did not think it was serious and went over to the building with his guard. He returned about forty-five minutes later.

According to Ben, one of the junior Consular officers had slept in that Sunday. He got up about eleven o'clock and finished a book he was reading. A little after one, the junior officer decided to make himself an omelet. He had just started to cook the omelet on an electric stove when the power went out. Without power, and it being Sunday, he decided to go back to sleep on his living room sofa. When the power came back on, his omelet was still on the stove; it began to burn and a grease fire developed that caught the kitchen window drapes.

Ben and his guard arrived at the apartment, knocked on the door, then kicked it in. Smoke poured out of the apartment into the hall. Ben ducked under the smoke, found the Consular Officer on the sofa and woke him up. His guard pulled the man into the hallway. Ben walked over to the fire, put it out with a small fire extinguisher, and checked on the apartment occupant, who was a bit dazed but had recovered. Ben made sure the officer was not hurt, counseled the man about leaving things on the stove in the iffy electrical environment. He then returned to his house and finished his martini.

After dinner the Embassy van returned and took us to the secretary's apartment. It was small but nicely decorated, with two bedrooms. The Seabee took the guest's bedroom and I took the secretary's bedroom. As I closed the door to her room, I found a framed Superior Honor Award hanging on the wall. It honored her service at the American Consulate in Arab Jerusalem during the Six Day War.

My father was a Foreign Service Officer, and he had been assigned to the American Consulate in Arab Jerusalem in 1965 as the Consul. He weathered the Six Day War in Jerusalem and received a Superior Honor Award himself for rescuing a number of American Tourists stranded in the Old City at great personal risk. He was in the Political Section, and it occurred to me that I was about to share a bed with one of his secretaries. Small world.

171. A RUN IN THE WOODS IN STUTTGART

In 1989, I had replaced Jon Lechevet as the Division Chief for Countermeasures, a new Division that the rest of DS knew very little about. In this same time frame, DS sought to improve its CounterIntelligence and CounterTerrorism programs, and reached out to the FBI for some training. I have already covered part of this experience: See Story Number 57, “Let Me Buy You a Beer.” DS organized back-to-back training sessions for RSOs from Europe, followed by RSOs from Africa. I was sent out to brief these personnel on our new Division, to describe some of the programs and equipment we were developing, and to participate in the FBI training.

Our briefings took place at Patch Barracks outside of Stuttgart, the U.S. Army’s Command Center for Europe. We were housed in a German hotel not far from the base, and we were shuttled back and forth by bus.

When I first arrived at the Hotel it was late afternoon, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that a German *volk* festival was in progress, with the hotel participating. The hotel lobby was filled with Germans wearing *lederhosen*, embroidered white shirts with suspenders, sturdy shoes and knee socks. Most of the woolen German clothing I saw was a brown color rather than the green I had formerly seen in Munich. Swabian *lederhosen*. There was an oompah band in the lobby playing German marching music and (every traveler’s delight) free food. I had a couple of bratwursts, some kraut, some cheese and a little mustard, and felt right at home. I also downed a little draft beer.

I was a jogger at that time in my life, and had brought my shoes and a running outfit with me. It was chilly in Stuttgart, but runners generate their own heat as they exercise, and I was looking forward to running on Germany’s famous bike paths. Sure enough, there was a clearly marked bike path right outside the hotel when I went out at about six in the morning on my second day in Germany. The area around the hotel was shrouded in fog, adding to the adventure. The path bent to the left towards busy streets, and to the right which took riders off to the base of a high wooded foothill right behind the hotel. I headed in that direction.

Not far up the foggy path, I saw a clearly-marked trail veering to the right that evidently took hikers into the woods. Running on a forest path is a lot easier on a runner than a jog on asphalt, so I slipped off the bike path and breathed in the odor of a German pine and hardwood forest. The path was dry and it wound back and forth as it climbed up the side of the big hill.

On my third leg of this winding path, I was surprised on the run by four European Red Deer. They were running up the hill, away from something. These animals seemed a about the same size as our whitetail deer, but the antlers on two of them swept back rather than jutting forward. They were more like the heads of European deer on family crests than the racks of

antlers I remembered from the United States. I stopped for a moment and watched the deer as they bounded into the woods.

Looking past the area where I saw the deer, and further up the side of the hill, I now noticed that many of the trees among my running path were fitted with hunting stands. I realized that, as a runner in a sweatsuit thumping along the forest path in the morning mist, I might look something like a deer to a waiting German hunter in a tree stand. I decided that I should walk out of the woods immediately and find a better place to run.

On my remaining time in Stuttgart, I turned to the left as I exited the hotel. My run then took me (on concrete and macadam) all the way around the hill and back to the hotel. I had to get up a little earlier to make this run and be ready for the bus, but I came back alive.

172. REVIEWING THE MARDEX SYSTEM

Before we had a Security Enhancement Program, we had an earlier program called “Minimum Standards for Public Access Areas”. At least in Africa, we were hard pressed to meet the letter or the substance of that program, being short on manpower, equipment and funding. Still, we tried. When Security Enhancement came along, however, we were suddenly fully funded to implement a wide range of new Standards we knew nothing about. Some of these were rich in humor.

The Security Enhancement Program began to impact us in Africa about 1981. The Office of Security was having a very difficult time in meeting its own requirements for the security of Embassies and Consulates, and the new Security Enhancement program went a long way toward protecting our personnel. SY put SEO John Wolf in charge of its Standards program, and John was the right man for the job. Tirelessly, he spent the next twenty years of his life identifying durable equipment, specifying what should be installed at each type of door in our facilities, and pushed us firmly to a stronger forced-entry and ballistic standard all over the world in a remarkably short period of time.

One of John’s pet gripes was an Embassy back door that admitted personnel into the area behind the hard line, especially when that door was opened remotely by a Marine Security Guard who could not see the person requesting admission. Such doors were generally coupled to an intercom or even to a doorbell. Anyone on the compound could walk up to the door, ring the doorbell and be admitted to the Embassy almost automatically. John felt that the Marine should be able to see the face of the person seeking admission, should also be able to see that person’s ID card and, importantly, should be able to see if that person was alone or if someone was holding a gun to their head before opening the door. Under the SE standards, this meant that every back door now needed three cameras, all over the world.

One of John’s other gripes was that security equipment should all be run in dedicated conduit. Such conduit was not available in West Africa. John assured me that the Security Enhancement program would provide all of the conduit we needed, with fittings: all we needed to do was specify it. This was difficult without his catalogs, but we could use the McMaster-Carr catalog to identify the conduit and fittings we needed and similar material would be shipped to post with the SE equipment. Fortunately, our Seabee electricians were familiar with conduit requirements; they helped us learn what was needed.

My first Security Enhancement security survey was conducted in Accra, Ghana in 1981. Realizing that overseas personnel were not familiar with his new program, John came out to conduct the survey with me, to show me the requirements of the program and the new set of

equipment available to us. After my previous two years in Africa, making this this trip with John was not unlike coming from a dirt farm to spend Christmas at a rich kid's house. There were new ballistic doors and ballistic windows in the inventory, and door control systems, and new television systems that worked, and walk-through metal detectors that worked, and new alarm systems, and on and on. Even then, John was developing comprehensive catalogs that showed overseas personnel what was required at each door and what to specify on surveys. He carried these catalogs to Ghana with him and allowed me to look at them, but I was not allowed to copy the catalogs (several hundred pages each) because they were still under development. This gave a dreamlike quality to the survey: I was specifying systems I had never seen or worked on before, with John assuring me that they would work without allowing me to carry documentation on the systems back to Abidjan where we would need that information for other posts.

When we got to the back door for the Annex Building, John 's new standards specified a "Mardex" system for the Embassy back door. This was a fancy pod with a durable plastic cover that sat next to a control door which the Marine could not see. Within the pod were an intercom and two CCTV cameras, one focused on the face of the person seeking entry and the other focused on a mirror above a slot in the pod into which an ID card was to be placed. The Mardex system would present the Marine with a split image, allowing the face of the entrant to be compared with the face on their badge. A third outdoor "duress" camera was to be sited on an outside wall near the back door, showing who was standing in front of the Mardex pod and whether or not they were alone. We put a Mardex system on the survey for the back door.

The Mardex pod was secured by a cylindrical key lock at the very bottom of the unit. To place the internal "face" camera at face height for most people, the pod needed to be mounted on a wall near the back door with the lock about two inches off the ground. The lock was slightly recessed in the pod, and resisted efforts to simply reach down with the cylindrical key, insert it and open the lock. Instead, you usually needed to lie down on your back by the back door to insert the key properly, hoping that no one would come out and step on you. The pod cover was supposed to keep the inside of the unit clean and dust-free, but this was Africa and you quickly learned *not* to open the pod while lying on the ground next to the unit. (If you did, you received a face-full of dust, dead insects and sometimes water.)

In 1981, television cameras needed light to work. The Mardex system provided its own lighting, but that light came from tiny fluorescent tubes of the sort found in battery-operated Coleman lanterns. These tubes were not available anywhere in Africa and did not appear as spare parts in electrical catalogs or even in John's catalogs for several years. Voltages in Africa, especially in the early years of the SE program, were unstable and contributed to the rapid death of Mardex bulbs. In our 28-post territory of West Africa, Mardex systems had an operational life of about a month, after which we tried to get new bulbs for the units for the rest of our tours.

In practice, someone seeking entry would walk up to the Mardex pod and push the intercom button to contact the Marine. The Marine could not see either the face of the entrant or their ID card. The Marine *could* look at the “duress” camera mounted to the side of the unit, and at least determine whether the entrant was alone or was being threatened. If the Marine recognized the entrant, they would be admitted: otherwise, they needed to walk around the building and come in the front door.

173. POLTERGEIST

I have been a fan of music and stereo systems since grade school, but in the early years of work my eyes for stereo hardware were much bigger than my wallet. I used to go to the Washington D.C. Stereo Show each year with my brother-in-law, with the two of us listening to new speakers and exploring new amplifiers and receivers that neither of us could afford until we developed severe headaches from all the noise.

When we received orders for Abidjan, I found a nice Marantz receiver on sale and purchased a couple of AR speakers to go with it. I already owned a belt-driven turntable for LPs. LPs, however, weighed a lot, and I was already beginning to put music on cassettes. I liked the lighter weight, the fact that they fit easily into drawers and the 45 minutes of playing time on each side. I also liked the fact that I could play cassettes in my car rather than listening to local radio in Abidjan. I looked around and found a simple Pioneer cassette deck that looked like a good buy. This deck held a cassette vertically with the exposed tape pointing to the floor behind a gray plastic cover that rolled down. To play music, you thumbed the cover up, put a cassette in the deck snuggled against the two sprockets, rolled the cover back down and pressed “play”.

None of this equipment was provided with a remote. To keep our living room looking light and airy, I installed our speakers above the French doors leading into the living room, ran white wire neatly along the tops of valences above the doors and installed the stereo system in our store room, which was right next to the living room behind a wall.

This arrangement produced really good sound with the only caveat being that you needed to get up from your seat and walk into the storeroom to select different music or turn the cassette over. My daughter was about two when I first assembled the system, and I used to carry her into the storeroom on my left arm when I turned the tape over. Jeana became fairly mobile during the next six months, and her independence grew.

One Saturday, I was at home listening to some background music as I read a magazine on the couch. My wife was out shopping and had taken our baby with her. I was sitting on a sofa looking toward the driveway and the speakers; my daughter was coloring a book on the coffee table at the other end of the sofa. At some point the music stopped. I continued reading, absorbed in the magazine. My daughter, then 2 ½, continued to color, then got up and walked down the hall towards her room with a crayon in her hand. After a short pause, she returned, sat down and started coloring again.

Almost immediately, the music began to play again: same cassette, but the *other* side. I did not notice this at first until I remembered that the music had *stopped*. Initially, I could feel the hair on the back of my neck rise as I tried to figure out what had happened. Eventually, I

made a huge mental leap and asked: “Jeana, did you turn the music over?” Still busy coloring, she said: “Uh-huh.”

To reach the cassette player, which was on a large dresser in the storage room, my daughter would have had to stand on her tiptoes to roll down the deck cover and flip the cassette. I had only demonstrated these actions to her incidentally, on those occasions when I carried her into the storeroom while I was turning the cassette. She knew, however, what to do when the music stopped.

Over the course of our tour, the power system of Abidjan tested all my stereo equipment. Working off a transformer, it was vulnerable to abrupt changes of voltage, which occurred frequently. One by one, the six hidden front-face bulbs within the Marantz tuner section died, not affecting its sound but lessening its aesthetic appeal. The simple Panasonic cassette deck, however, never skipped a tune or ate a tape or lost a bulb during our entire tour.

174. THE MIMI TOOL

After about 1980, when the number of installations we were addressing increased sharply, I decided to add a rugged folding knife to my toolbox. A knife was useful in removing burlap from shipping crates, in opening boxed materials and in slicing insulation on thick multi-conductor cables. I bought a Buck “Folding Hunter” and I kept it in my toolbox because I thought it might be confiscated in the airports I passed through.

I was in Lagos, Nigeria in 1981 when I found my knife getting dull from cutting up cardboard boxes. I walked over to the GSO shop area and discovered a fabulous knife sharpener. This thing was nearly a foot long and was formed of three surfaces of increasingly fine honing stones which rotated, with two stones immersed in an oil bath and the top sitting flat for sharpening. Intrigued, I dipped my knife in the oil, whetted it on the coarsest surface briefly and then progressed through the other two stones to a point where the blade would easily slice through the hair on my forearm. I was impressed, and my kids bought me a smaller but similar whetstone several years later.

After I retired in 1995, I no longer needed to carry my hunting knife around with me, and I put it in my rolling tool chest. For Christmas in 1997, however, my mother-in-law gave me a tiny Leatherman pocket tool. Her family name was “Mimi”, so this became the “Mimi Tool”. The tool was lightweight, made of stainless steel and weighed about a third of what a normal Leatherman weighed. The little gadget was useful: it was spring-loaded, so that it opened quickly to pliers when they were needed and snapped back into a pocket knife the rest of the time. It had a tiny, inch-and-a-half knife blade that took a good edge off my honing stones and held it for quite a while. Better, I could true the edge with a couple of swipes on a kitchen steel and it was good to go for a week or so. It had a flat-blade screwdriver and half of a Phillips head screwdriver, which worked. It had an awl, an eyeglass screwdriver, a can opener and a beer-bottle opener. All of life’s essential tools in a two-inch pocketknife.

At first, I carried the Mimi Tool around in my pocket to see if I would like it. I quickly discovered that I used it for something nearly every day. I was teaching at that time, and for six years I used it to help set up lab equipment, tighten things, to get a light grip on long-unused connectors, to strip wire and open boxes. I continued to carry the tool around, taking it out of my pocket only on those occasions when I was going through airports or coming into DS for WAE work.

When I reached Wellington in 2003, I was picked up as a WAE SEO in residence by ESO Canberra. The Embassy did not have Marines at that time and was protected by a key card

system that opened the rear gate to the Embassy compound and got you in the front door. Your ID card, if so programmed, would also allow you access to other areas of the building.

The Mimi Tool helped me keep the Embassy in Wellington working for all three of my years at post. Once in a while I would need to go get my toolbox, but with the little tool in my pocket I could remove the covers on a mag lock and adjust its position on a door, tighten loose Phillips head screws, reach in and loosen or tighten coaxial connectors on our digital video recorder, strip insulation, cut wires, open boxes and trim packing tape without needing to go find other tools. After a couple of weeks at post, I learned that a lot of simple problems could be prevented by regular preventive maintenance with the Mimi Tool: I would go through the Embassy once a week and adjust or tighten locks on frequently-used doors.

175. ANTIGUA

In 1985, I was invited to attend a three-day RSO Conference for Latin America in Guatemala. RSO John Swafford was our host, and he had set up the conference as if participants were a visiting CODEL, with a hospitality room in the hotel and little party-favor baskets in each of our rooms, containing an invitation to an Embassy reception, a little bag of Guatemalan coffee beans, a napkin-sized sample of Guatemalan weaving, a couple of local chocolate candies and some emergency phone numbers for visitors.

The conference went well, with lots of questions directed my way on the lightly-armored SUVs we were producing in Panama. We had two RSS officers at the conference, George Larson and Bill Clark, and discussions were both interesting and productive.

On the third day of the conference, we were taken to Antigua, the old Spanish capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala, for a lunch and a peek at a little of this mountainous country. We journeyed to Antigua in several Embassy vans, arriving in a little town rich in Spanish baroque architecture: Antigua had been the seat of government in Guatemala and the Spanish capital for most of Central America for over 200 years. We went to an old hotel that had an open-air plaza inside the building, with tables for the hotel's restaurant arrayed around a wooden railing along the North edge of this plaza, inside the hotel but open to the sun and air. We had a modest but well-prepared lunch and toasted John for his efforts on our behalf.

At the end of lunch, John suggested that we visit the shop of an American ex-patriot knife maker which was in a small building at the back of the hotel. John mentioned that Robert Terzuola, the knife maker, had been a Peace Corps worker in Panama before coming to Guatemala and was about to move his company to the United States.

Robert Terzuola's shop was something like a Toys 'R Us for RSOs. It was a complete machine shop focused on knives, with enough hand-made wood benches, chisels, sharpening blocks and polishing buffers to give it a feeling of age, quality and timelessness. On the wall were knife blade blanks of many shapes and sizes, made of a wide range of high-quality steels with many different coatings. There were Bowie knives, fighting knives, skinning knives and, for most of us, the first tactical folding knives we had ever seen. Mr. Terzuola was honing these blade blanks, then fitting them with exotic handles of carbon fiber or ivory or stag horn or exotic hardwoods from Central America. All of us milled around in the shop as the owner addressed our gathering, talking about the process of doing business as an American in Guatemala, and pointing out his more popular knives. He was receiving a lot of orders from police forces in the U.S. for the tactical folding knives, one of the reasons he was planning to relocate. He casually

invited us to handle some of the knives to better appreciate their balance and quality. The knives were beautiful, but expensive.

RSO Gary Marvin from Jamaica, a former Idaho Deputy Sheriff, was a hunter. With his bushy handlebar mustache, he could have passed for Wyatt Earp. Gary was drawn to a medium-sized skinning knife with a tough alloy steel blade and a handle made of rings of exotic wood. He liked the heft of the knife but was a bit concerned about its durability, so he asked Mr. Terzuola how well it would hold up under hunting conditions.

