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

AMBASSADOR CHARLES A. RAY

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 5th of February 2013, interview with Ambassador Charles A. Ray, R-A-Y. Do you go by Charles?

RAY: Charles, but most people call me Charlie

Q: What does the A stand for?

RAY: Aaron. My mother got it from the Bible.

Q: A-R-R…

RAY: Two A's. I grew up in Texas where everybody's name has to be longer than everyone else's.

Q: Absolutely, well let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

RAY: I was born July 5, 1945 in a little town called Center, Texas. It's in Shelby County in an area called the ArkLaTex, right near the tri-border of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas area.

Q: Sort of the Red River area?

RAY: Well its south of the Red River area where…the town I was born in is about twenty miles from the Louisiana border and it's the Sabine River and if you want to use the fancy one about 60 miles or so west of Shreveport, Louisiana.

Q: Well let's start on the family; let's start on your father's side. What do you know about your father's side of the family?

RAY: My father's family comes from a little south of where I grew up in St. Augustine County and I remember my grandfather, my father's father was still alive when I was

growing up. To sort of put it in perspective my father and mother broke up when I was a tiny infant so we grew up…

Q: Quite separate.

RAY: …quite separate. My father's family was sort of a mixture of African/Scottish and Native American from the area around St. Augustine County which is south of where I grew up in what they call the Big Bend area, lake area. My dad was a railroad brakeman for good grief till they made him return in his early 70s; sort of a gad about.

Q: He was a moving man?

RAY: He moved until they finally made him retire and a few years after he retired he just said I've had it and he died of a heart attack; but he was in his late 70's.

Q: Okay, on your mother's side?

RAY: My mother's side is also a rather heterogeneous family. My grandmother who actually raised me was the daughter of a Quesada Indian man and a slight woman that he purchased.

Q: That is one of the things that's often not known that many of the Indians…

RAY: Purchased.

Q: ...had slaves. I mean they were very southern.

RAY: Oh yeah, in his case he purchased her as a bride not as a slave but it was a purchase. She was a bit of a feisty type all of about five feet tall, born sometime a few years after the Civil War, I don't remember her exact date of birth but it would have been sometime in the late 1880s or probably so just about twenty years after the Civil War. She was a real frontier type, always lived by herself until she died when she was almost 100. She carried a gun around with a barrel as long as her legs but was deadly accurate with it, was self-taught, never went to school but taught herself how to read and write. She was very strong for such a little woman and the most vivid memories I have as a kid is watching her walk out into the yard, we lived on a little truck farm, grab a chicken that seemed almost as much as she did by the neck, whip it around in the air a couple times and snap its head off.

Q: Did you pick up anything as a kid about Indian ways or Indian lore that sort of thing?

RAY: From my grandmother I mean because as I said being the daughter of a native American father and an African mother who as far as we could tell and there are no documents surviving to validate it is that my grandmother's mother probably was a second generation African slave; in other words had been born to someone who had come over. So basically we had two tribal type people thrown together and the fact is that

having done that meant that they weren't accepted completely in the native American community, only so-so in the Black community and that meant that she pretty much grew up with just her mother and father's influences. I never thought of it as odd when I was a kid, it was just her.

Q: It was just the way it was.

RAY: Yeah, I think I probably grew up listening to her and had my head filled with a lore that was neither African nor Native American nor totally American but was just an amalgam of the things she had learned growing up.

Q: Okay, what was this place where you as a kid grew up?

RAY: I grew up in a little town called Tenaha which in the Cato language means muddy water which is very appropriate because it has that red laterite clay and when it rains everything is orange. It was a little town of about back then 700 people and I guess if you used the existing class of Cajuns, half Black half White, 90 percent mixed race because practically everyone there had some Native American blood and there was so much cross-breeding between the two major communities that…

Q: How Cajun was it?

RAY: It was pretty Cajun, the demographic which changed now because a lot of Hispanics moved in but when I was a kid growing up I'd say we were probably like a non-French Cajun community, it was a weird community of 700 people where everyone knows everyone. To put it in perspective when my mother died in 2002 and I went to the funeral; the town is now 1,000, there were over 200 people at her funeral. I mean if you look at it it would be like one of those Benetton ads. I hardly knew anyone, but everyone seemed to know me. I guess after being gone so long, I no longer have that ability to remember every second and third cousin like some people I know back home have.

Q: United colors.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: I notice when you talk there is not a touch of sort of Cajun in your…

RAY: Well there is not a touch of East Texas either because I spent a lot of my time trying to get rid…it's a slow-drawling accent that always bugged the crap out of me when I was a kid. I have a kid sister who takes forever to say good morning. I left home right after I graduated from high school and joined the Army. At one point during my Army career I was in public affairs and I did some radio work; this was back in the '60s when if you went on air you had to sound like you came from the mid-west, they didn't do regional accents.

Q: Everybody spoke the same on the air.

RAY: I graduated from high school at 16 and turned 17 a few months after and joined the Army so from 17 on I was all over the place and the influences sort of affected my accent I guess. I can be real Texas when I get pissed off or when I want to make a point. But back in those days a Texas drawl Southern accent was associated with low intelligence so I guess there was this sort of impetus to not sound stupid.

Q: Yeah, well often it would be used for a very sharp politician or someone would start talking in a drawl and all of a sudden you reached for your wallet because…

RAY: You aren't sure this guy…no you are right and that sort of caused me to work it out.

Q: Well let's talk about growing up as a kid. I mean you have these different groups who didn't quite accept each other and here you are an amalgam of these. How was it as a very young kid, how did you find the little town?

RAY: Well you might find it strange being in a little town where the stereotypical view is that everyone knows everyone and everybody gets along with everybody and every kid is a part of everyone's family. I grew up as really a loner, I was always more comfortable by myself. My mother taught me to read when I was about four and so I found a lot of escape in books; I never was very comfortable around other people. If I wasn't reading I was off in the woods hunting, or tracking or just walking and then as I got bigger, say after eight or nine years old, I was always curious so I had a little lean-to built onto the side of our barn that was my lab where I did all kinds of strange things so I spent a lot of time by myself up until I actually left home.

Q: Well was there much of a White presence in the area which was working to put you down or that sort?

RAY: That's a complicated one to answer because like I said the town was only about 700 people half what was called Black and half what was called White. There were a lot of relationships, it was a farming community and like a lot of small farming communities there was stratifies…there was the Black community, there was the White community and then there was the little sort of overlapping areas. If a barn caught on fire everybody got together to put the fire out. Come harvest time I worked for a lot of the local White farmers from about the time I was about seven, you've heard of cotton picking.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I mean I can remember…

Q: When you say farm was it cotton?

RAY: Well it was cotton, there were fruits, there was a lot of grain it's a cattle growing area. I can remember picking cotton when I was about six or seven. But to answer your

question I think it was a mixed bag and I remember one family that my mother worked for who basically sort of encouraged me through her to learn to learn to grow, to stretch. Then there were others who basically paid you no attention and then, of course, you always had the ones who and I finally realized after I grew up it was people who felt threatened who would try to put or keep you in your place. Having been raised by my grandmother from the time I was about eleven or so and her thing was people can only hold you down if you let them and basically you just ignore people and do your own thing and stay out of their way. I was never really trapped in that which is probably lucky because back in those days that could get you physically…

Q: No that was dangerous. What about reading where did you get your books and what sort of things were you reading?

RAY: Anything I could get my hands on. My mother remarried when I was about six months old and the man that she married was one of the I guess you could call him wealthy families but one of the land-owning families in the area. He had a sister, who had, if I remember, it was Encyclopedia Britannica and some other books.

Q: Many, many families used to have the Encyclopedia man come around and this was…

RAY: And she had in her living room this complete set of Encyclopedia's and I guess from the time I was about six or so I was the only person she would let go into the living room. You have to picture this. A living room with the sofas covered with white sheets like someone had died and the room stayed shut off…

Q: It was called a parlor.

RAY: The parlor that's right, the parlor.

Q: My wife's family comes from New England and the parlor's the place you display the body…

RAY: Yeah, but you don't ever use it for anything. My aunt Rosie, I remember her, she is really sort of stepping it would let me go in the parlor and sit on the floor as long as I didn't sit on the furniture and read the books. So by the time I was ten I had read from A through Z the Encyclopedia Britannica in third grade and my mother would occasionally save pennies and buy me books. So I had the Audubon's Guide to Birds and things at home. They had about fifty or one hundred books in the school library when I started school and when I was in third grade they let me have access to the school library.

Q: There wasn't a library…

RAY: It was a bookshelf.

Q: I mean there wasn't….

RAY: A town library? No, no, no and by the time I graduated from high school I probably had more books under my bed at home than the combined White and Black schools had in both their libraries.

Q: When you started school how did you find school?

RAY: Boring, I mean I had already been taught to read when I was four and to sit there in first grade and read See Spot Run, See Dick run…about the second day the teacher put me in the corner and just let me sit there and do what I wanted to do for the first year. The second year I was reading the third and fourth grade kids' books.

Q: Did you find that reading in a way separated you from many of the kids?

RAY: It separated me from a boring environment and it - I won't say separated me from more like it protected from being bored out of my skull.

Q: Were you a dreamer?

RAY: I never really thought of it as being a dreamer, I was more of an imaginer. The one thing that books did was it put the picture in my head that there had to be something beyond the pine trees and the red clay hills and the grain silos.

Q: Yeah, well as a kid I had a globe. I'm older than you and I found on the globe a wonderful spot and it looked just beautiful. It was just this wonderful dot but a wonderful place I'd like to go to called Wake Island. A little later, of course, it became a center of one of our first battles of World War II against the Japanese.

RAY: World War II.

Q: I actually landed there on my way to Korea.

RAY: I've been to Wake Island on my way to Korea.

Q: But it was sort of not quite what I imagined but anyway…

RAY: Well mine was China which I didn't actually realize until I joined the Foreign Service. I always wanted to see the Great Wall of China.

Q: Well this is one of these…these things get into your blood early if you have that interest. Were you encouraged by any of your teachers or anyone I'm talking about sort of elementary school to think beyond the Red River and all?

RAY: Not so much the elementary school teachers. You have to remember back in those days all it took to be an elementary teacher was a high school diploma and a desire to be a teacher; most of our teachers in fact though did have college degrees. I think basically the encouragement came in high school. My home room teacher, who is still a very good

friend of mine and still alive, saw something what I'm not sure and was very encouraging of me doing what I felt like doing. Then there was my last high school principal a guy by the name of Montgomery actually tried to get me to apply for the Coast Guard Academy. The problem was I grew up in an area where the biggest body of water was a lake you could almost throw stones across and the idea of spending a good part of my life on boats didn't appeal to me and so I ended up joining the Army; still spent a lot of times on boats, karma; but yeah I had between my grandmother who basically was do what you want to do type.

Q: Did you have any feel because of the environment or was it just sort of neutral about the Civil Rights movement which was after your time in a way but was there in you either resentment or a fighting against the system or was that just tied to your small environment and not something to get away from?

RAY: I can't say that I actually was rebelling against the ethnic stratification as much as the geographic cultural smallness, the small mindedness, the limited vision. I don't think the whole idea of racial discrimination in the way that people think of the Civil Rights movement actually hit me until I was in the Army for a couple of years. I realized that I was encountering things that didn't quite track and that when you started scraping it aside it was based on racial assumptions that I hadn't really given…I mean you grow up in an environment where you have…

Q: That's the way it is.

RAY: …this group stays here, this group stays here and that's the way it's always been and no one questions it. It's when you are out of that and you are in a different environment but you see the attitudes that come from that that it starts to dawn on you. By the time I realized the sort of cultural racial dynamic it was sort of strange. I didn't resent it, I didn't understand it, by the time I realized that there people who assumed that other people were inferior because of external characteristics I already knew that was a bowl of crap. So it was more of an attached amusement than anything else.

Q: How about the role of church in your life when you were a kid?

RAY: Well it's a small, very fundamentalist community and I think the town I grew up in was mostly Baptist; there may have been a little Methodist church on the other side of town I don't remember. Unfortunately, being taught to read so early and having read a lot created some problems with my being able to sort of follow what's in the Bible you've got to believe it because I said it, which caused me to part ways with the Protestant Church at about thirteen. The conflict between theology and science and when you are thirteen you think you know everything…

Q: Oh you do, of course.

RAY: But unfortunately you haven't learned to keep your mouth shut about everything. It didn't do me any good to question some "Biblical" truths in the presence of some of the

elderly ladies of my mother's church. So that is when I said goodbye to Protestantism. I think I actually from about thirteen to until I graduated from high school probably became an Animist. To me the whole idea that every living thing has some kind of spirit actually resonated…

Q: You might have picked that up from the Indian side.

RAY: Probably, I never really thought about it but there was always something about nature that resonated with me. After I had gotten out of high school I joined the Army in the summer of '62 and in the winter of '62-'63 I wound up in Germany. I experimented a lot, I had friends who were Catholics so I'd go to mass with them, I had other friends who were Jewish and I would go to the Synagogues. I flirted around with some of the little sects and then in 1968 when I went to Vietnam for the first tour I sort of discovered Buddhism as sort of a philosophy. So when I have to give a religious affiliation I just say Buddhist.

Q: How about news? Did you get any news of the world? Did the world intrude outside of...

RAY: In East Texas? We had what was it? - we had our first TV in the fifties, a little screen about six inches. There were three channels I believe, channel nine, eleven and twelve; they were all from Louisiana, the city of Shreveport. There were three networks and when the wind wasn't blowing and shaking the antennae you could see them. I remember watching Edward R. Murrow and that was the only outside the area news that you ever saw was the evening news with Edward R. Murrow. We got two local papers, my hometown had one called The Light which was all local news and then there was the country seat The Champion which was county news and then we got The Shreveport Journal, I believe it was called, which occasionally something that happened somewhere in the world...this was back in the fifties so the Korean War was big on the evening news and in the paper but even back then people were focused on their local area.

Q: How did you find high school?

RAY: Even more boring than grade school. I mean in our school, until I graduated you had two classes per teacher per room. So, I went into high school in 1958, I graduated in '62, just before my 17th birthday.…

Q: Was it segregated by the way?

RAY: It was segregated, yes. They integrated five or six years after I graduated which is an interesting story because it didn't follow a normal route, there were no demonstrations or court orders; it had to do with football but that's because it's Texas. But I went into high school in 1958 so I was thirteen. You had ninth and tenth grade in one room, eleventh and twelfth grade in one room with one teacher each. The teacher I mentioned was the homeroom teacher; she was the English teacher for the high school and was the

home room teacher for the ninth and tenth grades. So you got six kids in ninth grade and I was thirteen and the next oldest was fifteen.

Q: It's a big difference.

RAY: Then you had the tenth grade which had eight so you had fifteen kids in a room; we only had 112 or 113 students in the whole school K through 12th, very small. The equipment was antiquated or nonexistent, books were secondhand, teachers did the best they could with what they had and most of the students were kids from farms. One of my classmates when we graduated was 22; you had kids missing a lot of school so they would struggle through. Looking back on it a kid who would hang in there and still graduate from high school at 22; that's a lot of dedication.

Q: Yes.

RAY: But it wasn't exactly what I would call intellectually stimulating.

Q: You didn't with that small of a high school I guess football didn't get…

RAY: We didn't have football, we had baseball, our basketball team had nine players, we had barely enough to field a baseball team because it was such a small school. We had track, we had basketball, we had baseball and that was it. To sort of fast forward that's why the school district in my hometown integrated. The coach at the White school had a football tournament in the '70s I guess; let's see I graduated in '62 so that would have been maybe '69 or '70. They went to a tournament in San Antonio where an integrated team kicked their butts and he came back and he told the school board that he was not going to be embarrassed like that ever again and the next year they integrated the schools so that they could get the…

Q: It shows what drives education.

RAY: So my two kid brothers who were still in school at the time and my kid sister all graduated from the combined school, I was the last to graduate from a segregated school. My kid brother, the youngest one, who was always a bit more athletic than the rest of us and actually while he was a bit of a dwarf in height was built so he wound up on the football team and everybody, was happy.

Q: Okay, well you joined the Army when?

RAY: 1962, July 9th.

Q: Thoughts of university enter your mind at the time?

RAY: Well it entered it, but the money I had made working the four years of high school and two years before that was just not enough. With my mother and step-father's combined incomes being about $80 a month, college wasn't exactly realistic for me at

that time.… The valedictorian of every high school graduating class was given a $500 scholarship which even I could figure out wouldn't go very far and I wanted to see the world. So going to some land-grant college and at that time the options were Texas Southern and Houston and Prairie View which was just west of Houston or Wiley College which is in Marshall that didn't seem to be getting far enough away from it for me. I had read up that people in the military got the GI bill which would give you the money to pay for college. So as I got closer to my seventeenth birthday I signed up.

Q: Before we move to that you mentioned jobs. What sort of jobs did you have while you were a school kid?

RAY: I worked for a poultry company and basically the main job was…in summers we did harvesting fruit crops, melons and I did some cotton picking which I hated so I quit that. I think I didn't do that ever again after I was about eleven. But in the poultry industry not many people realize it that when they go and buy those nice packaged chickens in the supermarket is those things get raised in these little long narrow rectangular buildings that are 100 yards long and 20-30 yards wide and they will have ten or fifteen thousand chickens in each of those. They feed them until they are about butchering size and then you go in at night when the lights are out and the stupid chickens are sleeping and you grab them by the legs and you stuff them in crates and you truck them off to a place where their heads are cut off and the feathers are taken off, they are dressed and sent to the store. I probably did that for five years from about ten o'clock at night until three o'clock in the morning four or five days a week.

Q: That was fun.

RAY: Yeah, it takes a while to get the smell out of your hair, clothes and I still have marks from it because…

Q: Okay, Army. Were you kind of prepared for basic training or where did you get basic training?

RAY: I took basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, which had been an old World War II base that had shut down and they had reopened in the sixties. I didn't realize it at the time in '62 but it actually was being looked at as a place to sort of increase the output of troops for overseas deployment. I was probably readier than a lot of the kids in my basic training unit because one I was already familiar with firearms. My grandmother taught me to shoot when I was six and, in fact, I got my first rifle as a birthday present at my sixth birthday. So despite having really poor eye sight from an injury when I was a kid when I got hit in the head from a brick I could outshoot almost everybody in my basic training company. If I could see the outline of the target I could hit any part of it I chose to even if I couldn't see it. The outdoors part I camped and slept out in the woods sometimes just for the heck of it as a kid so camping and hiking and sleeping on the ground and all that stuff weren't strangers to me. Living with my grandmother you cleaned your own room, she didn't clean up after you so about the only thing I had to get used to was a bunch of sergeants yelling at me all the time.

Q: I was going to say that's the…

RAY: Again, I learned to sort of shut it out.

Q: By that time the military was integrated wasn't it?

RAY: It was but most of the drill sergeants that I had and, in fact, I'm trying to remember now there was one Black drill sergeant and I never actually had anything to do with him when I saw him. Almost all of the drill sergeants in my basic training company had come out of the segregated Army. They were Korean War vets and prior and most of them were pretty good. I ran into one or two people who sort of had the old attitudes. In basic training initially there were some of my fellow trainers who had these attitudes…it's a funny thing about getting yelled at and being made to do pushups in the dust and disassemble your rifle and bury it in the sand and dig it up and put it back together and there better not be a speck of dust on it. It tended to erase a lot of those superficial differences because you were all just a bunch of raw recruits who are as one sergeant would say, "lower than the stuff I scrape off the bottom of my boot after walking through a kennel". So yeah I never really…my problem was and it didn't actually surface until after later was putting up with idiots in positions of authority who didn't realize they were idiots. My mouth got me into a lot of trouble throughout the years.

Q: I had some problems I graduated from college with honors and then all of a sudden I was an enlisted man and I was being lectured by…

RAY: By guys who couldn't even speak English properly?

Q: …guys who would say America has this and I would say excuse me sergeant but Sweden has…that sort of thing doesn't go over very well.

RAY: Never tell a stupid man that something he said is stupid especially if he's got the authority over you. That is something that took me a lot of years to learn.

Q: We've both been through the same school. Well were you being trained to be an infantry man or what?

RAY: Well basic training back in those days was you were just trying to be a soldier. Basic training and it's still pretty much the same is you have basic training which is the indoctrination. This is stripping you of your civilian persona and teaching you your left foot from your right foot, a little discipline, close-order drill, responsiveness. You get taught your skill in advanced individual training or AIT. I did fairly well on the AFQT, the Armed Forces Qualification Test so instead of being sent from basic training to advanced training as an infantry man I was sent to Fort Dix New Jersey where I was trained as a Morse code operator. Then I was sent to Germany and assigned to a medical battalion where they didn't use Morse code and I wound up let's see I was there from '63-'64, two years roughly, I worked as a radio operator voice for about six months and

then I was a chaplain's assistant, I assisted the post's librarian for a while and I wound up in the sports program alternating between playing basketball during basketball season and coaching little league during the rest of the time.

Q: Strictly good solid military subjects.

RAY: Then I was sent off to OCS, officer candidate school, to be trained and commissioned as an artillery second lieutenant.

Q: After you got out of basic training you went off to Germany did you? How did you find the military at that time?

RAY: It was interesting and particularly in Germany I was still seventeen; I got to Germany six months before my eighteenth birthday. I found Germany fascinating; it was just such a different environment. First of all I got there in the middle of winter and to ride on the train from Bremerhaven to Augsburg in Southern Germany with snow drifts that were higher than the rest of the train cars that's mind blowing to someone from Texas who had never seen that much snow. We lived in an old base casern that had belonged to the German army during World War II that still had bomb damaged buildings on it. In Augsburg you had the gate that Caesar Augustus rode through and the train station downtown where my buddies and I, there were four of us who used to hang out. There was a kid called Brown from Iowa, there was a kid called Bailey from Kentucky and then another kid from New Jersey whose name I've never been able to remember, the four of us were roommates and we became sort of the four Musketeers. We were also the youngest in the battalion. We'd prowl the town, go to the park, go to the local swim bad, go to the train station and sit at the little outdoor café when the weather was good and drink beer and eat brochen and sauerkraut and sausage and practice our German. We hung out with a lot of German teenagers. I think I went to the local GI bars once or twice.

One thing that was interesting back in those days in Southern Germany, in Augsburg, the bars in the town were racially divided. The Black GIs had their bars, the White GIs had their bars and the Germans tended to sort of drift one way and the other and enforce it. So the four of us tended to be odd man out since we didn't really drink that much and weren't old enough to be interested so I really wasn't part of the military community socially back in those days.

Q: I was stationed in Darmstadt in the Cambury Fitz Caserne and I was surprised too that the bars if I was White I felt uncomfortable if I went to a bar it was sort of self…

RAY: And you could sometimes…it was done by choice.

Q: It was done by choice and at a certain point if you go to a bar to have a drink well you go to a place where people aren't glaring at you.

RAY: No, it was a weird thing and it was self-inflicted. I ran into the same thing in Korea. I went to Korea in 1973 right after my last tour in Vietnam. To a certain extent in Seoul that was not totally but pretty much it still existed to a degree in the GI bar area in Seoul until probably well into the '80s.

Q: It's one of these things that sort of get hidden in a way. Nobody talks about it but that's what happened.

RAY: You even had it on base. I can say in Korea in the early '70s but in Germany and I did two tours there I went back after I was commissioned in '65 for a one year tour, the clubs if you had more than one they tended to sort of become differentiated. Or if you only had one they were all like sections of the club where people tended to congregate. It took a long time for that…I worked as a deputy assistant secretary of Defense from 2006 to 2009 so I visited a lot of bases around the country and overseas; that's gone away now. You don't see that anymore.

Q: Particularly the problem being that this was self-selection, well high schools have this.

RAY: Yeah, I think it's normal. What you see now on a lot of bases is gender self-selection because you have so many women in the military and you tend to see the guys sort of drifting off in one direction and the women in another.

Q: Which brings up the question going back to my time which was a little before but this is '50-'54. I spent four years as an enlisted man in the Air Force and I don't think I, except for nurses, I…

RAY: Never saw a woman.

Q: …never saw a woman. How was it in your time?

RAY: It was pretty much the same. If you were in or around a major headquarters you had the nurses at the hospital, there might be like in the finance office or in the APO. None in regular units, I didn't start encountering any number of females in regular units until probably I was assistant public affairs officer at Fort Bragg from '77-'79 and I had three women working for me and a staff of about twelve or fourteen which is pretty significant and they weren't clerks. I had one woman who was a photographer, another who was a print specialist but before that it was very rare it was mostly clerical jobs, medical jobs. The army didn't have a lot of…it was amazing they got the first female jump master in an airborne unit at Fort Bragg when I was there in 1978; you just didn't see them.

Q: Okay, how did you get selected I mean you are now a high school graduate coming from a small school how did you get into OCS?

RAY: The battery of tests they gave in addition to the Armed Forces Qualification Test there was one called the OCT, the Officer Candidate Test, and based on those scores which I'm told were pretty high, I don't remember I'll have to look. By the time I was old enough to actually be selected and my battalion operations officer at the time sort of arm twisted me into putting my application in. I was already going to school at night, I was working on my degree but I didn't get it until '72 but between '63 and '72 I got enough credits doing evening…

Q: Is this the University of Maryland?

RAY: I did the University of Maryland, I did Morgan State College, the University of North Carolina, and I must have done night school in about ten different schools. When I went to Benedictine (which was formerly St. Benedicts) in 1972 to finish my degree I had to do the residency twelve or twenty-five hours credits for three degrees. Wherever I was I'd enroll in night school. Then they also had in those days the old U.S. Armed Forces Institute where you could take correspondence courses and I must have taken about 100 credit hours' worth of those. So I actually got commissioned before I got my degree but shortly after I got it.

Q: Well how did you find OCS?

RAY: That was challenging. Parts of it were really good, I enjoyed some of the field skills training and the academic parts I liked. Back in those days they had three, they had the engineering OCS at Fort Belvoir here, they had the infantry OCS down at Benning and the artillery OCS at…

Q: Sill.

RAY: …at Sill. I'm sorry; I misspoke, I think engineering hadn't opened up then; they only had the two, they had Sill and Benning. If you past the OCT and didn't get over 130 you went to Benning and if you got over 130 you went to Sill. You also had to pass a math test, if you couldn't pass a math test you went to Benning which says something about infantry officers. There was a lot, a lot of the courses where you had to learn survey techniques the whole thing of directing artillery fire required you to learn some trigonometry and learn geometry and have a sense of relationships. Some of the history courses were pretty good, the discipline courses and the whole lower class, middle class, upper class, stuff flows downhill until it hits a green tab lower classman at the bottom where it just sort of piles up on him. I found that to be a bit over the top at times but I managed to keep my mouth shut long enough to graduate.

Q: Did you find that half of the military is learning to keep your mouth shut?