Sizing up his client expertly, Robert did not speak about the Rockwell hardness of the blade or the tensile strength of its chrome vanadium steel. He instead looked at Gary and said “You could pound that sucker into the pelvis of an elk and split it right in two”.

Gary laid the knife on the glass counter and took out his wallet. On the spot, he paid \$125 for the knife, which came with a tasteful leather sheaf.

This triggered a buying frenzy. Nearly every RSO there produced a wad of cash and purchased either a sheaf knife or a folding tactical knife within a couple of minutes. Then we went back to Guatemala City and packed for departure the next day.

176. CLIMBING THE SYDNEY HARBOR BRIDGE

During our tour in New Zealand, my wife and I took a vacation to Australia. We spent our time in Sydney, allowing my wife to cross an activity off her “Bucket List”: Climbing the Sydney Harbor Bridge.

This bridge, called “The Coathanger” in Australia because of its appearance, was opened in 1932. A mammoth construction of steel and stone, the bridge carries trains, bicycles, pedestrians and cars between the Sydney central business district and the North Shore. It is a tall bridge, with its top standing 440 feet above the harbor; it’s also wide at 160 feet.

Opening in 1998, a firm calling itself “BridgeClimb” has established a legal route for tourists from the road level to the top of the span. The route goes up the West side of the Bridge, crosses over the roadways beneath as you walk North, then turns West again and takes you back down. The guided tour is expensive (about \$100 each) but is fun and is a great way to see Sydney Harbor from an unusual perspective.

Gail and I reported to the ticket office below the bridge, paid our entrance fee and went into a waiting room. Gradually, the room filled with about fifteen other would-be climbers. We received a video briefing on what we were about to do. We went to a clothing issue area, where we were sized and then supplied with grey Gore-Tex jumpsuits. Lockers were provided: we were told to remove all objects in our pockets as well as watches, bracelets, necklaces and anything else that might fall onto the traffic crossing the bridge. Lanyards were issued to climbers wearing eyeglasses. Then we went into a training area where we first learned to rappel, then practiced rappelling until we felt comfortable descending a featureless wall on a rope. Once all this was done (requiring about an hour and a half) we were ready to climb the bridge.

Each of us was issued a very strong nylon safety belt equipped with a two-foot wire rope lanyard that ended in a steel orb a little larger than a golf ball. As we climbed a ladder to reach the bottom of the supporting arch, there was a split rail to our right into which we slipped the little ball. Should we lose our balance anywhere along the climb, the ball, wire and safety belt would keep us from becoming accidents.

Walking on the curved upper surface of the bridge’s arch, we began to hike toward the top. To our right, across part of the harbor, was the Sydney Opera House, a fabulous facility that is very much a symbol of both Sydney and of Australia. The harbor was filled with ferries, power boats, sail boats and the occasional ocean-going ship. It was a sunny day, but the temperature was mild and the climbing was easy.

Gradually, looking in all directions as we climbed, we inched our way towards the top of the archway. At the top, at the guide's direction, we arrayed ourselves in a line with the Opera House behind us and the guide took a series of pictures. The wind had picked up a bit, and the hairstyles of many of our co-climbers were somewhat ragged. We turned North at a gentle corner and began to walk across the traffic below us.

Whereas the previous portion of the walk, while inclined, took place on a solid strip of steel that was wide enough to block your vision of what was below you, the traverse was carried out on expanded metal mesh. The rising wind whistled through this screen, sounding lonely. You could clearly see a drop beneath you of some two hundred feet onto cars, trucks and buses. The mesh gave a little as you walked on it, making you wonder how well it was attached. Our touring party took its time walking from one side of the bridge to the other, with some climbers resolutely not looking down.

On the other side, we again turned a corner and headed back to our starting point, comfortable now with the ball-in-groove safety feature and the realization that we were headed lower on the bridge. The superstructure was dirty to touch from the thousands of vehicle exhausts occurring below it, so we kept our hands off the railings and tried to walk without assistance from the safety rail. Eventually we reached the bottom of the archway, descended another ladder and walked down a hallway to the locker room. As we were leaving, we were presented with large pictures of our crew at the top of the bridge.

177. BUYING CELADON IN SEOUL

Korea has many fine arts: carpentry, calligraphy, embroidery, the manufacture of bows of exotic woods and animal horn for archery and exquisite jewelry based on deep purple amethysts, to name a few. As we became familiar with Seoul, we began to encounter a lot of celadon, and gradually learned to appreciate fine pieces and unusual glazings.

Celadon is a form of Asian pottery that originated in China during the Northern Song dynasty. It usually begins with a fired white porcelain vase or dish, over which an iron-rich glaze is applied as a slip. The porcelain is fired again and the brown ferric oxide (Fe_2O_3) becomes ferrous oxide (FeO). In the process, the glaze changes color, emerging from the kiln in a light shade of green. The firing can cause the glaze to form fine little cracks. Over time, in China, the potters using this technique pushed the coloring of the glaze towards a jade-like blue-green. During the Yuan Dynasty in China (13th-14th century) celadon from the Longquan kiln achieved an icy blue-green color with a fine crackle finish visible under a smooth outer glaze. China treats Longquan kiln celadon pieces as national treasures.

Korea emulated many of the fine things of China, including celadon. Korean potters mastered celadon glazing in the 10th and 11th centuries and continued their craft into the Goryeo dynasty of the 12th and 13th centuries. The Korean craft suffered after the Mongol Invasion in the 13th century, but was resurrected in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Today, there are a number of stores throughout Korea selling objects made with a celadon finish, from dinnerware sets to decorative bowls and vases.

Land in Seoul is very valuable, and businesses establish themselves wherever they can. An important resource to a seller of porcelain is a continuous flow of customers: this is why there are bridal registries at major department stores in America. Seoul is also very congested and heavy with vehicular traffic. In some areas, there are ugly bridges built so as to allow pedestrians to cross the street without slowing traffic. In other areas, there are underground passageways linking several streets at intersections. Near the East Gate, my wife found a major dealer of celadon who had set up both his store and a warehouse underground at the juncture of two busy city streets.

Once we found his store, we used to visit Mr. Song periodically on weekends, looking for gifts and novel objects. Just about every piece of celadon sold in this store was packaged in shredded wood within a finely-made wooden box. We bought some vases, we bought some bowls, but the best pieces from my point of view were chopstick holders shaped like little animals and glazed with celadon. We have a box with chopstick holders for eight guests that are

shaped like crocodiles, very lifelike and slightly curled, all in a light blue-green. We also have a little pitcher for ink-stone water that is shaped like a lop-eared rabbit.

Once in a while, with a visitor in town, we would go visit Mr. Song with our guests rather than taking the visitor through our more regular Button Alley tour. (Story number 159) Our guests could usually find some gifts to take home in this shop for a reasonable price.

During our second Christmas in Seoul, our kids found a big, round celadon vase for us with a repeating diagonal pattern of tiny white flying cranes which were painted over the iron-rich slip and then fired with it. The birds seem to fly above the green crackle finish beneath the clear glaze overcoat. The vase is nearly the size of a basketball, and it is a great holder of poinsettias at Christmas time.

178. WHAT'S FOR LUNCH? (Laos)

Somewhere around 1993 I was in Bangkok visiting Tim Daly to review work requirements and take in a constituent post. I had not previously seen Laos and he had scheduled a trip to Vientiane. We took his Seabee along on the trip; I remember him as a Steel Worker or a Builder. Travel arrangements to this overseas post were unusual: we flew to Udon in Northern Thailand and the Embassy in Laos sent a car across the border to meet us.

We processed through the airport in Bangkok in the morning, flew to Udon, met the car and headed for Laos. We crossed the border at about 12:30 and found ourselves motoring along a two-lane road that was built on the upper banks of a narrow river. All three of us were ready for lunch and we spotted a restaurant to our left that was built over the river; it looked like a reasonable place to stop and eat. We asked the driver to pull over, park and join us for lunch, which pleased him.

The restaurant was open and cool, constructed of wood with electric ceiling fans and cane furniture. It overlooked the little river through a lightly-forested slope. Stands of bamboo grew on either side of the dining room, shading the restaurant's interior and giving the place an Asian quality. The tables were cloth-covered and (as often seen in Thailand to the South) were decorated with small vases holding cut orchids. The waiter came over, took our order for cokes all around, and returned with menus.

All of the menus were printed in Lao and Thai.

Realizing that not all of their customers could read or write either Lao or Thai, the editors of the menu had thoughtfully spelled out in English some of the menu items that might be misunderstood. There were about eight such menu items, encased in parenthesis, identified for us next to the matching Lao text. My favorites were:

27. (Young langur monkey)

33. (Young iguana)

48. (Spiny Anteater)

With the assistance of our driver and the Seabee (who was learning Thai and was making great progress with the language) we opted for *Larb Gai*, a spicy Thai salad of chopped chicken, red onion, fresh lettuce and Thai peppers. It was excellent.

After lunch, we drove up the road to Vientiane. The countryside looked very much like the ones I remembered from Vietnam without the sand bags, barbed wire, watch towers and other

fortifications that I saw there. At one point we crossed a narrow bridge where young Lao boys in cut-off shorts were herding water buffalo along a creek. The kids were jumping off the bridge into the creek, splashing their friends with big smiles, then swimming over to sit on a water buffalo while someone else tried a splash. They waved enthusiastically as we drove by.

Along the road, we passed through bright green rice paddies surrounding a couple of Lao villages. The village huts were made of bamboo thatched with straw; there were cribs for grain, pig sties, free-running chickens and other farm animals in evidence. Between the rice paddies were narrow paths that led to the villages. My favorite sight, just to the side of the road, was of a young Lao girl dressed in black silk trousers, a conical Chinese hat of finely-woven straw, a white blouse with a Chinese collar and a long yellow stick herding six white ducks towards a village along one of these paths. It was almost as if the war in Vietnam had never happened.

The Embassy in Vientiane had added an upper room which was not structurally sound to their facility. We were engaged in some re-wiring while we were there and had to fabricate a panel to accommodate some of this wiring. Finding the needed materials in the post's meager warehouse was a challenge, but we were successful.

On a Friday evening, we went into Vientiane to explore a local market. I found that I could communicate with the older shop owners in French; the Seabee could communicate with their grandchildren in Thai. I bought some interesting hand-worked gleaming silver boxes, which tarnished almost immediately.

On Saturday, the Embassy was closed, but they allowed us to travel to a new dam outside the city by Embassy car if we agreed to reimburse the Embassy for the mileage and pay the driver. The trip took us about two hours in each direction. We drove through more of the same countryside and arrived at a restaurant on the reservoir near the dam. As we sat down to eat, we again encountered a menu in Lao. We asked the driver what might be good to eat at the restaurant, and he suggested fish. We ordered fish.

About twenty-five minutes later, a waiter appeared with our order: one fish for all of us, and French fries. This fish was about the size of three laptops placed end-to-end and was about four to five inches thick: it had been poached and was served with a spicy sauce. All four of us started to eat. We ate very well, but the four of us could only finish one side of the fish. We called for a box lined with newspaper and put the rest of the fish in the box for the driver to take home to his family.

179. COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA

In 2006, the local guard contract at our Embassy in Samoa was not renewed. The Embassy decided to hire, train and equip its own Local Guard Force, and RSO Wellington sent the ranking local guard from Auckland, himself of Samoan ancestry, to the island to recruit and train the guard force. All of the applicants showed up in sarongs and leather sandals. The RSO asked me to put together a training program for the door control system, the walk-through metal detector and the X-Ray system.

I created several Power Point programs to teach these courses, adding a practical course to see if the classroom work had been effective. I was surprised at how much material was available on the Internet regarding packages you would want to detect with the WTMD or the X-ray system: home-made bombs with nails, let's say, or pipe bombs, or grenades, or sticks of dynamite or blasting caps: it was all there. I wanted to train the guards to recognize a wide variety of firearms in a country where they are rarely if ever seen: every gun I could think of was on-line somewhere. I put together a class on knives of all shapes and sizes. I also wanted the guards to understand what a home-made bomb would look like by making some in front of them, so I bought eight small foil-wrapped bricks of light red modeling clay. I made up triggers: foil-wrapped clothes pins, mag contacts, pressure switches, mercury switches. I made up "detonators" out of narrow aluminum tubing cut to size, fitted with wires shorted together and packed with epoxy. Then I packaged up all this stuff, pouched it to post, put the lectures on a thumb drive and headed for Apia, Samoa.

The Embassy in Samoa made arrangements for me to stay at a famous hotel near the Mission: Aggie Grey's. Aggie was an American-Samoan woman who became the first female hotelier on Samoa, and her clientele included a number of movie stars like Marlon Brando and William Holden. She was a friend of James Michener and his wife, and tradition has it that she was the model for "Bloody Mary" in *Tales of the South Pacific* and later in the Broadway show and movie based on that book. The hotel consisted of a couple of quasi-modern buildings, a central separated dining area that looked like a huge Tiki Hut, a large outdoor pool in a palm garden and a string of little cabanas which were named after the movie stars who had once rented them. You could stay in the "Marlon Brando Cabana" for an extra fee: I opted to remain within per diem.

My Guard Force class showed up early on my second day on the island. Seven men, all in their thirties and early forties, all Samoan. I introduced myself as their technical instructor and explained that they would be using equipment that was new to Samoa, that the lives of people in the Embassy and their own lives could depend on how closely they followed what I was going to show them: I started to talk about knives. I showed them slides of a couple of sheath knives and

a machete, weapons that might be familiar to islanders. Then I showed them an exploded, fat Swiss Army Knife with sixteen tools protruding from it. They all stared intently at the new picture; it became apparent that I was not only training the Samoans to recognize weapons, but I was showing them weapons they had never seen before.

We went on to guns. I started with revolvers, then derringers, then .45 autos and Glocks. We progressed to an Ingram and an Uzi. The students were perched on the edges of their chairs and some were shaking their heads.

Finally, we went into explosives. The first slide was an x-ray of a bomb packed with a lot of nasty-looking roofing nails as shrapnel. There were other slides of bombs exploding, of buildings collapsed by bombs and of charred, burned-out office areas. We went on to pipe bombs, and explosive packages packed with finishing nails, and booby-trapped ice coolers and a wide assortment of the many explosive items I had been able to find on the Internet.

We moved on to a discussion of the WTMD and how it worked. We talked about the Garrett Wand and how to check people who failed to pass the metal detector. I showed the guards how sensitive the Wand was to metal, and how people could hide weapons behind sunglass cases on their belt or at the bottoms of purses as they sought to enter the Embassy.

We turned to the L3 X-ray unit. I presented slides that showed x-ray imagery in black and white, then in color, and we discussed what the colors meant. I showed them x-rays of some of the weapons they had seen before, and what those objects might look like as they passed through the L3.

Finally, I held a class on bomb-making. Using the bricks of plasticine, some wire and the “detonators”, I slit open a brick with the Mimi Tool (Story Number 174) and inserted the detonator. I then constructed a circuit with a battery, a light bulb, a clothespin switch and the shorted detonator. I put a piece of index card into the jaws of the clothespin as an insulator, tied a string to the card, punched a hole in a small cardboard box with the awl on the Mimi Tool and snaked the string through the side of the box. There was an address on the box: “The Ambassador, American Embassy, Samoa”. I asked one of the guards to pull the string.

They did not know I was using modeling clay. They were very reluctant to touch the box at all. I opened the top of the box and showed them how the lamp went on when you pulled the string. We made a couple of different bombs, one with a flashbulb as the payload and a micro switch under the lid of the box.

After these classes, which filled two days of instruction, we did the practical. I had a number of boxes and bags, a backpack and a couple of briefcases for the men to check. We started on the door control system and how to use it to both open doors and secure them with the emergency switch; we practiced admitting guests to the Embassy and greeting them with respect.

We practiced locking out the Auckland Guard Force Supervisor when he showed up with a baseball bat. I hid objects on my person and had them find the objects after I transited the WTMD.

One of the briefcases had a hidden “gun” made of lead foil cut to resemble a Glock 19. It was fun to see the guard spot the gun on the X-ray, then open the case and not see it. The modeling clay in the boxes looked a lot like C4 on the L3’ s colored screen, and the guards began to show an understanding of what they were looking for.

Then I brought in the wheelchair. There was a small clinic across the hall from our Embassy, and they loaned me a chair for an afternoon. I hid a pipe bomb under the seat of the wheelchair and wheeled it past the metal detector and into the Embassy waiting room before I showed it to the guards.

After the practical exam, the guards were issued new uniforms and badges in a ceremony hosted by the Principal Officer and the senior guard from Auckland. They were very proud of their new status and responsibilities and started working immediately.

If I have spent too much time on this story, it’s because the trip was both unusual and a lot of fun.

180. THE CHENGDU NIGHT MARKET

I have, over the years, had the great fortune to see a lot of foreign marketplaces. These have come in all shapes and sizes, from Arab merchants spreading blankets along the dock in Alexandria as we got off a ship, to similar markets in Mongolia which were selling collections of Soviet military medals from the Russian soldiers who had left the country after the breakup of the Soviet Union. I have seen Arab souks, been through fabulous jewelry stores in Rio de Janeiro and have seen the equally fabulous Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. Each market was interesting and had a variety of items to look at: some of these places just took longer to explore than other places.

All of these experiences helped to prepare me for a visit to Chengdu with Field Cooper in 1994. After meeting with Post officials at the new Consulate there, discussing our program and their needs, the Consul-General invited Field and I to have dinner with him and then to visit the Night Market. The CG's wife, a beautiful woman from Laos, joined us for dinner. We went to a (Chinese) restaurant that specialized in Tofu. I was not fond of Tofu, but had never eaten any quite like the Tofu in Szechuan Province, which is famous for spicy food. This Tofu was *laced* with red pepper; it was memorably spicy but also delicious. We had a good time at dinner, with most of the restaurant's patrons looking at Field, who might have been the biggest person any of them had ever seen. (See Story Number 52.)