RAY: Well when to speak and when not to speak is a good part of it. Learning to listen, learning to sort of read other people was very important.

Q: Going ahead but later you had quite responsible positions in the Foreign Service and all. Did you find that you were picking up or realize later that you were picking up some pretty good instincts in the military?

RAY: Oh yeah, by the time I retired from the army and joined the Foreign Service I'd pretty much come to realize that a lot of it was dumb, well not dumb, actually looking back on it I understand it. It's part of the process of sort of taking a real challenge of how do you take an individual and you take individuals from disparate backgrounds and cultural, put them together so that they retain a certain amount of their individuality and initiative but also have the ability to think of themselves as part of a bigger whole and something there.

Q: You build up good reflexes, mental reflexes.

RAY: Mental and physical reflexes so I realize a lot of this stuff that I thought it was total crap actually had its uses self-control, mental and physical self-control. Assessing problems, situations and awareness sort of not reacting blindly to things; yeah I found that it was a big help. The interesting thing too was I had two commands in Korea in the '70s of being responsible for other people and what that actually means to be responsible of taking care of other people and of being focused on what is really important in getting a mission accomplished so yeah, the army prepared me to be successful in the Foreign Service there is no doubt about it. This is like being raised by my grandmother prepared me to be successful in the army.

Q: Okay well let's take your military career. You go to OCS and then where?

RAY: I went to OCS and after OCS I went back to Germany, I was up in Hanau. I was a second lieutenant in an artillery battalion and normally second lieutenants in artillery battalions are executive officers or firing batteries; that's where you learn to be an artilleryman. The problem was that the system screwed up and they assigned too many second lieutenants to this battalion and I got there too late so all the exec positions were gone. But I was lucky because the battalion commander was a Russian foreign area officer who was doing battalion command to sort of earn his spurs to become a full colonel and I guess he sort of recognized a kindred spirit so I was put in the position of battalion liaison officer which in an artillery battalion in peace time is like a third nipple. A liaison officer is a war time position in combat is the guy who goes to the infantry unit that you support to sort of coordinate things; in peace time you have absolutely nothing to do. But it also happened and most of my life has been being in the right place at the right time and either being too dumb to know I shouldn't or lucky enough to realize it of being able to seize the opportunity. Being in that position and not having a lot to do was a big benefit because that was at the time when the army, particularly the mechanized units were experiencing real problems in keeping repair parts and spares flowing properly and accounting for them. This was shortly after one of the armored divisions lost a tank on an exercise in Germany; I mean lost like left it somewhere and couldn't find it.

Q: Oh God.

RAY: So Colonel Corcoran, I remember his name, asked if I would take over responsibility for sorting out the battalions supply part problem. They gave me like eight or ten of the misfits from throughout the battalion and alcoholic NCO to be my NCO in charge. They gave me a building in the back corner of the compound and a truck to haul my troops around in and a jeep for my own use and made me the battalion prescribed load list officer which is a position that didn't exist which meant that nobody know why I was there and the job was try and make sure this was a mechanized howitzer unit so you got all those parts, like thousands of pieces, bolts and things and you had to figure out how much was needed and what type of flow you needed in the pipeline to see that they were there. What was the usage factor, the whole thing which was a fascinating thing because I'd never done anything like that before. So we worked on that and then they were looking for someone to be in charge of the aggressors for exercises at Grafenwoehr to exercise the artillery units, you would be the guerrillas who attack and things, so I was put in charge of the aggressor forces at Grafenwoehr; I had these two jobs that didn't exist.

I got to travel all over Germany; I got to go to all kinds of little training courses and stayed in a castle in southern Germany while I learned all about military supplies. I did that for a year and it was great.

Q: In any point in this particular period did you get married or not?

RAY: No, I was still single then. So I did that for a year and then Vietnam started heating up so being full of piss and vigor I thought I might as well earn my spurs by going to Vietnam. So I put in for that and thought I can go get me an artillery battalion somewhere and go to Vietnam as an artillery officer. Finally near the end of my first year in Germany they said, "Okay, we are going to send you to Fort Benning where the 173rd brigade was getting ready to go." I was a first lieutenant then so you will be a battery exec maybe a battery commander. Okay, so I hot footed off to Fort Benning. I get there and it turns out all those slots were filled and they sent me over to the infantry OCS as a company exec, an artillery officer on Fort Benning as the executive officer of an infantry OCS training company was not a place you wanted to be. It was no fun because you did things like you have to wear the blue infantry scarf, I'm not infantry. I don't have the idiot sticks on my collar (that's what we artillerymen called the crossed rifle insignia of the infantry). Anyway, that lasted for six months and I just said, "Naw this is not it" and so I applied for Special Forces training. I passed and got orders to go off to Fort Bragg. During that time while I was working at Benning I met and married a girl who was a student at Tuskegee across the river from Fort Benning. We married just before I left for Fort Bragg and then when she graduated she came down to Bragg and joined me. I wound up doing, this was in the winter of '67 so it would have been right after Christmas '66 and then through '67 I did Special Forces training at Fort Bragg, then off to Panama for the three week jungle operations training course.…

Q: Eating snakes.

RAY: Yeah, eating snakes and swinging across the river and stuff. Then I went back to Fort Bragg where I did the psychological operations course. Then I went down to Fort Gordon where I did the civil affairs course and then they sent me up here where I did nine months of Vietnamese language training; this, by the way, takes well over a year; because language training was ten months all by itself. So finally I got off to Vietnam leave my new wife in Mobile where her family lived, went off to Vietnam supposedly to be assigned to the psychological operations directorate of the MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) headquarters and wound up getting siphoned off into MACSOG (MACV Studies and Observation Group) which was I don't know if you've heard was studies and observations group. It was a cross border special ops reconnaissance special operations outfit. I worked operations into Cambodia but we did operations into Laos. There had been some aborted operations into North Vietnam and basically we were the Vietnam wars equivalent to OSS; did that for a year.

Q: What sort of stuff were you doing?

RAY: I was an operations officer so I did mission planning, I did basically the analysis of recon team reports, prepared the daily reports that came back here to the Joint Staff, briefed senior people on what we were finding, sort of planned areas of reconnaissance.

Q: Were you under constraints not to talk about what you…essentially we were talking about confining the war to South Vietnam when we knew the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were all over the place.

RAY: Even my roommate at the BOQ I lived in in Saigon didn't know what I did. It wasn't something you could actually…back in those days before like the mercenary magazine, before a guy started talking about it and you started seeing things in the paper about it you didn't even talk to other military people about it.

Q: Right now we are two days into having the secretary of state who was probably going up the Mekong River into Cambodia too as a young ensign.

RAY: It was basically just strategic cross-border reconnaissance and there were a few other things. There was some direct action missions but it wasn't something that you could really…some of it still I don't know if it can be talked about, some of it is a little vague. You get this guy Plaster who has written books about it and a lot of it focuses on the recon teams and the guys that were actually out on the ground doing the recon.

Q: We used to have a long range…

RAY: The LRPs, Long- range Reconnaissance Patrol, that's slightly different. The Long-range Reconnaissance Patrols basically if you have a unit the long-range patrols are looking out where that unit is operating and there is the international border.

Q: So they are watching.

RAY: Well we had trail watchers who were watching the Ho Chi Minh Trail to try and get a sense of what was coming down. We had teams that were trying to figure out where particular units were and what they were up too. There were missions that would go out and get a prisoner and try to capture one of their couriers, there were missions to sabotage some of their arms caches and if you think about what the whole behind the lines operations would be then some of it was probably taking place.

Q: How did you cotton to this type of work?

RAY: It was fun, it was fun. It was sad in a way because we were taking some pretty heavy losses in those days. Some of the guys that were lost I had gotten to know but it was also fun so it's hard to describe it, it was interesting.

Q: I mean this type of when you want to use an awful lot of self-control you are not part of a bigger thing you are doing it.

RAY: No it was fun and it was interesting career wise because by then I had been promoted to captain and up to this point I'm still an artillery man who had never done anything artillery. So the people back there in Washington said that's no good we are going to have to move you so I was moved to military intelligence. I came back and those were back in the days when they had the post up in Baltimore, Fort Holabird, so I was trained as a counter intelligence officer and worked there for six months in the old Army Intelligence Command. Then I got time off to go and finish my undergraduate degree and went off to Benedict College and got my BS in business administration and went straight back to Vietnam. Well after transitioning from counter intelligence to collection I ran the collection services for the 525thMI group for MACV from '72 until they pulled the unit out in '73.

Q: How did you find…did you work at all with the Arvin?

RAY: I worked more with the Vietnamese than I did with American units.

Q: How did you find them?

RAY: At my level pretty good. There were some dedicated, hardworking people. The problem they had is a lot of their senior officers were political patronage; there was a lack of real good senior leadership. At the working level most of them were pretty sharp.

Q: These, of course, were people who, God knows, they had a lot of experience they had been fighting for a long time.

RAY: All their lives. As the chief of collection for MACV basically my job was to vet the operations of the Vietnamese Intelligence Services and provide resources. I remember some of those guys were really among the best and there were some of them that weren't worth a bucket of warm spit but then there were a lot of my American colleagues that

weren't either. But I found them to be quite dedicated and quite good. There was no clear leadership at the top to hold that thing together.

Q: Well how did you feel about our commitment to Vietnam?

RAY: You know back in those days I'd taken an oath and if that's where the chain of command said I had to go that's where I went. Once you got there and you got to know the Vietnamese I think I had probably swallowed that domino theory in the beginning but one you got there though it didn't take me long in '68 to realize that the urban legend that we'd been told about how the Chinese Communists were going to get together with the Vietnamese Communists and take over all of Southeast Asia was a crock. I learned this very early on working with my Vietnamese counterparts there was no way the Vietnamese and Chinese were going to get together on anything. But, at the same time you got to know individuals and there was a sense of entrepreneurship and liveliness in the south that almost got crushed out after 1975 and I thought most of those people deserved better than that. So it wasn't this stop the spread of communism that bothered me back then it was these people should have the right to determine their own fate and you have these people from the north who are trying to step on that. It was much the same when I went to South Korea in 1973. South Koreans, I'm married to one so I can say this, can be real trying at times, quite harsh but at the same time…

Q: Very direct.

RAY: …very blunt but they have a right to live the lives that they choose to live. You had this element in their case the North Koreans and in the Vietnamese case the North Vietnamese trying to take that away from them; that was sort of the way I looked at it. Then, of course, we lost.

Q: Did you have any contact with the CIA or Cords or that?

RAY: Not a lot with Cords. When I was in MACSOG there was a significant agency presence in it.

Q: How about the embassy?

RAY: Yeah, we actually drove around in vehicles with embassy plates which was part of our "cover". I worked in the headquarters of MACSOG which was on Pasteur Street in Saigon which is really around the corner from the embassy and had been in the embassy a couple times. In fact, I met what's his name…

Q: Volker?

RAY: …no, no the colonel who…

Q: Vance?

RAY: …became secretary of state who said "I'm in charge."

Q: The Senator?

RAY: …The Iran Contra, Ollie North.

Q: Ollie North, yeah.

RAY: I met him no, not Ollie North the one who became secretary of State the colonel who became a general.

Q: Haig.

RAY: Haig, Alex Haig; I never met Ollie North. I met Alexander Haig in the lobby of the U.S. embassy in Saigon and I think he was a colonel at the time but I used to walk past the embassy three or four days a week from my office to the zoo.

Q: Oh yes, the zoo was right down the street.

RAY: But in the job I was in I didn't have a lot of contact with the embassy or with people in the embassy. I had a lot more contact with the embassy my first job in Korea when I was commander of the 24th Psychological Operations detachment. I used to brief the PAO, the public affairs officer, at the embassy in Seoul about twice a month on North Korean propaganda trends and then what we were doing because my outfit put propaganda into North Korea and then we evaluated the North Korean propaganda that got sent south.

Q: When were you in Korea?

RAY: The first tour was '73-'76-'77 or so and I went back in '79-'81.

Q: Did Korea represent a change? I mean here you were all of a sudden you were getting Asia. How did Korea strike you?

RAY: At first it was sort of culture shock because I was in Vietnam. I have to tell this story and people always shake their heads when I say it.

We were in the '72-'73 drawdown when units were being pulled out of Vietnam and as the chief of collection I had to bundle up our case files and take them to Bangkok to turn them over to the 500 demi which was picking up our load because the 525th was being pulled back to the U.S. Meanwhile I was in Bangkok the unit got the go, I mean it was one of those under the arrangements I think when the units are tabbed it had 48 hours to pack and move so when I get back from Bangkok and I go to my office it's an empty building. I go to MACV personnel and they say, "Oh, here are your orders you are going to Okinawa to the 7th Psychological Operations Group, you have to go out to Ton San Nhut Air Force Base and make your own travel arrangements so I hung around and got it.

The woman (a major) who was the chief of the resource branch and I were friends and in fact we had been TDY in Bangkok so we just hung around Saigon and partied for a few weeks and then I think I took off about a week before she did. I went off and hopped a flight to Okinawa, got to Okinawa just at the time that the commander of the detachment in Korea had been kicked out of the country for reasons I've never been sure of and the group commander asked if I wanted to be commander of the detachment; so I got sent up to Korea. That's the first time I'd ever been there although I'd met Koreans before and had worked with them in Vietnam. So Southeast Asia Korea was a bit of culture shock especially the weather changes and their attitudes. The Southeast Asians tend to be a lot easier going, a little less Calvinist but it was fun.

Q: Where was your headquarters in Korea?

RAY: Are you familiar with Seoul during the '70s?

Q: Yeah, I was there '76-'79.

RAY: Okay, you know Yongsan compound? It was two bases on either side of the road and as you got down there there was a statue of an American general right before you sort of took the left fork to Itaewon? Then to the right there was a gas station and there was a little compound with a few Quonset huts and buildings behind that gas station? That was my headquarters.

Q: I went by it many times.

RAY: That was my headquarters. That and I had a small group with a transmitter and a tower on Kangwha Island and then another group up in Chor'won Valley.

Q: When you got there what was the feeling one about the possibility of war and if war started how it would come out?

RAY: You know because there were so many incidents all the time I think it was more just sort of fatalist approach that we would hold them at the DMZ as long as we could until forces could get in from the U.S. This was the time there were all these incidents of North Korean infiltrators.

Q: Tunnels.

RAY: The tunnels, the incidents at the Demilitarized Zone, North Korean attacks against the south, and the incessant propaganda back and forth especially in Chor'won Valley they had the large South Korean loudspeakers up north of where my guys were; my guys were in a little compound with an antennae we basically did radio broadcasts into North Korea. The loud speakers were blaring back and forth at each other day and night. At night I would sometimes go and spend the night with my guys in Chor'won Valley and you could hear gun fire and you would go up and see bullet holes where the North Koreans would take pot shots at the South Korean antennae's and occasionally you'd

hear the whistle of one of the bullets that missed the antenna whizzing over our compound; that was just a fact of life. The funny thing about bringing it up is I was there like I said from ’73 till late ’76 you just never thought of it, you just did your job every day.

Q: How did you find your contact with the Korean troops compared to say the South Vietnamese?

RAY: Pretty similar, being in the unit I was in I had more contact with Korean troops than with American actually because we were doing the North Korean propaganda thing. I found the Korean troops to be tougher than almost any I’d ever met before and hard at everything they did. They worked hard, they drank hard, they were very blunt, if they liked you you would know that they liked you and if they were ticked at you you knew that too. I got along with them great.

Q: Did you run across the embassy?

RAY: Like I said I was in the embassy two or three times a month briefing.

Q: Who was the…

RAY: I can’t remember, I can’t even remember the name now of the PAO I used to brief. I was also in the embassy getting birth certificates for my kids because during that first tour my first wife, did I mention we were divorced right at the end of my Vietnam tour. She didn’t find military life to be all that attractive when I went into the second tour and then I met and married my current wife after arriving in Korea. So I was…

Q: What was her background?

RAY: A high school student/college dropout who wanted me to teach her English and since I don’t believe in teachers dating students and she was a lousy student I dumped her out of my English class and married her. I was in the embassy a couple times a month, about every other week I had to go in and brief the public affairs guy and I can remember what he looked like but I can’t remember his name.

Q: Don’t worry about it.

RAY: I had to brief him on what we were seeing in North Korean propaganda and what the people were doing. I spent a lot of my time though with the J2 of the Korean ministry of national defense and with the guys who actually worked on the ground back then.

Q: What were you looking at?

RAY: You have like the patterns of they would release these balloons and they would fly south and they would drop leaflets and occasionally you would get leaflets that would fall on An Sun’s compound even and looking at the content what were the themes they were

focusing on, were the themes somehow related to events that were taking place, just trying to get inside their minds and see what they were up to.

Q: Were you there during the infamous tree chopping episode?

RAY: I think that happened when I was at Bragg.

Q: Because that was in evidence in '76.

RAY: That happened right after I ended my first tour and I was at Bragg. I was there for the assassination of Park's wife, and I was there for his assassination.

Q: Did you feel that our commitment to this is sort of internally but our commitment to South Korea was a solid one and justified?

RAY: I think we certainly intended for it to be. Over the years one of the things that has bothered me is we make a lot of commitments and I think we mean well when we make them but quite often we don't analyze why we are making them. Just like Vietnam we made a commitment to Vietnam but I think it was made on the basis of faulty reasoning from the start. We were looking at it in a Cold War prism of the Communist takeover of Southeast Asia when in fact it was more of an internal power struggle as to which side would control Vietnam. On top of that we tried fighting one war with the tactics and mindset of another kind of war entirely and when all of this didn't work out we picked our toys up and went home.

Q: In the army you are moving up towards going as a lifer aren't you?

RAY: Yeah, I spent twenty years in it and when I retired September 1, 1982 by which time I had twenty years two months and a few days service.

Q: What rank were you?

RAY: Major.

Q: Did you get involved with Vietnam again…

RAY: With the Army?

Q: …after you got to Korea?

RAY: No, no…not in the army. When I left and went to Korea in '73 I was commander of 24th Psychological Operations detachment and then it was inactivated and I was commander of Camp Market which is a little base between Seoul and Inchon and responsible for the port of Inchon for the military supplies that come through there and my base had the big Armed Forces Exchange Service depot and I was post commander for a while. Then I came back from Korea in '76, I guess; I was at Bragg from '76 till '79

mostly as public affairs officer. I was the assistant public affairs officer for the 18th Air Borne for two and a half years. Then I went back to Korea in '79 as plans officer in the Operations division and the combined armed forces command on unconventional warfare planning till '81 when I came back to the U.S. and went to the Presidio at Monterrey as a senior Slavic language training advisor until I retired in '92.

Q: So you were at the army's language school area. Were they still using Spanish war barracks for…

RAY: Oh yeah. The building I had my office in had been one of the old 9th Calvary buildings with the stable building under there. Oh yeah. I had a view of Pebble Beach from the porch outside my office… oh yeah.

Q: Yeah. I was in the 6th Platoon I think, I went to the Army language school for a year; I took Russian.

RAY: I never attended DLI – Defense Language Institute. The only language training I had was in Korean. I took Korean at the Army education center in Seoul. I took Vietnamese up here in Washington through a special contract with a civilian school called the Institute of Modern Languages; I was never a DLI student but I did my last tour as a DLI staff.

Q: During this time all of a sudden you are really getting much more involved with Asians than most military people. Did you have any feel or contact with the Foreign Service or not?

RAY: Like I said other than briefing this guy at the embassy twice a month and getting my wife's visa when we came to the States and getting my kids birth thing not really. My whole introduction to the Foreign Service was back door. When I put in my retirement papers at Monterrey I used to have lunch with the Presidio librarian. I would go and we would have lunch at the library and I would sit and talk books. I was carping to her one day about my concerns about retirement and being stuck in a 9-5 job living in the same place and not being able to travel and probably going to be driven crazy and this woman who I think was the wife of one of the sergeant majors on the Presidio who hadn't even gotten her U.S. citizenship at the time, come to think of it, she suggested the Foreign Service. I had never to that point been made aware of how people in the embassies I dealt with got their jobs. I mean the Foreign Service didn't do a very good job of recruiting back in those days. She found the address of the board of examiners and gave it to me and I wrote off for the Foreign Service exam.

Q: You took it I take.

RAY: I took it in San Jose on December 5, 1981 and a few months or weeks later I got word that I had passed it and I registered for the orals that were conducted in San Francisco I think in April of '82 and a few weeks after that I heard that I past it. Since I was in the process of retiring I had done my retirement physical so they let me submit

those papers rather than have to go through others; I also had an active security clearance to include SI so that only required them to send the DS agent out to do a neighborhood check. I lived on Fort Ord so here is a lieutenant colonel on one side, a major here and a colonel over here so that was pretty easy. Then I got notified that there would be an A-100 class starting August 10th. When I talked to the personnel guys at Monterrey they said that with the leave I had accrued I could go on leave and go on and join the Foreign Service.…I was a reservist too by the way; I never was regular army, so there were no dual compensation restrictions. Anyway, on August 10,. I joined the Foreign Service and I would just be retired on the date of my retirement. So I packed the family and packed the stuff up and drove across country to Washington and went to FSI-Foreign Service Institute, in Rosslyn at that time.

Q: We will start the next session with this. I think this is a good place to stop. First I want to ask do you recall any questions that were asked you during the oral exam?

RAY: The one question that I recall that almost blew it for me is there were two or three people, a sort of heavy set woman who looked to be in her mid to late thirties and then two older guys. I'm sure now having done oral assessments when I was at senior seminar not one of them at least was retired from his age. She asked a question that sticks in my mind. She asked me of my assessment of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. I came back with what policy? We don't have one ever since we quit using gunboats which apparently pissed her off to no end. She didn't appreciate my answer which could have sabotaged it but other than that I don't remember, that was the only question that sticks in my mind because he body language when I answered said you nearly blew it. She didn't appreciate the candor and I think the funny thing is both the guys their reaction to my answer was very positive and I found out later that she had been a Latin America specialist. I gored her ox and she didn't appreciate that at all.

Q: Well on that why don't we stop on this point and we will pick this up when you are coming to the A-100 course the junior officer course in 1982?

RAY: Yes, August 1982 I did A-100.

Q: Alright today is the 13th of February 2013 with Charles Ray. We are going to start you with the A-100 course. When did you start it?

RAY: I think it was August 10, 1982.

Q: A-100 being the basic orientation course.

RAY: The orientation course, it was nine weeks back in those days.

Q: Can you talk about the composition of the student body.

RAY: Well there were 26 of us at the time; six were mid-level hires and 20 of us were JOs, junior officers. There were about four or five women in the class, I'd have to haul

out my old A-100 class photo but I think there were four or five women in the class of 26. Let's see there was one Hispanic and five African-Americans in the class of 26.

Q: To go back to when I came in 1955 and we had I think there were thirty of us, one minority a Chinese-American from Hawaii.

RAY: No women?

Q: Oh, good God no. There were women who came in before or later but very few. We were class 1 because the McCarthy period had sort of stopped recruitment and they had started renumbering. Then the numbering had gone up from one to one hundred and something and then started all over again.

RAY: Yeah my class was Class 11 under the 1980 Act.

Q: In the first place taking a look around how did you feel you fit in? I mean did it seem like a group that fit together at all or what?

RAY: Eventually we did. The one thing that I've noticed is when you throw a bunch a people together in that kind of environment whether it's classroom or training or combat after a few weeks they tend to sort of bond together. You'll occasionally have outliers and I think we had a couple who were forever outliers throughout their careers; but we bonded fairly well. I wasn't the oldest in the class at 37; I think there might have been two people of the mid-levels who were older than me who had extensive experience in government before but most of them were considerably younger than my 37. I don't think anybody else in the class had military experience.

Q: I was wondering this particularly military experience. Military experience trains you to be trained. I mean so you can sort of sit back and be the observer while you are going through this process.

RAY: I have to say frankly A-100, and I don't know if it has changed much, I didn't really find it that useful other than as a networking tool. When you first join the military in addition to learning how to march and hold your weapon you learn a little about the history and legacy and culture of the organization. I remember A-100, I still have some of the handouts from then and there was a little on how to write for the Foreign Service, there was a lot on career management but it seemed to be more like taking shop in high school.

Q: Yeah. I just sat in one a couple weeks ago and the history of the Foreign Service section of it four hours and that's it.

RAY: I think that's more than we got; I don't remember getting more than about an hour or two. There were readings that were available but if you didn't take the time to go out on your own and read about it there was really very little about the history of the Foreign Service.

Q: We are hoping to change this and this is being done essentially by our organization of retirees but not professional trainers but these oral histories. The idea is to develop a culmination of experiences and somehow or another get some of those experiences to the troops.

RAY: I'm sharing AFSAs professionalism in ethics committee and that is one of the things that we are looking at too is we don't really do a very good job of creating a Foreign Service officer who can then be trained to do a lot of different things. I mean I just recently reviewed the A-100 syllabus or at least a schedule of the current class. They have many hours on how to deal with your CDO, career development officer, and how to ship your household effects and very little on not just the history on Foreign Service but the history of American diplomacy.

Q: You know this last group that I sat in on now I allow for a certain amount of people being a little bit of not wanting to stand up in class but the first that was asked was how many of you know who Dean Atchison was? I'd say in about 60-70 only one hand went up. You know…

RAY: You might have asked them who was America's first diplomat posted abroad.

Q: Basically it wasn't Franklin but damn close to it.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: Well Franklin was in a way…

RAY: He was the first minister.

Q: The first minister and Franklin had served in London before representing Massachusetts. He really qualified for all the relatives before him.

RAY: But people don't know this stuff;…yeah that's pretty sad in a way.

Q: It's really unfortunate because I think something is missing. What we are hoping to do as this course, we've been doing this for about 26 years and hopefully this will continue, but to establish something I like to call and sort of like the equivalent to West Point the long gray line. I mean Philip Habib went and did this and that and others did this and that and you know to let people know…

RAY: Well its part of our heritage which very few people in the Foreign Service know or appreciate and actually very few outside know. Anyway, A-100 was very interesting, I got to know some nice people and the few who are still around, not very many, I'm keeping tabs on or keeping in touch with people but we occasionally run into each other. I am still in contact with a few; of the 26 I think there might still be four on active duty. When you consider that was thirty plus years ago that's not bad.

Q: As you were doing this did you kind of know what specialty you would be doing or where you wanted to do it?

RAY: I came in as admin because at the time I was on the register for consular, admin, USIA and political but the only one that had a class starting that summer, the only openings were admin so I took that. From what I read about what admin officers did didn't seem to be that much of a strain to do. So I was coned admin which is now management. As to where I wanted to go my desire was to go to places I hadn't been before and when our class got the list of open assignments there was one slot, one position in China and at that point had been all over Asia and I wanted to go to China so I let it be known to my 25 classmates that the China position was mine and that as an ex-Special Forces officer I would take it unkindly if I had too much competition for it. A funny thing is and I didn't find it…you know and I don't know if they did it with your class but you would have the agency people who are going to be covered as FSOs who go through the A-100 class…

Q: They didn't in mine.

RAY: …they tell you who it is near the end of training in fact right about the time when they do the assignments and everybody thought it was me until the guy who it was was introduced. So no one complained but I had to fight HR, human resources, or personnel, at the time because I had two kids. My two youngest were, this was '82 so they would have been like second, third, fourth grade. The feeling in the system was they didn't really want to send anyone with young school age kids to China as it would be too hard. I had to remind them that those kids had grown up moving from military base to military base and by the time I joined the Foreign Service my son who was born in '74, so he would have been eight, had already gone to four different schools by the time he was eight. He had been born in Korea, had gone to school in Korea, had lived in Korea, had lived in North Carolina, had spent a summer in Texas with triple digit temperatures and I didn't think China would be that tough for him. So finally they gave in and paneled me for the job and so I went to Guangzhou as a consular officer.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RAY: I got there in '83 so we did A-100 for nine weeks from August to the end of September. Then I did six months of Chinese plus the ConGen Rosslyn so it would have been about March, say. We arrived in Guangzhou in March of '83, did an eighteen month tour there. I worked in the consular section doing mostly immigrant visas for the first half of the tour and then combined citizen services and consular fraud investigations for the last half.

Q: What was Guangzhou like at the time?

RAY: Gray, depressing but trying to bloom. We were in the Dong Fang Hotel which was an old Soviet era hotel with a lot of glitz and statues of dragons and fountains in the

lobby. Our quarters were in one side of the hotel, which they basically gave us adjoining hotel rooms with doors knocked in them depending on family size. The consulate was in another wing with the visa section on the ground floor and the others on the top and the next to the top floor. We had a school for the kids on I think it was about the fifth or sixth floor.

Guangzhou, when I first arrived, they were building new hotels. The first hotel they built was the China Hotel next door to the Dong Fang Hotel which had the first all you could eat buffet with decent food in Guangzhou probably in decades. They were building the White Swan, which is where the consular moved shortly after we left; you still had a lot of people wearing blue and brown and green and gray Mao jackets. The big event in Guangzhou was the, I don't remember if they had it once or twice a year, the big trade fair that they held in Guangzhou, a big international trade fair when all of a sudden you would see women in the lobby of the Dong Fang Hotel wearing Cheongsams or tight Western dresses. I remember it was difficult explaining to the kids where these ladies came from and what they did. It was interesting though because it was just beginning to sort of develop into what I call a shabby second cousin of Hong Kong. Schengen was just being built then, the special trade zone. Guangzhou was interesting in a way as you had the Ching Ping market where you could drive through and see the cat and dog carcasses strung up for sale. Interesting restaurants, not a whole lot at first but you could see the potential that was developing.

Q: Were Americans a novelty there at the time or not?

RAY: Not as much as in a lot of parts of China. Guangzhou at the time when I got there in '83 the consulate had been open for a couple years, I don't know how long but it had been open for a while. Guangzhou did all of the immigrant visas so you had a steady flow of Chinese going through there either applying for visitors visas or applying for immigrant visas. The Chinese were opening up so you had a lot of Americans, Chinese-Americans and others going through there to tour China. There was some hesitation about dealing with the Americans but we weren't quite the novelty that we were when we went to places like Guilin or my second tour was in Shenyang in the Northeast and we were like Martians, that was…

Q: By any chance was Liz Raspolic there when you were there?

RAY: Liz Raspolic was the chief of the consular section; she was my boss, yeah.

Q: Because she worked for me when I was consul general in Seoul, she was in the consular section.

RAY: No, Liz was the chief of the consular section and she and I got along…well she had that job for quite a while too because I remember she was still chief of the consular section when I ran the consular section in Shenyang for a while; I don't remember when she left.

Q: Well tell us a bit about your work.

RAY: The immigrant visas that was probably the start of the big spike in immigrants coming to the U.S. We did 20 thousand or more immigrant visas a year. I remember one day, and there were only two of us doing immigrant visas, we issued 100. You had a big push on what do they call them, the P-6 visas for Chinese cooks. One of the things that took up most of my time when I was doing anti-fraud was trying to decide which of the applicants coming into apply for a visa to work in San Francisco as a cook was actually a cook and how many of them were actually mechanics who were going to work in their cousins restaurant in San Francisco. There were a lot of fiancé visas; I didn't work non-immigrant visas that much other than fill in on occasion but there was a big deal of Chinese women going to the U.S. as fiancées.

This was also the time when a lot of emphasis was put on the paper families, the fraud schemes that were cooked up back in the thirties and forties documenting before they got rid of the Chinese exclusion act of male Chinese born and going back to their villages in China, marrying, establishing a family, coming back to the U.S. and making repeated trips sometimes creating two or three or four paper families who were coming up in the 1980s with documents to justify immigration. We were processing applicants who were coming in with photos and land deeds and household registers and letters from the 1930. The most interesting one I did was a citizenship claim of a guy who came in, who had to be what in his early 80s or late 70s, short, non-Chinese looking brown skinned guy who claimed that his father was Chinese and his mother was Native American and he had been born on an Indian Reservation in California. He had been taken back to China in 1938 and trapped there….I'm sorry not '38 but he was taken back just before the Communist takeover and got trapped there. He couldn't get back to the U.S., after the Communists took over he had to get rid of his paperwork proving he was an American in order to survive got married, had kids but always remembered living in the U.S. What did he say I guess he was about 17 when he was taken back to China so he had basically spent his first seventeen years in the U.S. and he missed home. He was coming in in 1983 to apply for his citizenship.

Q: Did you figure out where he was from?

RAY: They finally did. I worked that case for a long time; I believed him and the guy clearly was mixed. He spoke rough but he spoke English and after that many years without being able to speak English it was rough. He had memories of places and things that he couldn't have gotten any way other than having been there but he didn't have any documents and you know how the bureaucracy is. A gut feeling won't get it done and we went back and forth. The case was still pending when I left post in…let's see I got there in March of '83 so I must have left in sometime the summer or maybe even later in '84 to come back here to get ready to go to Shenyang. I found out later that they had finally through some mechanism given him his passport and let him go back to the State; he just wanted to go back and die at home, the whole Chinese thing, to die where you were born. Well he wasn't born in China so he had no desire to do that.

Q: What about students? Did you get involved with students?

RAY: Not in Guangzhou, not that much. That was mostly though the non-immigrant visa section.

Q: Who was the consul general?

RAY: I can't remember the name of the guy who was consul general when I first arrived but he was only there a few months and then was replaced by Wever Gim. He was interesting because I think Wever's family was from Guangdong Province originally.

Q: How stood Chinese-American relations during the period you were in Guangzhou?

RAY: They were interesting in that I think the Chinese were struggling with just how to interact with us. I found it interesting that there was a difference between the way the officials in the south dealt with us and the way their counterparts in Beijing did; I found that out in an interesting way. I was sent as escort officer once with a guy from the refugee bureau here, this was also about the time when you had lots of ethnic Chinese coming from Vietnam who were being evicted. Then there were also the occasional artillery duels between the Chinese and the Vietnamese and they were putting the ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam in refugee camps within artillery range of the border which upset a lot of people back here. So this guy whose name I have forgotten, we were in touch for a long time and then we dropped out; he came out to do a tour and check things out. We had an official from Guangdong accompany us and two people from some ministry in Beijing. I thought it was interesting that the official from Guangdong didn't have much to say to the two people from Beijing who couldn't talk to locals because the locals we encountered refused to speak Mandarin; they were would only speak Cantonese. At that time I probably knew 150 words of Cantonese and 152 words of Mandarin but I often found myself having to be the interpreter between these guys and locals who would talk to me but wouldn't talk to them.

Q: Did you get at all involved with local officials and were they interested in what we were up to?

RAY: We were always watched, technically we couldn't go anywhere outside the city without having someone from the Wai Ban go with us from the local foreign affairs office. In fact, from Guangzhou the only place that we could go legally without having an escort we could drive from Guangzhou to Macau, to the border crossing, without an escort as long as we didn't stop and then we could walk over into Macau. But we weren't allowed to go outside the city for anything else without an escort and our tickets had to be purchased through the foreign affairs office and if we were gone for meetings we had to have someone from the foreign affairs office with us to include dealing with citizen services cases. It was interesting.

I didn't find any animosity, we weren't harassed or anything even the time, as I said, we were working these fraud cases and a lot of them involved cooks. You had people in San

Francisco who would mistranslate Chinese documents and to put this in perspective in the Chinese restaurants there were two classes; there were the chef and then there were the kitchen helpers. The difference in Chinese between the two was one character. There were a couple of liars in San Francisco and there were people in the notary offices in China who were consistently translating kitchen helper as chef and it wasn't until…and unfortunately at the time when you were taking the six month course FSI didn't want to teach you to read so I had to teach myself a few characters. It was only after I had learned that when I was reading these documents and I would see two different characters. There was *chu shi* which was chef or cook and then there was *chu gong* and I had one of my locals explain to me that it meant the person was a kitchen worker, not a cook; they might be allowed to chop vegetables, but that's all. That's when I also noticed that a lot of these certificates that said so and so was a certified cook at such and such place in the English, but that it actually said that he was a certified kitchen helper in the original Chinese. That didn't go down too well with some of the notarial offices when I started bouncing their documents back saying that they were mistranslating. Then when a guy came in who was a legitimate cook, very competent, brought in the book that they kept in the county listing every registered chef in the county; his name, his address, his birthday, everything. While I interviewed him I had my FSN – Foreign Service National make a copy of that book so we had from at least that one country, everyone who came in we could run them against our own records. That didn't make them happy either but they never took any action. The only action that they ever took that's impunitive was we would get social security checks for retired people; there were probably fifty to one hundred retired Chinese-Americans living in the consular district who got monthly social security checks which we would repackage and send in registered mail through the Chinese postal system. I remember one day going to the post office and being told that we could no longer do that; the regulations didn't allow it. I couldn't read the regulations because they were secret. We went around and around on that for a long time. I'm not even sure how that ever got sorted out because that was near the end of my tour. That was about the only and I don't know if that was retribution or just some bureaucrat being bureaucratic.

Q: I might point out to somebody reading this that if you have a license as a cook this means you are a professional going to a cook's job but if you are a kitchen helper that's just a manual laborer and that doesn't qualify.

RAY: That's also fraud because the guys would come in with a certificate that said in Chinese so and so is a kitchen helper with a translation attached with seal that said so and so is a specialty cook which required, in my view, complicity on both ends because these documents were obtained, sent to the U.S. and then sent through the Department of Labor to get the Labor certification. But yeah, that's precisely it and often it was a way to get around the long wait for P-5s or the brother and sister visa category which is years waiting. In most of those cases you would find out that the applicant was a brother, or cousin, or uncle of the petitioner in the U.S. I have no idea how many were issued before we tumbled to the bad translation but we probably had 200-300 of these a year.

Q: I take it that these people getting visas from you were going fairly well distributed throughout the country wasn't it?

RAY: In the U.S.?

Q: Yeah.

RAY: No, actually one of the things I did you'd think doing one hundred visas a day I'd be busy enough but I was always fascinated by the people coming through; no one had ever done a demographic study of where were they coming from in China, what was their income status, family size, where were they going in the U.S. So I went back through our visa files for two years I think and I did a number crunching thing. How many visas were issued, to whom, what was family size, age, relationship it was a thirteen section cable. Most of them were going to the West Coast, they had a lot. The year I was there we started getting more people coming to the East Coast, to New York, and to the Washington area. But because most of the visas especially in the early days were relationship based, family members who had been living in the U.S. long enough and the biggest Chinese communities that had mainland connections were in San Francisco and the San Francisco area so the bulk of them were going there. The bulk of them too by the way, were coming from one county in China, Taishan County.

Q: Is that a traditional county? There are a couple of them on the coast where so many of the Chinese came from.

RAY: Fuzhou province had a lot, as did other parts of Guangdong Province, but just in terms of sheer numbers the largest percentage; I don't remember exactly but I think it was more than half; were coming from Taishan County and surrounding areas in Guangdong Province. I found out later that most of the Chinese who came to the U.S. during the time the railroads were being built came from that area.

Q: No.

RAY: There was a pattern for instance the Chinese community in Singapore comes from one part of China and the Chinese community in Malaysia came from another part, the Chinese community in San Francisco another part and the Chinese here in the Washington area, it is a little more diverse now but the initially the Chinese here in Washington were from different parts of China than the Chinese on the West Coast.

Q: For you and your family what was life like?

RAY: We got to know each other well. We would occasionally have consulate events in someone's hotel room/apartment but because we were in a hotel that had…basically we had what had been four single rooms connected doors so we had a TV in each room, we had a bathroom in each room and we had a couple VCRs so we watched a lot of tapes, and we would watch Chinese TV. The kids would occasionally do little school things and we'd go out to dinner maybe once or twice a month but basically we just sort of stayed home and read and enjoyed each other's company when we weren't traveling.

Q: Did you go down to Hong Kong much?

RAY: A lot we tried to get to Hong Kong about once a month. I mean that is where we got our fresh food, fresh meat which was illegal to take into China but we would always get frozen meat. We would always take an empty suitcase to Hong Kong and bring it back full of frozen meat. We did other traveling too. The 18 months in Guangzhou and the two years plus a few months in Shenyang we saw a lot of Asia; we went to Bali, Australia, Sri Lanka and Korea a couple of times to visit the wife's relatives.

Q: Your wife is Korean?

RAY: Yes.

Q: How did she find she fit in there or not?

RAY: She did and she speaks a little Chinese but not that much. People tend to think of Asians as sort of monolithic but they are not.

Q: We know the Chinese are not well accepted in Korea.

RAY: Koreans have a pretty inflated opinion of themselves particularly in Southern China where a lot of the Chinese tend to be shorter, darker and Koreans have this sort of stratification attitude. I think she enjoyed it she talks about it a lot pretty much. Shenyang was a bit of a strain on her.

Q: Where in China is Shenyang?

RAY: It is in the far Northeast, it's Liaoning Province, it's the…

Q: We are looking at a map now and…

RAY: Shenyang is well there it is right there. This part here the big hunk on the top the Northeast with North Korea to the south and Russia to the north is China's northeast of Yang Bay is three provinces, there's Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning. That was the consular district for Shenyang which opened in late '84. I arrived there…

Q: Is that all mucked in?

RAY: No, Mukden is Dalian. Yes, Mukden is Dalian no maybe Shenyang is Mukden. I get confused sometimes, but yeah, Shenyang used to be known as Mukden.

Q: Up there was a horrendous earthquake wasn't there?

RAY: Not while we were there.

Q: I thought in northern China somewhere.

RAY: It might have been but…

Q: It probably happened some time ago.

RAY: That consulate opened in late ’84. Jim Hall who had been the deputy principal officer in Guangzhou was the first CG, consul general. He got me up there as the head of his consular section and we covered everything from the Port of Dalian to the Russian border. There is up in the central province of Guilin Province Yanbian Prefecture which is an autonomous prefecture of mostly ethnic Koreans on the border with North Korea; Dandong, which is on the Yalu to the southeast of Shenyang and then, of course, the Port of Dalian. Back then it was a depressing gray polluted place except for the countryside which is beautiful, the cities were just depressing.

Q: Was there much around the Antong? I think of the Antong River, was it the Antong River?

RAY: Well yeah you have the Amur River…

Q: The Amur River.

RAY: …in the north. I actually got up there a couple of times. The CG and I went on a ten-day border trip once. We went up to the Russian border, went along the river and there was no military activity, the Russian and the Chinese had increased trade. They had a I don’t remember the name of the border town but there was a Russian trade mission in the rail yard in this border town and the Russian trains would come over, pull into the rail yard and they would have to lift the cars off the rails and put them on to new rails so they could get around on the Chinese tracks.

Q: New wheels.

RAY: New wheels yeah. The Chinese were sending raw materials and the Russians were sending cheap trade goods. The Russian trade mission was funny, the lady who was in charge of the trade mission spoke a little English and I’ll never forget the day we went in and our Chinese minders took us over just to show us they were getting along with the Russians. These people were so happy to see non-Chinese they basically invited in for tea and we found out that no one in the rail yard would talk to them except for business and they really wanted to go home, it was lonely and the place just basically sucked as far as they were concerned.

Q: How about the North Korean border? Was there much in the way of leakage of Koreans coming to the States?

RAY: Then not as many it really spiked a few years after I left. You didn’t have that much illegal passage across the border back in themid-‘80s; there was some not nearly as

much as today. I found it interesting the relationship between China and North Korea. The foreign affairs guy for Heilongjiang Province up in Harbin who was dual-headed; he was the America's desk guy and he was the North Korea desk guy. I dealt with him a lot because we had a lot of American foreign experts working up in Heilongjiang Province up in the oil fields and English teachers around so I was in Harbin probably twice a month; I got to know this guy well. He had to go to Pyongyang on a monthly trip so he would come through Shenyang and take the train to Pyongyang and on his way back he would always stop in Shenyang and we would have coffee together and he would tell me about his trip. I found it interesting that while publicly the Chinese were always talking about *their* friendship with the North Koreans in private when you got to know them they thought the North Koreans were the most brutish, barbaric people on the planet.

Q: What was his impression of events or relationships within North Korea?

RAY: Well that was funny being in a country like China that controlled where everyone went and everyone had to have an ID. He found it shocking that in Pyongyang they had streets that commoners were not allowed to walk on and walking down the street if someone wearing a dark suit, sunglasses and a tie walked down the street all the common people would bow and act subservient; he just thought that was absolutely fantastic, he'd never heard of such things. There was a little North Korean girls dance troupe that toured China and they had as many guys in dark suits and dark glasses surrounding them and going everywhere with them as they had dancers in the troupe. The Chinese just thought that was hilarious. We used to go to Dangdow on the border and they had these rules. You weren't supposed to point your camera toward North Korea because the North Koreans might get too sensitive about it but the Chinese whenever we would visit and I would take visitors there occasionally when they would come to the consulate would always stand us in such a way and pose us to take a commemorative shot with Korean in the background or they would take us on a boat trip and we would go down the Yowlou river on the Chinese side to the bridge that was bombed during the Korean Way and then they would turn around and come back up the river on the North Korean side close enough that you could throw spitballs and hit the buildings on the wharf. They would pose us for pictures on the boats so that North Korea was in the background. It was strange and at the same time in local hotels you weren't supposed to mix socially with the Chinese so if you had a Chinese organization having a dance or a party or something at the hotel they would block that part off so when the foreigners came in to eat you would have your own special place in the hotel. Yet the foreign affairs people that we worked with would come to the consulate for parties or invite us to their houses. It was a strange lash up.

Q: Were we seeing the Chinese in your area up in northern China were they working for basically foreign firms or foreign export?

RAY: It was starting; I had got around to a lot of the former state farms and factories. They were starting to slowly dismantle the old mass farms; some of the factories were starting to do work for export. I met my first Chinese millionaire a guy who came in to apply for a visa to go to the States to drum up business who had developed some new

security system that he was allowed to sell and was making a fortune from it. When I asked him how he was going to pay for his trip to the U.S. he picked up his briefcase and put it on the counter, opened it and it was full of one hundred dollar bills. It was still a cash economy.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: But there was a lot of flow back and forth. This was at the time when the Chinese had started, even though they were still pretty tight with the North Koreans publicly had started to trade quietly with South Korea. We had a number of ships from ports like Pusan docking at Dalian. I know because I processed crew visas for a lot of them because at least two ships during my tour had docked at Dalian and the next port of call was the U.S. so they needed crew visas. So here I've got all their documents, the last port of call Pusan, current port Dalian, next port San Francisco or San Diego. The Koreans were getting a lot of coal and other raw materials. You had a lot of Korean businessmen, you couldn't move in Dalian without stumbling over a Korean businessman looking to start joint ventures. You had some American companies, Kimberly Clark and Gillett had joint venture factories, Boeing had a co-production thing with the Chinese air force for airplane engines; this was before Tiananmen so the Chinese were going hell bent for leather to make money.

Q: Were you able to establish I won't say close but good relations or social relations with Chinese?

RAY: Yeah, there was this guy who was the head of the America's Department and the North Korea Department in the Heilongjiang provincial foreign affairs office; he and I got fairly close. We had to hire our Chinese employees through a construction…they called it a diplomatic service's bureau. They provided all of our logistics and administrative service and I can't remember his name but the guy who ran that was just fond of Americans I guess, he was the one who would invite us to his house. I remember once going to his house and everybody getting drunk and him sitting in his kitchen in his undershirt teaching us how to make noodles. We had a couple of dance parties at the consulate and all the people from the diplomatic services bureau came and they danced and sang and had a good time. I'd say we were able to make slightly more than surface friendships. You always knew that they could be turned off at any time and maybe it was my time in the army but I always felt one of the best ways they had of keeping track of us was to stay close.

Q: Was there much in the way of Korean women being sort of brought over?

RAY: Not in those days.

Q: When one thinks of today that there is sort of a shortage of women. You had this one child policy and you don't want a girl.

RAY: That really didn't rear its ugly head in what you are talking about probably until when I was in Cambodia that's when we started getting more reports of Korean and Philippino women being enticed into China. When I was there from '83-'87 when I left it was when you were getting the negative publicity about the one child policy; the fact that some people were being punished for having more than one. There was a lot of talk of girl babies being killed.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So those single boys didn't grow up until later and that's when that story…I don't recall every hearing about efforts to get foreign wives into China when I was there in the '80s.

Q: Well the Chinese have real demographic problems.

RAY: Well that was predicted. In the '80s there were people predicting that this whole one child policy meant that people favored having a male child was going to come back to bite them one in the form of having all these men with no mates but the other and I don't frankly know how that ever worked out was they were saying a single male child in the Chinese family grows up to be a rottenly spoiled brat.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I mean I hate to say it because it's not very culturally sensitive but males in many Asian families in that era tended to be spoiled even when they had sisters.

Q: Yeah, no it's true in some other cultures too.

RAY: True, true.

Q: The Greeks do this too. Did the hand of the embassy weigh at all on you?

RAY: When I was in Guangzhou and Shenyang?

Q: Yeah, when you were in the north.

RAY: No not that much. Shenyang was the back and beyond. People from the embassy didn't come there that much; we actually went to Beijing more because we did classified pouch runs. Actually no, they didn't. I remember a few weeks after I arrived we had a very serious citizen's service case with an American businessman who accidentally started a fire in a hotel that killed people including his business partner. He was arrested and this was up in Harbin in Heilongjiang and basically because the phone service was lousy and it was really hard sometimes to get phone messages back and forth when I was in Harbin I wound up having to handle that case all by myself; fortunately it worked out. But no the embassy didn't…in fact about the only time we really had a large influx of people from the embassy was I offered to host a consular conference just to introduce

Shenyang to the rest of the China missions and a lot of people came up. I'm trying to remember if the ambassador ever came; he might of but I honestly don't remember. George Shultz in his farewell visit came to Northeast China but he flew into Dalian and flew back to Beijing; he didn't even come to Shenyang, we didn't get a lot of visitors.

Q: Were you coughing coal dust a lot there?

RAY: Yeah, it was pretty polluted. I used to get a kick in the winter when it was warm enough to snow because quite often by Christmas the temperature would be 30 below to stand on our six story apartment building and watch the snow fall. You could watch it change color as it neared the ground from white to gray as it absorbed the coal. The consulate was surrounded by these old buildings, sort of Korean style the ones with the charcoal heating systems.

Q: Andal systems.

RAY: Andal systems and they were recycling andal; they were literally scrapping up the ashes on the ground and glue them back together and reburn them. I remember we got this air monitoring system, I don't remember where we got it from but we put it in the lobby of the consulate; it had little white filters, you put them in and just sort of turn this on and it would suck the air in. By the end of the day the filter was like…

Q: Pencil lead.

RAY: And I grew a full beard and in the winter when I would walk to work I'd get ice crystals in my beard. I would go into the bathroom and wash them out and the water would be gray from the dust. It was pretty polluted.

Q: What about the health? Was this a concern?

RAY: Yeah, we knew it was polluted, we minimized our time outside in the winter; it was worse in the winter with the andal heating, I don't think we ever really thought that much about it. The kids enjoyed it we got a chance to…they have a couple of old royal palaces in Liaoning Province; there is one right inside Shenyang, old royal tombs. Up in Jilin in what's the name of that town, Chung Ching, is the home of the last emperor, if you remember that movie.

Q: <u>The Last Emperor</u>.

RAY: <u>The Last Emperor</u>, well his home is in Chung Ching. In Dalian you had the ice festival in the winter when they would build the ice carvings to include a two-story replica of a Russian Orthodox Church that had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution that was lighted. You could actually walk in and go up and down the ice staircase.

Q: Could you talk much to the local employees or contacts about the Cultural Revolution?

RAY: That was a sore subject to most people.

Q: Rightly so.

RAY: I had two employees in the consular section and got to know them real well and that is the one thing they never wanted to talk about. They would talk about a lot of things, they complained about shortages, they would sometimes when they thought no one was around to hear about how the government had its nose in their business but you couldn't get people to talk too much about it. I think there was an effort to forget that.

Q: It was neighbor spying on neighbor. It was much worse than being a different political party, I mean families for their own advantage or protection were ratting on each other; it was a terrible time.

RAY: I think they were just trying to suppress that memory. I don't recall ever having a conversation with any Chinese I ever met about the Cultural Revolution other than here in the States. The teachers here at FSI would sometimes bring it up.

Q: You left China when?

RAY: My tour in Shenyang ended in 1987 and I came back, did a year of Thai and went to Chiang Mai.

Q: Chiang Mai you were there from when to when?

RAY: '88-'91.

Q: How did you find Thai as a language?

RAY: Well I had done Vietnamese and I had taught myself Cantonese so Thai was relatively easy and it was hard to read but the speaking and the listening wasn't that difficult. The tones are a lot less intimidating than Vietnamese. I didn't find Thai language all that difficult.

Q: What was the status of Chiang Mai when you went there, the post?

RAY: It was a consulate general and in fact it was the only one that retained consulate general status because we had one in Sunkla and one in the northeast that were both eventually downgraded to consulate before being closed. Chiang Mai was a strange place because the north much more so than even the south and the northeast thinks of itself as being sort of being apart from the rest of the country. You've got back then the drug trade was still pretty heavy. You had a lot of refugees from Laos and in the north there was this one big refugee camp that must have had ten thousand or so Hmong refugees in it. It was

sort of the locust for the drug trade and at that time we had a DEA, drug enforcement agency, unit of about six people working with the Thai and we had an air force seismic detachment that was monitoring seismic activity up in that area.