The Chengdu Night Market was about eight blocks long and it went eight streets into the surrounding neighborhood. There was not much in the way of street lighting in this part of Chengdu (which is in a huge depression right in the middle of China): so, for shoppers to see their wares, vendors hung Coleman-type kerosene lamps with ash mantles on poles along the street. Each vendor put out one, two or three card tables with items for sale. There was wide variety in these items, but most of them were artifacts from the China of yesterday, and it was fascinating to poke through all that was available. There were broken tiaras in silver with inlaid iridescent blue kingfisher feathers, old Chinese coins with square holes, a huge variety of snuff bottles, old jades that Chinese citizens used to carry in their clothing, paintings, cooking utensils, antique jewelry in the form of rings, ankle bracelets and necklaces, stamps, 78-rpm records, exotic tools like the rings a fisherman would slip over the necks of Cormorants used for fishing and on and on. Every table seemed to have a specialty (stamps, let's say) and a pile of other things of possible interest. The first two streets were a grab bag of mixed items from table to table. On the third street, however, the merchandize changed, and we walked down an entire street containing table after table of fresh-water pearls. Some tables specialized in colored pearls, most had white pearls of different sizes, but there were a lot of strands of pearls to take in, and I bought some.

The CG's wife, who spoke fluent Chinese, had advised us not to show apparent interest in anything unless we wanted to buy that item. We took this advice to heart and if we touched anything on a table, we made sure to touch three or four other things as well to dissuade the vendor from starting negotiations. We did fine until we reached the fifth street, where I saw an amber snuff bottle. I have a small snuff bottle collection (with bottles made of crystal, turquoise and coral) but had never seen amber in China before and was intrigued. I picked up the bottle and looked at it, then asked the price. The merchant immediately wrote "\$100" on a piece of paper. That was a bit rich for me and was way too much for that bottle, so I put it back on the table and we moved on.

The vendor followed us. After about three tables, on which I examined old guns (rusted badly), old typewriters and old Chinese gowns, he dropped his price to \$80. We kept moving. On the sixth street, perhaps aware of the exposed merchandize on the table he left behind, he again dropped the price to \$40. At this point the CG's wife asked me if I wanted the bottle. I said "yes" and she started to scold the merchant in Chinese. He hung his head, held out the bottle and I purchased it for \$20 worth of RMB. (This was a form of money reserved for the use of foreign guests to China and was worth a little more than the regular Chinese yuan.)

We explored the remaining streets, now into a section containing old Chinese furniture which I could not easily take back to Korea. Still, the range of material was stunning, from carved chests, chairs and tables in a purple sort of rosewood to old Chinese carpets, cloisonné ginger jars and a wide variety of stools. We headed back to our hotel, with Field parting the small crowds that gazed in wonder as he walked by.

181. THE JOYS OF GABON

In 1978, for my first trip out of Abidjan, John Keys sent me to Libreville, Gabon with a Seabee to design a new Marine Booth for the post. The Assistant RSO from Kinshasa, who also covered the post, was to meet us there and discuss what was needed. I sent a telegram to the post asking if there was other work in Libreville that needed to be addressed, and asked who would meet us as our Point of Contact. Post assigned us to the Administrative Officer, an FSO on his first assignment who was a little younger than me. They also asked us to take a look at the Post's emergency generator for the Admin Section.

I have previously related how my luggage did not arrive on that trip and the circumstances that led me to begin speaking in French. See Story 152, On Languages.

On the first day, we met with the Admin Officer, who gave us a tour of the post. It was immediately clear that Libreville was not in compliance with the new Minimum Standards for Public Access, which had recently been defined by the Department. The Marine sat behind a partial enclosure in the middle of the Embassy lobby with a piece of thick Lexan in front of him. To allow him to communicate with visitors, there was an irregular cluster of hand-drilled holes in the center of the Lexan and a little slot at the bottom through which he could issue keys. The Marine had a small alarm console and a couple of doorbell switches that opened Trine electrical locks leading to the Embassy (the Consulate was in a separate building.) Also located in the lobby, seated at open desks, were a receptionist/telephone operator and a local guard. I started to plan a new Marine Booth that I thought would meet the new Standards.

ARSO Doug Roberts showed up in the afternoon of the second day. Survey work can be dirty, involving trips through crawl space to locate wires and circuit breaker cabinets, ladder-climbing and searches above suspended ceilings. The Seabee and I were wearing khaki pants and polo shirts as we explored the Post. Doug arrived in sartorial splendor, wearing a three-piece summer suit, highly polished dress shoes, a nice tie and movie star sunglasses.

Doug was interested in the survey, but what he most wanted was a CCTV system for the Marine to look at. We asked him what he wanted the Marine to see, and he indicated an area along the street in front of the Embassy that the Marine could not see from his current location. I borrowed a step ladder from the post and set it up on the front lawn, inviting Doug to climb the ladder and select the view that he wanted for the Marine. To Doug's credit, he climbed the ladder (suit and all) in the hot African sun several times before he selected the camera location.

I went back inside and began measuring for my Technical Services Report (remember TSRs?) In my design, I grabbed about a quarter of the lobby and located the Marine and the receptionist behind a ballistic barrier, supported by a couple of TV monitors, door control

switching and an alarm panel. I replaced the Trine locks with the much more durable Brute electric locks and I fed them from cypher power supplies with backup batteries. I then asked the Admin Officer to show me the emergency generator.

We climbed a winding set of stairs in the old house that then housed our Embassy, stopping at a landing between the first and second floors. There was a flat space on the roof outside the Admin section, and there was a little generator sitting there. Someone had previously taken the generator and its Briggs & Stratton motor apart and had left the parts strewn all over the roof. All of them were rusty. I told the Admin Officer to buy a new little generator for the Admin Office: it supported a typewriter for preparing telegrams and a coffee pot.

I needed a haircut at that time, and asked the Marines where they went to get clipped. The Marine on duty told me of a barber shop near the Embassy run by Vietnamese. I slipped out at lunch to find it.

During my tours in Vietnam, I learned that an Asian haircut usually includes a back rub. I walked into the barber shop on the West Coast of Africa and found it lined with Vietnamese women, almost like a barber shop in Saigon. All of them, however, conversed with their customers in French. I asked for my haircut in French, received a Marine-like crew cut and then a back rub, and paid in Central African Francs. It was bizarre.

Walking back to the Embassy, I found the corniche along the sea wall to be planted with cashew trees. Unlike most African foliage, the leaves of these trees turned a deep red and fell towards the end of summer, giving my walk something of a New England in Autumn quality.

The Admin Officer had invited us over to his house for beer, some food and an opportunity to meet several other members of the Embassy Staff. We were able to walk to his house, which featured a front porch that stretched all the way across the front of the building. Two communicators and a secretary joined us and we all stood or sat on porch furniture listening to music from a record player. On perhaps our second beer, a heavy rainstorm blew in rather suddenly from the Atlantic. The porch was deep enough that we could stay there and keep dry, so we went on with our discussion.

Suddenly there was a very powerful buzzing sound overhead and a blinding lightning bolt zipped down from the sky right next to us. It hit a large transformer building immediately across the street from the Admin Officer's house. A deluge of sparks dripped down the side of the stucco-faced building. The transformer building began to emit a lot of smoke and all the lights for several blocks around went off. The record player stopped. The party was effectively over, and one of the communicators gave us a ride back to our hotel.

I returned to Abidjan, wrote up my report, got John to sign it and sent it down to the RSO in Kinshasa, who also signed it. Wally Gilliam liked the report, but the Minimum Standards had

already changed: Marines and receptionists were now *not* to be housed together, but were to be sited in separate ballistic enclosures meeting our ballistic standard. I went back to the drawing board (no CAD programs at that time) and re-did the lobby drawing to accommodate the Standards change.

182. EYEBALL

Late in 1978, I went to Nouakchott, Mauritania for the first time on a countermeasures inspection. My RSO at that time was Mark Mulvey. Mark had been supporting almost as many posts as the ESO did in West Africa, working by himself. SY sent out an ARSO, John Chornyak, to assist him; John arrived just before my arrival in August. Mark thought it would be a good experience for both John and I to travel together so that each of us could see what the other person's job entailed.

I made only two trips to Nouakchott during my tour in Abidjan. Even though a number of our posts were on the edge of the Sahara Desert, a trip to Nouakchott seemed more like a trip to Arabia than to an African country. If you arose early in the morning, as I did one day, you could watch a camel caravan with over a hundred animals leaving in a line on a journey to North Africa. It was very much like a trip back in time. In the light of early dawn, the caravan seemed to be formed of shadows. The sounds of braying camels, the shouts of the camel's riders, the voices of children saying goodbye and the noise of pots and other implements tied on to the camel saddles were memorable. As the sun came up, all of the soil that you could see was sand; when the wind picked up you were coated with finely ground hot grit, and the number of visible green plants could be counted on your fingers. The local people seemed more Arab than African, due principally to their loose clothing which was necessary to protect them from the fierce sun and accompanying heat.

Before we arrived in Mauritania, the Admin Officer (Post Security Officer) apologetically explained that the only decent hotel in Nouakchott was far out of town on a deserted beach. Most of the Embassy personnel went home for lunch because there was no cafeteria or snack bar inside the Mission. We were told that a car would pick us up at 8:30 each morning, drive us in to work, take us back to the Hotel at 12:30, come back out for us at 2:30 and return us to the hotel by 5:00. This resulted in an abbreviated work day but allowed the Embassy to use the vehicle they sent for us around lunchtime, and allowed us to have three regular meals each day. The PSO suggested that we bring swimming suits as we would have time to swim at the beach each day.

The hotel was rather strange. It was made up of a series of trailers perched among sand dunes, connected by wood-slatted walkways. Most of those walkways were partially buried in sand. There was one fixed building that served as a reception area and dining room/kitchen; all of the hotel guests were assigned rooms in the trailers. The wind coming off the nearby ocean blew sand across the trailers, and you felt like you were living in a beach house, which we were in fact doing. There were not many other guests in the hotel and we had the dining room almost

to ourselves during our visit. The trip from the hotel to the Embassy took slightly over thirty minutes in each direction.

At lunchtime on the first day, we decided to go swimming before eating. We put on our suits, grabbed towels and walked down a short path to the Atlantic Ocean. The weather (at the edge of the Sahara Desert) was hot and dry, but a steady breeze coming in off the ocean made it tolerable. The beach, which stretched for miles in each direction, was absolutely deserted. As we approached the water, we could feel that the sand was loose and even spongy underfoot, and the waves churned up a lot of sand as they came in. The beach had a gentle slope, so most of the waves coming in were about seven feet high as they broke and then slid smoothly up to the beach. These were great conditions for body-surfing, so we entered the water and went out about fifty feet. At this distance, we could catch a wave and ride it all the way to the beach with great regularity.

Each of us caught several waves: we were delighted with the rather gentle landings we experienced on the spongy beach. It was a little hard for us to see each other in the sand-filled surf, but we stayed close together as we swam out and surfed in.

After about six rides to the beach, John suddenly yelled at me: "Get out! Get out of the water! Right now!" and started swimming for the shore as fast as he could. I followed his example and we arrived at the beach. John explained that a large dark body had suddenly appeared next to him in the surf. It seemed to be more than twice his length and had a jet-black eyeball about the same circumference as a tea cup. After a little reflection, we realized that the sand-filled surf represented a fine opportunity for large predators to pick up an easy meal. We decided to forego surfing and went back to the hotel.

It was Ramadan, and the hotel dining room had a lot more patrons on our last night in Nouakchott. They were gathered to share *Itthar*, the allowed evening meal during the period of fasting. We sat at a table near the front door but observed guests at several tables and a small crowd of perhaps twelve men sitting at two tables pushed together further back in the dining room. Many of the men were bearded. There were no women present; the men spoke in low tones and looked at us in a rather unfriendly way, as if our presence there was unwelcome. As we ate, an Arab face would occasionally appear at one side or the other of the swinging doors that led into the kitchen, each of which was fitted with a small porthole.

Towards the end of our dinner, the lights in the dining room dimmed. An Arab wearing a chef's smock and a pleated hat walked through the twin doors, held them open and announced to the group of men in Arabic: "Suchtain!" (Two healths; Bon Appetit). Two helpers then wheeled their dinner into the dining room.

Dinner consisted of two sheep, roasted whole, positioned during roasting so that their forelegs and hind legs were folded under each animal. Each sheep was set on top of a stainless-steel kitchen cart. Their heads had been severed and cooked and were placed on a lower shelf on each cart. Over the stumps of their necks, as we do with turkeys at Thanksgiving, the Chef had placed large, frilled paper turkey booties, which looked like bizarre heads on the roasted animals. Other helpers brought in platters of rice, raisins and nuts, Arab bread and couscous.

The two tables applauded and cheered at the arrival of their Ramadan supper. We finished our meal and went back to our rooms to pack.

183. PMEL

In 1985, towards the end of my tour in Panama, SEO Bob Frahm was assigned to our Engineering Services Center. Bob was an unusual SEO: he was a former USAF Master Sergeant, and had been a boom operator on a KC-135 flying tanker before turning to electronics. Bob had fueled cargo planes, bombers, hot fighter jets and even a couple of SR-71 reconnaissance planes.

Once he got into electronics, Bob was hooked. He became a hard-core amateur radio operator at about the time that the first home computers were coming out, so he was enthusiastic about controlling his radio station with an early Apple computer. Panama was Bob's first assignment overseas as an SEO, and he was interested in nearly everything.

After about two weeks on the job, Bob asked me if I had ever visited a PMEL. I had no idea what they were, and said so. Bob explained that the Air Force had a type of electronics laboratory that I might find interesting, and that there was, in fact, such a laboratory in Panama. He said that he thought he could get me into the laboratory if I was interested, so I encouraged him to get us a tour. What I did not know was that Bob had been an inspector of such facilities all over the world for the Air Force for quite some time.

We drove over to Albrook AFB in Panama and Bob guided me to a nondescript rectangular building constructed of cinder blocks with a flat roof. There was a doorway into this structure with a small foyer area behind the outer door. In the foyer was a special machine that scrubbed boots and shoes and vacuumed away any mud or debris from their soles. We then went through the second door and were greeted by the commanding officer of the laboratory and his senior NCO, both of who said they were honored to receive a visit from Bob as a civilian.

"PMEL", as it turned out, stood for "Precision Maintenance Electronics Laboratory". Like ESCs, the Air Force uses a lot of electronic test equipment: to calibrate the radar systems of fighter aircraft on a flight line, for example. To do their job correctly, flight line technicians need carefully calibrated test equipment. PMELs repair and calibrate most of the test equipment used by the Air Force. All of the technicians I saw in the Albright facility (about fifteen men and women were working during our tour) were wearing white lab coats. The facility was designed with a positive air flow to move any particle-sized contaminants out of the building and not into equipment.

Equipment for repair and calibration was stored in glass-fronted cabinets stacked along the walls and placed over very respectable electronics benches. Technicians worked on one piece of equipment at a time, using maintenance manuals as they labored to guide them through the process of calibrating, let's say, a Tektronix 492B digital spectrum analyzer, several of which

were visible in the facility. Each equipment item was tagged with the reason it had been sent to PMEL, the actions taken on the equipment at each repair and calibration station, the date service was rendered and the signature of the supporting technician. On other shelves were meters, signal generators, signal analyzers, pattern generators and a pile of interesting hardware I could not recognize. The sanitary conditions in the laboratory were humbling.

When we returned to the ESC, Bob explained to me that we were doing things wrong. He pointed out that our key cutting machines were located within ten feet of some expensive electronic equipment items, and that even if those instruments were packed in cases, we were likely to get little slices of brass or aluminum inside our equipment. He felt that the floor in the ESC lab should be cleaner and that we should reorganize the way that we stored things to better protect our equipment.

Bob was uneasy telling me this as a new man in the office. I took out his recently-prepared Statement of Work Requirements and tore it up, to his dismay. Then I wrote him a new Work Requirements Statement, naming him (among other duties) as the ESC's Laboratory Supervisor with a free rein to make any changes in our lab that he felt necessary.

It seemed like the right thing to do.

184. THE FOOD SHIPMENT

My first effort at coping with overseas living as an employee took place in West Africa. We were assigned to the ESO in Abidjan in 1978. We quickly found that the process of finding food compatible with our diets could be troublesome. While there was fresh fish in abundance, and chicken was available locally, beef and pork were hard to find and we had no idea how local meat was handled. Visiting an African market, you could see carcasses of sheep, goats and even the occasional cow hanging up on wooden poles and covered with flies. There were some French grocery stores in town, and they were good ones, but the cost of a roast or a beef filet in one of those stores was prohibitive.

To help its employees weather these conditions, the Embassy GSO section would organize bulk frozen food orders from either Peter Justensen in Denmark or a similar American firm in Houston, Texas. These outfits would supply the Embassy with a comprehensive list of frozen meat products; the Embassy would copy and distribute the list, take orders from personnel along with payment, organize a bulk order to get an appreciable discount and send it in. Our food would be packaged in boxes by employee name, would be palletized and moved by refrigerated truck to a refrigerator ship and sent to Abidjan. This process took about three months from the time we placed our order until the time the food arrived. Usually, we confined our orders to beef, ground beef, lamb and pork.

To tide us over between shipments, the Embassy provided each home with a large chest freezer. Ours was amply-sized to hold three months' worth of frozen meat. We kept our freezer in an interior storeroom where we had shelves for canned and dry food as well.

Shortly after our arrival in Abidjan, my wife and I put in an order for about \$800 worth of frozen meats. Our daughter was very young at the time, so the meat was just for us and for dinner guests.

Gail, pregnant at the time, returned to the U.S. to wait for our son's arrival. While she was away, I was travelling frequently. In between trips one day, I received a call from the GSO:

"George, we've been trying to get you all morning. The food shipment came in, but our big walk-in freezer has broken and we can't keep the food frozen. Everyone else has picked up their orders. Can you get over here in a hurry?"

Very concerned at the impending loss of our food, I zipped over to the GSO Warehouse. I found six large cardboard boxes of frozen meat with my name on them. Each box was the size of a suitcase; they were sitting on the floor of the warehouse inside the door to the loading dock. The cardboard was cool to the touch, but was obviously getting warmer in the tropical heat.

With the air conditioner in my car running full blast, I loaded the car, closed the hatchback and raced home.

All the way home, I could smell spoiled meat inside the car.

When I reached the house, I left the car running in my carport. I ran into our storage room and emptied out the chest freezer. With my car continuing to run, I brought in box after box of frozen meat and placed their contents in the freezer in an orderly manner, making a map of the food locations as I progressed. The meat all seemed to be frozen solid, making me feel a little better about our food order: maybe it was the blood-stained boxes I was smelling in the car. I unpacked all of our meat order, put the former contents of the freezer back in place on top of the new food, then moved the boxes out onto the porch area. I let my car air out; on walking back into the storage room the odor seemed to have gone away.

Over the next three days, everything was fine. Then I started to smell the odor of spoiling meat in the storage room. It got much worse the second day. I was really concerned about the situation: not only were we looking at the loss of over \$800 in food, but we would not have any beef, pork or ham until the next order and shipment three months down the road.

On the third day, deciding to pitch the spoiled meat, I opened up the deep freeze. To my surprise, all of the food inside the freezer was still frozen solid, and there was no spoiled food odor inside the chest. I closed the door: the spoiled food odor was *outside* the chest.

I got down on my knees and followed my nose to a small plastic bag under one of the storage shelves. In my haste to empty the freezer when I arrived with the meat, I had set a small bag of frozen shrimp on the floor in the storage room and had bumped it under one of the shelves with a cardboard meat box. I double-wrapped the bag of dead shrimp, pitched the garbage and opened a window to air out the room. The food order was fine.

185. DINING IN ULAN BATAAR

Toward the end of my tour in Seoul, I had visited most of the constituent posts of each of the ESOs in my region. One Embassy that I had not previously visited was Ulan Bataar, the capital of Mongolia. One month, Steve Klein informed me that he had a Selectone installation planned for the Embassy, and I offered to go along and help.

Flying in to Ulan Bataar was a strange experience. Looking out the window, you saw rolling green fields in almost every direction with very few trees visible. There were narrow roads going out into the fields, a few temples that stood up off to the sides of roads, and herds of sheep and goats. Most of the buildings visible from the plane were one or two stories high, and there was usually space between the buildings. The airport was not heavily used but had spacious runways and aircraft parking areas. The airport gave me feelings of isolation and loneliness, but also of tranquility.

Our Embassy sat directly on a small river's flood plain. While the water level was low during our visit, it did not take too much imagination to envision the water rising in the spring and the Embassy crawl space filling with water. Next door to our facility was the British Embassy.

The Embassy was somewhat L-shaped, with the long arm of the L being the Embassy proper and the attached short leg of the Embassy being the Residence. The Ambassador, always attired in a brown suit with highly polished shoes, used to emerge from his residence through a connecting door and walk directly into his office without a word to anyone.

We started on the Selectone system. The guts of the system were installed in the Embassy, with extension speakers going into the Residence. Steve Klein bravely took on the job of installing the conduit and wiring between these facilities through a narrow crawl space/ tunnel that looked as if it might once have been a sluice of some kind. I remember looking down into the building's crawl space and seeing his legs disappear into this dark little groove.

At the end of the first day, we had most of the conduit work completed, the power supply and the control unit mounted and had done some of the wiring. We went out on the town to find something to eat. Steve saw to it that we left early, because there were only three restaurants in town that served European food, and each of them usually ran out of vittles after the first serving. It was important to arrive early if you wanted to eat. Dinner was chicken with carrots and potatoes, all roasted.

On the second day, we hung the rest of the Selectone speakers, ran the wiring to the speakers and tested the system. We had to pick a time when the Ambassador was out of the

Residence to test the system over there. Afterwards, we addressed some door control problems and were done for the day. We went to our hotel, cleaned up for dinner, and went out for a walk until the restaurants opened.

Ulan Bataar was a boneyard. A lot of Mongolian food was grilled on charcoal fires along the road, was sold there and was eaten off the bone by hand. The bones were just dropped on the ground once the meat was devoured. Almost everywhere you looked were small sheep bones and the occasional hoof.

On our second night in town, Steve, his Seabee electrician and I went to a different restaurant. Not surprisingly, the dish of the day was a lamb stew served over rice with some roasted root vegetables on the side. The restaurant had a number of European patrons, but there were also some husky Mongolian men eating at a table over by the window. As we sat down, one of them was watching us closely.

Shortly before our trip to Mongolia, the Soviet Union had folded up and its troops stationed at distant Soviet republics had been called home. The United States was suddenly viewed more as a supportive nation and a possible trading partner than as an adversary, and people in the former captive republics were feeling us out.

A large Mongolian man with a square face and drooping “Fu Manchu” moustaches stood up at the window table and lumbered our way. With narrow Tatar eyes, he looked like he might have been one of Genghis Khan’s right-hand men, and seemed as if he might be spoiling for a fight. He was holding two large shot glasses of something alcoholic and was weaving a bit. He came up to our table, gestured at me with one of the glasses and said “You. Drink.”

I viewed this as a request for comradery, and stood up. I walked up to him, looked him in the eye and took the extended glass. Then I interlocked arms with him, raised the glass to my mouth and looked at him again. He grinned, lifted his glass and we drank together. After downing the shot of what turned out to be vodka, we each returned to our seats.

The following day was Saturday. We went to a market, which was basically a large macadam parking lot with a number of Army blankets spread out on the ground on which wares were exhibited. Quite a few of the sales personnel were hawking collections of Soviet medals, evidently abandoned or sold by their former owners. There were also a number of used tools that probably came from the Russian Army or Air Force. I bought a nice stainless steel Vernier caliper for about four dollars.

We walked past the market and out of town, where we ran into a religious celebration taking place at a Lamaist Buddhist temple. Monks of this religious persuasion wear fantastic gold-colored woven hats that look like half-moon shaped brooms perched over their heads. The monks were all wearing red and gold robes and were chanting outside the temple. The temple

was massive, was three stories high and each corner of each floor was mounted with a bell-shaped prayer wheel which was meant to be rotated by devotees. We watched the proceedings until a member of a filming group that was documenting the ceremony came over and told us in English that we should not be there. We slipped away.

That evening, our Embassy was as silent as a tomb. There was some music coming from the Embassy next door, however, and we were invited into the British Embassy as we passed. There we encountered what was possibly the only British pub in all of Mongolia, with beer, darts, pub food and a lot of people enjoying themselves, including several staffers from our own Embassy. The *British* Ambassador joined his personnel after the work week, throwing darts and laughing with the rest of them.

186. CHARLES de GAULLE AIRPORT, PARIS

Another airport story....

As most of you may remember, when we traveled for the government, we traveled Tourist Class. There were occasional exceptions, usually surrounding the accompaniment of a diplomatic pouch, but we were mostly seated far back in the plane. There were a few opportunities for traveling in Business Class, generally requiring a government traveler to forego an overnight stay somewhere in return for a more luxurious flight. All of us accumulated a lot of frequent flier miles in conjunction with our work, but the official view for a while was that those bonus miles belonged to the Government and should be turned in to the Embassy. The entire Foreign Service squawked when that ruling was proposed.

Our Admin Counselor in Abidjan, an enlightened diplomat, took the position that the frequent flier miles we earned could be used by us on change-of-station flights going on to our next assignment or back to the United States. Her ruling (and her discussions with American Flag Carriers) allowed us to share our accumulated miles with family members, so that everyone in the family traveled Business Class on the way home. This resulted in a very pleasant flight with less crowded seating, better meals and a more attentive cabin crew.

At the end of our African tour in 1981, we left Abidjan for Switzerland on a Swiss Air DC-10. Mimi, my mother-in-law, had come out to visit us toward the end of our tour in the Ivory Coast, to see what our assignment was like and to help with our two children on the way home. When I made our reservations, I was able to use my frequent flier miles for all of us, so the entire family was booked in Business Class all the way back to the States. We opted to return through Switzerland (the other route went directly through Paris) in order to see a little of Europe on the way home. I asked for two day's leave enroute.

I sent the RSO in Geneva, Art Hanrehan, a message indicating that I was coming through town and would like to see the building used for SALT talks in Geneva during my visit. There had been some concerns raised about this facility and I wanted to take the opportunity to see it while I was in town. Art invited me to come in. On the morning after we landed, my wife, our kids and Mimi headed down to see the lake and I zipped over to the Consulate to meet Art. We walked over to the SALT building and Art showed me around for a couple of hours. I returned to the hotel, ate lunch, and arranged to hire a car for a day. On the following day we drove all the way around Lake Lehman, going through the vineyards and Montreux, visiting the castle at Chinon, continuing into France and returning to Switzerland. The little tour was Mimi's first exposure to Europe and was quite a change from, say, the *marché* in Abidjan.

On the following day, our flight left Geneva for Paris, where we were to change planes and return to the States on an American Flag Carrier. I had not previously visited Charles de Gaulle airport but had read about it: I was expecting impressive architecture and a terminal with elegant stores for shopping. What I did not know until we arrived in Paris was that there was an airline strike going on in the United States and overseas flights were backed up for hours and hours.

When we deplaned from our Geneva flight, the terminal was filled wall-to-wall with grouchy and anxious passengers. Most of the seats in the terminal were occupied with stranded passengers who were either reading or sleeping; we were very lucky to find an empty bench near a window from which our kids could watch planes come and go. I went over to the TWA desk and checked in; our flight was estimated to be four hours late but that departure time was not at all certain. Looking around, I saw families sitting on the floor, long lines at rest room doors, frazzled ground stewards trying to reassure passengers who had connecting flights to catch and the entire array of airport troubles in those pre-terrorist times.

I wanted Gail and Mimi to see the airport shops, so I stayed with our kids while they toured the terminal. They found an eatery and used some of our remaining Swiss Francs to buy lunch for all of us, then wandered through the high end shops: Hermes, Gucci, Chanel and many others. They explored for about an hour and a half and then returned.

At one of the electronics counters, Mimi had purchased a small radio for me. It was a black, thin, rectangular Sony short-wave and AM/FM radio that was about the size of a paperback book. It had a tuning dial and several sliding controls with a folding antenna. It looked like an ideal travel radio, and I said so: I decided not to try and use it in the crowded terminal.

As our departure time approached, the strain of waiting in uncertainty began to show in the terminal. Families lost patience with their bored and uncomfortable children; pushy people angrily chastised the ground stewards at the desks and began to demand hotel accommodations in Paris. Passengers went back to the bookstore for more to read. The terminal's trash cans filled to overflowing and trash began to pile up around the cans. Each departing plane was like a breath of fresh air to the stranded passengers, raising hope that they, too, might be able to leave. When our time came, we found ourselves in a 747 in Business Class, and settled in for the trip home.

On our return to the States, we moved back into our home, found a Montessori school for our children, set up housekeeping and started back to work. On my first day back, I found that Art Hanrehan had sent a telegram to the Department demanding increased security for the SALT

building on the grounds that the new SY/T Operations Officer had visited the facility and found the technical security lacking. It was not the best way to begin a new assignment.

When I got home that day, I decided to try out the Sony radio. I put it on a coffee table, extended the antenna and tuned through the FM band. I counted the number of stations it pulled in as I did so, and was impressed that the little radio acquired two dozen FM stations in the Washington area. I carried the radio with me for years, learning to pack it inside and play it through a bubble-wrap zip-lock bag. It still works and is now my accompaniment when I barbeque.

187. MSDS – A WHOLE NEW WORLD

In 2008, I was working as a WAE Employee in DS/ST Operations. While there, it occurred to me that our organization did not have any published safety standards, so I decided to write some and try to get them approved. Over time, this led to DS/ST creating an actual organization to prepare and review such standards, which was a good thing and a better approach to the problem. For a while, however, I was busy writing about dangerous but interesting things.

In the course of this effort, I decided to write a safety standard for the Itemizer, the explosives detector that we were using at the time. I read the manual for the machine and was somewhat surprised to discover that the Itemizer used methylene chloride as a carrier within its vapor transmission system. I looked up “methylene chloride” on the internet and found that it is a known carcinogen. In that the fluid needed to be replaced from time to time, I wondered if the fluid that escaped was somehow being vented into the air as a gas, and how much gas was so produced. This became important because many of our Itemizers were located in tightly-sealed guard booths around the world with very little air circulation: were we subjecting our local guards to daily doses of a known carcinogen?

Exploring the Department’s telephone directory, I learned that there was an Environmental Safety Office in the Overseas Buildings Office. Embassies use and store a very wide range of solvents, cleaning agents, construction materials and other items which are regulated by OSHA, and OBO had a crew that was trained and equipped to study hazardous materials and weigh in on whether or not those materials should be in our facilities. I gave them a call.

The Office Director and his principal assistant, both of whom had impressive academic credentials, were interested in the problem I brought to their door. We talked about how best to study the situation. I reasoned that our training facility at SA-7 probably had more Itemizers in a single location than any of our overseas facilities, where the explosive detectors were generally deployed at the level of one machine to a given gate house. The OBO team gave me a very detailed MSDS sheet (Material Safety Data Sheet) for methylene chloride. I decided to call the Itemizer manufacturer and ask about the problem.

The Manufacturer’s representative assured me that there was no hazard whatsoever from their product, and strongly suggested that I did not need to study the equipment emanations. I decided to do so anyway, with OBO’s assistance.

With the cooperation of our training section at SA-7, I arranged for OBO to set up air samplers in the Itemizer training room during a period of instruction on three successive days while perhaps fifteen Itemizers were being used in the classroom at the same time. The thought

was that if any of the fifteen detectors was emitting methylene chloride, we were more likely to see the chemical at SA-7 than anywhere else. The students were told about the study and the reasons for the air samplers in the classroom; they were a little uneasy about the prospect of working with a machine that might be exposing them to a cancer-causing chemical. I explained that the manufacturer had given the Itemizer a clean bill of health, and that our test was just a safety precaution.

The testing went on for three days. After each day of class, the explosive detectors were left in the ON condition, as they usually are in our overseas guard booths. At the end of the test period, the OBO examiners retrieved their air samplers and returned to their office to study the results.

The results were good. No trace of methylene chloride was found. I called the manufacturer to discuss the results of our testing. The company steered me to their engineering section. I talked about our concerns and our testing program and our results. I was then informed that the Itemizer can be used for *either* explosives detection or drug detection, with different programming, and that the methylene chloride is only used as a carrier when working with drugs. (This was somehow not in the equipment manual.)

188. THE WHEELS ON THE GATE GO ROUND AND ROUND

As many of you have discovered, working with motorized gates is often a headache for security personnel. They break at the worst times, prevent staff and senior officers from entering the compound, cost a lot to fix and can be dangerous to work on. They are often very heavy, they involve the use of motors and chains and put fingers and feet at risk. Plus, they are expensive to acquire and install.

OBO-designed security improvements for our Embassy in Wellington in 2005 called for a new steel fence around the compound with two large, motorized steel gates. Each entry way was to feature a large Delta Scientific 501 vehicle barrier and a channel of bollards to direct incoming traffic toward the barrier. The rear gate was wide enough to allow a car to enter as it allowed a car to leave, although post policy tried to limit the gate opening to a single lane. The vehicle entrance at the other end of the compound was narrower and would only open for a single vehicle.

Both of the new gates ran on stainless steel tracks that were triangular in cross section. Each gate was supported by two 10-inch bronze wheels with a triangular groove in the middle to keep the gate on the track.

The gate was too heavy for the wheels; there should probably have been four wheels on each gate to support the load more evenly. It was, however, built as designed. Accordingly, almost as soon as the big back gate was installed, the bronze wheels started to flake. Our contractor told us that it was “normal” for the wheels to shed bronze: the purpose of the softer metal was to avoid damage to the track.

Our track was very well protected. The wheels got smaller and smaller until (after a period of three months) the gate no longer worked. We asked for new wheels under our warranty and got them fabricated and delivered. Almost immediately, the new wheels started to flake. Our contractor was very reluctant to remove the gates and weld additional support tongues for more wheels on the bottom. Instead, the contractor found a tougher bronze wheel and we installed them on both gates.

With the new wheels, the gates worked fine for a couple of months. Then the bronze began to “plate” the stainless steel track on the North gate with a layer of yellow metal. More wheels were ordered for that gate. I left post as another warranty claim was being processed.

189. WHEN IN ROME

Americans, by and large, *sit* when they are not walking around. We sit on chairs, stools, Barc-a-Loungers and even on logs around campfires. The rest of the world is a little different: overseas, in many places, people *squat* when they are tired of walking or standing.

During my tour in Korea, the Consular Section at our Embassy was so busy that they lobbied for an Annex from which they could renew or issue non-immigrant visas. After some discussions between the RSO and DS/PSD, we were given permission to construct a Consular Annex inside a reasonably large storage building at the back of our compound. The building was constructed of concrete blocks, but we came up with a six-foot high inner lining of concrete-filled block and steel sheeting to meet protective standards. We also found three suitable ballistic windows with deal trays to embed in the wall. We designed a desk system to run beneath the windows and obtained three intercom systems to allow Consular Officers to communicate with the Korean public. It was a little awkward for visa applicants, who were processed while standing on the street behind the Embassy, but it relieved the crowding in the Consular Section and sped up NIV visa processing significantly.

I had a set of plans for what we were going to do in the Annex building, and I needed to discuss those plans with the Senior FSN at post, Mr. Lim. This distinguished gentleman was the Maintenance Coordinator for the Embassy, and he had an office on the ground floor of the Chancery just off the lobby area. I made an appointment to come down and discuss the plans with Mr. Lim, after which he was to supervise the renovations to the Annex building, with me checking on the work from time to time. I took the elevator down to his office and brought the plans with me.

Standing in the office were Mr. Lim, the principal Embassy electrician and the local contractor for the renovation. I came in, was introduced to the contractor, and looked around. There was no desk or table in the room large enough for the plans, so I spread them out on the floor and squatted down to explain what we were going to do. Mr. Lim and his personnel also squatted around the edges of the plan. I began to explain what we were about to do, with emphasis on the electrical wiring needed to support the intercom systems and some conduit runs that I wanted installed to neatly run tiny microphones and speakers through the ballistic wall above the windows.

While we were squatting around the plans, Mr. Lim's door opened and Ambassador Laney walked in. We all stood up, but he waved his hands to indicate that he did not mean to interrupt our work. He asked what we were doing and I explained the meeting. Interested, Ambassador Laney (who had been in the American Army during the Korean War, had served as

a missionary in Korea and spoke the language fluently) squatted down himself to look at the plans. The three of us resumed our places around the drawing and I brought the Ambassador to the point where we had stopped, then continued to explain the features we were going to install in the Annex. Ambassador Laney asked several excellent questions about egress from the facility, about heating and air-conditioning and lighting, all of which had been addressed in the plans. He asked questions of me in English, and of Mr. Lim and the contractor in excellent Korean.

Toward the end of my presentation, the door to Mr. Lim's office opened again, and the Embassy's Political Counselor peeked in. He was looking for the Ambassador. His eyes went very wide as he saw the five of us squatting around the drawing, and his eyebrows went way up. He shook his head quietly and gently closed the door.