Q: Was there any air activity up there at that time?

RAY: Any what?

Q: Was there an air base?

RAY: No, no.

Q: Was it still an airfield there?

RAY: Well there was an airport.

Q: An airport.

RAY: The Chiang Mai airport could take fairly sizeable jets, not huge ones but there were daily flights between Chiang Mai and Bangkok. You had the airport and there was a guy who had become a missionary who had been part of the old days when it was an air base supporting U.S. operations toward the North and then, of course, a lot of the old missionary families still live there. But the main thing was the refugees and the drug trade.

Q: What about army sergeants, air force sergeants, retired and married Thai girls and settled there?

RAY: That was mostly done in Bangkok, we didn't have that many; we had one or two up in Chiang Mai, not many at all.

Q: The natives around there were there ethnic differences between the other parts of Thailand and all?

RAY: Language difference more than anything. Northern Thai is very different than the Bangkok or main Thai. Northern Thailand is where you have a lot of the ethnic minorities who live in the hills and you have the Shan and the other Burmese minorities and a few from Laos. But the Thai themselves I didn't see that much difference; it was basically the language and outlook.

Q: Well what were you doing?

RAY: Well, my official title was administrative officer of the post but I was sort of the de facto number two. We had four State Department people when I got there, the CG, myself, a JO who did political reporting and a secretary; we lost the secretary because the CG didn't use her for anything and an IG inspector said if she isn't going to be used as a

secretary we didn't need it so Bangkok took the position and increased their political officer slots. We had a PAO, public affairs officer, this is before USIA combined with State, a lot of communicators, a DEA and an air force detachment so I wound up actually doing admin, doing citizen services, working refugees, dealing with the narcotics situation and being the face of the post because the CG that I worked with for the longest of my time there didn't particularly like dealing with groups of tourists. Whenever the royal family comes, they have a residence in Chiang Mai and, of course, either the king or one of the royal family would come up about every two or three months to spend a few weeks. Of course the diplomatic corps at that time we had us, the Indians, the Chinese and one or two other consulates and the local government all would troop out to the airport to welcome the royal family. My boss didn't like doing things like that so I was always the one who had to go and be the U.S. consulate rep at airport meetings.

I remember Chiang Mai hosted oh what's it called, it is this meeting and it's named after a town in Virginia, the Williamsburg Conference. A former Secretary of State was the keynote speaker and he was coming and I was the one who had to go out to the airport and meet him because the CG didn't like doing things like that. I won't name names but he just didn't like doing things like that. Meetings with the royal family I got to meet personally the king and queen, I got to know Princess Sirindhorn because I met them at the airport. After three or four times, let's face it you have the American consulate and I was the only African-American there, I was the only one in the whole city. So my face tended to be quite known after a while and after the third or fourth trip to the airport everybody knew who I was except they didn't know what I was. I mean the local press thought I was the consul general because I was the one at all these meetings.

Q: Did the inspectors come around and all?

RAY: Yeah, but back in those days people didn't really do anything. When the ambassador came to Chiang Mai, this was Dan O'Donohue, I don't know if you've heard of him.

Q: I've interviewed him.

RAY: Okay, I was the one who escorted him and his wife around to his meeting. Whenever a CODEL, congressional delegation, came to town I was the one who escorted the CODEL.

Q: Did the consul general prosper; was he at his last post?

RAY: He retired as an FS-1 the year after I made OC.

Q: Well that speaks…

RAY: I'm sure it was just a personality thing, he didn't like doing certain things and…

Q: He got around it; he had you and what the hell.

RAY: That was his thing; I got you for that stuff.

Q: Were there any particular problems that you had to deal with at the post? I'm talking about dealing with the government, dealing with natural disasters or what have you?

RAY: There was no shortage of problems starting with the fact that the consulate there is in the old royal residence of the last Chiang Mai king. The walls were falling down; the flag pole was an old wooden flag pole that was dry rotted from the inside out so there was a major effort to renovate the place. This is about the time when the Burmese going after the Curran, the Burmese units were coming into Thailand trying to hit the Curran from the back and were occasionally attacking Thai villages that got in their way so you had that little effort. The two major drug armies up in the tri-border areas were shooting at each other and occasionally their bullets would fly across. There was the case of the yellow rain when someone said that the Hmong in Laos were being attacked by the Laotian army with chemical weapons and our embassy in Vientiane had no way of getting to that part of Laos so we had to deal with it from Chiang Mai. Then, of course, there was the issue of the refugees and the Thai weren't that happy having that many refugees in their midst.

Q: Did the refugees leak out and go back again?

RAY: No, the refugees pretty much…talk about depressing the Thai controlled access to the camp. I made about two visits and there were kids in their teens that had been born in those camps. Eventually over the years they closed it down and resettled those people but we weren't resettling fast enough in the U.S. so people were literally living their lives out in those camps.

Q: Were the Chinese a presence there?

RAY: You had a lot of ethnic Chinese there; I wouldn't say that the Chinese were a big presence in Chiang Mai when I was there. They were starting to trickle in.

Q: I'm told that the Thai's in the upper classes tend to marry Chinese or at least there is quite a bit of...

RAY: Well, if you look at the top ranks of corporate Thailand most of them are either married to Chinese or they are Chinese themselves. You can always tell by the way when a Thai is ethnic Chinese. The Chinese were allowed to become Thai citizens but they had to adopt Thai names. The more complicated the name the more chances the person is ethnic Chinese, really. Thaksin Shinawatra, the former prime minister is an ethnic Chinese.

Q: Were there any major electronic firms or that type of thing going on in your area?

RAY: The big thing back in those days was hotel buildings. The most exciting thing that happened in northern Thailand when I was there, other than the occasional fire fights between the drug armies, was when they filmed Air America there.

Q: Yeah which is a minor movie really.

RAY: Yeah but I got a part in it. No, they came up there to do their location filming in Chiang Mai and over on the border at Mae Hong Son and one of their assistant directors died who happened to be a dual Israeli/U.S. national so I wound up on the set of that movie for about a week sorting out his affairs and getting his body shipped. One of the casting directors who had come out with them said I was on the set so damn much I might as well get paid for it so they asked me if I wanted to be an extra. I wound up being an extra in the bar scenes and when they got ready to go and do the air ops part of the movie they asked in the embassy if it was okay if I went out and I actually got a part as a pilot with a short speaking role.

Q: My goodness.

RAY: So it was sort of fun. But that was the excitement, there were things going on all the time mostly though it was the kind of stuff that you get used to when you are in a consulate in a relatively I don't want to say isolated but area like Thailand. We did four or five death cases a year of people, drug over doses, one was a homicide of a guy who had been brought to the northeast slaughtered and spread in a rice patty literally in several different places. That kind of stuff was routine as well as the indigent American with mental problems who comes to Thailand and gets a bit too much of the opium in his system and runs out of money. I remember one guy repatriated three times during my tour.

Q: What about guys going to Thailand for girls? Did they go to Bangkok?

RAY: To Bangkok, Pattaya. What we tended to get in the north were people who came for the opium or one of the things we did get one pedophile who I had to visit periodically in prison but he had operations in both north and in Bangkok. Most of the ones we got were the drug tourists or the trekkers who get off the beaten path and have an accident. Occasionally you didn't get too many Americans doing it but mostly Europeans who come for the combination of smoking opium with the hill tribe villager and eating an endangered species.

Q: Oh my God. I would thing that well the Europeans have these sex tours don't they?

RAY: You get those occasionally too.

Q: They were I guess Bangkok and the beaches.

RAY: Bangkok and the beaches mostly and we would occasionally get them up north but fortunately not that many Americans. I didn't start running into many American sex tourists until I was in Cambodia.

Q: What about storms, did you get any major storms?

RAY: No, the weather in Chiang Mai was always pretty nice. You didn't really get heavy rains, you didn't get high winds, it would get a little hot in the summertime and occasionally in the winter it would get chilly enough to need a jacket but it was basically pleasant, a great tour, great food. We got a lot of travel in over the north.

Q: Was there any problem in traveling around because of insurgent groups or things like that?

RAY: No, like I said with the exception of some of the border areas particularly the Burmese border area and it wasn't so much insurgent groups as the drug gangs. There were one or two places down in this area but that was way south of us anyway where you had a problem with the Burmese army and the Curran. The big problem was right up in here.

Q: We are talking about a bulge on the map in the tri-border area…

RAY: In the Lao, Thai, Burma area but even then a guy I know got to be friends with a guy who owned a hotel in Chiang Mai, built a hotel on an island in the river right at the tri-border area. We would go up every now and then and spend the weekend.

Q: You are talking about the tri-border which would be Laos…

RAY: Laos, Burma and Thailand in Ching Rai which is in the northern most part of the country.

Q: Were you getting reports about the Burmese army and how it was treating the insurgents, a tribal thing? Pretty nasty wasn't it?

RAY: Well it was pretty nasty on both sides but yeah. The Burmese I didn't have a lot of contact with the Burmese and in fact the actual time I even saw any significant Burmese was after the Thai had complained that the Burmese incursions into Thailand they sent a group of Burmese military officers to Chiang Mai to meet with the Thai army to sort of put the lid on it and they were a mean looking bunch. You'd get that and occasionally we'd get ethnic minorities who would come out of Burma and they would come through Chiang Mai on their way to wherever they were going; occasionally we'd get stories. We actually did an interview with Ashan who came out of Burma who knew the location of a World War II plane crash, American air crash but a lot of the time was spent dealing with American citizens in trouble and in trying to keep the post from falling apart.

Q: How about what sort of trouble did the Americans get into?

RAY: Like I said drug overdoses, running out of money and getting beat up. I had one case of a young woman who had just finished law school and passed the bar and wanted to do a little vacation before going to work who came out and went out at night with a Thai man who was their tour guide by herself and got raped. Of course the man's wife spoke for him in court and he was let off but it was mostly just people doing the dumb things that some people do when they travel abroad. The kid with a severe asthma attack and strong asthma medicine who drank several large strong Thai beers and then takes his asthma medicine and had a heart attack in the middle of the night.

Q: Oh yeah.

RAY: I did more than my share of death certificates while I was up there.

Q: Well looking at the time this might be a good place to stop but where did you go?

RAY: After Thailand I came back to Washington for two years and I was special assistant to the director of the office of defense trade controls. After that I went to Sierra Leone as DCM.

Q: Why don't we do the Washington tour and then we will stop for today.

RAY: I took the Washington tour so that the kids could finish high school in the U.S. and the defense trade controls at the time a guy by the name of Bill Robinson, the late Bill Robinson, ran it. Bill was a fixture around the department, he had been a World War II bomber pilot who had been a Foreign Service officer during the creation of the P/M, pol/mil, bureau and then when he retired from the Foreign Service he became a civil servant and worked until his 80s as director of the office of defense trade controls. These are the guys who issue the licenses for munitions exports. The office at that time was about 80 people and I was the only FSO.

Q: Were you running ComCon or something?

RAY: That was the commodities jurisdiction reviews; it was basically defense contractors who wanted to transfer what was considered munitions on the U.S. munitions list. They had to get the license from us but it was a process requiring coordination between State, DOD and the Department of Commerce.

Q: Was this around the period of time when they had that problem about submarine propellers in Sweden?

RAY: It was after.

Q: It was after.

RAY: The problem during my time there was computer encryption algorithms.

Q: Oh.

RAY: At the time they were still scrubbing the munitions list but the computer chip in most ATM machines was considered a munitions item so banks that have foreign branches that wanted to service their ATM machines in foreign countries had to get a license to ship the chip to go in the ATM machines. Those cameras that they use for filming at night, that night vision, that was a munitions item so whenever CNN took their cameras overseas they had to get a license from us to take their night vision cameras.

Q: Did you feel that there was much leakage?

RAY: I wouldn't use the term much. There was, of course, leakage. We always had a problem with end use certification and whether or not the legitimate company being exported to wasn't then further sent. We had a few cases like that and there were a few problem countries. The big problems were here in the States, just one defining what was a munitions item and there was always a lot of arguments over should an item be even subject to such license restrictions. One of the big issues at the time was really sort of an intellectual property issue. A lot of people who developed encryption mechanisms felt that this was intellectual output and it shouldn't be classified as a commodity with restrictions. There was one guy in particular, I still have all the documents on that, who threatened to take the encryption algorithms that he created and make them available publicly since he couldn't get the government to agree that they weren't subject to being licensed. He got to be such a nuisance no one would talk to him. Unfortunately, one of the jobs I had as the sole FSO in the office was public relations and trying to create a more customer friendly face for their office with the public and I made the mistake of taking one of his phone calls one day and wound up being sued for it. But eventually it got thrown out of court but the case file was that thick. I was called everything from a Nazi storm trooper to a torturer violating his constitutional rights by telling him that if he broke the law he could go to jail.

Q: What do you do in a case like that I mean you don't take his calls? Is that the…

RAY: Well you can't not do it and eventually…unfortunately there are a few of our district courts who will take any case, particularly back in those days; people file suits. I once had a guy in Chicago file suit against me because my consular officer when I was CG in Ho Chi Minh City my consular officer failed to issue his fiancé a visa in time to get to the wedding that he'd scheduled before applying for a visa. What are you going to do its part of being in the business. But that two years in defense trade controls I got a chance to know an industry, get to know a life outside the State Department.

Q: How did the kids find Washington?

RAY: Interesting. We were out in Montgomery County; they went to Wooten High School so they really weren't in Washington itself. They were typical suburban kids, cross country, school plays, and school band. My son only did one year and he was off to

Penn, my daughter did two years before she went off to Georgetown. It was a bit strange for them because they had been three years in a British boarding school in Singapore so they had to be evaluated as foreign students before I could enroll them in Montgomery County schools. They found it interesting and this was about the time when that area in Montgomery county was getting a large influx of immigrants and so they were sort of part of the foreign student community at Wooten High School.

Q: How did you find working in Washington and the State Department?

RAY: It was my only time working in the State Department. I never bid on another State Department job after that. I found it was and I understand the reason behind it sometimes it is just something that I just don't necessarily agree with. I found people putting more emphasis on how many hours they sat in their offices as opposed to how much they got done. Too much of an obsession with symbolic gestures and meaningless paperwork, letting rules keep them from getting things done rather than trying to find ways to make the rules work. For instance, in the officer where I worked you can imagine working with industry you had a lot of congressional contact because any time a license is delayed or a company loses money they are going to go to their congressman. I had worked out a deal with most of the staffers who were from those districts that had a lot of contractors. When they had a problem they could call me and I would do the research and get them an answer and then we would worry about doing the paper work or the congressional letter afterwards. They were happy; they were getting letters to their constituents. We were in Rosslyn at the time that is where DTC was. People across the river found out that I was talking directly to staffers without going through H and they had puppies. They absolutely fore bid me to speaking to a member of Congress or a staffer without running it through the proper channels which meant we got back to the Congressman has a query and it takes him five days to two weeks to get an answer back to his constituent. To me that is just not the way to run a railroad.

Q: Okay, we will pick this up the next time when and where do you go?

RAY: After DTC I went to Freetown as DCM.

Q: OK Freetown let's see…

RAY: Sierra Leone.

Q: Sierra Leone,

RAY: And that was in 1993.

Q: OK, great.

Q: Today is the 20th of February 2013 with Charles Ray. Charles let's start. When we left you were going to Freetown as DCM.

RAY: Right, right.

Q: Well how did you get the job?

RAY: I had been two years in P/M and I was getting ready to bid and my career development officer gave me a call and said that the DCM job in Freetown, no, I'm sorry I had already submitted my bid list which was basically a bunch of administrative jobs so I figured I had ducked it long enough. My CDO – career development officer called and said that the DCM in Freetown was curtaining and if I would be interested I could get my name on the list. Of course I was interested and surprising my name got on the list, the ambassador at the time Laura Lee Peters actually interviewed me by phone from Freetown and I think to everyone's surprise including my own chose me over whomever the other candidates were. That's how I got to Freetown.

Q: You were in Freetown from when to when?

RAY: I was in Freetown from about September 1993 to July 1996.

Q: What was the situation in Freetown at that time when you went out?

RAY: When I went out they had just had the previous year a military coup. The then President Momoh had been overthrown by a group of young captains and lieutenants of the Sierra Leonean army who had formed what they called the National Provisional Ruling Council or NPRC under the leadership of a young captain named of Valentine Strasser who had been the army's paymaster. He wasn't actually a combat soldier but if I recall he was the only one of the junta who had ever been out of the country; he had served in Liberia with ECOMOG, which is the military arm of ECOWAS, the Economic community of West African States, at one point. That was about the most hapless bunch of young men I think I must have met in my life. I got to know almost all of them quite well under the principals in the junta and I don't know if it's ever actually been written and I don't know how credible it is but piecing together the stories they told me over the nearly three years I was there the coup was an accident. They had actually come roaring into town guns blazing and screaming at the top of their lungs to protest the lousy way the government had been treating the military which had been fighting Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front at that point for a couple years I believe. Momoh panicked and made his way to the Guinea Embassy and asked for asylum and the senior military people at State House informed these youngsters that you just chased the president out of office the country's yours what are you going to do about it? This happened in the afternoon and it was late that evening before they even decided who the leader of their coup was and Strasser because he was actually Krio he wasn't one of the two major tribes was a compromise candidate because it was felt that as paymaster and as a Krio it wouldn't become a tribal thing that they could pull together.

When I got there it was like a comic opera in many ways because these guys would roar to work in their armed convoys every morning with armed soldiers lining the street and guys with RPGs and automatic rifles standing in the backs of pickups. It would have been

funny except that an accident could have been a tragedy. Anyway, Ambassador Peters because of my military background sort of tasked me with getting to know them. Part of the problem was she was a woman and she was White in West Africa with a bunch of young guys in charge of the government; she was a bit hampered in her ability to approach these guys and I did get to know them to the point where I actually changed their method of going to work. At a reception one night I said to the number two in the junta that they were ridiculous with the guys lining the streets with the RPGs and the guns because they were facing the wrong way; they were facing the street. I said one guy with an AK or a sniper rifle could get in any alley, pick off these idiot guards standing with their backs to the alley and just wipe you guys out. The next day there were no guards although they still roared back to work but they pulled the guards off the street.

I visited the military headquarters about once a week, at least two or three times a month just to get a sense of what they were about and also got to know a lot of the civilian politicians not only the ones that were in their government; they had a few. But there were other parties that were clamoring for return to civilian rule which for reasons I'm not too clear on didn't get a lot of support back here in Washington.

Q: What had been the situation and a sort of very brief history of the country?

RAY: Well it had gotten its independence from Britain unlike a lot of the countries in Africa without having to fight for it; the British gave them their independence. The first prime minister was Sir Milton Margai who was actually a fairly decent chap, one of the first West Africans to get a medical degree. Then he died and he was replaced by his cousin whom I think was named Charles who was a bit of a disaster; he caused a lot of ethnic tensions between the various groups and was ultimately replaced by a former labor union activist named Siaka Stevens who then proceeded to bankrupt the country. Siaka Stevens was the I think they call it the All People's Congress and at any rate he arranged for the head of the army at the time Joseph Momoh to be his successor and if anything where Stevens was just venal Momoh was frankly stupid. He was more interested in parties and little girls than running a country and didn't trust his own army so the army wasn't very well armed and didn't get a lot of training.

Q: Was this controlled by the British?

RAY: By that time the British weren't really there that much. We were providing military training to the Sierra Leonean army. I had two or three training missions a year I ran the program because our defense attaché was actually in Monrovia, Liberia and only got up to Freetown a few times a year. I also ran the AID humanitarian assistance mission with the aid of a contractor from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

Q: I'm surprised because normally the colonial power usually takes that job over.

RAY: I think they just basically washed their hands of the place and then when Stevens messed things up I don't want to attribute any bad motives to them. I think they were just as happy to let us do it; we were doing huge feeding programs because by the time I got

there the country had gone from being a rice exporter to having to rely on international food aid to feed its population.

Q: Why was that?

RAY: I forget what some…

Q: Was there something wrong…

RAY: It was economic mismanagement, bad economic decisions. Stevens bankrupt the country's treasury to build this huge conference center for some West African conference or other and corruption; people were basically banking money, stealing and they allowed the infrastructure to deteriorate. Maybe it was typical of West Africa colonies, the British literally controlled directly Freetown, the hinterlands; the big provinces Makeni and the other were under control of local leaders who sort of answered to the British. So you had the two major tribes the Mende and the Temne had their own areas; the other little tribes the Fullah and a few others never really counted for much they were tradesmen and such. Freetown was also the center of the Krio population which is a minority, not really a tribe. These are the descendants of the recaptives, the freed slaves, because the British settled there when they banned slavery.

Q: This is a little bit of a reflection of Liberia

RAY: The Americans and Liberia? Well no not really because in the case of Liberia it was slaves from the U.S. that were freed and taken to Africa and settled in Monrovia. In the case of Freetown the British and initially I think whatever the society in Britain was anti-slavery but the land on the peninsula to resettle people who were taken off ships that the Navy…

Q: The soldiers before they got…

RAY: …before they ever got to the U.S. There was a U.S. connection because Bunce Island, right off the coast was one of the major and only second to that castle in Ghana as a shipping point. A lot of the slaves in the sea islands of Georgia and South Carolina came from Sierra Leone. So you had the situation where the government in Freetown never really had strong control over the provincial areas, the paramount chiefs and their hunting societies sort of did their own little thing. One of the things about Sierra Leone impressed me is that it has a large Muslim population and a large Christian population and they coexist. Most of the people I knew were interfaith marriage, they'd have a husband who was Muslim and a wife who was Christian and kids would be split sometimes down the middle; when they got married they'd have both a Christian and a Muslim ceremony, a lot of tolerance in that regard.

There wasn't that much ethnic strife either it was a strange pattern. A lot of the fights in Sierra Leone were over resources and one story someone told me of and I might have the tribe wrong but it doesn't matter which tribe. A man from one tribe married a woman of

the other tribe. His new tribe assigned him to be the war leader to attack his old tribe in a property dispute; a big battle and that was sort of the history of the country. There hadn't been these major ethnic cleansings like you have in Kenya or Nigeria there have been no religious strife and they mostly fight over who controlled resources. Then, of course, you had the problem of the alluvial diamonds that creates strife and it impacted on agriculture because a lot of the young men who would be growing food because the economy had collapsed and the government was mismanaging what was left found it more productive to go into alluvial diamond mining than to scratch out a living on the farm. Then Charles Taylor started the war.

Q: Tell us a little more about this alluvial mining. When you say it it sounds like you have these rocks and if you have a good eye, sitting on…

RAY: No it's not quite that simple. It's basically they say surface mining or alluvial. Basically these are diamonds that are normally no more than two, three, four, five, six feet down, washed down. The way they would do it they would dam up a stream and they would dig in the mud of the stream bottom to find the diamonds. I've seen rocks pulled out of streambeds like that.

Q: That's about six inches.

RAY: Huge rocks and while I was there one kid found one they said was like 15 carats; huge, huge, huge stone.

Q: Well now the diamond market can be very carefully controlled by DeBeers and all. What was happening?

RAY: Sierra Leone is in large part the reason we have the Kimberly process. At that point in time if you could get the diamonds out of the country and into a place like Belgium or Amsterdam or New York you were home free because no one asked their provenance. I quite often ran into people, not many Americans, fortunately, but there were Russians and Israeli's and others who would have little cloth bags with stones trying to sneak out through the airport. I once had a paramount chief come into my office to thank me for a project that I had done in his village by dropping a bag of diamonds on my coffee table which I picked up and gave back to him. But there really were no controls; the government tried to control but there was so much corruption and so many people doing it. Then you had the rebels taking over areas and they were mining diamonds and trading them to Taylor for arms and ammunition but it was a free for all.

Q: Okay let's go back to it must have been sort of a major event or whatever you call it that was going on when you got there.

RAY: It was. The rebel war had been going on for about two years. The coup had been in place for about a year or so. They had a rebel war one year and then the coup; I arrived one year after the coup. So the whole thing must have been going on for two years when I got there. Many areas of the countryside were going back and forth; the rebels would

control area one day and the army would control it the next. The major towns though Kenema, Makeni, Port Elizabeth and Freetown were basically the only areas where you had pretty much freedom of movement. Sierra Rutile, which was an American company that mined titanium from Rutile had an area that was pretty safe for the longest time; I think they finally had to pull out shortly after I left in '96. On the Guinea border there were no diamonds up there. There is a big national park up near the Guinea border and that was pretty safe and you actually could go by road and you didn't have any problems. But as it reached near the end of my tour particularly after the elections in '96 and during that period the run up to the elections in 1996 it got dicey and the rebels started attacking closer into Freetown which had people here in Washington having puppies.

I remember once sitting in my office getting a phone call from Washington and it had to be late at night as it was like nine o'clock in the morning in Freetown. "We hear there have been bombings in Freetown and the rebels are at the edge of the city. Why haven't we heard from you all about an evacuation?" I said, "Because we haven't heard any bombs going off yet." "This is credible information." I'm sorry but from my office window I can almost see the Elizabeth Quay and I could see the river and I could see the traffic moving and people walking down the street. Knowing Sierra Leone, at the first gun shot or bang there would have been a mob and I said, "I'm sorry but I don't know where you got the information." The last bombing in Freetown happened about a year or two before I got there when someone set off a bomb near some army commander's compound and the story on the street was it was a personal dispute. But there was nothing going on in the city and it took a while to get Washington to calm down. In my short assignment I don't even remember who it was on the phone, I didn't spend two tours in Vietnam and survive it ignoring when I am under attack. I think I sort of know when I'm under attack.

I said, "You can rest assure that the first bullet that comes through my window you will hear from me and if you haven't heard from me it means that probably nothing is happening." They finally calmed down.

I arrived in '93 and Ambassador Peters left in the summer of '95 and there was about a three months period I was Charge while Ambassador John Hirsh was confirmed; then he came and I served with him until I left in July of '96.

Q: What was Ambassador Peter's background?

RAY: She I think was economic cone; she'd served in Korea and Vietnam. In fact, she was part that Operation Baby Lift out of Saigon.

Q: When that plane went down.

RAY: Yeah, when that plane crashed. She had actually had to leave the Foreign Service when she got married. She was married to a Foreign Service officer Lee Peters who was on the, I think, Cuba desk at the time and then when they changed the rules and allowed married women she came back in and proceeded to…when I met her, I think, she was

minister counselor; she's done quite well. I don't know if she had Africa experience I honestly I'll have to look that up. I was going through some papers over the weekend and this weekend I ran across a letter from her after she retired and a few other notes about her. She was an economic officer I believe but like I said she had to get out and then came back in. That was her first ambassadorship in Freetown. Then she left there and went to the Naval War College and then I think she retired from there.

Q: What was our evaluation of the rebels?