190. THE BIG DRUM

Once the aqueous foam system was installed in Bogota, our office became the supply depot for a number of parts associated with the equipment. We were successfully able to argue that the mechanical parts in our inventory would better be stored in Bogota, where they would be more immediately at hand if something broke. Bogota had a lot of space available and saw merit in that argument. What they did not want to store were canisters of bulk tear gas. These arrived (unbidden, sometimes) in 50-gallon drums. And the drums leaked.

We had an Embassy warehouse in Panama in one of the buildings that used to belong to the Panama Canal Zone. We had a garage and shop downstairs, where we did light armoring of vehicles for the Defense Attache Offices up and down Latin America, and we had an upstairs vault area. There wasn't much in the vault, but it had thick concrete walls and a Class 6 door; it was considered a secure area, so we decided to keep the drums of tear gas there.

Once you closed the door to the vault, the air inside was not well ventilated. After we stored the canisters of TG in the vault, we tended to forget about them. When Bogota asked for more TG, however, we were reminded of the air circulation problem as soon as we opened the vault door. Those of you who have gone through military training will remember the gas chamber associated with your training on the use of a gas mask. Our vault would have been an ideal training area for that exercise.

To send things to Bogota, we had access to Howard AFB, a major aerodrome across the Bridge of the Americas from where the Embassy and our warehouse were located. Don Hoover had sent us a pickup truck for the ESC, and we would drive it to the warehouse, put a couple of 2X12's on the back of the truck as a ramp, roll a drum onto the truck and take it over to Howard. For the first year and a half of my tour, Howard would package the drum on a pallet for us and take care of the necessary paperwork.

Then the staff at Howard changed a little bit.

After one of Walter Sargent's aqueous foam drills in Bogota, we were asked to send another drum of tear gas to Columbia. We went through the above transport procedure, drove the drum over to our accustomed loading dock at Howard, and verbally consigned our shipment to Bogota. Then the pickup truck returned.

That afternoon, I received a call from the Safety Officer at Howard AFB. She wanted to know who was in charge of our facility in the Embassy. I explained that I was in charge. She said: "What's this big drum of poorly-labeled tear gas doing in my warehouse?" I explained what the drum was for and where it was going. She said: "Unh unh. Come and get it right now.

It isn't going anywhere: this shipment violates every safety regulation in the Air Force, and I am about to send some serious charges over to the Embassy Administration Section. This is WRONG!"

Feeling that my career in the State Department was now in jeopardy, I discussed my problem with our new Seabee Senior Chief Electrician, Gary Cadle. Gary said "This is a military matter. Let me go talk to the Safety Officer." Gary went home, put on his well-decorated white Navy uniform and headed for Howard.

It turned out that what the Safety Officer was most concerned about was the lack of paperwork accompanying our shipment and the complete lack of OSHA-mandated (or maybe Department of Transportation-mandated or FAA-mandated) hazardous cargo tags on the drum. Gary persuaded her to drop the charges and committed our entire office to attend some safety classes at Howard on how to properly prepare documentation for an Air Force shipment of a hazardous cargo. It was good training. We learned how much could go wrong with a loose drum of, say, hydrochloric acid on a C-141. (It turns out that a loose drum of tear gas was just about as bad.) The Safety Officer loaded us up with the requisite Air Force forms, with a box of hazardous material stickers, and with a stick-on hazardous cargo diamond that we could attach to the truck. We were back in business.

After a modest delay, Bogota received its drum of tear gas with all the proper documentation.

191. YOU SEEM WELL ADJUSTED

I went through countermeasures training in the spring of 1978. My class was composed of trainees from several government Agencies and a smattering of military personnel. Our class was small (I think there were nine of us) but we were all looking forward to the training.

At that time, all branches of the U.S. military were beginning to create secure conference facilities on military bases. This included the US Coast Guard, which had a small countermeasures program at that time: a total of four civilian personnel. They were so busy that not all of them had completed the requisite training, and were in a catch-up mode: two of the four officers were in my class. Of these two gentlemen, one (the head of their program, actually) seemed high-strung. He was excitable, angered easily and was frustrated if he did not grasp concepts quickly. He asked many questions about the equipment we worked with, anxiously writing down the nomenclature and sources of equipment his personnel did not have. He was openly concerned about how well he was doing in the course and if he was doing anything wrong. He seemed to be a bit out of his element, but perhaps we all were.

The other Coast Guard employee sat next to me and was something of a polar opposite of his OIC. He listened attentively, took good notes, asked a very few excellent questions, and laughed at himself on the few times he did something incorrectly. During a break one day, I said: "Lonnie, you seem well adjusted. Were you ever in the military?" Lonnie looked up and said: "Yes. I was in the Marine Corps." Hazarding a guess, I asked: "Did you spend any time in Vietnam?" and he answered: "Yes. I was in Kae Sanh in 1968."

Lonnie had been trained by the USMC to be a repairman of the small radar systems that were used to track the trajectories of incoming mortar and artillery rounds so that our batteries could fire back at those weapons. He had been a part of the Marine buildup at Kae Sanh near the Northern demilitarized zone for several months and was due for relief.

When the Tet Offensive started in February of 1968, Kae Sanh was surrounded by several Vietnamese Divisions. The Marines were severely outnumbered. The Marine Base came under very heavy artillery fire and there were a lot of casualties. There was an airstrip there, but it was carefully targeted by artillery. The only way into and out of Khe Sanh was by helicopter, and many helicopters took serious damage or were shot down during resupply and evacuation efforts.

Lonnie was interested in photography. He had two Nikon SLR cameras at Khe Sanh, and when he wasn't working on radar equipment or crouching in a sandbagged shelter, he was shooting lots of pictures on 35mm film. He was expecting relief, so he kept the exposed film and

his cameras wrapped with towels in a separate duffle bag next to his USMC gear in case his relief arrived. He knew the pictures would be valuable.

After two weeks of nearly continuous artillery bombardment and counter-fire, Lonnie was notified that his relief had been selected and would be arriving on the following day. On the appointed morning, Lonnie went over to the helicopter pad and took shelter. When his relief arrived, he helped the new man carry his bag to shelter, gave him a quick tour of the base between incoming barrages and scooted over to the Tactical Operations Center with his relief to introduce the new Marine to his Commanding Officer. He asked his replacement to wait outside while he checked to see if the Captain was free. As he walked back to get his relief, an incoming shell came in to where the new man was standing and killed him.

Lonnie called back to Personnel in the rear area and told them what had happened. His military skill was not that common in the Marine Corps, and no one was available to replace him. It took another week, with the bombardments becoming more intense and air strikes pounding the North Vietnamese forces all around them, before a second replacement turned up. Since at that time barrages were coming in hour by hour, Lonnie's CO told him that another Marine would do the meet and greet, and that Lonnie should get on the chopper for the return flight as soon as it came in.

Lonnie took his bags to the helicopter pad to wait for the new arrival. Just as his second replacement arrived, a terrific artillery barrage raked the camp. With his duffle bags next to a protective bunker, Lonnie dived for shelter, trying to keep an eye on the helicopter. An artillery round landed very near him, missing him but blowing both of his bags (including all of his clothing, both cameras and all of his pictures) into little bits.

The helicopter came in. Lonnie's replacement jumped out and Lonnie got in. Automatic small arms fire impacted the helicopter as it was taking off. At first, there seemed to be no damage done, but on the way back to their rear area, the engine started to smoke. The helicopter lost altitude rapidly and it landed, very roughly, in a garbage dump. A rescue team from the rear base rushed out to pick up the crew and passengers, then ferried them back to safety.

Lonnie said: "That was as bad as it got until we were over-run down South."

Back in the States, Lonnie was very relaxed. Nothing seemed to bother him at all.

192. SWING YOUR PARTNER

When I first arrived in Seoul, SEO Dick Nordine was the Officer in Charge of ESO Tokyo. Dick was a little older than most SEOs of my acquaintance, and had come to DS through an unusual route. An electronics engineer, he had actually owned his own company for a while, but had difficulty making a profit and meeting his payroll and tax obligations. After lengthy deliberations, he decided to sell his company, invest the profits and take a job with the Federal government. Tokyo was to be his last assignment.

Dick and his wife (Maureen, as I remember) were into square dancing. They were enthusiasts, with authentic costumes, many of which were sewn by his wife. On arriving in Japan, they looked into the availability of square dancing opportunities, and were surprised.

There are *a large number* of Japanese square dance clubs. Probably dating back to the American occupation of Japan, American troops engaged in square dancing and invited Japanese citizens to join them. Their Japanese invitees enjoyed the activity, and began to develop callers of their own and square dance organizations to go with those callers.

As time went by, some of those Japanese square dancers became very influential citizens. When Dick and his wife joined the festivities in Tokyo, their Japanese partners included senior military officers, elected officials and high-powered businessmen and women. Notably, Dick and his wife were often the only participants in these gatherings from the American Embassy, making their participation all the more important to their hosts. Dick and Maureen were *deluged* with invitations to participate in square dance tournaments around the country, coupled with offers of accommodations in distant Japanese cities when they were able to participate.

Dick and Maureen danced throughout their tour, saving their funds and preparing for retirement. A year before leaving Japan, they purchased a forty-foot sailboat in Florida and made arrangements for the boat to be chartered from time to time on their behalf. With the clear intent of retiring to their boat and occasionally taking on a charter to help with funding, they also purchased a small house in Florida to have a home on land to live in at times when the boat needed to come out of the water. I have not heard from Dick since he retired, but he was strongly focused on what he wanted to do after his government job, and I would not be surprised to hear that he and Maureen are currently anchored offshore of Aruba or Barbados.

193. CHANGI AIRPORT SINGAPORE

This might be my last airport story.

I have previously expressed admiration for the beautiful Schipol airport in Amsterdam. (See Story Number 70.) For years after my visit there, other airports were interesting, had unusual features or facilities, but just did not compare to the airport in Amsterdam. When I was assigned to Seoul, however, I headed South on my third trip out of Korea and was routed through Singapore on my way home.

During World War II, the Japanese attacked the British at Singapore and eventually overwhelmed the Colony in 1942. They set up a prison camp for some 50,000 Allied soldiers at Changi towards the Eastern end of Singapore: the camp housed primarily British, Dutch and Australian soldiers and sailors. The prison camp fed prisoners to labor camps supporting the Japanese war effort, such as those that constructed the Burma railway. Think “The Bridge on the River Kwai”.

After the war, Singapore gained its independence from Great Britain and became an independent Republic. Filled with a population that was part Malay, part Chinese and part Indonesian with a smattering of Europeans, the Republic became a major manufacturing city, a major port with a huge container ship processing facility, a banking center and a major transportation hub. It needed a new airport and opened one in 1981. This facility is now the second busiest airport in Asia and the sixth busiest in the world.

For a transiting passenger, Changi Airport is right up there with Schipol. It is bright and airy, with beautiful (living) plants grouped into interesting little groves throughout the facility. Its temperature is very well regulated for a hot, steamy setting. The airport features all the modern amenities: passenger coupling fingers that swing out to meet planes, moving sidewalks and elevators, digital arrival and departure boards, rest areas, lounges, restaurants, bars and hotels. It has unusual features as well: a public library in the airport, play rooms for kids, high end stores and clubs for major airlines. The décor has touches of all the ethnic cultures that make up Singapore, and there are artists here and there in the airport creating new works.

On my first trip through Changi, I noticed a number of Chinese paintings set up on easels and tables in one area of the airport. On close inspection, these lovely paintings were made of fired tiles. A beautiful young woman in a Chinese dress was painting designs on unfired porcelain completely by hand, creating traditional Chinese scenes of birds on flowered branches and scenes from the Pearl River area in Guilin in exquisite detail. She was not firing any of her work in the airport, but fired ceramics with her designs were available for sale at modest prices.

I bought a single tile about a foot long and eight inches wide, fired and framed in teak with a Chinese brass hanger. It showed birds on a delicate branch of a cherry tree.

When I returned home, we hung the tile painting in one of our bathrooms in Seoul. Despite years of exposure to moisture from showers, the ceramic tile looks the same as it did on the day I bought it.

194. THE PIMP AND TART PARTY

I don't know how many U.S. Government retirements Terry Ruddick has earned: five, maybe. He's been around a long time. He was in the Navy: he served in Saigon at least a year before my first tour in Vietnam. After I joined the State Department, I ran into Terry periodically, from early encounters at meeting centers and Christmas parties, to seeing "the Rat" scribbled on the bottom of embassy telephones in exotic places, to the time he showed up at my office in Panama as a "new" SEO. It is hard to describe Terry properly: a beginning might be that he has enthusiasm for everything, and that he is very much a people person. If you, readers, think I have a good memory, I believe Terry remembers the names of everyone he has ever met and maybe the names of the friends they were with at the time he met them.

Terry knew how to work the Foreign Service system. He kept in touch with his friends. When he was assigned to a new post, he would try to find housing that had an extra bedroom or two. Thereafter, a continuous flow of people he had served with on other assignments or whom he knew from trips or parties or maybe Texas would mysteriously show up at the Marine House with him as his guests for a week or two. Often, these guests were good-looking women. When he arrived at post, he would have cash in hand and would buy a nice car for a song from a departing Diplomat who needed to sell. He had wheels, usually nice wheels, the first week he was at post. He was willing to take on any job, travel anywhere, and he met new people who became his friends wherever he went.

Perhaps a month after his arrival in Panama, Terry announced to me that he was going to throw a "Pimp and Tart Party" on the roof of his apartment building, with the Marine Detachment as co-hosts. I was *appalled*: what would our staid, conservative diplomats think about such a lewd activity? How would a salacious brawl on a rooftop reflect on the ESC? Who would even come to a party like that? It *was* traditional in Panama to hold rooftop parties: they went on well into the wee hours of the morning, with traditional salsa music blaring from big speakers and people dancing and drinking until they had to go home. But a Pimp and Tart Party? I was really concerned.

My wife was *delighted* with the idea and said we would *go*, of course. So did our ESC secretary, Shirley Corn. I was evidently going to the affair.

The day of the party approached. Terry laid in a good stock of beverages, arranged for food, lined up some music and had the roof cleaned up. His apartment was close to ours, so Gail and I arrived early, to see bars being set up and food tables being prepared. The music started and Terry, in an expansive frame of mind, began greeting his guests. Among the very first to arrive were the Deputy Chief of Mission and his wife in full costume.

Guests from all over the Embassy poured in. So did some military personnel. Many were in outlandish costumes or were wearing drag. Fancy hairdos, boas, wigs, beauty spots, heavy makeup and gaudy jewelry appeared everywhere. The music got louder, the bars got busier, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Two of our Seabees who were friends with Terry, however, were missing. So were some of the Marines.

About an hour into the festivities, there was a lull in the music and Terry announced that a special floor show had been arranged for his guests. The roof door was closed, but there was a knock at the door and Terry went over to open it. Our two Seabees, both weightlifters, bounced through the door dressed as shirtless Chippendale Dancers with black bow ties, to the wild appreciation of the crowd. Similarly attired Marines also danced in. Led by the DCM's wife, female guests crowded around the Seabees and Marines, asking for dances. Money charged for those dances, stuffed into skimpy bathing suits, helped to fund the annual Marine Ball. The music fired up again and, in Panamanian tradition, the party spun deeply into the night, with everyone enjoying themselves.

195. GURLIE STREET IN MONROVIA

In 1979, I made an inspection trip to Monrovia, Liberia. Coming in to the Embassy was an event by itself (see story number 141). Where most of the posts we supported were in French-speaking countries, Liberia had been founded by freed slaves from the United States, and English was spoken there.

Our Embassy was located on a sprawling 13-acre compound perched on a cliff above the Atlantic Ocean. There were a large number of buildings on the compound, all strung together by electrical wiring and telephone wiring. Because the cliff was formed of basalt, with almost no soil on top of it, all of this cabling was run above ground on poles, and it had all been there a while. Every outdoor telephone connection box was characterized by rust, dirt, weeds, spiders, lizards, nasty wiring with sun-faded colors and the occasional 110 VAC surprise voltage. The name of the area on maps, which I believe I mentioned in a prior story, was “Mamba Point”.

In those more innocent times, the main gate to our Embassy in Monrovia was secured by a vehicle-stopping drop arm consisting of a long steel pipe counter-balanced by two car-sized engine blocks welded together and painted silver.

In the Ambassador’s office, there was a large (12”) speaker on the wall connected to the huge Voice of America facility several miles from the Embassy compound. There was a channel switch below the speaker. If the Ambassador was so inclined, he could listen to the VOA programming being broadcast to many different parts of Africa in a variety of local languages as well as in English. I was concerned that a speaker in the Ambassador’s office was connected to outside wiring that stretched out of Embassy control for several miles. In the OFF position, however, the speaker was not connected to anything.

Studying the ether, I was surprised to see the strangest radio signal I have ever encountered. The visual display on my spectrum analyzer showed a gigantic low-frequency signal with strange-looking sidebands on both sides of the main carrier: it looked like a giant butterfly on the VDU. This turned out to be the output of the Omega Navigation System. There were three of the Omega system antennas around the world (in those years before GPS) and the Monrovia antenna was (and is) the tallest structure in Africa.

After completing my work in the Embassy, I went over to the VOA compound to change the combination on a safe. This compound was much larger than the Mamba Point facility, and featured Curtain Wall antennas, which I invite you to Google if you have never seen one. These massive antennas were as large as several roadside billboards nailed together and supported by

guy wires: they were tall enough that there was actually a golf course that ran underneath them. The Monrovia antennas broadcast as far South as Capetown.

On the Saturday after my arrival, I went into beautiful downtown Monrovia. Wandering through a series of poorly-maintained streets and run-down buildings covered with mildew, I stumbled onto Gurlie Street.

In Africa in the late 1970's, women and men alike wore African-styled shirts and dresses. The Daikishi shirt and pullover dresses with a similar style were lightweight, practical and popular. These clothes were generally made from local fabrics, either embroidered fabrics or tie-dyed cotton fabrics. Most of the embroidered work came from Liberia.

Gurlie Street was where the embroidery happened. As far as I could see along the curved road, the street consisted of shop after shop of sewing machines. Each shop I passed by might have had a dozen sewing machines in it, running constantly; where the shop interiors were poorly ventilated, some embroiderers moved their machines out onto the sidewalk. As workers finished one garment, they placed it on a pile or on a hangar and picked up another shirt or dress. Together, the accumulated sound of dozens and dozens of sewing machines sounded like a huge swarm of bees all the way up and down the street.