RAY: Well my evaluation of the Rebels was that they were relatively ethnically mixed but a lot of them were draftees and the rebels would go into a village and grab young men and women as young as ten or twelve and basically co-op them into service. They were a vicious bunch from both the Mende and Temne tribes who I think had been sold on the idea that they could actually take over and run the country, some of them and some of them I think were just basically doped up and so into violence that I don't think it mattered to them who they were fighting as long as they had somebody to do violence to. They were fairly well organized and because they had support from Taylor…I set up a long wave antennae on the roof of the apartment building that I lived in and had a radio and I used to sit on my balcony in the evening after work and sometimes I'd monitor their radio transmissions until eight, nine, and ten at night. They were getting convoys from Liberia and they were getting supplies when the Sierra Leone military couldn't get supplies. They were also getting support from someone in Freetown and I never found out who but there was someone in Freetown who was actually providing them with logistical support.

Q: Incidentally, you mentioned when you first went to Libreville was this Freetown?

RAY: I'm sorry did I say Libreville? I first went to Freetown and actually I've never been in Liberia even though in 1996 when they had to evacuate Liberia they used Sierra Leone as an intermediate staging base; that was during a period when I think the ambassador was out of the country…in fact he was out of the country for the whole evacuation as a matter of fact. I had a Marine air unit and a helicopter carrier off the coast with 150 marines at Lungi airport and just literally thousands of people from Monrovia transiting through; what a mess that was; but we pulled it off. No, in West Africa the only places I have been in West Africa I have been in Conakry, we stopped in Mauritania on our way to Freetown the first time and Sierra Leone. I've been in several other countries of East, Central and Southern Africa but West Africa…I've even been in Ethiopia once when I was on my way from Zimbabwe to Cambodia.

Q: Did you have much dealing with the president of Sierra Leone?

RAY: You mean the head of the junta or the guy who…

Q: The head of the junta was the president or not?

RAY: Well he was called the chairman.

Q: Oh, okay.

RAY: Chairman Strasser. I actually met with him two or three times. I was one of the few foreigners he would actually talk to and I think it was because of the military background. What I don't know but I actually had a lot of contact with the people beneath him. His number two I actually personally sat and watched TV in his house, him in his undershirt once while we discussed them stepping down and allowing elections. Then several of the other people on the junta I met once or twice a week. Strasser was very shy, not very comfortable around people. I would say though the one thing that makes me think that we had a good relationship is his aide, a young major named Terwelly was sent to my office every Friday to brief me on everything they had done during the week. We met on a couple of occasions and he was shy but friendly; he didn't deal with people too well.

But I did have an interesting last meeting with him; this was after the election. I won't say we I was me, the UN Resident. Representative, the German ambassador, the British ambassador primarily and the Nigerian ambassador talked them into not blocking elections, allowing the elections to go forward. They all agreed to it we would then arrange for them to get visas and scholarships to go abroad to study when things calmed down. Somewhere along the way Strasser decided to put his name up for election which is a violation of the agreement that they made and one Saturday morning as I was sitting in my apartment the doorbell rings. One of the members of the junta, I remember his first name was Karifa but I can't remember his last name, he comes in and he wants to talk to me out on the balcony. He tells me about this and Strasser is reneging on the deal and they all feel bad about it because they made a promise and they just wanted to let me know that they weren't going to let this happen. I said, "Well I hope you guys aren't going to be violent." "No, we've had enough killing" and he goes, "Well okay." So he leaves. Monday the ambassador and I had to go to the foreign minister for something and we are coming back and I see two cheap loads of armed soldiers heading toward the state house. I told the ambassador we better go back to the embassy right away; we're going to have to be sending a cable pretty quick. I hadn't briefed because I wasn't sure and then when I got back I briefed him and sure as the dickens we get a call about two hours later. In their weekly morning Monday afternoon meeting when Strasser walked in they grabbed him, slammed him down on the floor, handcuffed him, put a bag over his head, took him out to the airfield, put him on a helicopter and had him flown to Guinea into exile. We got this call saying we will live up to the agreements we made and they pretty much did. There were a few hiccups here and there.

A few of the military commanders tried little shows of force but by this time it must have been about March/April of '96 I think the mood was the people wanted elections and they were ready to face the army down to get it. They actually had a fairly decent election. The guy who won, Tejan Kabbah, who was a retired UN employee who had come back home after he retired won. Him, I knew pretty well, he had been on the advisory committee for the return to democracy that they appointed and tried to write a new constitution. He was actually pretty good at first he struck me as a decent, caring individual but then a year after I left he was overthrown in a coup and then reinstated to

serve out his term. I think he got the big man's disease; he became very intolerant of any opposition. They had a fairly contentious election that replaced him but they are on their way to having a country that almost functions normally now.

Q: What about things such as garbage pickup, hospitals, education?

RAY: The education system was broken. Some of the schools worked relatively well and some didn't; there were some private schools. Fourah Bay College was rebuilding, the hospitals, they had one or two hospitals that were in an emergency I would go but I wouldn't go for any routine treatment. They were pretty good about garbage pickup; they couldn't keep the electricity going or the water supply. Our embassy housing was 24/7 generators and water tanks on our roofs because they just couldn't keep the national grid going. The road network had started to break down, a lot of the paved roads were gone and once you got more than 33 miles outside of Freetown you were on dirt roads.

Q: Well then were you able to function as a regular embassy?

RAY: In a lot of ways yeah. We did regular visa work, there were a number of American citizens there and we got our share of the American citizen cases arrests and the like. We didn't have an AID mission we had an office and a foreign disaster assistance contractor who worked for me, we did feeding programs, American assistance programs. We had an IMET – International Military Education and Training, program that I managed because I didn't have a political officer; the embassy consisted of the ambassador, me, a consular officer, an admin section, a public affairs officer and a station. But under the circumstances we functioned pretty much as a normal embassy and I actually got a chance to get around to most of the country during my three years there.

Q: Was there much going on with other countries?

RAY: Yeah, I mean when it looked like elections were going to take place there was a big UN mission, UNDP, again because it was an emergency situation; you had WHO, WFP and UNDP. The main actors in the effort to support Sierra Leone to go to democratic elections was the UN, the British, the U.S., the Germans and believe it or not the Nigerians even though at that time they didn't have a very democratic government of their own. Security for the American embassy was provided on an informal arrangement we had with the commander of the ECOMOG forces in Sierra Leone who was a Nigerian. They had a large; I think they had two or three battalions of Nigerian troops in Sierra Leone at the time.

Q: Were they part of this ECHOSOC or…

RAY: Well ECOMOG the military deployment was ECOMOG, was the military operations group that was part of ECOWAS the Economic Community of West African States. But yeah, they were. Actually, its funny Sierra Leone had provided ECOMOG troops in Liberia before their own mess started.

Q: At that time you were there what was the role of Charles Taylor?

RAY: At the time we didn't know it; well let me rephrase that. At the time we couldn't really prove it. It was suspected and a lot of it was based on what I said I listened to rebel radio communications constantly. In fact, I broke their little field code and it was clear that they were getting support from across the border, the natural suspect there would be Taylor. As it turns out later that is exactly what it was; he was funding the war in Sierra Leone to advance his own name in Liberia.

Q: Was the departure of Taylor being seen as the prime way of bringing peace to that area?

RAY: I'm not sure it was seen as the prime way but it was certainly seen as an essential element. As long as Taylor was there and running free it would have been pretty difficult to achieve any kind of peace and stability in Sierra Leone or Liberia.

Q: Were the troops we heard about lopping off arms and toes?

RAY: Oh yeah. Yes that was probably even more vicious in a lot of ways than what I saw during my military assignments in Vietnam. There was one attack I don't remember the name of the village. The rebels went in and killed every adult male in the village, cut their heads off and then lined their heads along the road leading into the village. It was common for them. In the run up to the election to discourage people from voting they would cut off hands. The phrase was do you want a long sleeve or a short sleeve? Long sleeve they cut your hand off at the wrist, the short sleeve they cut your hand off above the elbow. They were disemboweling pregnant women, it was vicious, it was absolutely vicious.

Q: Looking at this was this endemic within the I use the term tribal culture or was it endemic within the culture or was this something that was sort of dreamed up by them?

RAY: I never really knew and nothing that I had read about the culture of the ethnic groups of Sierra Leone leads me to believe that that was part of their culture. I think it was something that the rebels really brought on although both sides did it.

Q: Once you get that going you have this equivalent group the Children of God in Uganda or the…

RAY: The Lords Resistance Army in fact I'm in communication with one of those guys now that got out of that and is running an NGO to help others. I suppose that some of it is part of their culture of war. Let's face it even in Europe in the old days when one side attacked the other the winning side would usually slaughter the men of the losing side; it was particularly brutal and I don't know I think about Cambodia, for instance, the Khmer Rouge. Look at what they did; look at what some of things that were done in Vietnam.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I guess it was just the type of war that would scrape the last vestige of humanity off the people who engaged in it.

Q: Where there many non-government organizations involved?

RAY: Yeah but not as many as in other places but there were quite a few; being in a war zone made it a little difficult for a lot of the non-governmental organizations. There were missionary groups, there were a group of Catholics in the northeast of the country, and Protestant missionaries along the peninsula, Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) had representation there; nothing like you see in Iraq and Afghanistan, though.

Q: I've been interviewing Robin Sanders and she was saying in Congo, Brazzaville, she went to visit three American women psychiatrists and all who are working with demobilized children soldiers.

RAY: Yeah, we had a few of those. They were there, I don't remember all of the different groups but when you say a lot of NGOs I think of a place like Cambodia where you couldn't move without tripping over an NGO.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I mean yeah I mean there were a lot. You had the medical assistance types, you had a few working in education, and there was a program for the child soldiers. What we tried to do was to build indigenous NGOs across the board and get them more into doing things for themselves. I would have to dig through trunks of papers to find out…there were NGOs there, yes. It wasn't quite as…I mean the situation you see now in places like Afghanistan where you have hundreds of NGOs I don't think it reached that level.

Q: What about outside business people I would think this would be an absolute no go area.

RAY: Pretty much, like I said you had this company Sierra Rutile which was at that point I think Sierra Leone was responsible for about twenty-five percent of the world's titanium production the mineral used in white paint and other stuff. I'm trying to think there might have been one or two others, very small almost insignificant.

Q: What sort of staff was the embassy?

RAY: Well we had the ambassador and her secretary, me and my secretary, an administrative officer, a budget officer, a general services officer, a public affairs officer, GSO, RSO and station which was like three people and a communicator; that was about it and we had a local staff of about fifty.

Q: There is a certain Sierra Leone settlement here in the United States isn't there? My wife volunteers, she's a teacher of English for foreigners and she had a woman with four or five children; she was illiterate but she was teaching.

RAY: Getting her kid's educated. There's a long historical connection between Sierra Leone and the U.S. You have a sizable Sierra Leonean community here in the Washington area, you have Sierra Leoneans in places like Atlanta and because of the war and the military government at one point it was very easy for Sierra Leoneans to get I've forgotten the term but it was like asylum here. So you had many and I remember after the election the man that they selected to be the Sierra Leonean ambassador to the U.S. was a businessman living in Atlanta who was told he would have to give up his U.S. citizenship to take the job.

Q: Sort of career wise how did you find this job?

RAY: It was interesting I got a chance to apply a lot of the leadership techniques that I'd learned in the military. You know it is funny when I bid on the job and got it people were saying, let's see this would have been my what let's see I did Guangzhou, Shenyang, Chiang Mai and this was my fifth tour. I was getting reactions like, it's a little early in your career to be going for a job like that in a war zone isn't it? I didn't find it difficult in that way, yeah it was challenging; there was a war going on, you've got morale to worry about and all kinds of administrative issues. We were in an old building that had more administrative problems than this place and so that had to be addressed. But I didn't see any of that as insurmountable; it was just a tough job and you'd go on about doing it. From a career standpoint I don't guess it hurt.

Q: What about morale?

RAY: Morale believe it or not, was relatively high. We had our little issues but you know what I found that you have more morale problems in places where you don't have other problems. In a place like Sierra Leone we had a little beach house for instance along the coast just outside and south of Freetown. People would go there on weekends, barbeque, and swim in the surf. We had an 18 foot Boston Whaler that occasionally a bunch of us would take out on the weekends to keep the engine tuned and we'd go fishing. The infrastructure wasn't working well, but everyone had generators so you had the Bintumani and the Mammy Yoko Hotels, you had great seafood restaurants along the Atlantic coast; fairly good restaurants and one or two bars downtown. We did a lot of stuff in people's homes. There was a large Lebanese community that most of us were taped into so there was always something to do. We occasionally could do trips and at the time it was just us because our two kids were in college. We went to the big national park in the northwestern part of the country so it wasn't like people were sitting around bored. There were occasional problems like I remember the day my wife, who worked in the consular section, and we came home from work and we were on the second floor of this apartment building and our living room was flooded. The water tank in the kitchen the hose had broken and the entire reservoir on the roof drained through our kitchen water tank and into the kitchen and living room. There was about that much water…

Q: About two inches.

RAY: …about two inches of water on the floor of the apartment and we had to sweep it off the balcony. But no on balance morale was pretty good.

Q: Were you able to have good social relations with the Sierra Leoneans?

RAY: Yeah, the Sierra Leoneans were outgoing and there is this American connection anyway. If you look at the African descendent populations of coastal Georgia and North Carolina most of them are from Sierra Leone. In fact, there was this former Peace Corps volunteer and anthropologist, Joe Opala.

Q: Opala.

RAY: So there is that connection and a lot of the older Sierra Leoneans had studied here in the U.S., the language of the country was English and Krio and I found them to be just outgoing people.

Q: My wife, as I said, was teaching this woman who had a bunch of little children English so she could keep up because they were going to school. At one point she lost contact with them who was taking therapy for a hip replacement and a young lady came up to her it was one of the daughters and…

RAY: A nurse?

Q: She wasn't a nurse she was an…

RAY: Physical therapist?

Q: …engineer.

RAY: Oh wow.

Q: …for mechanical limbs and all that.

RAY: Wow. I was always impressed with the Sierra Leoneans. You had to look past the situation of the war and the violence, when you got past that even the guys in the hotels, I got to know them, they were not as one dimensional as we tend to put people in baskets, he's a bad guy, he's a good guy. There is a lot more complex than that and there were a lot of things going on but underneath they were relatively tolerant, relatively peace and fun living people. They were hardworking as proven by the fact how well most of them do when they come here.

Q: Yeah. My wife was surprised at the father because this happened to be a Muslim family but the older girls weren't kept back from the little boy to move on. The girls were right at Virginia Tech.

RAY: The Sierra Leonean Muslim's I think gave the Saudi Wahhabis fits because in fact unlike a lot of places where the Saudi's send Imams to teach in a Muslim country you found Egyptians in Sierra Leon because the Egyptians were a little more easy going. It wasn't at all unusual to go into a village in Sierra Leone and see a mosque at one end of the village and the Church of England or an Anglican Church at the other end and the village in the middle with teenage girls topless selling there. That just drove I think the Saudi Muslims crazy. Tejan Kabbah who was elected president in '96 was Catholic; it was just a different attitude about religion which is why after I got there the whole idea of trying to put people in little slots, i.e., these are rebels and they are unredeemable and these are this, there was a lot more to the Sierra Leoneans than we appreciate. Of course we don't appreciate history in this country very well.

Q: Well then how long were you there? You were there from when to when?

RAY: Almost three years. I was there from September '93 until July '96. I came back, went to the War College for a year and then I was sent to Vietnam as the first U.S. consul general in Ho Chi Minh City.

Q: Well let's talk about the War College; this is the regular War College?

RAY: Yes, over at Fort McNair.

Q: How did you find that?

RAY: It was fine, I had a great year. It was a chance to sit back and think and to discuss thing with people, to sort of find out where your mind is in terms of your profession and how you do things. It was something that unfortunately the State Department doesn't do enough of and doesn't do well is to take people who are in this really high pressure important occupations and pull them out every now and then for a few months to give them time to decompress and to sort of reinvent themselves. I got a chance to do a lot of reading that I just ordinarily wouldn't either have the time to do or just wouldn't have the motivation to do some writing and research and to stretch. In the department you are in your cone or in your geographical area and you are pretty much locked into that. In the War College I got a chance to explore parts of the world that otherwise probably never would see; I got a chance to go to India and Pakistan, that wouldn't have been possible without the War College experience because I'd been pretty much locked into Asia or Africa in the Department. So again it was a fun year.

Q: What was your class like at the War College?

RAY: I think we had sixteen civilians mostly from State; I think two of them might have been civil servants and the rest of them were Foreign Service. We had eight or ten

international fellows to include one who's pretty high in the IDF in Tel Aviv right now and then rest were the military services and I'm still in contact with some of them even after all these years; periodically we run across each other.

Q: You say you took a trip to India and Pakistan?

RAY: Yeah, in the War College you do a two week study trip and I signed up for the South Asia group; we did a week in India and a week in Pakistan.

Q: What was your impression?

RAY: I wouldn't want to go back there. I enjoyed it but Pakistan even in '97 was a mess. We had to have military escorts everywhere we went because there were Muslim holidays. For instance we couldn't go to Karachi, the Pakistani government wouldn't even think about us going to Karachi because of potential for an incident. I found the Pakistani's to be nice, hardworking, interesting, but it is just too clannish, too many conflicts inside the country and their sort of paranoid reaction to the outside world bothered me a bit. India I've worked a lot with Indians over the years and I actually have very good Indian friends but it is such a complicated culture though. I just found it difficult to be in a place where it's bad enough in this country to see the gap between the well to do and the not so well to do but in India the gap is not physical it's monetary because you'll would have a mansion surrounded by slums and then you find out that most of the people in that slum work for the guy in that mansion.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I just found that a little difficult to work with.

Q: While you were there were you pointed towards anywhere or not?

RAY: No, well in both places each tried to point us toward their border dispute to show that they were right and the other side was wrong, which we expected. In Pakistan, of course, there were limits where we could go because of security but other than that I didn't get the sense that they were keeping huge things from us but, of course, they did as it was classified stuff. But I found both after we had been in both countries for a day or two to be quite open to discussion. We visited the Khyber Rifles and had a lunch in their mess and I found over the years that when you get military people whether active or not in a room together after a while the national differences are trumped by the military camaraderie. When I was in China for instance, when senior air force people from the U.S. Air Force would come out to Shenyang once we had a general from the air force and I think he became chief of staff at some point, was at dinner with the commander of the Chinese air force in the Shenyang military district it turned out that they had both been young pilots in the Korean War who had probably flown against each other and halfway through the dinner they were doing the old fighter pilot hand wave thing and laughing and on each other's shoulders and drinking. I found the same thing in Vietnam when I

went back as consul general in '98. I'd meet these former VC, Viet Cong, and we'd have a few drinks and start telling war stories. It's sort of that way.

Q: Well then when you approached your end in the War College where were you going?

RAY: To Ho Chi Minh City.

Q: Had they prepared you for that or not or did you get…?

RAY: I don't think anyone could prepare you for that. You have to do your bid list almost as soon as you actually get into the War College because of the assignment system and I had been told by an old colleague that they were going to be opening the consulate in Ho Chi Minh City and that if I bid on it I would get the support of many within the bureau; so I did. It turns out that I also got the support of Mary Ryan in CA and I had met Mary when I was in Shenyang and we got along quite well. So I got the job. I took a refresher Vietnamese language to get my Vietnamese back to a 3-3 and I had a few meetings with people to include the POW and MIA people, people on the Hill who were interested in the Montagnards and I'm not sure that they prepared me for that assignment any better than the army had prepared me for my assignment the first time in Vietnam with their domino theory orientation because everybody knew Vietnam from their narrow unique perspective. So I had in my head pictures of a lot of little Vietnam's before I got there. Once I got there as I had to do my two military tours I just got to know people on the ground and tried to figure out what was really going on.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RAY: I was there from 1998 to 2001?

Q: Where is the consulate general located?

RAY: On the site of the old embassy; it's not the exact footprint. The old embassy you had the main chancery the one you see in all the pictures and then beside it you had a long narrow building which is where the consular section was.

Q: You know I was consul general…

RAY: So you know the footprint.

Q: Then I have that…

RAY: That building footprint is the consulate general.

Q: That was awfully thin.

RAY: That's actually wider than you think.

Q: It might have been but…

RAY: The new building is wider than the old building and it's constructed…

Q: There was a wall over to one side which could have been moved over a bit.

RAY: Yeah, I think we might have shifted the wall and there is a little single lane driveway down through there or was when I was there; then we demolished the old embassy building. We actually took the flagpole from the front of the old embassy, reconditioned it and took one of those granite glass shields and had them carve a flagpole base and that is the flagpole of the consulate general with a plaque that says this flag flew in front of the U.S. Embassy Saigon. Then after a while that area was parking for the GSO, the GSO warehouse, GSO compound and built an employee dining room and a soccer field.

Q: We'll talk about some of the buildings. I go back to '69-'70 and there were these tremendous military establishments with a half a million men there. What about them?

RAY: A lot of that was destroyed and some of it, the old hospital that was out toward Ton San Nhut was turned into a hotel. They kept a lot of the revetments and shelters on the air base but redid the terminal and a lot of the outbuildings I think they just let them collapse. I'm sure they are all gone by now, but when I was there the parking bays at the airfield were still there and the little huts. My old office on Pasteur Street they finally tore it down but it was there for a long time and it looked exactly the way it did when I left it in 1969; they retained the big antennae in the back and everything.

We owned three or four properties in Saigon which under the agreement for opening the consulates in San Francisco and Ho Chi Minh City we were allowed to keep those but the embassy property is U.S. government property. Then there was another one that had a house on it that used to be part of the USIS and then there was a little compound out toward the airport that was some kind of storage area and one other that I can't remember now. But a lot of those old military buildings just disappeared.

Q: Yeah. Where did you live?

RAY: I lived in Diamond Plaza which is a huge eleven or twelve or fourteen story apartment building built by the Koreans just down the street from the consulate, right across the street from the Cathedral.

Q: Oh yes.

RAY: I could look down into the…

Q: Was the presidential palace gone?

RAY: Right down the street that's now what they call the museum of liberation or something.

Q: Something like that. Well let's talk about the attitude when you got there.

RAY: Surprising, it was friendly. There were one or two people I met who 'oh you're an American' but for the most part even the government people were prepared to be friendly and outgoing. I played golf regularly with the mayor of Ho Chi Minh City who had been the commander of a VC ammunition unit during the war. We actually were in contact after I left for a while until he retired and sort of fell off the grid. I remember, just as an example, going to Ben Kat which is one of the poorest districts in that area to observe some sort of medical mission with all the consuls general from Ho Chi Minh City. At that time we had several Asians, we had Malaysia, Singapore, China and Europeans but no Africans and no Polynesians so you can imagine I stuck out like a pimple on prom night. When I was in China, for instance, the Chinese would never come up to me and automatically ask me if I was an American. In the early '80s in China they hadn't seen that many Black Americans and the Chinese just assumed you were a foreigner shipped to the U.S. and you were not really an American at all. The Vietnamese never made that mistake especially the southerners; the first thing that came out of their mouth was are you American?, and I said, "Yeah." Anyway, we were at this ceremony and I was standing there and this little old lady who maybe she was in her 50s, it's hard to tell when they get that age, comes up and asks me in Vietnamese if I was American. I said yes and she just took my hand and stood there the whole ceremony holding my hand. When the ceremony was over she gave my hand a squeeze, looked up at me and smiled and walked back.

Q: Oh boy.

RAY: I mean it was that kind of thing. I met Hanoi Hannah; I had tea with her and have a picture of me having tea with Hanoi Hannah. She was a beautiful lady just absolutely a charming person. So no someone said to me, it was my friend the mayor, we were kidding around and like I said he and I played golf two, three, four times a month. We were having dinner after golf with some of the other consuls general and someone made that comment about you were all enemies once and he said, "Well you know we fought the Chinese for a couple thousand years, we fought the French for over one hundred years, and we only fought the Americans for about ten years." So it puts it in perspective. Then he said the wars over, only a fool fights a war after it's over.

Q: What type of work were you doing there?

RAY: We did everything I mean the consulate in Ho Chi Minh City when I was there we were responsible for the southern two-thirds of Vietnam from Hue south. They thought it would be a little too reminiscent of the war to include Quang Tri in the consular district. But most of the commercial activity was in the south, almost all of the immigration to the U.S. was from the south so my consulate when we got the new consulate built and in full operation for a while until they expanded the embassy staff American and local staff at

the consulate of Ho Chi Minh City was slightly higher than the staff at the embassy. We had heavy economic reporting, business facilitation, just a constant flow of American businesses through there. The visa section and non-immigrant visa sections were just packed day in and day out.

Q: Was there much of Vietnamese-Americans going back to visit and all?

RAY: It started to pick up about then, there were still problems that the Vietnamese hadn't quite it took them a while but by the end of my tour they were better. You still had problems with a lot of the overseas Vietnamese not being trusted on the one hand; a lot of them had very strong southern sympathies and tended to do or say things to get them into trouble. A lot of them too and I think this is probably not untypical they come to the U.S., they've done well, they go back to a country that is struggling to develop and they like to show off their good fortune and wealth; this doesn't go down well.

Q: 1955 I was protection and welfare officer in Frankfurt, Germany and I was getting the German-Americans who came back…

RAY: And lorded it over everyone.

Q: …and lorded it over everybody.

RAY: It was that, you got a lot of that. There was a period of sort of learning to get along with each other. It wasn't helped by the fact that you had some people in the political sphere back here who were still fighting a war. You had that Montagnard independence group down in North and South Carolina and some of the old Special Forces guys who would support them; they were occasionally giving us headaches. I remember Senator Helms was having a hearing on the Montagnards and all the troubles they were having, they were having troubles I won't argue that although some of their…

Q: They were having troubles.

RAY: …troubles were self-inflicted.

Q: And they were also having troubles. The Montagnards don't get along well with the flatlanders and…

RAY: They don't get along well with each other. But the fact is that the good senator did not know that Montagnard was not a tribe but was some forty or fifty different tribes. I had to deal with just that, and people with agendas who would occasionally come and try to get us in the middle of their agenda.

Q: Had the missing in action agenda…again it was a big political thing up through the first election of Clinton. What's his name the Texas businessman?

RAY: Ross Perot?

Q: Ross Perot was playing that.

RAY: It's not being played as much now as it was; it was an issue and this was one of the problems. You had the let's save the poor Montagnards people doing things that would occasionally upset the Vietnamese causing them to not be quite as helpful in the whole accounting effort which would then set that bunch off and when you are in the U.S. government trying to keep a balance of things and you're in the middle of all that it's a wonder I ever got selected to be the deputy assistant secretary of defense for that issue because I probably ticked off a lot of people.

Q: It was very emotional and remains so.