Outside clothing racks and the occasional shop window displayed completed garments. Some of the stores featured shelves with shirts arrayed in standard sizes. Other shops hung their products on hangars and buyers would hold a dress or a shirt up to their chest to gauge its size. Shopping was pleasant, wandering the street in bright tropical African sunlight with vendors calling you over to show you what they were selling.

The embroidery did not stop at shirts and dresses. There were jackets with motorcycle club backs, baseball hats for every NFL, MLB and NBA team I could think of, sweatshirts with college logos and dress shirts with monograms. If you were a Singer sewing machine vendor, Monrovia would have been the place to be.

196. SHALOM!

I was sitting at my desk in Operations in 1983 when I received a call from Travis AFB in California. The caller was an Air Force Ordnance Officer, a woman, calling me from an ammo bunker at the Air Force Base. She wanted to know if I was the Technical Security person for the State Department. I said that I would try to help her.

The Officer, a Captain, said that she had a large spool of detonator cord marked with tags in Hebrew in a box addressed to Technical Security at the Department of State. The box had come in on a C-141 from the Philippines. There was nothing on the box to suggest that it contained a serious explosive. She wanted to know how it got there and what I was going to do about it. I asked for her number and said that I would call her back.

I then called a contact at DIA and asked for assistance. He said he would call me back. Finally, I called the Air Force Officer and asked her to keep the box in her ammo bunker until someone from the Department of Defense got in touch with her.

A week later, DIA called me. They had made some enquiries, and the results were interesting.

A USAF weapons crew had been invited to watch a military exercise in Israel. One of the crew members (a TSGT) observed the use of a new type of detonator cord developed in Israel and was impressed. He thought the U.S. Government would be interested in the material. At the end of the exercise, he quietly picked up a spool of the explosive material from a pallet of similar spools and slipped it under the seat of their vehicle.

The weapons crew, on a C-130 aircraft, was scheduled to leave Israel and fly to Pakistan that day. The TSGT put the detonator cord spool in a cardboard box and sealed it. He then (for some unknown reason) addressed the box to Technical Security at the State Department. In Pakistan, they met a crew from a second C-130 headed for Singapore. The box was transferred to that crew, with instructions to send it back to the States. It was uncertain if the contents of the box were disclosed to the new crew.

On reaching Singapore, the second C-130 crew passed the box to a third C-130 crew headed for Clark AFB in the Philippines. At Clark, the box was transferred to a C-141 crew, who took it back to Travis AFB. The box was opened by the Ordnance Officer at Travis. Basically, a substantial explosive charge addressed to us had been hand-carried half of the way around the world in a cardboard box on military aircraft.

DIA offered to take custody of the box. I accepted their kind offer.

197. A SPECIAL DOOR FOR ATHENS

There are good places to work, and there are bad places to work.
And then, there are doorways.

In the summer of 2001, Steve Klein was the OIC of the ESC in Athens and needed to take Home Leave. John Holland asked me, a WAE employee at the time, if I would like to go out to Athens and replace Steve for about seven weeks. I was delighted with the offer. I had always wanted to see Istanbul, one of Steve's constituent posts, and Steve informed me that we were about to close our old, downtown Consulate in Istanbul and open a new one on a mountain outside of town. He indicated that we might go in and close out the old Consulate together on his return. I accepted the assignment on that basis and headed for the Mediterranean.

Our ESC Office Manager at that time was a former Marine Security Guard named Patrick, who has since become an RSO. Patrick seemed to be the middleman for everything, and had the office running like a fancy sewing machine. He could communicate with teams on the road in other countries by cell phone and get them needed tools, supplies and parts within a day or two without needing to use a computer at all, but he was an ace on computer usage when it was needed. I focused on meeting and spending time with each member of the ESC, learning about new equipment, helping out where I could and encouraging Patrick to apply for an RSO job.

In the lobby of our Embassy in Athens, there was a door to the rear of the Lobby that connected the secure area of the Consular section to the rest of the Embassy. This was an Insulgard ballistic door, with an EL-33 push bar on the Consular side and a simple winged grip on the Embassy side. Consular officers seeking entry to their work area were buzzed in by the Marine, who could not see that door very well; they often waited in a line for someone to notice them. The Consular Section asked us to mount a Unican push-button lock on the Embassy side of the door to facilitate entry by authorized personnel. I assigned a Seabee builder to the job and offered to work with him.

This little project required some modifications to the ballistic door to mount the Unican. Using a hole saw, we gingerly cut two holes into the Embassy side of the expensive door. We had to fuss a bit with a mounting system for the Unican, but we were able to slip flat washers, lock washers and nuts over machine screws on the inside of the door to hold the lock securely in place. Once it was firmly on the door, we coupled the Unican tang to the EL-33 and put the covers on.

The first time we tried the Unican, the lock was stiff but it opened. The second time, we heard something snap inside the lock. The door would not open, so we took the locks apart

again. The tang provided with the Unican had snapped in half. We realized that there was a lot of torque in play between the two locks, and went back to the Seabee shop to make a stronger tang. We sacrificed a cheap Philips screwdriver, cut its shaft to the right length and filed it down to fit between the two locks.

We returned to the door, now secured only by its magnetic lock, asked the Marine to admit the small line of Consular employees waiting outside the door, and got back to work.

It will surprise none of you if I say that a busy doorway in a big Embassy is not an ideal place in which to work. Despite our best efforts, impatient people wanted to go in and out of the door while we were trying to fix it. We attempted to keep parts and tools out of people's way, but employees swept through them without a thought. Two little tapered-head screws actually walked away from us in the crepe soles of a young Consul: I had to hunt him down. We finally got the locks back together with the covers back on and the combination worked. We congratulated ourselves, packed up the tools, gave the Consular staff and the Marines the Unican combination and went back to the ESC.

Late that afternoon, Post One called to say that the lock was not working any more. Getting good at the disassembly/reassembly process by now, we opened up the locks again and found that our new tang looked a little like a corkscrew.

We went back to the Seabee shop. We poked through the tool drawers and I found a much more expensive screwdriver to sacrifice, one with a square cross-section shaft made of Chrome-Vanadium steel. I authorized the Seabee to cannibalize the screwdriver and make a new shaft. It took a lot longer to cut this one, and we used a grinder to take the shaft down to roughly the thickness we needed at either end. We filed for quite a while until the new tang fit perfectly, then reassembled the two locks and tried it out. (We also dusted the moving parts in the two locks with a little graphite powder.)

The new tang held up. Employees could exit the Consulate using the panic bar, enter the Consulate using the Unican, and the Marine could open the door with the EL-33 solenoid *and* secure the door with the mag lock. The dual lock combo was working well when I left post five weeks after the installation, and I'll bet it's still working.

198. FIRE WALKING

I made my first trip to Tokyo in 1990. Mike Jacobs was the Officer-in-Charge of the ESO there, and I came in to set up his Work Requirements Statement, meet people at post and learn about his territory. I set up my trip so that I had four working days at post, a weekend in the city and a return to Korea on the following Monday.

On my first day in Tokyo, I slipped into the CLO office and asked if there were any interesting events going on in the city that weekend. She laughed. There was always *a lot* going on in Tokyo, from new movies to classical music concerts to Noh Theater. What would I like to see? I wanted to absorb a little Japanese culture.

The CLO explained that there was a Fire Walking exhibition going on that Saturday just outside of Tokyo on a plain beneath a famous Buddhist monastery. I could reach the event by subway. That sounded like an event I might like, so I wrote down the directions and got a map of the subway system from my hotel at the end of the day.

On Saturday, I took a subway from the heart of Tokyo to a station at the outer edge of the city. From the train platform, I could look down into a little valley with a flat floor. In the middle of the valley, there was a large gathering of people clustered around a layered pile of wood about thirty feet long and covered with a green tarp. There were little triangular flags around the wood pile that were tied to strings; these in turn were tied between stakes in the ground to keep people away from what was to be the fire pit. I headed down into the valley on a little trail to join the crowd.

After perhaps an hour of standing among all the other people who had come to watch the event, a procession of perhaps twenty Buddhist monks came walking down a road towards the wood pile. Their point of origin seemed to be a nearby hill with a large Japanese building on it, which I took to be the monastery. The monks, chanting, walked through the crowd, walked around the wood pile three times and then formed a line at the West side of the pile. An elderly monk with a bull horn began to address the crowd in Japanese. He talked for quite a while. It became apparent to me at this point that if they lighted the pile right that moment, it would take several hours before the wood burned down into coals for the fire walk. Also, it had started to sprinkle. I decided to walk up the road and take some pictures of the monastery.

It was the eighth of April, and the festival generating the fire walk was Buddha's Birthday. I walked up a pretty steep road that wound back and forth as it climbed the hill. The lowest three switchbacks were heavily wooded and I could not see much of the countryside as I climbed. As I reached the fourth switchback, however, I saw a stone statue of a Buddhist monk to the side of the road. It was a bust: an upper torso of a man and his head. The statue was

wearing a bright red paper hat. Looking closely at the statue, I guessed that I was looking at a representation of an early Chief Monk who had served the Monastery all his life and then passed away.

As I looked up the road to the Monastery, I could see more statues, similar in composition, all wearing red paper hats. There were perhaps forty of these statues, running all the way up the road to the door of the Monastery. In many ways, it looked like an array of beret-covered Catholic Cardinals set along the side of the road. The drizzling rain, unfortunately, was working against the paper hats, which had begun to droop and to drip red dye down the face of many of the statues. The dripping dye looked a lot like blood, and the display was more gruesome than the Buddha would probably have liked.

I reached the front door of the Monastery and found it closed. Small wonder, all the monks were down walking over the coals. Off to the side of the building were several traditional Japanese wooden buildings with tile roofs, a mess hall, a dormitory and an immaculate rock, sand and pine garden for reflection. I did notice a viewing area off to the side of the road with a great view of the farmlands and small factories around Tokyo.

To the side of this viewing area was a sizeable pile of stacked Japanese bottles wrapped in white paper and covered with formal Japanese calligraphy. Each bottle could have held about twenty gallons of liquid. The bottles were protected by a gazebo-like oriental roof. I asked about those bottles when I got back to my hotel and was informed that they contained Saki (rice wine) for the monks.

I should have stayed a little longer.

199. HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

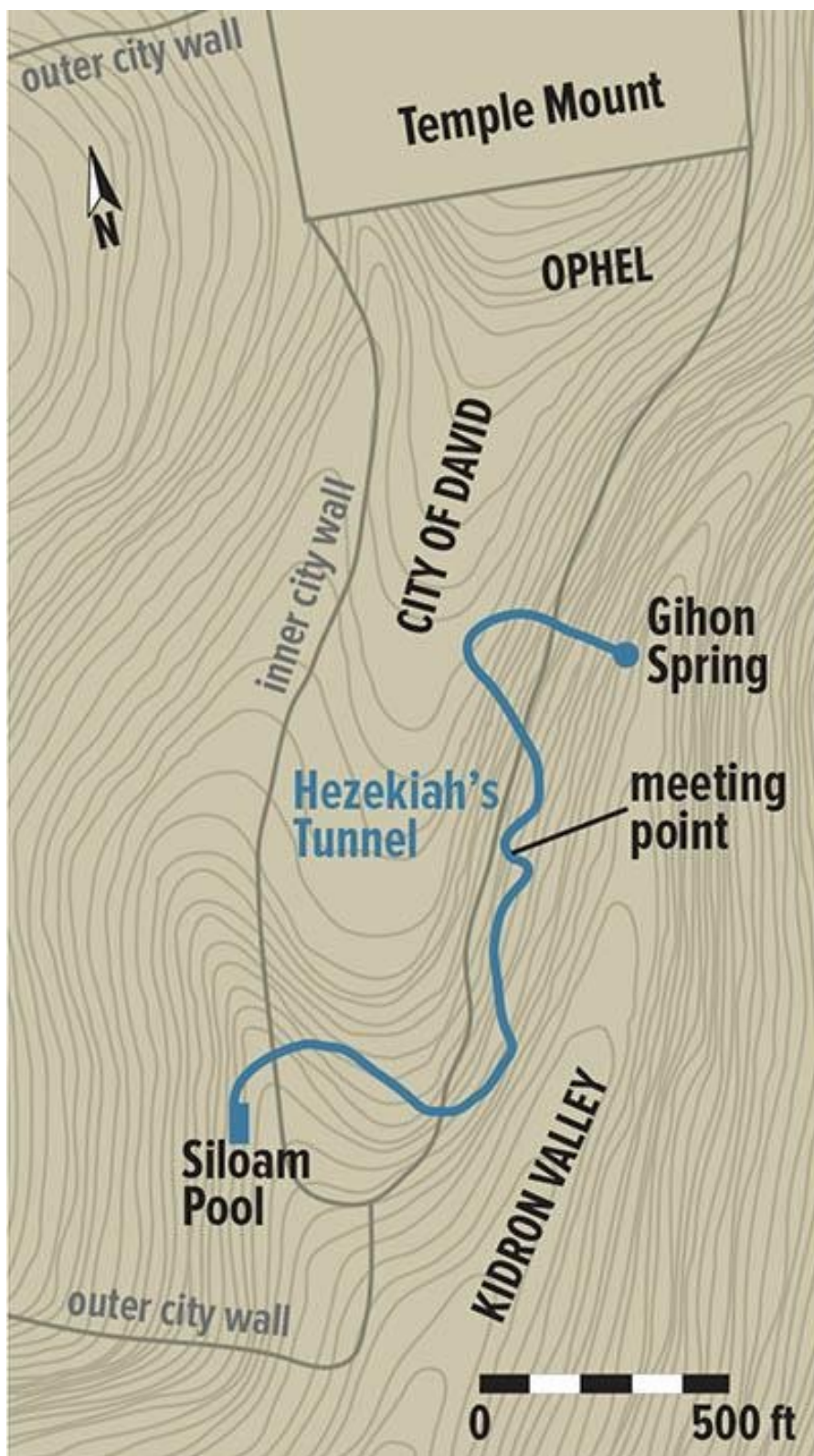
Some of you know that I was a Foreign Service dependent before I joined the State Department as an employee. In my youth, we had overseas tours in Pakistan, Poland, India, Lebanon and Jordan. Foreign Service kids (as those of you with children understand) have many unusual opportunities to see the world and to get into interesting situations, and I am no exception. In these last two years of stories, I thought I would throw in some of my early experiences, which often reflect a simpler and friendlier world.

My mother was a Golden Eagle Girl Scout, the first in her town of Bloomington, Indiana, and she paid her way through college by summer work as a counselor at Girl Scout camps in Wisconsin. She was interested in many things in nature, and she passed some of her knowledge on to my brother and sisters and me. After my father joined the Foreign Service, she became interested in Archeology, especially during our tours in the Middle East.

I went back to college in Pennsylvania after graduating from high school in Beirut. My family moved to Jerusalem in 1964, before the Six Day War. At that time we had two Consulates in Jerusalem, one on the Israeli side and one on the Jordanian side. My dad was the American Consul on the Arab side. In Jerusalem, we lived in an old Arab villa made of chipped limestone blocks with a domed roof, perched on the side of a large hill overlooking the Damascus Gate to the Old City.

Our next-door neighbors in Jerusalem were the British Consul-General and his wife and daughter. Our neighbor's wife was a strong supporter of the British Museum in Jerusalem and often took my mother there to look at new finds from digs all around Jerusalem. They had some examples of Roman Glass in containers from which the air had been evacuated. Buried in the soil for a couple thousand years, Roman Glass is coated with metallic oxides that glisten in many colors when first extracted from the ground. These artifacts lose that radiance quickly when exposed to the air. The colors in these artifacts are preserved if they are quickly placed in air-free protective containers as soon as they are unearthed.

In the 1960's, if you were a government employee overseas and sent a student back to college, that dependent was entitled to a single trip out to your overseas post and back between the time the student left home and the time they graduated. I elected to travel to Jerusalem in the summer of 1965. My mother wanted to have some interesting things lined up for me to do during my visit, and conferred with our neighbor, who suggested a trip through Hezekiah's Tunnel.



(Picture borrowed from the Biblical Archeological Society)

In the 8th century BC, according to 2 Kings 20:20 in the Hebrew Bible, the City of Jerusalem was expecting a siege from the Assyrians. Jerusalem was a walled city at that time, and a principal water supply that invaders might use was located just outside the walls. King Hezekiah, reigning at the time, decided to block the source of that water supply and dig a tunnel from the spring's location to the Pool of Siloam inside the city walls, denying the Assyrians the use of a convenient water source while providing the city with additional water.

Digging a tunnel nearly six football fields in length underground by hand through hardened limestone rock was a serious challenge. Moreover, the floor of the tunnel had to slope from the spring towards the pool in order for water to flow into Jerusalem of its own accord.

There was an inscription inside the tunnel which indicated that two teams were used to dig the tunnel, working toward each other from the two intended ends of the waterway. The means of navigation used to keep the tunnel true is not certain, but might have depended on teams of personnel tapping on the rock above the diggers with hammers. (The original inscription now sits in a museum in Istanbul.)

That summer, there was a British Archeologist in Jerusalem with his family who was studying the tunnel. My mother talked to him about my impending arrival, and he volunteered his 14-year old daughter (let's call her Phoebe) to guide me, my brother and my two oldest sisters through the waterway.

About three days after my arrival in Jerusalem, we met Phoebe at the Virgin Spring, as the water source is called these days. We were wearing the prescribed outfits: jeans, sneakers, tee shirts and were carrying flashlights. Phoebe led us down a little ramp, around a corner and up to a roughly rectangular opening partially filled with water about seven feet in height. She stepped into the water, which was about calf-deep at that point, turned on her flashlight and walked into the tunnel. We followed, finding the bottom of the tunnel to be nearly smooth and the walls to be a little rough.

The tunnel was largely dug by candle light. All along our journey, there were little shelves along the walls that were apparently intended to hold candles as men labored with the rock. Here and there the tunnel would widen a bit, but it seldom became narrower than the entrance. It curved gradually on the inside, as the map above might suggest. It did get deeper, perhaps waist-deep, especially in the middle where the two teams met. The alignment of the two shafts was not perfect, and there was sort of a cave in the middle where the two teams apparently heard each other digging and dug towards each other. It was apparent that lots of candle ledges were dug in the big cavity, and my guess was that they had a big party after joining the two tunnels and humping out all of the broken rock.