RAY: It got more emotional later when the government decided that not just the missing from Vietnam but the missing from Korea in World War II deserved a little attention too. You want to see a war the battles that I had to referee when I was at the Pentagon among the advocacy groups for the different wars were not to be believed.

Q: We will come back to that in due time.

RAY: It was a very sensitive issue. Overall progress was made and the Vietnamese they lost several of their own people in that effort too when that helicopter went down killing the outgoing and incoming commanders of the detachment there. I think on balance it's one of those things that you always have politicians who are manipulating things…

Q: It is.

RAY: …on both sides. Then you have the guys in the middle who are trying to do their job.

Q: Were the Vietnamese doing much of an effort to locate their dead?

RAY: Not as much when I was in Vietnam as when I was in Cambodia my tour right after that. Then yeah they were doing a massive effort particularly since a lot of their missing are in Cambodia. They started yeah. That was one of the things that I always brought up whenever people on our side would start crying about their cooperation. They would always remind us you all have 1,700 we have whatever the number was several hundred thousand.

Q: Of course, they were all cultured in bringing…

RAY: Well it does but you have to put it into perspective; that several hundred thousand didn't include the army of South Vietnam missing.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Those they weren't concerned with they were only concerned with their missing; it was an issue.

Q: Did you run across people who had been serving the United States or the government of South Vietnam who were coming to you to…

RAY: Help?

Q: …address the issue?

RAY: One or two but not that many. I got a few letters from people who claimed to have worked for the U.S. government. I met one or two but most of the ones who were still alive had already made it back to the States. I didn't encounter that many.

Q: Had the reeducation camps pretty well closed?

RAY: Pretty much.

Q: I mean this was…

RAY: Pretty much and that was another issue that the reality didn't quite match the rhetoric. The reeducation camps were terrible, some of them people were treated rather brutally but they were very flexible. I met a guy who was the winner of the border or whatever the words the Communists give for labor metal who had been a South Vietnamese army Special Forces doctor who happened to have a specialty in pediatrics. When they took over he was running a hospital, his reeducation was done at his desk so he could keep running that hospital and he retired from that hospital during my tour with the award of labor merit or whatever; he was considered one of their top doctors. The guy who was the manager of the Saigon water works retired while I was there. Now he got demoted from director to deputy director but he was never sent to a reeducation camp; someone came to his office three times a week to reeducate him but they made sure that his work of running that water plant was never disrupted. So, yeah, the reeducation camps as such were pretty much closed; there were people who disappeared in them. There were people who were brutalized in them and then there were people who because they had special skills and were prepared to become part of the new system were pretty much given a bye.

Q: Were there any Americans who were surfacing when you were there who had been…

RAY: Missing?

Q: Huh.

RAY: Missing?

Q: Who had been missing?

RAY: The ones who had stayed behind?

Q: The ones who had stayed behind.

RAY: No, not to my knowledge. We had some showing up who had been in Southeast Asia. Of course, you have that myth of the American prisoners who were still kept there.

Q: Oh yes.

RAY: That was always popping up and some of these guys would have had to have been suicidal.

Q: They were carrying bones and all.

RAY: Two or three times a month someone would show up at the consulate with a bag of dog bones saying these are American bones how much will you give me for them? Yeah. Actually I had a congresswoman show up like that once. A U.S. congresswoman showed up on a holiday with two guys and said, "I've got these two boxes that are missing American soldiers and wants you to get them identified." I said, "Ma'am, where did you get them from?" "I can't tell you that." "Well it's going to be a little hard to identify them if we can't have any information." Then I'd tell her it takes a while even when we know where they came from to identify them. There were two sets of bones that we have no idea where they came from means going through all 1,700 cases that could take time. It upset her a little. Then when I told her, "Oh by the way these are complete skeletons chances are you've been had because…" I tried to explain to her air crashes, fragmented remains, even ground losses in that soil very little of the denser bones are left after a few years. She didn't want to hear that, came back here and trashed me all over town for several months until Rich Armitage basically told her to stick it. A year later we did a forensic analysis of the two sets of remains that she had left me. It turns out they are three Vietnamese peasants, somebody had robbed a grave and sold them to her and she…well I don't know how much she paid them.

Q: Was there much in the way of or any sex tourism? Because that was that the…

RAY: There was a little but not as much. The problem in Vietnam was the adoption shams.

Q: How did that work?

RAY: In all kinds of ways. There was one in particular there were these two brothers who were going around the villages paying girls to allow them to impregnate them and then coming back nine months later getting the babies and putting them up for international adoption. There were people talking peasant girls into selling their babies for international adoption.

Q: What could we do about this?

RAY: Well we suspended adoptions from Vietnam for a while. Just be extra demanding on the paper work and checking to find out where the kids actually came from.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: The problem was there was this demand for healthy babies.

Q: My problem was that to adopt a baby you had to abide by the rules. They were really French rules and the president of the republic had to sign off on each adoption. You can imagine it would keep him kind of busy.

RAY: They decentralized it so it got to be a little bit more hectic when you'd have local provincial and district officials signing off on documents. That was the big sort of scandal was the adoption bit.

Q: How were the Americans who came over with you on your staff? How did they find life in Ho Chi Minh City?

RAY: I think most of them found it fun. It's always been a lively city, beautiful restaurants and bars, there was a water park, and the zoo was heh.

Q: How about was it the Caravel Hotel?

RAY: The Caravel Hotel was going and I always found it interesting to take some of my younger staff to the Caravel and explain to them that before they were born I used to get drunk in the Carvel Hotel. You also got to travel around. You had Phan Thiet, Trang, Da Nang, and Hue in the Delta. You could get around and see the country, a beautiful country. I think the Americans there pretty much had a good time.

Q: Was the 614th going or that was the French club or whatever it was.

RAY: Not while I was there.

Q: That probably had been taken over.

RAY: Most of the Cercle Sportifs there, well I'm getting ahead but the Cercle Sportifs in Phnom Penh is now the site of the U.S. Embassy. The Cambodian government took it and sold it to us. It was the French sports club.

Q: Were there many get together for national days or things like that?

RAY: Oh yeah, we had more than 30 consulates in Ho Chi Minh City and every one of them had their national day.

Q: Ho Chi Minh actually is probably a bit livelier than Hanoi wasn't it?

RAY: In a way but Hanoi started to pick up but Ho Chi Minh there is just a difference between the two. Hanoi is serious and sort of full of itself, stogy and Ho Chi Minh City is always just balls to the wall. I used to tell people they needed to be careful that Ho Chi Minh City didn't become like Bangkok. It was very much in danger of it but it was always lively. Then, of course, you had places like Can Tho, Vung Tau, Dalat, Da Nang, and Nha Trang they were always fun to go to.

Q: Did you have any major problems there?

RAY: Well other than almost being kicked out of the country because of an uprising of Montagnards in the central highland my last year there, no.

Q: Well then tell about that.

RAY: We got a call from someone in the U.S. who claimed two relatives, two Montagnards who had been arrested in one of the central highland provinces. So I had the consular section call the provincial office and they gave us this run around and said, "Well, you need to write us, fax us these names." So we do that and then they still don't want to answer it. Then a few days later it hit the fan, I mean it was just a general chaos with Montagnards turning over cars, torching government buildings and running gun fights and stuff. It had got pretty dicey for a few days and then the government banned all diplomatic travel to the Central Highlands and the next thing I know I'm being called into the Ho Chi Minh Foreign Affairs office and being accused of conduct not in keeping with my diplomatic status and being hostile toward Vietnam. It took me a while to figure out that because I had been asking about these guys who were part of the uprising that I must be the one who caused this to happen and I was accused of an unfriendly act. I'm afraid I probably responded rather undiplomatically when I said I was doing my job as a diplomat; I had gotten a call from a U.S. citizen. I had called members of your government for information and if there are questions you don't want me to ask then I suggest you give me a list of those questions instead of getting mad at me when I ask a question; I'll probably ask it anyway because that's my job. You don't have to answer it anyway and then I got this "Oh you Americans". I said, "Well the idiots in your province are the ones who asked me to put it in writing and if you have these dip shits up there who can't get their act together, if they don't want to answer the question all they had to do was say we aren't going to answer and that would be the end of it." Then the guy says, "You guys can't preach to us about this." I got mad and said, "You are too low on the food chain to even be discussing crap like that with me," and I got mad and walked out. The junior officer from my political section I had taken with me in the car says, "That wasn't covered in A-100."

Funny thing is that very guy who delivered that message was the one who hosted my farewell party two months later and it was like it had never happened; he had his instructions.

Q: Oh yeah.

RAY: And the kid who was the interpreter from their office was assigned here later. He told me, "That's the most fun I've had interpreting a meeting in my life." But that was probably the only big problem. The biggest event was the visit of Bill Clinton.

Q: How did that go?

RAY: That was like having a rock star show up, crowds, twelve deep and people lining up to see him. They still have his picture and I too might add, in a couple restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City even now. He made quite an impact on that country.

Q: I served both in the military in Germany and Japan after the war and they were our enemies and we were...

RAY: Yeah but the war's over.

Q: When the war is over, it's over it really is.

RAY: The Clinton visit was fascinating.

Q: What did he do?

RAY: Well he went to Hanoi and he had a few meetings there. He came down to Ho Chi Minh City and arrived very late at night; crowds lined the roads from the airport into town from almost right after dark until it was like midnight when the plane arrived. You could see crowds in parking lots just craning to get a look. Then the next morning Mrs. Clinton did a program with some students, I took the president and Chelsea to an art gallery where he met with some young people who were involved in basically democratization and the arts. Then he took me antique shopping. We came out of the art gallery and he saw a lot of antique shops and he just basically said let's go.

Then we went to the container port where he did a speech, but, before that, I took him to lunch at a *pho* (noodle soup) restaurant where we had Vietnamese *pho* for lunch. Then we did one other thing - oh I took him to city hall where he met with the mayor, then to the consulate where he met with the consulate staff and then took him back to the airport. We stopped at this restaurant on the way to the airport and had supper, put him on the plane and he took off. It was a 24-hour visit and we spent ten days preparing for it. I should say my staff spent ten days preparing for it; I figured the best thing for me to do was to stay out of the way until absolutely needed.

Q: Did you get any feel for movement in the muddy politics towards a change from a sort of rigid communist rule?

RAY: I'm not sure that they ever completely, totally had rigid communist rule especially in the south. The collective agriculture experiment was a colossal failure and they had

food riots. One Vietnamese said it well to me, we were having dinner and he said, "You have to remember Vietnamese are really outgoing, aggressive people and they need firm social controls or they'll go off the rails." So he said, "In order to maintain order we need a communist political system. So politically I am a very strong Communist but when it comes to making money I'm a devout capitalist and when I die I will be buried a Catholic." That's Vietnam.

One thing I've learned in the last fifty years nothing is ever black and white except the colors black or white and depending on how you shine a light on either of them either. There have been a lot of changes over the years. I went back there every year in my job at the Pentagon and the place you can almost see it changing as you stand on the street corner. They are very entrepreneurial and I think in some ways even more ways than the Chinese and darn much intent on being a success in the world.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the entrepreneurial side was being driven by women?

RAY: In terms of their percentage of the population probably more entrepreneurial women in Vietnam than in a lot of the other Southeast Asian countries. But the Vietnamese were just all over, male or female, old or young a lot of the movers and shakers were women but a lot of them were men too. What's interesting is that it's a communist country but there is this sort of traditional background to it and women for some reason in Vietnam have more of a role of what goes on than they do in a lot of the other cultures in that region and back to the Trung sisters…

Q: I was going to say the Trung sisters come to mind.

RAY: So yeah women were a lot more evident in public affairs in Vietnam than in some of the other countries.

Q: Okay, well Charles I think this is probably a good place to stop.

RAY: We can pick up with the Senior Seminar, Cambodia, the University of Houston, DOD and Zimbabwe and then my career ended.

Q: Today is the 4th of March, 2013 with Charles Ray. And we are -- you're going to the Senior Seminar.

RAY: Yep.

Q: You did that when?

RAY: That would have been the summer or August I suppose of 2001 through June 2002.

Q: OK. How did you find it? What were your experiences?

RAY: Well, it was interesting. I mean it, it was -- I was not unprepared for it having already done the War College before going to Vietnam. So I was accustomed to the sort of senior interagency forum thing. The Senior Seminar was considerably smaller. Around 30 or so of us. But you had that same broad range of people. You had, you had some military people, you had people from the agency AID, from -- they had not at that time I believe integrated USIA into -- or maybe they did that between -- I think that was done between War College and -- yes it was.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: But you had people from the former USIA who were still sort of getting accustomed to now being State Department, Treasury, several other organizations. I think the thing that marked my Senior Seminar class --number of things -- one is we were the, we were the 9/11 class. I mean we were in session for just about a month when 9/11 happened. We were in fact on a class trip to, to the northwest. We were in Seattle and had -- I think we were into our second day of the, of the northwest field trip, having visited I think Boeing and the Seattle city government and a few other points. And woke up that morning to, to a changed world when, when -- and I remember, because I'm not much of a TV watcher. I mean I, when I, when I travel I watch old movies on cable at night. I go to bed, I get up in the morning and at most I might turn on and watch cartoons as I brush my teeth and get --

Q: Yeah, I'm the same way.

RAY: And for some reason that morning, I woke up about my normal time. It was maybe about 6:00, 5:30 Seattle time. So maybe six I suppose. And I turn on the news for some reason. And to this day I don't know what it was that made me want to watch the news, but I did. And, and the first thing that struck me was here was a guy standing in front of the camera. Behind him was, was a city skyline and a column of smoke in the air. And he's talking about a plane accidentally flying into a building. And I thought at first I was watching a promo for some, some new apocalyptic film, until I realized I was watching CNN and it was news. And I'm, and I'm thinking to myself, "How does an airplane on a clear day," -- I mean you could see the sky on the background was clear blue -- "How does an airplane on a clear day fly into a building accidentally? Unless the pilot was drunk." And then I watched live on TV as they filmed that second plane flying into the second building and I realized that one, he wasn't joking and two, it wasn't an accident. And, it was interesting because our whole class changed at that point. One, we were -- we weren't able to get back. Everyone -- practically everyone wanted to just immediately drop everything and come back to Washington, you know, it's the old fire horse, the fire bells are going off and we need to get to the scene of the fire. But we couldn't because all the planes were grounded, couldn't rent a car even -- and I don't even know why people thought about renting cars. We were in Seattle, for Christ sakes.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: But people actually thought about that. Cars were -- all the cars were rented within the first couple of hours. It was impossible the first oh, I'd say half-day, it was impossible to get a call back because all the lines, mobile phones, land lines were just closed. So we, we sort of hung around our hotel that first day deciding what to do. And then it was, it was decided that we might as well finish the Seattle part of our trip. We canceled the -- our defer to Alaska part. We were supposed to go from Seattle to Anchorage. And then when things quieted down we came back. But what, what struck us was that the whole, the whole premise of the Senior Seminar, of having time to, to sort of think about the domestic component of what we foreign affairs professionals do and to acquaint ourselves more with our own country to be able to be more effective abroad, it -- for me at least, and I think for most of us too, all that changed overnight. I mean it was brought him one, that we're not safe behind two oceans, and two, there's something going on in the world and I don't think most Americans are aware of it.

Q: Up to that point, and I'm not talking just about Senior Seminar but Vietnam, but other times, had Islamic fundamentalism and its hatred of the United States been a cause of concern at all for you?

RAY: Well, you know, I mentioned before when I was in the War College in '96, '97, we did our India-Pakistan trip. And of course you'd have incidents in, in Karachi, the attack on the church. You had the, the situation where -- I mean when we went -- when we arrived in Pakistan in 1997, it was during a Muslim holiday. We -- because of that we were not allowed to go to Karachi at all. And we were cautioned against even moving around a city like Lahore or Islamabad without armed escorts. Because there was the possibility of Sunni-Shia violence, and they didn't want us caught up in the middle of it. I don't think any kind of hatred directed specifically at the U.S. was something that many people gave a lot of thought to. I know back in the '90s there were a series of exercises where someone even speculated about the possibility of, of extremists flying airplanes into certain targets. And I, and I think it was discarded because it's just so alien to anything that *Americans* understood, having forgotten the Kamikaze pilots of World War II. But I think the thing that concerned me before and after 9/11 was not so much Islamic extremists hating America as America not understanding how its actions incited anger in a lot of groups, not just abroad but here in the U.S. as well. But anyway, I mean so that, that sort of changed things for our class. At that point, we, we sort of ran afoul of the administration because, because we got together as a group and decided that we really needed to seriously do what the program said, and that is learn more about America so we could be more effective in explaining it to foreign audiences. And that meant really learning about America, not the standard things. So we, we tried to dig in -- dig below the surface. For example, when we did a class trip, I think it was our Chicago trip. And the seminar directors, the people in charge wanted to do it the way they'd always done it. You know, you go, you do a ride along with the police, and you know, you go visit this slum area. But we wanted to -- and I was in charge of that, setting up the police part of it. What I wanted to do was get a briefing from the police academy on how they were training their cops to deal with extremist activity in a city with a lake separating it from a foreign country.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: Were they prepared for mass casualty incidents to get a look at their special weapons and tactics. And, and the police had -- somehow the idea of spending four hours sitting in the back of a police car riding around a city didn't strike me as a useful -- needless to say, that didn't go down well with the administration that liked to do things the way they'd always done them. And we had several, we had several little incidents like that. We, we did things that were probably -- I'm not even sure they were unusual. I think the difference was that we didn't mask it. I mean, for example, when we went to -- we went on a bus trip form New Orleans to Memphis and some of the civil rights trails stopped in Clarks -- Clarksville, I think it's called, Mississippi. The birthplace of the blues. Rather than getting government briefings at places, I mean we prowled neighborhoods. We checked out the local eateries. I mean we went to a Cajun -- we went to a Cajun bar in, in, in the bayou country of Louisiana after visiting -- after spending a day visiting Angola Prison we spent a day line dancing and eating crawfish. And, and there -- the reason was that these are people we're supposed to be representing. And if we don't have a sense of who they are and how they feel, how in the hell do we explain this country to a foreigner? I mean this country is not just what sits inside the Beltway. It's popcorn farmers in Indiana. It's, it's a 300-pound cook who's running the best catfish restaurant in Memphis, Tennessee whose wife is an MBA who quit a, a, a six-figure job at a bank to help her husband run this restaurant, because that was his lifelong dream. These are the people we're supposed to be representing. And we don't -- we've never met 'em. If we don't know what they feel and think, then how do we -- how do we explain the U.S. to a foreigner? That didn't go down well. And unfortunately, and I say we because collectively we probably were at fault, our class president, when he made the -- his -- at our graduation made his remarks, unfortunately stressed too many of the culinary experiences we had in the nine months. And I think that just drove the Senate floor over the time. They'd been thinking of killing the seminar for some time because they didn't feel it provided enough short-term benefit. Which I didn't think was ever its purpose. But then we were considered the frivolous class, spending our time traveling around the country eating and dancing and having a good time. They totally ignored the fact that we spent a day helping conservation on the Chesapeake and, you know. But that was neither here or not there. We were, we were Senior Seminar class 44. We nicknamed ourselves the Fighting 44th. And we were the second or third to the last, but several people told me since that we were the class that definitely put the nail in the coffin of the Senior Seminar. Grant Green apparently went ballistic -- he was adamant that the seminar be cancelled.

Q: Well, they were looking for something.

RAY: They were looking for an excuse, and unfortunately we gave it to them. But, it was still a valuable experience because it helped us get to know the country we represented abroad. When I was in the army I was stationed all over the place. I went to school in Kansas, I'd been stationed on the West Coast. I've been stationed several posts in the South. I've been stationed up in this area. I was in Baltimore for about a year at Fort Holabird. Here a couple times. I went to the Defense Intelligence School at Anacostia

Naval Annex. So I had a sense of the country, but I had never since leaving home in 1962 actually lived in the U.S. You know, I mean I'd never actually -- I grew up on a farm in, in, in, you know, I left farm country in 1962. 19 -- in 2002, I spent three days on a popcorn farm in Indiana and it was like yeah, that's right, this is what farm life is -- this is what it's like, I had forgotten. Even, even with automation and GPS and all the other technology they use, there's a certain -- there's a certain thing about farm life that makes it unique. And if you don't, you know, if you're not there, if you don't see it, if you're not sitting back down -- if you're not sitting in a diner having breakfast with a bunch of farmers listening to what they talk about, you can, you can lose that. So it was a, it was a -- it was fun, it was educational and worthwhile. Unfortunately, you know, that short-term mentality, we got to have immediate return from everything we do. I mean it's like, it's like if you can't make an immediate profit, throw it overboard. It's what struck me. But anyway, that, that -- so that was that nine months. And from there I went off to Cambodia to be ambassador.

Q: How did that assignment come about?

RAY: When I was in Vietnam, and of course when I was promoted into Senior Foreign Service, it got near time to bid, I was informed that as a member of the Senior Foreign Service I was eligible to express my interest in being assigned as chief of mission, which I did. And I think I had sent in a little list of several countries. But just before I left, must have been around June 2001, there, there were, there were problems next door in Cambodia. I mean we were seeing things happening from where we were in Southern Vietnam that were a bit disturbing with the Montagnard crossing back and forth. There were a number of things that the then ambassador did that were, were a bit troubling in terms of making implied government commitments without having Washington backstopping -- or doing things in Cambodia regarding the Montagnards that complicated our lives in Vietnam. And so my deputy and I were sitting around joking and, and we were talking about my -- what I would be doing after Senior Seminar. And, and he said, "Well, you know, you couldn't do worse than going next door to Cambodia and straightening that mess out."

And so almost as a joke I sent an email to my CDO (career development officer) saying, "You know, I sent my list in, but should the embassy in Phnom Penh come open when I'm eligible, I will -- I'd be interested." I didn't know at the time that the embassy in Phnom Penh was very close to becoming open because they were considering yanking the ambassador out. I mean no -- you know, people don't tell you this. So I come back to the U.S. I, I go -- I take a couple of weeks leave in the summer, or I think I get back in July. And so I had about almost a month. I got a phone call about the fourth or fifth day we were back, just as soon as we got the phone installed from -- and I think it might have been Ruth Davis who was DG (director general) at the time, informing me that I was the committee's accepted candidate to be ambassador to Cambodia. I mean who, who, who knew? And so I had to the Senior Seminar in a strange status. Because they hadn't made a decision, you know, you weren't supposed to tell anyone, so I had to go through the first seven months of the Senior Seminar trying to cover the fact that while everyone else

was doing bid lists, I wasn't and not telling them why. Which was a bit stressful *(laughs)*. But that's how I got it.

Q: OK. Let's talk about the situation that you were seeing from Vietnam and other -- what was the problem?

RAY: Yeah, I don't really know, and I'm hesitant to say anything that seems to be going at another person negatively . . . I think it was just a, a -- well, a number of things-- I mean one thing that struck me was it seemed poorly led - and some of my staff had actually visited Cambodia on occasion and sensed the same thing. And then of course after I got selected and I started getting briefings, it became clear that it was really poor leadership. You know, the Foreign Service I think tends to encourage people to be individualists, it rewards the sort of look out for yourself, do things for yourself. And when you're in a leadership position as a deputy chief of mission or as an ambassador or as a principal officer, that's, that's -- I mean that, that's a killer. If you are looking out for yourself and you're in a leadership position, you're screwed. I got the sense that there was a lot of that going on. That there was the -- that the, that the man in charge was more concerned about the I than the we. And in the system -- as it I think often does really didn't focus on that for the long time. And in fact, what they focused on was, was, you know, do -- he would do things like grant interviews to the international press without getting clearance from Washington. The thing that I think killed him was when he violated the Privacy Act in, in regards to a very high profile adoption case where a Privacy Act waiver hadn't been signed and the individual involved was a celebrity. And he was asked about it and he, he shouldn't have even been involved in the case in the first place. But not only was he personally involved in the case, but he gave a press interview confirming certain facts that violated the Privacy Act. And that was, that was -- you just don't do that. I mean especially with the international press. I mean that's, that's, that's -- and so they pulled him out. And, and then, and then I -- so then I -- then the announcement was made and I could, I could let my classmates in Senior Seminar know --

Q: OK, you're reading up obviously before you go. How stood -- beyond what amounted to sort of a problem within the embassy -- but how stood relations with the United States and Cambodia at that time?

RAY: Strange. Very strange because Cambodia wasn't considered strategically important in Southeast Asia. And because you had this -- well, I mean you -- when you look at the map you wonder about that statement. But the fact is that in the, in the East Asia Pacific Bureau, Cambodia wasn't considered strategically important.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: At the Pacific Command Hawaii and when I looked at a map and after getting on the ground, my reaction to that was somebody's got their head in rectal defilade, and we're setting ourselves up for a real problem here. But that came later. The, the real issue was, at the time what occupied the East Asia Pacific Bureau (EAP), was China of course

and North Korea. But in Southeast Asia, EAP was concerned with Vietnam and, and of course, you know, the Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Laos never came up on the radar screen so nobody really cared. And the two --

Q: Except for missing in action.

RAY: Except that group and, and, and the East Asia Pacific group didn't think, you know, they didn't care much about that. Cambodia and Burma, Burma was a bit of a pariah because of the, the military takeover. And you had a, you had a staffer on the Foreign Operations Committee, the son of a former Foreign Service Officer, who had served in Cambodia with an NGO, with the International Republican Institute, had developed very close contacts with the anti-Hun Sen forces, had a huge amount of antipathy towards the prime minister and his government. And was a bit of a bully. He, he, he used his position on the foreign opts committee to sort of intimidate the department. And, and when I became ambassador in fact this kid, and I say kid because at that time I was -- this was 2002, so I was almost 60, and this kid was in his early 30's -- would write statements for, for public release about Cambodia, send them over to the department and they would often issue the statements without the mirror. I mean they would just issue the statements. And the standing phrase was, "Give him what he wants on Cambodia and Burma and he leaves us alone for everything else."

Q: I want to point out for anybody reading this that we're finding a phenomenon here which has occurred certainly in dealing with the Kosovo and other places where you have a staff person who is important either on a committee or to an important senator or congressman, who has maybe either relatives, either family ties or ties because of previous jobs or experiences like this Foreign Service Officer, that they can pursue you might say their hobby horse to a much greater extent than is warranted by rational government practice and all. And, but these things have a real, real affect in, in, in, in the world of foreign affairs.