Throughout our hike, the flow of water was clear and steady. There were no algae in sight in the tunnel, and it was impressive that a channel like that could hold up for ten centuries.

We emerged at the Pool of Siloam, a lightly terraced area, from behind a hidden corner in the wall around the pool. Dripping wet from the waist down, we surprised a small group of German tourists who were taking pictures of the facility, and we met our parents for a ride back home.

200. BUYING CARPETS IN KABUL

Growing up, my family lived with hardwood floors covered with carpets from the Middle East and Southwest Asia. My parents favored Bukhara “Elephant Footprints” rugs, but they had a wide variety of other styles, most of which were maroon and white with other colors as accents.

In 2008, our SEO in Kabul suddenly resigned. We needed to fill that slot immediately and DS/ST Operations began looking for a TDY fill-in SEO. I was a WAE employee at the time. I had not previously visited Kabul, so I offered to go.

On the plane between Dubai and Kabul, I met a young USAID employee who was in charge of polio eradication in Afghanistan. She was well educated and was focused on her job; she explained to me the problems of inoculating people in a country that was suspicious of Western medical treatments, especially vaccines.

Visiting an Embassy in an actual war zone was interesting. I was moved into a special waiting area in the airport reserved for diplomats and stayed there until a car from the Embassy arrived to pick me up. In the white Embassy Suburban were the driver and two Afghani contract guards with M-16s. I was given a helmet to put on and a flak vest. My fellow passengers on the ride did not have the same protection. I wondered, all the way to the Embassy, who was likely to be shot first if the car was stopped. I did not like the answer that came to me.

Outside the Embassy, my car and a mini-bus that arrived at the same time were unloaded and we were all asked to open our suitcases. We did so and sat back to wait. After about 15 minutes an American contract guard with a dog walked out of the compound in our direction and the dog sniffed each suitcase for explosives. Finding none, we were allowed to repack and enter the Embassy. The STS of the ESO Office met me and helped me process in to the Embassy. I was badged and given combinations to a number of areas.

Our mission to Kabul was in two large buildings situated next to each other, designated as “Our Old Embassy” and “Our New Embassy”. The ESO had offices in each building.

The Embassy compound was connected to the USAID compound across the street. A deeply-situated concrete tunnel connected the two properties. One could access the tunnel either through two sets of three-storey concrete stairways, one on each side of the road, or via a vehicle ramp that corkscrewed down from the surface, crossed under the road and wound back up to ground level on the other side. The tunnel smoothed interaction between the Embassy and

USAID and could serve as a shelter if needed. I drove through this tunnel twice in a little all-terrain vehicle: it was a lot like driving a car in a video game.

In Kabul, Embassy employees not assigned to post (of which there were many) were housed in converted shipping containers. These trailers were arrayed in long lines, with entry doors on each trailer placed a little off the center of a side wall. Each container was converted to two two-person TDY quarters. They each contained a heater, a shower, a couple of bunk beds, a couple of desks, two closets and a refrigerator. Both desks were equipped with Internet cables. The containers were somewhat insulated, but the heaters were very welcome in February. The tops of each container were piled with three rows of sandbags which were covered with tarps. Electricity and Internet cabling ran in messy bundles from one container to another, reminding me of similar wiring in Vietnam during the war. Outside of the trailers, there was a concrete sidewalk that guided residents back to the main walkways approaching the two Embassy buildings and the housing area for assigned personnel. It snowed periodically while I was there.

There were dining areas on each side of the road. I initially ate in the Embassy dining room. This facility was full of hired security personnel from Blackwater who were always wearing sidearms. There were Marines, our Seabee and a lot of military personnel. Meals were reasonable but ordinary: salads, hamburgers, a steam table with a couple of entrees and a dessert table. Most of the people I encountered there were focused on convoys heading out to different cities and towns, and on whether those convoys had adequate ground and air cover.

A couple of days later, I went over to USAID to eat. I found this dining room to be filled with much more interesting personnel. The USAID Director chowed down with his staff, visiting table after table to ask about progress, program setbacks, encountered political problems and new ideas. He encouraged all of the personnel he spoke to. I met another woman in this dining room who was responsible for building new highways in Afghanistan. She explained the reluctance of Afghani men to deal with a woman, even if doing so would bring trade and travel opportunities to their village.

In the ESO, much of our work for the first week of my visit was focused on getting the two-compound Selectone system working properly. There were more than thirty of the large outdoor speaker-horns involved, with several multi-zone control units in the Marine Booth providing signals to a scattered array of poorly-documented amplifiers. Selectone speakers were often hard to understand even inside a building, and the sound from the outdoor horns echoed around the dozens of shipping containers on either side of the road.

Most weekends, the U.S. military in Kabul set up an Afghani market in an empty parking lot outside of one of the in-town Army Base areas. Vendors were licensed, were carefully screened by MP's and explosives-detecting canines when they arrived and were paid in Afghani money. Most vendors set up what I would call church tables to hold their products; some erected

tents or built shelving with cinder blocks and boards. Troops could walk through an MP-controlled gate and into the souk area without leaving post, but vendors were not allowed through that gate.

Surprisingly, there was a lot to see in the little souk. There were hand-made and inlaid Afghani rifles with weird stocks and strange patterns in mother-of-pearl. There were Nazi helmets, old British rifles and pith helmets and a variety of other guns, all rusty. There were all sorts of jewelry on display, especially beautiful dark blue Lapis Lazuli which the Egyptian pharaohs used to import from Afghanistan; possibly from the same Sar-i-Sang mine still worked Northeast of Kabul. There was carved Onyx and Alabaster, inlaid wooden boxes, pirated music CDs and video DVDs, sandal vendors and four or five carpet vendors.

Afghan sales personnel sat on rugs or on low stools sipping sweetened tea. There was an APO just within the MP-controlled gate on the actual base which my Embassy credentials allowed me to use. I decided to buy each of my children a carpet and mail the rugs back to the States through the APO.

After looking at several vendors, I found a classic Afghani Carpet Shop under an outdoor tent. A bearded old man ran the shop, with two of his sons as helpers. There were piles and piles of rugs on the ground, covered with heavy plastic sheets. In the piles (heavily mixed) were Turkoman carpets, Baluchi carpets, Bokhara rugs, woven camel bags and carpets from Uzbekistan and Iran. After flipping through several piles, I liked a design from Mazar-i-Sharif that was a five-color carpet, introduced to me as an Afghan wedding rug. I looked at about twenty other carpets, negotiated a good price for the rug I wanted, went to the APO, boxed it up and mailed it home.

The next weekend I bought jewelry, mostly lapis necklaces but including a ruby bracelet, a turquoise bracelet, carnelian agate necklaces and some Afghani silver pendants. The lapis was strung on silk but was not knotted: if the string broke, there would be beads all over the place. Little coin-silver beads were strung between the lapis beads. To contain these purchases, I bought about 15 Afghani kohl purses, used by women to carry makeup for their eyes: without some packaging, the kohl makeup would smear clothing. The little purses were generally rectangular with straps, and were beautifully embroidered with sequins, metallic thread and beads to catch the light: they looked something like American Indian beadwork. These exquisite bags were about two dollars each.

There was no souk on my third weekend at post. On the fourth weekend, I went back to the same vendor and bought a second wedding carpet, similar to the first one but with lighter bird decorations in chains running down the long axis of the carpet. Another visit to the APO and I was through with carpet shopping.

201. A GUEST FOR DINNER

In 1975, when I joined the Department, my first trip was to Copenhagen and Frankfurt. My host in Frankfurt was Casper Pelczynski, whom I came to know fairly well. Casper entertained both me and Don Fisher splendidly in Frankfurt, and I resolved to ask him over for dinner if he ever came back to the States.

In 1976, Casper returned to Washington for several days of consultation, and I decided to have him over for a meal. I wanted my wife to meet him as well, so we planned a Friday evening dinner. Gail was working in the Congressional Relations office of the General Services Administration at that time and we owned two cars, a 1973 Camaro and my older Karman Ghia. I called Casper over one of the leased lines to Europe to invite him to dinner in advance of his trip, and he accepted my invitation. I mentioned my wife; he thought I was too young to be married, but said he might believe it if he met her.

In the week before Casper came back, my wife received a summons to Jury Duty in Montgomery County. Appearing in the Courthouse on a Tuesday, she was selected for a jury on her second day in court. Jurors were released for the day about 3:30 in the afternoon, and she came home to prepare our dinner in advance for Friday. Gail had a nice dinner planned, and she put every dish together, covered it in Saran Wrap and put the dishes in the refrigerator with sticky notes on top to guide me as to how long each dish should remain in the oven at a specific temperature and which dish should be prepared first, etc. She thought that there would be plenty of time for her to do the cooking when she came home on Friday, but she prepared against the possibility she might be late.

Just after noon on Friday, I received a call from Gail. Final arguments for her trial had not yet been presented and the trial was running late. She wanted me to bring Casper home and start cooking dinner at 4:30.

Casper and I left the Department in my Karman Ghia and headed toward Bethesda. My little sports car had started to rust around the windshield wipers, and each time I braked going

uphill Casper received about a cup of water on his right shoe. I drove up my then-usual route through Rock Creek Park, giving my guest an unusual perspective on Washington, and arrived home. I showed Casper around, found him a beverage, and explained that Gail expected to get home a little later than planned. We talked about overseas assignments, especially Abidjan where he had previously served. There were some empty spaces that our conversation did not fill. Casper again stated that I was too young to be married; he thought it likely that I wasn't really married at all.

The phone rang again at 4:30. Gail's jury had been *sequestered* for the night, and she wasn't coming home at all. I explained this to Casper, whose ideas on my marriage status now seemed confirmed. Following Gail's instructions, I put dish after dish in the oven, brought the food out at the right times, set the table and served dinner. After dinner, the two of us cleaned up. Casper expressed interest in attending my wedding when I actually did get married, and I drove him back to his hotel. He did not meet Gail until we returned from Abidjan five years later.

202. PROPER PARENTING

When we arrived in Panama, our children were aged six and four. We slipped our daughter into one of the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DODDS) for first grade and eventually put our son into a day care program.

In the early fall of that first year, my son had an invitation to a Saturday morning birthday party and my wife was going to take him to the event. My daughter was home with me and felt left out. I suggested that we go see a movie on one of the military bases: there were several theaters from which to choose. I looked for a comedy that was “G” rated, found one at a nearby Army base, and took Jeana to the show: her first military movie theater experience, at the age of six.

I bought tickets. We walked into the theater, and I bought popcorn and cokes as well as a small box of candy, which I let my daughter select. We entered the theater with our purchases, and I let my daughter choose our seats. It being a military theater, we stood for the national anthem, then sat down and watched previews until the main feature came on. This was a Saturday matinee, and the theater was filled with military families, including lots of children.

Shortly into the very benign movie, two actors got into a fist fight on the screen. (I know none of you has ever seen this on film before.) After the actors traded punches for a moment or two, they backed away from each other. The theater was rather quiet at that moment, and my daughter’s agitated voice carried from wall to wall:

“Daddy! Why are they FIGHTING?”

The eyes of every mother in the theater turned toward me in disapproval and anger. I felt like crawling under my seat, but knew that doing so would not resolve the problem. I decided immediately that “G” rating or not, this particular movie might not be appropriate for my six-year old daughter, and I slipped her out of the theater as quickly as I could. I explained to her that the men on the screen were *actors* and they weren’t really fighting. We went to an on-base snack bar and had an ice cream cone as an alternate outing.

203. DINNER AT THE BRUECKENKELLER

In 1982, there was an OIC Conference held in Frankfurt. In setting up the conference, ESC Frankfurt announced that wives would be welcome along with their husbands, if the round-trip costs of flying the spouse to Europe would be absorbed by the employee. Our children were old enough at that time to stay with my parents in Bethesda for the duration of the Conference, so Gail and I decided to go together.

As with most such conferences, there was a welcoming dinner thrown by our host (Lou Grob) and the ESC Staff. The following evening, we had an evening to ourselves, and Gail and I went over to Sachsenhausen for dinner (See Story Number 111, "Dinner in Sachsenhausen"). There was a communal dinner outside of Frankfurt in an old castle on the third night.

On our last night in town, we wanted to try a good restaurant, and asked the Grobs for recommendations. Lou suggested that we try the Brueckenkeller, so we made reservations there.

We took a taxi down toward the Main River. The restaurant was housed in an old wine cellar right next to the river. The front of the building was a grey stucco with exposed wooden beams, like many older German buildings, but the entrance to the restaurant was through wide doors that might once have admitted horse or ox-carts carrying casks of wine. Inside the doors, everything sparkled. The tables were set with white linen tablecloths, gleaming silverware, spotless glasses and smartly folded napkins. There were fresh flowers on every table, surrounding low candles that flickered gently as the doors opened and shut. We checked in at the desk and were guided to our table by a polite young man.

The Brueckenkeller had at one time been a commercial wine cellar, and the restaurant was divided among several dining levels. Each level seemed to be a landing on the broad wine cellar stairway. Tables were arrayed on each landing directly in front of enormous wooden wine casks stretching almost to the ceiling. There were about eight tables on each landing; we were on the second deck going down.

Shortly after we were seated, a sommelier stopped by our table, complete with a chain around his neck supporting a broad tasting spoon. He handed us an extensive wine list. I was definitely in the mood for Rhine wine, but I found most such wines to be somewhat sweet and fruity. The sommelier suggested a Rhine wine that he claimed was dry, so we ordered a bottle.

As the wine vendor moved off, the maître 'd arrived. He was fluent in several languages, recognized us as English speakers, welcomed us to the restaurant and told us a little about its history. He ran through an impressive list of the day's specials, with offerings like fresh

brook trout, filet mignon, osso bucco and venison. He also handed us large menus with a stunning variety of a la carte dishes. It certainly wasn't McDonalds.

We read through the menus, made our selections and barely looked up before the maître d' returned to take our orders. A basket of fresh bread arrived, with a variety of rolls and types of bread. Chilled salted butter formed into little curls accompanied the bread. As we began to nibble, our wine arrived and was chilled at our table in an ice bucket. It was dry and of excellent flavor.

I ordered a salad and a chicken dish with dumplings and *rot kohl*. I believe Gail ordered a salad and a seafood dish. We dined on the bread until the basket was empty, at which time a second basket magically appeared without a word to our waiter. The salads followed the second bread basket and our wine glasses seemed to fill themselves; we ordered a second bottle of Rhine wine. Dinner arrived and was sumptuous.

All around us were Europeans, speaking in a variety of languages and ordering a stunning variety of wines, dinner specials and menu dishes. Patrons were neatly dressed, jovial in the winter weather, and the odors of good food beautifully prepared permeated the wine cellar. Throughout the dinner, servers appeared out of nowhere to present food and to remove empty plates; it was like watching a ballet.

As we finished our main course, our waiter rolled a dessert cart up to the table. There were several shelves on the cart, each filled with fattening goodies. We decided to live a little, and each selected tiramisu. We nibbled at the desserts (to make them last) and asked for our check. It was expensive, but worth every Mark in those pre-Euro days.

204. PREPARING FOR A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

In 1994, during my tour in Seoul, President Clinton scheduled a state visit to Korea. DS was asked to support the trip. I was already in Seoul and knew the security staff, so I decided to stay in town for Presidential support and work with the Secret Service.

Normally, in Seoul, the Republic of Korea put up its State visitors in the Shilla hotel, always in the same suite. This was a luxurious twenty-story building perched on the side of one of the local mountains near the center of town. The hotel had two Presidential Suites to offer: I had supported other visitors at that hotel and was not enthusiastic about the venue. Throughout the VIP suite, there were pillars that were completely wrapped in mirrors, and there were other mirrors on the walls. All of the mirrors were *glued* to the substructure. There was not much that could be done in the short time usually available to us before a Principal arrived, short of spray painting the mirrors black, and even that would not address all of the problems I saw.

I shared my concerns with the lead Secret Service Agent, who agreed with me. He made some enquiries through the Embassy and decided to place the President in a newer Holiday Inn which was near the Yongsan military base.

Embassy personnel, Secret Service agents and White House communications staff arrived in Seoul a week before the visit and descended on the Holiday Inn in large numbers. An incredible quantity of communications equipment was installed, run from room to room through two floors of the hotel, checked out and taped to the carpeting with duct tape. A Hospitality room was set up and stocked. Guard posts were established and arrangements were made for Embassy Marines to shuttle any documents required between the hotel and the Embassy.

One of the Secret Service Agents requested my help. The President travels with a large entourage, and emergencies sometimes occur. While host government support is always requested in advance of the visit by diplomatic notes, experience has shown that it is wise to also *ask politely* for that emergency support directly from the officials who would provide it. A senior Agent is assigned this task. With Mr. Song, our local investigator, the Agent and I went over to visit the Seoul Fire Department Commander and asked for his assistance. We sipped ginseng tea as the Commander considered our request, then generously promised his full support.

The Fire Department support was needed. Two days before the President's arrival, a large boiler in the basement of the Holiday Inn mysteriously exploded, injuring no one but completely destroying the hotel lobby immediately above the boiler. The President couldn't stay there. Desperate, the Embassy looked around for an alternate place to put the President; we were informed that the Shilla hotel was available. They even had a Presidential suite we could use.

Working against time, all of the equipment previously installed in the Holiday Inn was reclaimed, moved to the Shilla Hotel, reinstalled, checked out and taped down. All of the refreshments were trucked to the new location through Seoul Traffic. Work to get the Shilla ready for President Clinton lasted well into the night of the day just prior to his arrival. People were tired, tempers were short, but the job was completed on time.

The mirrors remained in place.

205. DON GLORCH AND THE LADDER

In early 1981, we were complying piecemeal with the requirements of the Security Enhancement Program, installing systems at our constituent posts. Our Embassy in Dakar, Senegal needed a Selectone public address system: we had surveyed for its installation and a system had been shipped directly to post from Washington.

Dakar was perhaps the best-designed Embassy in our territory, and one of the newest. It was framed in reinforced concrete, but it featured easy to work with amenities like stacked electrical and wire closets, suspended ceilings and acoustic tile. Here and there you could see concrete shear walls, however, that were a nominal eight inches thick.