RAY: Yeah. Well, in this particular case, it, it was purely because the department rolled. I mean what he wanted they gave him. I was told, for instance, when, when I was doing my round of last minute calls before going out to post, and of course it was -- you have to remember. This individual was on the Foreign Operations Committee, not directly connected with Asia, but it was decided that I had to play a courtesy call on him, a staffer, a non-elected person half my age. And I was told in the car going down, "Please don't say anything to antagonize him." I won't tell you what my response was to that. It was unprintable. And of course, immediately about three minutes into the conversation he made an absolutely unsupportable stupid statement and I contracted him. And I thought the person from H who went with me was going to fall off her chair, or his chair. I think it was a guy. Got pale, got nervous looking. And this kid and I had a very healthy debate over something he knew nothing about. But he was so accustomed to saying things and being agreed with that he proceeded to -- he was talking about the International Military and Education and Training, or IMET program. And he didn't know what he was talking about. And I corrected him quite bluntly. And it was felt I think -- no one would come

right out and say it to me, that I had burned my bridges because no one disagreed with this young man.

Q: Who was this young man?

RAY: Paul Grove. He at that time was the chief clerk on the Foreign Operations Sub-Committee of the Budget Committee. But, quite literally, often he would communicate directly with people at post on things he wanted them to do. I made it clear when I got to post; he didn't communicate directly with me because frankly I didn't think that a clerk on a committee was at my level. I would communicate with his member of Congress. But if he wanted to communicate with me it would be through the department. I did permit communications between him and my deputy, just wanted -- because I always believe in knowing what your enemy's up to. But when he would send, "I'd like this to happen," I would instruct the answer back to be, "Send it through the department and we'll look at it." And more often than not, even when the department would cave and send it I would find a reason not to do it.

A funny thing happened on the way to the farm. At the end of my tour -- well, during my tour on a number of occasions when the department tried to cut things out of our budget he would put them back in, which no one understood, why, why he would put money in the budget of the one ambassador in Asia who basically would tell him to go fly a kite. But my, my -- I did a farewell call on him after I left the assignment. And it was funny. He started out by saying, "The last three years I have found *a lot* that you've done and said that I disagreed with. But I have to say, I always knew where you stood and I have the greatest of respect for you." And that was the end of the conversation. For, for instance, one of the things that I -- that really distressed me when I got there, is that in the wake of 9/11, with, with known terrorist cells in Southeast Asia, in primarily the Jemaah Islamiya out of Indonesia, no one seemed to be concerned that Cambodia could become an area of terrorist act -- terrorist activity. I mean you'd get statements like, "Well, the government is corrupt and it's inefficient," and you know, all of the fail state markers, but nothing about well, what do we do to protect our people there if this place implodes and it becomes -- and of course no one seemed to understand or seemed aware until we started reporting on it, Cambodia has a Muslim population. Roughly 10% of the country is Cham Muslims. During the incursion into Cambodia in the 1960's --

Q: Early '70s.

RAY: Early '70s? '71? Guess whose villages took the brunt of a lot of the bombing? I mean we bombed some Cham villages out of existence. So here you've got a population that's marginalized by the Cambodian government, ignored if not unknown to the international community, has been bombed almost into oblivion by us during the war and we've done -- I mean we were, we were concerned about the Montagnards in Vietnam, there was never a program to address the Cham in Cambodia. They had every reason in the world to hate our guts frankly. So -- and then -- and so I started, I started reaching out to Pacific Command in Hawaii. I would go there probably every three or four or five months and meet with the commanders. First it was Tom Fargo and then I've forgotten

the guy that came after him, he wound up in Iraq. But we -- me and the people at, at PACOM agreed that to ignore the potential strategic importance of Cambodia was foolish and potentially dangerous, on a number of levels. On the one hand, not being able to develop some kind of really close working relationship with the military and police left us blind to potential threats. It left us unable to help them build a capacity to secure and control their own borders. But there were, there were a couple of other things that, that -- and I actually -- I, I sort of say it with a, a bit of pride, I visited every province in Cambodia and I think I was probably the first American ambassador in a long time, if ever, to do that. I know half of the ministers of that government hadn't been to as many provinces I've been to. And I learned a lot of things about Cambodia. I learned, for instance, that in the 1970's before the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the Chinese had built a 10,000-foot runway almost smack in the center of the country, just to the -- not far from Phnom Penh, about an hour, two hours drive from Phnom Penh, a flat area, no mountains, no hills, no even -- not even a tall tree, a runway that never got used because by the time they finished building it of course the Khmer Rouge fell and, and they never got a chance to -- that could still take pretty heavy aircraft and with a little upgrading could take some of the heaviest aircraft we have in our inventory. I learned from visits to the coast, there's a, there's a, a port -- not Sihanoukville, but near Sihanoukville -- that is second only to Cameroon Bay in terms of deep water anchorage capacity. The Chinese were pushing like the dickens to get access to that port.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: And item three, the -- there's a plateau -- it's an area called Bokor that overlooks -- here.

Q: We're looking at the bay between --

RAY: Thailand.

Q: Between -- well, actually between Cambodia and --

RAY: Vietnam.

Q: And Vietnam.

RAY: That plateau has an unobstructed view of most of the islands that you see in that area. And a, a long-range radar set atop that plateau could paint everything from the Philippines to the tip of Australia. So when, when, when PACOM was made aware of that fact, they became rather concerned that we didn't have a closer look inside what was going on in the Cambodian military and defense establishment. I approached the department, and, and basically what I approached them with was a proposal. Not to immediately change the policy, but to look at the wisdom of our then existing policy of not dealing with the Cambodian military at all, under any circumstances. We had very limited contact with the police, and that was mostly for anti-drug stuff. And basically I was told by the department, "Eh, let's hold off on that. Let's hold off on even discussing

that, because that might upset certain people in Congress who didn't like the idea of the U.S. dealing with the prime minister." Well, I put up with that for the longest time until in the wake of -- I'm trying to remember when there, there was this, this guy Hambali, a Jemaah Islamiya strategist who was captured in Thailand. And his interrogation revealed that he had spent eight months in Cambodia conducting surveillance of the U.S. and British embassies for a possible bombing attack. And we didn't find out about it until he was arrested in Thailand many months later. At that point, I just decided, you know, enough's enough. And so I did a direct -- I coordinated it with Pacific Command. I did a direct message -- what they call in DoD a P4, which is a Personal Message for Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, with information copies to Secretary Powell, Deputy Secretary Armitage, and Jim Kelly who was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia Pacific Affairs (EAP), pointing out my concerns; that I saw some vulnerabilities, and recommending that DoD do an assessment of the U.S.- Cambodia defense relationship from a security standpoint. Just a recommendation. State Department bureaucracy went ape -- I mean, emails were flying back and forth. I was accused of violating the chain of command and being some kind of traitor and I had to remind a -- had to remind a few bureaucrats that the assistant secretary was in my chain of command as my rater because it was the way the department did things. No deputy assistant secretary was in my chain of command. No desk officer or country director was in my chain of command. And I had a letter from the president that authorized me to communicate with other members of the executive branch of government at my discretion. And oh, by the way, I did not go behind anyone's back because everyone in the department who needed to be informed about my actions was informed. It didn't quiet down until I was back here on a trip and Rich Armitage had a meeting where he basically said to people that when I exceeded my reach. I would be fired, and I wasn't being fired *(laughs).*

Q: (laughs)

RAY: And that was sort of the end of that, almost. I was asked by DoD to lead a DoD delegation of people to the hill for briefings to, to various members of Congress with an interest in Cambodia with this idea that we needed to plug security gaps in Asia with a little more common sense instead of reacting viscerally to things. I --

Q: Two questions. First place, put this in context. How at this time -- you were there from when to when?

RAY: I was there from December 2002 to the summer of 2005.

Q: At this time, how stood relations sort of military-wise and relation-wise with Vietnam?

RAY: We were starting to reach out to the Vietnamese.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: I mean we were starting to -- there were efforts made, for instance, and I was involved in this later at DoD to get a military ship into Viet -- to make port calls in

Vietnam. We were, we were doing some limited outreach. So we -- in effect we were kissing up to the Vietnamese because they were considered strategically important.

Q: All right. What was the thinking -- as you were saying we should upgrade our relationship with Cambodia. What was your thinking and in the greater context, our thinking about -- was this essentially an either anti-Chinese or building up a, a barrier or something with China?

RAY: No, I certainly considered the fact that if you basically give Cambodia to the Chinese you've got this, you've got this thorn in the side of the Vietnamese. And of course the Thai wouldn't be all that happy with it either. If you look at what the Chinese appeared to be looking for at the time, which is a longer reach. I mean I don't think anyone would disagree that the Chinese want to be a global power.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And --

Q: And they're beginning to look at the South China Sea --

RAY: And they are looking at the South China Sea --

Q: -- and Spratly Islands.

RAY: Spratly Islands. You give them a port in Cambodia, you give them an airfield in Cambodia, you give them -- you give them a radio station in Cambodia. Then, the old domino theory of the '60s of Southeast Asia falling. Southeast Asia doesn't have to fall. I mean at the time we were seeing Chinese AID projects, road building, a power plant just outside of Phnom Penh that was run by Chinese engineers. So they were all over the place. You had Chinese road crews building roads. My, defense attaché ran across an all-Chinese road crew that was building a road from the Lao border down toward Phnom Penh. So yeah, the Chinese were there. And, and that was certainly a long-range concern. But the other concern is you have a country that sits right where Cambodia sits and it can't control its borders. All kinds of bad things can flow back and forth across those borders, drugs, human trafficking, terrorists. At, at a very minimum, if we're going to have people in the country we need to, to have our eyes on potential threats. And if you're not talking to the people whose job it is to keep track of those threats, then you're like a, you're like a man who puts a blindfold on and walks through an alley through the worst part of town.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. OK. Well, let's talk about you arrive and your reception there and then your impression at that time and from your reading and all of the Cambodian government. And we'll develop from there.

RAY: Well, when I first -- it was a, it was a pleasant enough reception. I mean I, I think I got my -- got to present my credentials to the king within a couple of weeks of arriving. I

arrived on the day after Christmas. So of course, you know, for a few days nothing happens because it's a holiday. I actually enjoyed moving with Norodom Sihanouk. I -- I mean it was sitting -- I, I met with him through, through my tour, until he abdicated just before I left, probably once a month or every six weeks. I used to enjoy going, just sitting there listening to him. I mean it's like a history lecture listening to him talk about the non-aligned movement. He saved -- he, he and the queen seemed to sort of take to my wife and I for, for some reason. I guess because I didn't -- I wasn't of European descent, so I didn't, I didn't press his sensitivity buttons. And then I had a fairly good relationship with his son who took over for him, Sihamoni. I met Hun Sen. My first call on him was at his office at the government building. He at that time didn't use much English. We discovered we had Vietnamese in common and so we, we used Vietnamese and -- sort of a combination, Vietnamese and interpreter. I was impressed by his seeming -- I mean he -- you know, he wasn't -- by no stretch of the imagination was or is Hun Sen a liberal democrat. He's a tough guy in a tough environment who had to be that way in order to survive. But I was impressed by his apparent sincerity. He seemed to want to do what was good for the country as, as a whole. And over the, over time -- well, first of all, I think our second meeting he invited me to play golf and I accepted. And during a, during a round of golf I discovered that he'd invited every American ambassador since he'd been prime minister before me to play, and I was the first one who'd accepted his invitation. And I did it because I like to play golf and I thought it would be a good way to get to know the guy. And I was fascinated to see how a one-eyed man played golf. Because you have no depth perception, that's got to be difficult. But it was interesting, because I did learn a lot about him personally. I mean his whole personal background, the fact -- yeah, he had been Khmer Rouge, but he'd been on the Khmer Rouge death list for marrying his wife against their orders. And had escaped to Vietnam just ahead of the execution squads.

Q: Was there any political reason for his wife being non-grata, or not?

RAY: No. The way he put it was they told you what to do, who to marry, and you didn't argue. And he -- the two of them fell in love and he wanted to get married, and he said, "Nobody tells me who to," --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

RAY: It was pure -- it was just pure control. I also discovered that he was no great fan of the Vietnamese, despite having been put in power by them.

Q: Oh yes, that's -- it's just like the Chinese and Vietnamese.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: You know, I mean there are things that we -- we --

RAY: We make assumptions. We make assumptions, but we don't look -- no. And Hun Sen's -- it -- it -- for example, we -- like I said, when we first met when we didn't want

other people involved in the conversation, and we had a few private conversations, we would struggle along in Vietnamese, and his is far better than mine. And, and jokingly once I was saying, you know, "I studied Vietnamese in a school back in Washington back in the '60s for a year."

And he said, "I studied school in a prison cell in Vietnam for 10 years," *(laughs).*

Q: (laughs)

RAY: But he didn't care -- he did not care that much for the Vietnamese. He, he was ambivalent toward the Thai, but he felt the Thai had better business sense and more money. So, so he tended to be more aligned toward Thaksin than the Vietnamese. He also recognized that he did not have the military force to be able to withstand the Vietnamese. As he said once, "If Vietnam invaded, what could I stop them with?" So here's a guy trying to, trying to keep his country in tact. And, and then you've got all these Khmer Rouge who've agreed to a ceasefire as long as he gave them pile-in and didn't, didn't go after more than just the top leadership who didn't turn in -- the UN didn't collect all their weapons and who could very easily go back to war if they decided to, trying to keep all that together, which has got to be a difficult job for anyone. And in a country that had no -- that had no history of democracy.

Q: How stood the, the various religious groups at that time?

RAY: Well, a primary religious group was Buddhist. As I said, you have 10% Cham who -- well, you have a Cham population, which is not totally Muslim but the number of Cham who are Muslim is not -- maybe not 10% of the total population. You had some -- you had Catholics and you had some other Christian denominations. But I'd say primarily Buddhist. Sort of laid back Buddhist. The -- there was no -- I didn't see any efforts to, to limit our control religious. I mean people just -- it was there. Sort of like here, you are what you are, you're Buddhist or you're Muslim or you're whatever. I remember doing a, I remember doing a book handover at a Muslim school for boys. And the -- one of the two Muslim members of government had gone with me. And there's this little, there's this little verbal formulation that they often used at the end of speeches wishing you the five Buddhist blessings, longevity, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And it sounds really great in Khmer, I've forgotten how to say it. But anyway, this guy gets up and he's speaking to this room full of maybe 200 young boys all wearing their, their whites and their little white caps. And he goes through the importance of what I was doing of bringing them books and helping them to read and learn the wider world and that, you know, this was proof in case anybody didn't know it that the U.S. was a friend to Cambodia's Muslims, not an enemy. And then at the end of the speech he wished them the five Buddhist blessings *(laughs).* And no one blinked.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So that's sort of the state of religion. The, the one exception was that there were efforts being made by Wahhabi Muslims to radicalize the Cham. Just little probes in

some areas, in areas where people who followed the Wahhabis were building separate mosques. They wouldn't even go to the same mosques as the traditional ones. I think we made some inroads into that. According to a French anthropologist who was studying the Cham population who came in to brief us on it, absolutely amazed in the period from 2004 to 2005 she noticed almost 100% change in the Cham Muslim attitude toward the U.S. Because for decades we had had no contact with them. And between 2003 and 2005, we instituted educational support programs, English scholarships for their kids to be able to compete with other Cambodian kids for foreign scholarships. We did some health programs in some Muslim villages too.

Q: Would you almost call them untouchable within the society or were they --

RAY: They weren't untouchables – they were invisibles. They weren't necessarily actively discriminated against; they were just ignored. By everybody. Us included. I had to fight USAID at first to get, I don't know, 50,000 or 60,000 dollars carved out of a two million dollar education supplement to be able to use it to target Cham students, because they didn't want to, they didn't want to have money for specific groups. It's supposed to be for the entire education system of the country. And I had to, had to point out to them that the entire educational system of the country wasn't serving this group. And so if we didn't carve some money out for them, they would be completely left out. We came up with some formulation of support to previously undeserved populations. It was a, it was a, it was pocket change. But it made such a big difference in their lives and their attitudes.

We did a lot of work on child sex abuse. I mean their -- Cambodia had a real serious problem with, with underage kids in prostitution.

Q: Had Cambodia gotten into the situation as they certainly had in Bangkok in spades, which is sort of sex tourism --

RAY: Oh yeah.

Q: -- from Japan and Europe and all?

RAY: Oh yeah. When I first got there, you could go on the Internet and type -- I'm trying to remember. There was this district right outside of Phnom Penh, a really depressed area just chock-a-block with brothels. And you could go on the Internet and type in the name of this district and it would come up with maps and addresses and price lists and ages. And this was mostly used by Europeans, although you had a lot of Asians - - you'd had a lot of Americans too, who came for sex tourism. This is about the time that Congress passed the Protect act. Before, in order to convict an American overseas who engaged in sex with a minor, the prosecution had to be able to show intent prior to leaving the U.S. How the hell do you do that?

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

RAY: Well, then they amended it to, to make it illegal, period. And we actually got the first two people in the U.S. in court out of Cambodia without a treaty of extradition.

Q: Tell me about this. I mean, you know, this strikes me, as a consular officer how the hell do you go about this?

RAY: Consular officer didn't have anything to do with it. It happened with a handshake between me and the prime minister on the golf course one Sunday morning when I informed him -- they had just arrested this really sleazy American who had sexually assaulted and literally brutalized a 13-year-old boy, taken pictures of it, and posted them on the Internet. He was arrested and, what we were afraid of was that he would buy his way -- I mean the Cambodian courts were very weak and inefficient and there was a good chance that if he was left in the Cambodian courts, he would buy his way out. So I was playing golf with the prime minister and brought it up to him. We had the customs enforcement agents in Bangkok who were just chomping at the bits to get somebody in handcuffs. So I had my RSO --

Q: Regional security officer.

RAY: -- Right, regional security officer make contact with the police and sort of keep an eye on things. And then while I'm playing golf with the prime minister on Sunday I bring this up and I mention to him how we could prosecute this guy in the U.S. for what he has done. And, and I just said bluntly, "And I fear that he might be able to use money or influence to escape the prosecution and punishment he deserves here in Cambodia."

So he said to me, "Write me a letter tomorrow saying you would like this guy turned over to the U.S." So I did, I get back -- next morning I go to the embassy, I sit down, I drafted the letter myself. Had the secretary type it up, I signed it, I had it hand delivered to his office. I find out later he, read it, and wrote on it in Khmer, "Give him what he asks for" and sent over to the Justice Ministry."

They got with my regional security officer and we worked out a way to transfer the guy to American custody, considering we didn't have an extradition treaty.

So what we worked out was, the charges against him would be dropped. He would be deported as an undesirable alien. He would be escorted by the police and my regional security officer would be with them, to the airport where he would be put on a flight to Bangkok. He would be told, "Your passport will be returned to you when you arrive in Bangkok." What he wouldn't be told is sitting in a seat behind him was a customs enforcement agent who would be given his passport, who when the plane entered Thai airspace would get up, tap him on the shoulder and say, "You're under arrest." And then he would be extradited from Bangkok. We did that twice. Got two guys back. They got -- they went to court, they were convicted, and I'm told -- I've never really read the, the finding -- but I'm told that the Supreme Court upheld the convictions and the whole process. And I guess that's a form of rendition, but in this case it was entirely justified.

Q: Oh yes (laughs). Well --

RAY: But it works. In fact, we got two people through the courts before they ever got the first one out of Mexico. And we have an extradition treaty with Mexico.

Q: How -- did you get involved in sex trafficking and --

RAY: Well, I didn't get involved in sex trafficking *(laughs).*

Q: No, no.

RAY: But I did --

Q: I mean --

RAY: No, I know, I know what you -- I know what you mean. I got permission and money from the department to try and build the capacity of the Cambodians to deal with sex trafficking. And, the real issue that everyone I think thought would have been difficult was to get them interested in doing something, which actually turned out not to be as hard as people thought. I approached the interior minister, who lived across the street from me, by the way. And he was a grandfather. And, basically in my meeting with him when I was trying to promote the program I asked him, "Do you as a grandfather want your granddaughters and your grandsons to grow up in a country where they could be snatched off the streets and, and sold into prostitution?" What grandfather is going to say no to that question? So I got his tacit support. The director general of police, who was a complete crook, he died in a plane crash or helicopter crash after I left, but , I got his OK. For, for some reason he liked me. I don't know. I've never figured it out. For some reason really bad people seem to like me.

Q: Well (laughs) --

RAY: But, but he supported it, and that's what matters. They actually organized a special unit of the police, which was commanded by a woman whose soul job was to, was to do anti-trafficking. And I got this NGO from here in the States, they're called International Justice Mission IJM), which is a -- sort of a faith-based NGO made up of former cops and prosecutors who, who specialize in, in, in anti-trafficking activities. And they came out and worked with this unit and with the Cambodians. I have a picture somewhere in a box of the first raid they conducted with the Cambodian Police that they, they presented to me where they rated this brothel and they found two girls about five years who'd been prostituted in this place, was -- the guy was telling -- the guy, guy from IJM (International Justice Mission) who was on the raid with him said one of the -- one of the Cambodian cops, a really tough, mean looking cop just broke down in tears when he saw it. I almost broke down in tears when they told me. I mean a five-year-old servicing four or five male customers a day is, is -- it's hard for ordinary people to wrap their minds around something like that.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- to process that. But the Cambodians took it seriously. There were some false starts, -- it didn't always work the way we wanted it to, but they basically kept it going in the right direction. There was continued skepticism back here for the longest time. We don't believe they can do it. They were *doing* it.

Q: Well, I would think -- I don't know whether it's started to happen or something, but we're talking about -- you've got this huge Chinese population. They've had the one child solution, which has meant an awful lot of --

RAY: A lot of men --

Q: -- been killed --

RAY: A lot of men without wives.

Q: -- which means there is a demand --

RAY: Yeah.

Q: -- a demand for Orient -- or for girls --

RAY: Yeah.

Q: -- will be very strong throughout the area because of this.

RAY: This is when -- you mentioned this when we were -- when I mentioned I was in Vietnam. This was when it first came to my attention that Asian women, in Philippines, Korea, Cambodia, Laos, and Thai, were being trafficked into China as brides. It wasn't a big issue in Cambodia. Cambodia's not that big a country.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: It was a bigger issue in some of the other countries. But, it did happen. One of the Pan-Asian issues that was really interesting in Cambodia, was that Cambodia became one of the main transit points for North Koreans trying to get out of North Korean.

Q: Good heavens.

RAY: They were coming down through China in Laos and, and then into Cambodia where they would be then transported directly to South Korea. And, and, and the prime minister was aware of it - it had his tacit approval.

Q: All right. I haven't asked sort of the big -- well, one of the big questions. The residue of the Khmer Rouge. I mean, you know, when you think about the horrors that country --

I mean real horrors, not just one group like the Jews in Europe or something, but I mean the entire nation --

RAY: They were devouring each other, yeah.

Q: What were you getting? I mean were people talking about their experiences? Or they weren't talking? Or what were the --

RAY: It wasn't like -- it wasn't, it wasn't like you would meet someone and they would immediately start telling you about how they suffered under the Khmer Rouge. But you -- when you got to know people, as you had conversations, you would learn what had happened to them under Khmer Rouge. And, and the fact is that the, the, the -- Hun Sen's faction of the government, which many of them were former Khmer Rouge, many of them were also people who had suffered under the Khmer Rouge. Either by being arrested or by being on an execution list. You -- it was hard to meet anyone in that country who, who wasn't impacted by, by that era. I also met a lot of former Khmer Rouge, the town of Pailin on the border with Thailand, was, was in effect seated to the Khmer Rouge as part of the peace deal. And so in Pailin the governor of Pailin, the police chief of Pailin, the commander of the military in Pailin, all of the officials, were former Khmer Rouge. And you meet -- I met some of these guys including one who I heard from a credible source used to during the war take royalist prisoners and use them for target practice behind the police station. You could -- you could sense the menace and evil in some of these guys. Some of them, on the other hand, were just Cambodians who happened to be on that side. But they were, they were a factory you had to deal with. And I made several trips to Pailin because that was where a lot of the gem smuggling between Thailand and Cambodia had taken place. And found out, for instance, that there were those -- there were still many in the Thai army who supported the Khmer Rouge. So there as a residue. There was -- that you could hear and that you could see in certain areas. The real damage wasn't what you could see on the surface. The real damage was what lay beneath the surface, the fact that they had destroyed the education system, they'd destroyed, destroyed the institution of family, they'd undermined the institution of religious. They had taken away in my view what is one of the most important things a society has, and that is mutual trust among its members. In Cambodia, no one -- it's just beginning to come back now. But when I arrived there it still existed. No one trusted anyone outside of their very immediately family. And even there, there was that element of resurrection, because for four years the Khmer Rouge had beaten it out of them. They, they had just -- I mean they reduced that country to a collection of individuals out for survival.

Q: God. Well, did we get involved in publicizing the horrors of this, or did we -- how did we deal with sort of the --

RAY: We, we dealt with it in a somewhat schizophrenic way. And the one hand we supported the Cambodian Documentation Center, which, which is, which is a, an oral history project run by a young Cambodian named Youk Chang, who himself had been a Khmer Rouge victim, had come to the U.S. as a young man, gone to school in Texas,

and, and gone back. So we, we supported the documentation. We were -- when I got there we were supporters of the concept of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, which was being floated about, of bringing the top leadership to justice but skeptical of -- there was a large skepticism. And then at the 13th hour, when the Cambodians agreed to the bloody tribunal, Congress banned us -- prohibited us from supporting it. Go figure. I mean we were pushing it when we were trying to get them to agree to a UN -- a mixed tribunal. And then when they agreed to a mixed tribunal, we wouldn't fund it.

Q: Was there any logic behind this? On somebody's part, or?

RAY: You'd have to ask the people. I mean you'd have to ask the Appropriations Committee person who made that decision, what the logic was. I never saw it. It never made sense. I mean the, the, the -- it, it was, it was, it was a -- my view was it was a ploy to try and destabilize -- was we couldn't provide support to, to the government of Cambodia for the Khmer Rouge tribunal as long as the government was constituted as it then was under Hun Sen's leadership. It was, it was just another quote, "regime change" ploy as far as I'm concerned.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And it didn't work. I mean the tribunal took off. It's not the best tribunal in the world, but it served the Cambodian purposes. Because it was never, it was never, it was never about justice. It was never about bringing people, bringing all the people who did bad things to justice and putting them in jail -- not in reality. I mean in reality it was about giving some closure to the Cambodian people, some international acknowledgement of what had happened to them, and of forcing them to acknowledge it to themselves. I mean a lot of Cambodians were living in denial about it, and a lot of others were living in, in a state of disbelief that the world stood by and watched what happened to them and it never acknowledged it. And in order to heal they had to get -- they had to get over that. And the tribunal helped that happen. But we, we here in this country -- you know, I, I, I call us the microwave culture. If we can't throw it in a microwave and zap it in 30 seconds, we just can't eat it.