We needed to make a number of small holes through those reinforced concrete walls to direct wiring to interior speakers in locations where they would be effective, especially in the basement and on the ground floor of the building. Our available tool for this activity was a big Bosch Hammer Drill with long carbide-tipped bits. Think “dirty job”. I scheduled myself for this trip and also scheduled Don Glorch, our Seabee electrician, to come with me.

Our standing practice was to inform the posts we supported about our trips ahead of time, explaining the jobs we would be doing and the nature of the work. We asked in advance for any post support we would need. I sent a telegram to Dakar outlining the Selectone installation process, mentioning noise and dust. I asked for sturdy foot ladders. I suggested that the offices we would work in should be emptied, or their contents covered well with drop cloths to protect furniture and equipment from dust. We received a response that post welcomed the trip and would be ready for us.

We entered the Embassy on a Monday morning. Post was between RSOs. We were told that our point of contact would be the junior Admin Officer.

You have all met someone like this guy at one time or another in your Foreign Service careers. This was an ambitious and egocentric young man: meticulous, fussy, with everything in his office carefully selected to impress. He was nattily attired in clothing just right for the season. There was a stylish carpet on the floor, an artistic desk set with a blotter, pen holder and desk lamp to match. A collection of neatly framed photos on the wall showed the young officer standing as close as possible to recognizable political figures who had visited his post and for whom he might once have held an umbrella. The office seemed to indicate that this was *obviously* a young man on the way up, working Admin in Africa now, but just for a short time until he could get a real, *substantive* assignment to Bern or Stockholm, where he might shine in the Political Section as the DCM’s protégé.

This young FSO was a delegator of work to others. He seemed to seldom be in his own beautiful office. He was usually out visiting other offices, currying favor in high places. Still, we needed his help to procure the supportive materials we had previously requested by telegram.

Don and I mapped out our wiring routes through the walls. Don started with the drill in a back office on the ground floor while I unpacked equipment in the basement. He needed a ladder and drop cloths (none were in place). He went to the Admin officer. The young FSO looked up from his newspaper. He said “No drop cloths. I think ladders are out beside the Guard Post in front next to a storage shed. Go get one out there.” Then he resumed reading.

Glorch found a spindly little ladder whose legs were connected by a piece of chain and whose legs wobbled badly. He went back and asked for another ladder.

“That’s all we have. You’ll have to make do.”

Don found some brown paper to protect the floor and started drilling. He made his first hole, generating a lot of noise and dust. The young man came in to complain. “Can’t you be quieter? People are working.”

Glorch drilled a second hole. The bit bound up and the drill began to get hot. We opened the cam area and found it was low on white lithium grease. I went to the Admin Officer and asked him to procure some for us. He called GSO and told them to get it.

We kept working, pulling wires on the upper floors while waiting for the lubricant. GSO brought us **black** lithium grease. I went to the Admin Officer and asked for the correct product. He was looking through a sporting goods catalog showing tennis racquets on the cover. He looked up “That’s all we have. You’ll have to make do.” And he went back to his reading.

We packed the cam area with black lithium grease. We started drilling. The FSO came by and complained. “You’re making too much noise. Complaints are coming into me from all over the Embassy. You’ll have to stop and do this at night.” I said no, that he was one of 28 posts we supported; we had to finish this job and move on to others.

Don Glorch was a heavy smoker at a time when smoking was still allowed indoors. He always had a couple of days of beard growth, sloppy clothes, and a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. He tended to let the ash accumulate on the end of the cigarette and fall on the floor.

Having finished the first room, Don decided to do the Admin Officer’s office next. The FSO was not there. He covered everything in the office with brown wrapping paper and, after lighting a cigarette, went up the ladder to start work. Don was wearing goggles and work gloves. The bit tore into the wall, generating a cloud of dust. Don kept working. With the vibration, cigarette ashes were everywhere. The drill got hot again and started to throw black lithium

grease around the beautiful office, but Don *had* put brown paper down. Then the spindly little ladder started to walk under Don: it was like drilling from a trampoline. The legs of the moving ladder tore the paper to shreds and the grease started falling on the floor, to be massaged into the now-dusty carpet by the ladder's feet.

The FSO returned and was furious. He pulled the drill's plug out of the wall and started shouting at Don. "You idiot! You've ruined everything. Look at my office. You'll pay for this!"

After lighting a new cigarette, Don came to see me in the basement. I went up to see the Administrative Counselor, whom I knew and who owed our Office a favor or two. (See "Go with the Flow", Story Number 36.) I brought in our original cable and went over it with him. I apologized for the noise and told him that we needed better support from the Post if we were going to finish as scheduled. I asked that he call in the young FSO we were working with to explain that post *wanted* the system we were installing.

The junior Admin Officer came in seething. He accused Don of destroying his office and wanted compensation.

The Admin Counselor asked his secretary to bring in the telegram Dakar had sent to Abidjan. He had the young FSO read it aloud to the three of us, especially the part where Post indicated that everything would be ready. Then he called the Officer's attention to the telegram's drafter. Why, the young FSO himself had composed that cable! Yet somehow, the Post was not at all ready. Who might be to blame?

The Admin Counselor promised us his support and said we might resume working. He told the FSO to remain behind. They needed a little talk.

206. ADVENTURES AT CONAKRY AIRPORT

Whoops. I was wrong. This is probably my last airport story.

On my first trip to Conakry in 1978, I traveled with a U.S. Navy Seabee. We were on an inspection trip and it was an eye-opening experience, especially where extraneous wiring was concerned. (See “The Conakry Playboy Club”, story no. 40).

Flying in to Conakry was a good introduction to West Africa. The airport for the city was near the beach on the Atlantic Ocean, and the approach to the airport brought you in over a big mangrove swamp. If you sat on the right side of the aircraft and looked down on the approach, you initially saw some dense groves of mangrove. Then you saw the tail section of an airliner sticking out of the mud. More mangroves, then an entire propeller-driven passenger plane that had made a belly landing in the mud and was just sitting there turning into rust. As you got closer to the airport, which housed both civilian and military aircraft, the wheels on your plane came down. You saw a number of older, rusty aircraft parked on the tarmac which were missing engines and other critical parts. As you looked down, there was a large concrete apron on the military side on which several helicopters parked in formation had all been burned to the ground. Then you landed.

During our visit to post, the President of Guinea, Ahmed Sékou Touré, had been out of country on a visit. He was due to return to Guinea on the day we left. On departure day, we drove out to the airport in an Embassy vehicle. When we reached the airport, it was clearly evident that a welcoming bash was planned. There were two companies of Guinean infantry in dress white uniforms standing on an open area to the side of the tarmac. They were armed with bolt action rifles to which bayonets had been fixed, and the weapons were in three-rifle stacks on the asphalt: the soldiers were talking in small groups as they waited. Next to the soldiers was a large band of musicians sitting on the ground behind native instruments: balafons, stringed instruments, reed instruments and drums, all of strange shapes and different sizes. Most of the musicians were wearing loose white robes and turban-like head coverings common in the Sahel region. Next to the musicians was a crowd of Guinean women, also wearing white robes and also seated. It was a hot, tropical day, and water-bearers walked through these three bodies of welcoming personnel, distributing small bottles of water and collecting the empties.

The airport guards recognized the Embassy plates and let us through to the Terminal. I stayed with the pouch while Pete took our passports in for processing. We then stood in the shade on the tarmac below the loading dock with our suitcases and pouches to await the arrival of our aircraft.

The President's plane was about a half-hour late, but it did arrive and it made a pass over the airport before it circled to land. The presence of the plane above them energized the crowd on the tarmac: the soldiers retrieved their rifles and fell into an inspection formation, the musicians tuned up their instruments and the women began to sing loudly. The excitement built as the plane landed and taxied up to the terminal. A staircase with red steps and a roll-out red carpet were wheeled up to the door of the aircraft; the rolled-up carpet was extended on the tarmac like a tongue.

The plane door opened and the President appeared in the doorway. The musicians began to play loudly: the sound of assembled balafons with resonators could be heard quite some distance away. As the music built, the women began to clap, dance and ululate. This produces a shrill and eerie sound that is used to express joy in many countries of the world. The President descended, the band played two musical numbers and then the National Anthem of Guinea. Everyone stopped singing and stood still for the anthem. Then the President walked past the troops with the guard commandant, nodding at soldiers here and there.

The Presidential entourage began to descend the wheeled walkway, baggage carts came out to unload the plane, the musicians and singers started up again and our plane appeared in the sky over the airport. It took another hour for the plane to land, for passengers to disembark, for outgoing passengers to process in and get aboard and for us to load the pouch. Then we hopped on the plane and headed back to Abidjan.

207. WALK LIKE A MAN

In 1978, on my second trip out of Abidjan, I went to Mali for a security survey. At the very edge of the Sahara desert, Mali was blistering hot with loose sand everywhere. Even that late in the 20th century, camel trains were much in evidence in Bamako, and most vehicles that I saw were rusty, dented and often held together by wire. I believe, of all the places I have visited in my life, that Mali might be the poorest country I have ever seen. There didn't seem to be much to eat anywhere I looked. There were a lot of people there with obvious afflictions: cataracts, broken limbs that were either never set or were set poorly, open sores and flies everywhere. The outsides of the central mosque were lined with poor people asking for alms.

Bamako was a strange place. Like Budapest or Istanbul, there were two halves to the city divided by a strip of water. There was a single two-lane bridge connecting the two halves of the city together, and the bridge was filled with traffic early in the morning. My hotel was on one side of the bridge, and the Embassy was on the other side.

At about 9:00 each morning, the bridge was shut down for security reasons. About half an hour later, the President of the country would leave his palace on the side of the river where my hotel was sited and travel across the bridge in a black Mercedes with a motorcycle escort. A half-hour later the bridge would reopen and people could again cross to the other side. At about 1:30 in the afternoon, the bridge would shut down again and the President would return to the palace for lunch. He would return, sometimes, to the other side of the city to continue to work, and would then return to the Palace in the early evening. Because the President would often linger on one side of the river or the other, it was sometimes uncertain that I could get to work if I didn't get up really early to beat the President across the Niger River. I found myself eating two meals a day, because getting back to the hotel for lunch was generally not possible.

On this survey, in those days before ballistic windows, I was attempting to bring the Embassy in line with the new Minimum Standards for Public Access Control. We had received those standards a short time after my arrival in Abidjan. I was particularly concerned about an open line of plain glass windows behind what we now might call a "hard line". All of the Embassy officers had to walk along this line of windows after entering the building, and they could be easily seen and shot at should we face a disturbance in Mali. It occurred to me that I might be able to line the windows with drapes to screen personnel from the streets outside, but I was also interested in the use of a glass brick wall in place of the windows, which would allow needed sunlight into the building while helping to screen Embassy workers.

On my first day at Post, I was scheduled to meet the Ambassador, DCM and Post Security Officer at 11:00. I wore a summer suit to work that day. To use my time well, I began

to make measurements for both the curtains and the glass brick installation at the back of the Embassy, using a clipboard, a pencil and a measuring tape. I measured the ceiling height, the width of each window and the thickness of the wall. Then I squatted down to measure the distance between the bottom of the window and the floor.

As I did so, the crotch of my suit pants split from the zipper all the way up to the top of my wallet.

Travelling back to my hotel for a change of clothes under the conditions of the bridge was out of the question. I was stuck in my uniform of the day, and I was rather anxious about my coming meeting with the Embassy management personnel. I spotted a vacant office and slipped in, seeing a stapler on the desk. I checked the stapler for staples, then pocketed it and headed for the mens' room. There, I removed my pants, carefully stapled the fabric along the seam back together, and put my pants back on. Then I walked back to the office and returned the stapler.

With great care, I completed my survey and went into the meeting with the Ambassador and his staff. In the Executive Office, I sat down very gently. I discussed the new standards, commented on those things I thought the RSO might agree to improve or replace, listened to their comments on what they wanted from security, and otherwise had a productive visit.

I walked around the Embassy very carefully the rest of the day.

208. RESPITE FROM A HARD DAY'S WORK

Note: This is the last weekly story for year 4. I have enough stories written for one more year, and then I plan to become an occasional guest contributor.

When I started writing these stories, I thought I would try to capture the Foreign Service experience. For me, that means going back into time a bit, and recounting some of my experiences as a Foreign Service dependent. I will try not to bore you, but you will see that things were different then, especially where passenger liners were the preferred route to overseas posts.

When I returned from Abidjan for my first of two tours in Operations, we were a busy bunch. There were five desk officers assigned, but no SEOs to fill those positions: our personnel were needed overseas, where a vacant regional position was likely to be given up quickly by a post. I was able to borrow five new Special Agents to address the Desk Officer assignments, and some excellent young men were sent our way to learn about overseas support. There was no email in those days, and telephone calls overseas were prohibitively expensive unless we had access to a leased line, which we enjoyed to places like Frankfurt.

Most of our correspondence with the field was accordingly by telegram. Composing a telegram in response to a question from overseas, especially an anxious Embassy or Consulate, was something of an art form. All of our borrowed personnel became experts on grammar, the use of TAGS and writing telegrams that did not anger or mislead the recipients. Covering the entire world, we wrote and received many telegrams every day.

The Moscow Microwave flap was in full swing at that time, with major news magazines carrying article after article about living with radiation. We were inundated with Freedom of Information requests demanding to know what we were doing about the problem, what equipment we were using to analyze the problem, how long we had been studying the strange signals and what they might be directed at. We had to read and reread voluminous documents and decide what, if anything, could be shared with the FOI requester and the Public. We became something of a government censorship organization, not knowing which of the FOI requests might have been sent in by foreign personnel claiming to be Americans. This took up a surprising amount of time, with nagging phone calls coming in periodically from the Freedom of Information Office asking us what progress we were making. Still, the FOI work was just a side show.

We were also involved in the screening of new applicants for SEO jobs, making many trips to Recruiting to evaluate possible hires. We usually had reasonable notice on these duties,

but occasionally someone would miss a scheduled interview and we would have to run to the Rosslyn shuttle to get over and meet the candidate within an hour.

We were also participating in interagency countermeasures meetings on a monthly basis. By tradition, our organization chaired the ACWG at that time, and the process of preparing for meetings, attending them and preparing and distributing the minutes was time-consuming.

We were fortunate to have two skilled American secretaries in the office to handle incoming calls, type up telegrams (each of which was printed onto OCR forms with an IBM Selectric typewriter at that time), make runs to the SY Office for our incoming traffic and distribute it to the correct desk officer. We had a regular stand-up morning meeting to review hot items, to discuss our strategy on various issues and to learn about the experiences of Desk Officers as they went up to explain our positions to Post Management Officers. Sometimes we had additional meetings to prepare each other for sudden overseas problems.

As with any office, sometimes people got sick, or took leave, or were necessarily absent from the office. At such times, one Desk Officer might be covering two or even three desks. This was excellent cross-training for the young Special Agents, most of whom went on to distinguished careers in DS. It was difficult, sometimes, to know who was covering Europe or the Far East, but each Bureau generally was covered by someone on a given day. The amount of paper handled by each officer was incredible. All too often, our RSO counterparts in Foreign Operations seemed to feel that “taking action” on a telegram coming into their office meant that they should bring it over and drop the issue in our in-box. This led to a little heat from time to time; generally, our two offices worked very well together.

We were also involved in training. John Bagnal was back from Hong Kong and he addressed the regular briefings of Junior Foreign Service Officers, Post Security Officers and Marines, but John needed to be spelled on these briefings from time to time and sometimes needed help with the Marines after hours. There were new SEOs coming in who needed to be greeted, oriented, trained and assigned. There was budget work, justifying funds for each ESC and ESO, defending our requests, shipping funds overseas and supplementing LOF accounts. There was daily interaction with the Seabee program, especially where car mechanics were needed for the growing armored car program. We were the purveyors of firearms and ammunition for the Office of Security at that time, as well as the procurer of FAVs; there were pitfalls aplenty in this area. Finally, there was the annual cycle of Work Requirements Statements, progress interviews and the preparation of EERs. Each week seemed something like a medieval battle.

With so many of these activities in the mill and so few personnel to address them, filing suffered. Our two secretaries tried to keep up with the ocean of paper arriving at our door every day, but the volume of material was overwhelming. Sadly, when we went to research a problem

for a specific post, it was vital that all telegrams and notes pertaining to that problem be in the post's file folder when we dug into that issue. To help the secretaries, I used to try and stay an hour after work some days to sort and file the paper that had come in or gone out. I used to do this by sorting the traffic by Bureau in piles on the floor, starting near my office door and progressing towards the entry door to our office spaces. This was a distance of perhaps forty feet. Once I had the paper so segregated, I sorted pile after pile into specific posts, then sorted that material in date order and went on to the next pile. This resulted in long vertical lines of paper-clipped files on the floor, sometimes stretching all forty feet across the floor from my office to our front door. When all of the paperwork had been sorted and date-ordered, I would try to file as much as I could before leaving, with the remainder placed in the bottom drawer of a safe filing cabinet. The following morning, I could usually prevail on a Desk Officer to help the secretaries complete the filing.

And then, as all of you will remember, you had to secure the office before leaving. Clipboard in hand, you would check first to see if you had left anything on the floor, then proceed desk to desk and safe to safe to spin off locks, check desk drawers, look on top of cabinets and otherwise ensure that no classified material was forgotten.

There was a lot of lifting and bending, walking, thinking, annotating, clipping and filing in this process. The procedure tended to wear you out. I would sometimes sit down at one of the secretary's desks in the outer office towards the end of this effort, especially while sorting a Bureau's pile into posts and date-ordering the material.

One evening after a particularly busy day, I sat down at JoAnn Robinson's desk to sort paper for filing. I had been walking all through the Department on that day and was tired. Sitting at her desk, I slipped out of the loafers I was wearing and sorted paper, then walked out to do filing in my socks. I worked my way through two more piles sitting at the desk and filed that paper. I picked up the final pile, sat down at the desk, and slipped my shoes back on.

They didn't fit. I wiggled my toes a bit, tried to hold the heel in place with my left foot as I attempted to slide my right foot into my shoe, then reversed the effort without success. Frustrated, I looked under the desk to determine the problem.

I was trying to slip my feet into a pair of red high-heeled shoes.

It seemed an appropriate end for the day, somehow. I thought of Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire and performing *her* role backwards and in high heels: something like the day I had just experienced. JoAnne apparently wore low-heeled shoes or sneakers into work and changed into heels at her desk. In those pre-Metro times, I decided to call it a day and go catch my two buses to get back home.