Q: No. No. Well, did you see, as observing Cambodian society and workings of the government, the apparent fruits of this horror? I mean as far as how things -- I mean things -- some things wouldn't work or some --

RAY: Well, I mean you saw that people didn't trust institutions. You, you had -- I mean a lot of the problem with Cambodia's politics was that this whole breakdown of trust had led to a winner take all, my way or the highway mentality. It made it very difficult for people to sit down and work out compromises. Because during the Khmer Rouge period there was no compromise. You did it their way or you died. That doesn't create a healthy society. That doesn't create a society where -- and just to give an anecdotal example, in the run-up to the last elections before I left, as they were trying to sort out how they would form the government, I used to have little functions at the residence. And, and one of the things that I would do is I would invite representatives of the different, the

contending parties. And I had a ground rule. I at that time had a little sort of separate kitchen, cookhouse out back. And it had a, had a game room with a pool table. And, and I'm not a really good pool shooter, but I used to like to go in and, and mess around. And my British colleague, my British counterpart and I, sometimes we'd get together and we would invite these guys. And we'd say, "OK, we're going to smoke cigars, we're going to drink, we're going to shoot pool, we're going to shoot the shit. Excuse my French. We're not going to talk politics. We're just going to sit here and have a good time, just a bunch of guys and gals sitting around."

I discovered that there was a guy who was part of Hun Sen's party, and there was a guy who was part of the main opposition, the Sam Rainsy party, who'd been high school classmates together. Hadn't spoken to each other since high school. Living in a town the size of Phnom Penh, for Christ sakes. I mean you could put Phnom Penh down inside Central Washington and lose it practically. But politics had kept them apart. And sitting there drinking and smoking my cigars and they, they, they, they sort of went back to their high school days. We had, we had a number of, we had a number of, of incidents like, like that where, where no -- the -- and there had not been -- and I'm not really blaming anyone, just an observation -- there'd not been any efforts to solve those problems. I mean we're always looking for something that we can, you know, put a -- pin it on a map or tick off on a chart. And we ignore the importance of building trust, institution building, and the sort of incremental evolutionary process of building a society hat's going to take place whether you work with it or not. But when you ignore it you have no control over the direction it goes. We don't have any programs to do that as far as I can see anywhere in the world. I mean we want to go in and we have a chart and we got five blocks and we got to fill out five blocks, and when the fifth block is filled we fold our chart and go home.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: To come back five years later and start all over again.

Q: Well, what was the -- what form of government was the Hun Sen government, and then how did it work?

RAY: It was a -- they had some remnants of the old communist central system, a little bit of semi-dictatorship trying to promote free enterprise around the margins. And then, on top of all that sort of a monarchy. It was a hybrid. I don't know how you would describe it -- I mean Hun Sen clearly was the guy in charge. If you look at Cambodia's history over the last 10 or 15 years, I mean he's been the central figure that's put that country where it is today. And it's actually improving. He was clearly the first among equals. He surrounded himself with people in such a way that he was fairly unassailable. And, I have no doubt that he's used violence on occasion to get his way -- every player in that game has used violence to include the democratic forces who tried to claim the moral high ground, violence, intimidation, bribery, extortion. Violence is part of politics in that part of the world. Look at Thailand.

Q: Well, were there efforts to bring American firms, I mean such mighty powers like McDonald's or Kentucky Fried Chicken or what have you, or computer type things?

RAY: Well, there was some -- there was some efforts to do some small tech projects. At the time I was there, Cambodia was not ready for McDonald's, not ready for KFC. It was building its textile industry. We'd negotiated a trade agreement with Cambodia that, that incorporated labor rights, which was, which was a, a big innovation at the time.

Q: By setting American labor rights in the country you were setting labor rights to the whole bloody country --

RAY: Well --

Q: -- in the long run.

RAY: Well, I mean their trade -- their, their trade agreement with us linked labor rights to trade access. Which was a first. I mean they were the first country to, to do a trade agreement that included labor rights, labor rights trade access quid pro quo. Surprisingly, when China, China had its membership application in WTO (World Trade Organization) at the time and the prediction was that when China joined the WTO all the small countries' textile markets would evaporate. When China joined the WTO, Cambodia's textile world market share grew. And primarily it grew because people looked around and said, you know, you, you, you can't put all your eggs in one basket. No company in its right mind is going to source all of its products out of China. So the Gap, for example, in San Francisco did a huge percentage of its sourcing in Cambodia, Nike, and others. So they did well. They went from a, they went from a textile industry that was about 20 factories and maybe 20,000 workers to over 200 factories with well over 200,000 workers. And, and textiles contributed a large amount to their GDP, tourism was on the increase. So --

Q: Well, did you have officers who would sort of check the factories to see that the --

RAY: We would --

Q: -- conditions or --

RAY: We visited the factories, yeah. I sent my -- I've been in a few myself. I sent people to visit factories, yes.

Q: And tourism. Of course you had Angkor Wat.

RAY: Yes.

Q: How was that going at the time? I mean what were --

RAY: It was starting to -- they were starting to work on the infrastructure, build a few new hotels. I was part of the coordinating committee for the preservation of the temples as the American ambassador. This was a time when we rejoined UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). It was also the time when the U.S. government for the first time directly supported renovation of a temple, rather than just giving to, to the international body.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: They were looking at I think in 2005 one I left they were looking at a million visitors that year. Which was a huge number. Actually, it was probably more than the infrastructure could cope with

Q: I was going to say, what does that mean?

RAY: It put on a strain on things. I mean you had -- you had for instance Korean, one of the Korean airlines, can't remember which one that started three times a week direct flights from Seoul to Siem Reap for Korean tourists. And they had every flight fully -- every flight was full. In fact, when I left they'd gone to daily flights, and you had direct flights from Bangkok to Siem Reap. There was a flight from Singapore to Phnom Penh, which then connected with Siem Reap. And they were beginning to try and develop some other tourist attractions, Sihanoukville, for example, on the coast. But Siem Reap - Angkor Wat - was the big one. It was growing by leaps and bounds.

Q: Again, my consular antennae go up when you say tourism. What about American tourism and consular problems?

RAY: American tourism was increasing, was -- I mean Americans weren't the biggest group coming. And you had your standard -- I mean you didn't have quite the same problems you have in a place like Thailand where you have a lot of drug problems. You didn't quite have the political problems with American tourists that you have in Vietnam. I mean we had our -- the, the, the big problem was the occasional sex tourist, the pedophiles. We had, we had a few of those. Otherwise it was just your, your normal accidents, lost passports type stuff. You had Americans coming over to adopt Cambodian children, and even though we suspended active adoptions just before I went out. We were cleaning out the pipeline of those that had been approved before the suspension went into --

Q: What was the suspension about?

RAY: Question of the source of the kids, that they weren't in fact orphans, that there may have been some baby-selling going on. There was a, there was a American from Hawaii who worked as an adoption facilitator in Cambodia who was actually charged in a U.S. court for, for that, and I think convicted. There's a lot of -- but the adoption -- the adoption business was a murky business. I mean you had people -- Americans wanting

healthy young infants, and people willing to -- and, and poor peasant women who could be talked into selling their kids for a few hundred dollars.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Basically I mean that's to put it, to put it in blunt terms it was basically buying and selling of kids.

Q: Was there much in the way of a Cambodian community in the United States and was it -- did it have a lobby here if it did?

RAY: Didn't have a lobby, but you have two big centers, you have Lowell, Massachusetts and you have I want to say Riverside, California, but a California community. Those two, Massachusetts and California, are probably more than 50% of the Cambodians in the U.S. At that time they weren't exactly well to do. I mean there were a few Cambodians who were doing well. There were Cambodian communities in Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas, and the Seattle, Washington area that tended to be relatively prosperous. You have a small Cambodian community here in, in the Washington area. But they weren't as activist as some other diaspora groups. They were loosely connected. There was a national Cambodian committee that I worked with when I was at the University of Houston. They were loosely pulled together, but I'm not sure they were all that effective. They had no impact on policy.

Q: Did you see -- was there any coalescing of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian emigrated groups who've -- sort of Indo-China --

RAY: I never saw that --

Q: They really --

RAY: I never saw that.

Q: -- don't like each other.

RAY: Well, and not so much that they don't like each other, but I mean they don't speak the same languages, ethnically they're different, and their experiences are different. You had basically the largest group of Vietnamese around that time were the boat people escaping the Communist takeover - -

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- who were fleeing communism. As to the Cambodians, you had a lot of the ones who had gone out through Thai refugee camps during the Khmer Rouge period and then subsequently during the war between the Khmer Rouge and the government. Regarding the Laotians, the biggest bunch of Laotians were probably the Hmong. I don't think they would ever get together.

Q: What about -- I'm just not sure, but were there significant Cambodians and refugee groups in Thailand, and did we have anything to do with that?

RAY: We worked with a lot of the refugee camps. There were camps along the Thai border during the war, some of the people in the camps went back in to join the government and some came here.

Q: But --

RAY: And I guess we supported --

Q: But when you were there, was this --

RAY: No.

Q: -- was this --

RAY: The camps had all closed.

Q: The camps had closed. What about drugs?

RAY: There was a problem and it became a transit point. There were some, there were some meth labs in Cambodia. There was a transit smuggling point for, for methamphetamines. Some heroin came through as well. There's some growth of -- some cultivation of marijuana.

Q: Where they would be transiting from?

RAY: Down through Laos. If you look at the tri-border area, the Burma-Thai-Laos area, down through Laos, bypassing Vientiane, the capital, and then coming down --

Q: Looks like you're talking about the Ho Chi Minh trail. That's the Ho Chi Minh trail, isn't it?

RAY: Well, that's west of the Ho Chi Minh trail; that part of Laos isn't the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: But, that's a relatively isolated, sparsely populated area with, steep valleys and mountains. I've been there several times. You could hide divisions in there. So it's relatively easy thing for drug smugglers to pass down through there. If you think about it, the entire population of the country of Laos is less than the city of Bangkok.

Q: Good God, yeah.

RAY: So you've got --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- people scattered. And most of the drugs coming through Cambodia were destined for Europe or other parts of Asia. It wasn't a really big thing for the U.S. We tend to worry about ourselves. We focus on those areas where the drugs are going to the U.S.

Q: How did the -- particularly your former, your ties to Vietnam, was -- I assume there was a Vietnamese ambassador there in that mission.

RAY: Yes.

Q: How did they -- were they sort of not very close neighbors, would you say, or?

RAY: The, the diplomatic community in Phnom Penh was actually very close knit. We had, we had North Korean and South Korean. We had Burmese. We had Cuban. And then of course the, you know, the other small missions, like the Laotians. And I didn't have that much contact with the North Korean, once or twice I actually spoke to him at functions. I actually had very good relations with the Cubans and the Burmese there.

Q: Your wife is Korean, was she --

RAY: Yes.

Q: I mean did that --

RAY: Well, my wife is South Korean, so her --

Q: I mean --

RAY: So she'd find it a little nerve-racking at first to talk to a North Korean. But after, talking to the guy a few times she realized that, you know, he put his pants on one leg at a time, and he never tried proselyting her or spouting propaganda, so she got comfortable.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: She found it interesting that he'd come up to her at parties and talk to her, because he felt constrained talking to me, and he just seemed to want someone outside his own embassy to talk to.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I got along fairly well with the Cuban. Whose name was Castro by the way. I can't remember her first name, but her last name was Castro. She was a very engaging redhead, who was also a nice person. The Vietnamese ambassador and I got along. I got along with both of the Burmese ambassadors.

Q: Both?

RAY: Well, there were two during my time --

Q: Oh.

RAY: -- there. One was replaced -- the one who was there when I got there left and a new came. They were both very nice, very interesting guys. I mean I played golf with them, we'd have dinner at their residence. Despite the fact that we weren't having the best of time with Burma at the time. It was a fairly close-knit diplomatic community in Phnom Penh in those days.

Q: What about -- God, I had a -- I'll have to come back to that. I can't -- but anyway, did China -- how important -- were the Chinese kind of the Big Puba in the area, or? You're shaking your head.

RAY: There -- no, the Chinese ambassador -- I didn't really get to know the Chinese ambassador who was there when I got there because he didn't stay there very long. A few months after I got there, the Chinese ambassador who had been there -- I knew him, but not well was taken back to Beijing to work on the Six-Party Talks. And the Chinese ambassador from Bangladesh who had been the Chinese consul general in Ho Chi Minh City when I was there was brought in as ambassador.

Q: Ah-ha.

RAY: I got along very well with him, because he and I had gotten along well in Ho Chi Minh City. We knew each other well. I wouldn't exactly say that he was super influential. I know they were -- I know, for instance, that the Chinese often attempted to convince the Cambodians not to agree to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. And I think that was partly because they were worried that, that, that information about the role they played during that era might come out. They failed at that as, as you well know. There were Chinese projects. There was, like I said, the road building, there was a power plant that I visited that was run entirely by Chinese from China. The engineers were all Chinese. There were no Cambodians on site, except the guards at the gate. But I don't think they had oh, that much influence -- there were those. I mean, you know, Sihanouk did his annual pilgrimage to china for medical care, came back through Pyongyang every time. But I, I don't think the Chinese wielded all that much influence. I mean what they could buy.

Q: What was Sihanouk's role at that time?

RAY: Well, he was supposed to be playing sort of the, the, the honest broker. It was difficult for him to do because he'd been so political for so long -- in fact one of the reasons for my respect for him was that I think he recognized that, which is why he stepped down. Because his son, the one he selected, had no dog in anyone's fight, had not been involved in any of the politics, and was the perfect person to play the honest broker, to be the mediator among the various factions, which I think he's done a fairly good job of since he, since he became king. Yeah, Sihanouk was a bit of a polarizing figure. He tried to rise above the fray, but you know, his antipathy for his son, Ranariddh, who was head of the FUNCINPEC, a royalist party. He had ambivalent feelings toward most of the political actors -- I think he actually liked Hun Sen more than he liked his own son.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: Which I can understand. If you'd ever met Ranariddh; he was really an obnoxious character.

Q: What was --

RAY: Very self-centered, very egotistical, just basically unsavory. I hate to say it. I liked his wife, Marie. She was the nicest person who endured the worst treatment in the world at his hands. He just never struck me as being very royal or very sophisticated.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: You know, he just --

Q: It sounds like a little of what I hear about the Crown Prince of Thailand.

RAY: Oh. Well, the Crown Prince of Thailand is a whole other issue. He's just distasteful. He's just an evil thug. But Ranariddh was just -- I'm willing to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. Ranariddh, he's the king's son, but, he wasn't raised in the palace. He was basically kept out of the palace. He's, he was sort of like the redheaded stepchild. And so I guess he grew up with a lot of unresolved issues.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: That never got resolved. I don't think he really ever got over not being the choice to succeed Sihanouk. And of course, he was a bit of a playboy. He took the wife of one of his ministers in his party, and got her pregnant, and had the nerve to show up at government and royal functions with her on his arm. And that's while he was still married to Marie. So the guy was just -- he just had no moral compass that I could see.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: It's just my personal view of him. The rest were people with the good points, bad points, but you know -- I was just never comfortable around him. I never was able to feel at ease in his presence.

Q: Was there much of a Chinese business community there?

RAY: Yeah. Yeah, sort of. I mean it was sort of petty trading, not really big Chinese companies. I mean the Chinese had investments in some of the big hotels. But nothing commercial that was really big.

Q: What about --

RAY: The Thai were pretty big. They had hotels and restaurants, and a company associated with Prime Minister Thaksin was one of the biggest telecommunications companies in the country.

Q: What about visits from State Department and other figures?

RAY: We got a lot of congressional visits when Cambodia hosted the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit, Secretary Powell came. Had a few visits from other government agencies.

Q: What about this congressional visits? What were they after? Was this just part of the -- was this sort of a part of the --

RAY: It depended. I mean you had Congressman Miller from California who is very much in to cultural preservation and education, and his interest was in seeing what we were doing at Angkor Wat --

Q: Oh yeah.

RAY: -- Angkor Wat and what we're doing in education. This kid Grove on the Appropriations staff I think during my three years there came two or three times pursuing his own agenda. You had the issue with the Montagnards coming out of Vietnam and being pushed back from Cambodia into Vietnam, and you had those who were interested in that issue coming out. We had -- during the election, we had the American election, observation delegation was headed by Christie Todd Whitman.

Q: Who's a former --

RAY: Former governor of New Jersey.

Q: -- governor of New Jersey. She's a major figure in the public --

RAY: Also something in the administration. She was some Cabinet -- she came out -- it was, it was -- we had several VIP visits. I got to meet Jackie Chan and, and Naomi Judd. Naomi, the actress.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I actually hosted a reception for her when she came. It wasn't like Bangkok or Paris or London where you have a constant flow of visitors, but we got our share I suppose.

Q: Was --

RAY: Minnie Driver. (Note: Not sure what should go here, so probably best to delete it)

Q: My daughter-in-law is involved with something about Cambodian children and went out there and she was the photographer doing a shoot about Cambodian orphans or something like that. Was there much of a problem -- I guess Cambodian orphans were still -- I guess we weren't letting them get adopted at that point.

RAY: Well, I mean the problem too was that the focus tended to be on these documentaries on, on the eight, nine, 10, 11, 12-year-old street kid orphans.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Who weren't adoptable anyway. Most Americans want to adopt cute little --

Q: Cute little --

RAY: -- infants. So, you did have a problem with orphans and street kids. It -- they were -- there were a number of NGO's working on it, both domestic Cambodian NGO's and international NGO's, the government did what it could with, with its meager resources. Yeah, it was a problem. I mean you had kids living in trash dumps, rag pickers living in trash dumps.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Or landfills.

Q: Well, probably a good place to stop here. Is there anything else we should cover or --

RAY: No, the big issues were the human trafficking, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, getting some balance and reality in our relationship with the security forces there in our interests.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Which, which actually proceeded quite well. I presided over the first military training team to come out to teach land navigation to a mixed group of military and police -- the first military training team in Cambodia since the war, since the '70s, which is, which is quite a, which is quite an occasion. I mean everyone, everyone thought it was nice. There was the issue of -- as I said, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, which eventually started itself out -- the Cambodian economy, which survived China's entry into the WTO. And then of course elections and the whole question of political inclusiveness, which had to be, which had to be dealt with on a daily basis. So getting Cambodians to sit down and talk to each other and to learn to find a meeting round in the middle instead of hanging on to extreme views was always a --

Q: How did you find the work of your political and economic officers and USIA or public diplomacy? Were they able to get out and around pretty much?

RAY: Yeah, we, we -- there were no parts of the country that were, that were -- I mean what kept us out of areas was infrastructure, not -- I mean the government didn't, didn't -- I mean I -- I'm sure you've heard of, of Preah Vihear, the temple that's contested between Cambodia and Thailand.

Q: Oh yes, oh yes. I've been --

RAY: I actually visited it. I mean, in fact the Thai were more upset about my visiting that than the Cambodians.

Q: Yeah, I mean -- how stands that now?

RAY: Well, the -- I have not heard anything about it lately, but as of when I worked in the Pentagon between 2006 to 2009, one of my visits to Cambodia came right after there had been gun battles --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- over that temple. I mean as far as the international courts are concerned it belongs to Cambodia. Thailand occasionally still rattles its swords over.

Q: In Cambodia, is -- I mean is Thailand the, the menace to the north, or is Vietnam the menace to the south? I mean or is it just between the jaws of two, two countries?

RAY: Cambodia sees themselves as between enemies to the north and south.

Q: Yeah, they really --

RAY: Well, I mean if you think about it, the ancient Khmer kingdom extended to well past Bangkok and included --

Q: Oh, it was way --

RAY: -- most of the Mekong Delta.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And I mean they still call, they still call the Mekong Delta of Vietnam "Khmer Krom" or "Lower Khmer." So for most Cambodians who know their history, Thailand and Vietnam are both seen as threats that they have to manage.

Q: OK. We'll stop at this point and you left there when and where'd you go?

RAY: I left there in July of 2005. I went to the University of Houston as a diplomat in residence because I was -- I had been selected by the D Committee to be ambassador to East Timor. But the political appointee ambassador who was there at the time had issues with me and --

Q: Who was that?

RAY: Guy by the name of Grover Joseph Rees, who had been a staffer in Congress. And he fought to stay at post. The department caved and so they sent me to Houston as a diplomat in residence.

Q: OK. Well, then we'll pick it up then at Houston.

RAY: Great.

Q: OK. Today is the 11th of March, 2012 with Charles Ray.

RAY: I hate to tell you, but it's 2013.

Q: Oh, 2013. OK.

RAY: Daylight Savings Time.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: It gets everybody.

Q: I don't know, the 2013 just sounds a little awkward.

RAY: 2012 sneaked up on me, so don't feel bad.

Q: OK.

RAY: I, I was, I was getting adapted to 2010 and I woke up and it was 2012.

Q: You're off to University of Houston. You mentioned that you were having your troubles with Mr. Reed --

RAY: Rees, R-E-E-S, yeah.

Q: Rees. What was the problem, do you know?

RAY: Well, I -- you know, no, I never really knew. I got hints of it, but I could never really pin it down.

Q: Did you have any contact?

RAY: The only contact that we had after going to post was at chief of mission conferences. And that was minimal. He wasn't a very communicative sort. We had had previous contact when he was a staffer and I was consul general in Ho Chi Minh City. And we got along OK. We, we had our confirmation hearings together. But, I was not aware of any rancor until -- in fact, this was long after the incident when I ran into someone, a mutual acquaintance who had told me of his reaction when he was told I had been selected to replace him -- that it was something like, "Over my dead body." But I never really figured out what his issue was.

Q: Well, anyways, so off you go to Houston.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: You were at -- this is Houston University, University --

RAY: University of Houston, yes. I was at the University of Houston main campus, which is in the area -- it's in south, sort of south central Houston not far from downtown and not too far from Texas Southern University.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RAY: I was there for their 2005, 2006 school year. That would have been from August 2005. I actually left campus in June 2006.

Q: What was your impression of the university?

RAY: University of Houston is a huge university system. When you're in it, it reminds you a lot of the University of California system. The University of Houston has several campuses. It has the main campus there in Houston and it has a campus in Victoria and campuses elsewhere. I didn't get to those too often. Because I also had to cover all of the schools in South Texas from College Station to the west, actually almost all the way to San -- San Antonia was sort of included, St. Mary's University there, all the way south to, to the Rio Grande, north as far as Rusk. And then of course to the Louisiana state line. It must have been -- with -- counting community college, state universities, private colleges

and universities, I would say I probably had 60 or more institutions in my area. And I had Alaska. I was assigned to cover Alaska.

Q: Well, what -- when you say you had it, give an idea of what the diplomat in residence, you were doing.

RAY: Well, the diplomat in residence program, and I've been out of touch with it for a while. At that time it, it was -- I mean there was the stated program. You were there as a, as a, an advisor to, to people who were about to take the Foreign Service Exam and, and sort of coach and mentor. You were there as, as a recruiter. We did, we did college job fairs all over the place. You were also there as sort of a liaison between the State Department Foreign Service and local communities. How you did it precisely was -- depended on the institution and, and the particular diplomat in residence. I was the -- only the second to ever be assigned to the University of Houston. That position had only been established the year before. And University of Houston didn't have an international relations department. I was assigned to the department of political science, whose head was a very nice guy who basically, as long as I didn't cause him any headache or grief, provided me with administrative support and an office and pretty much -- in fact the only time we ever sort of crossed paths other than, than the meeting when I first reported to the campus was when the president of the university invited me to lunch and, and the head of the political science found out about it and he was, I guess understandably, upset because the president of the university had never invited him to lunch *(laughs)*. But to his credit he never did anything. I understand he was a little miffed, but, but he never took any action. Basically my daily program was mine. I mean I booked my speaking engagements myself and I did a lot of those around south Texas I tried to visit almost all of the schools in my area at least once.

Q: These would be schools at the college level.

RAY: Yeah. I did a lot of outreach to high schools and junior high schools too. I dealt with like the World Affairs Council and other civic groups that had an interest in, in foreign affairs. I worked with a Justice Department-state law enforcement task force on human trafficking. Some of our diplomats in residence took full class teaching loads. At the University of Houston, since they didn't have an international affairs department there was no real pressure to do it. I wasn't required to teach. I did offer myself to other professors as a guest lecturer to come in, talk to their classes. But mostly I did information sessions, which is walking people through the oral assessment. I did job fairs and I did a few other odd jobs that the, the department wanted done. I went to an NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) event out in San Diego. I substituted for the secretary as a speaker at some affair there at Houston. I don't remember now even what it was all about. And, and I just basically got to know the area and the people.

Q: Did you get any impression of the student body? Being in Texas were they more alert to what was happening or less alert or what did you -- I mean it's a hard thing --

RAY: What I found traveling all over South Texas was that in a lot of ways Texans weren't that different from people we encountered during our travels around the country during Senior Seminar. Most people were pretty much occupied with their immediate surroundings. And this included college students. I never ceased to be amazed when I'd go to a job fair and had the nice posters, U.S. Department of State and all, you know, represent your country, see the world type thing, and I would have kids come up to me and want to know which office in Austin I worked in because to them the Department of State was a local entity. Or, or the question, "I'd like to come work for you guys. Can I work from home-- will I have to leave my home town?"

I had one girl come up to me once in a, in a little town in South Texas not far from the border. And, and when I told her, "No, you, you would have to leave home because we are the Foreign Service," her response was, "Well, no, I don't think so because I don't even like going to Houston." So I found people to be not that in tune with the world more than a few miles from where they hunkered down. One of the biggest challenges with college students, with high school students, with the exception of outfits like the World Affairs Council, which had a few people who did have an outward view, was to make them understand how interconnected they were with the world. A principal of a high school had invited me to come and speak to her ninth grade class. And when she invited me she said, "And, and you know, these are, these are 14, 15-year-old kids. I want you to make them understand why foreign relations and international relations are important." And you know, that's a challenge. You have all the off the shelf speeches that we're provided with on foreign relations and international relations. But, can you imagine a 14-year-old being impressed by most of the talking points we're given? I actually almost got stage fright. I covered it as I usually do -- I didn't prepare in advance because I just really couldn't think of what to say, just decided to go and wing it. So, I'm standing in front of this group in teenagers, and they're scattered around over the classroom, some even sitting on the floor. And I told a joke which sort of lightened the mood. And as I was telling the joke, I was watching the kids on the front row, because the ones who come and sit upfront tend to be the bellwethers for the group.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

RAY: And I happened to notice two of these kids were wearing these really expensive running shoes. You know, the ones with all the little --

Q: Oh yeah.

RAY: -- swooshes and swatches and things -- and I remembered something from my time in Vietnam when I'd been given a tour of a shoe factory about how complicated they are and how many pieces go into making one of those shoes. It's something like 20 or 30 separate components.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: They are made of all kinds of different materials, metallic materials, polyurethane, cotton. And it hit me. I mean it was like, it was like one of those epiphanies.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Just like eureka, I got it -- these kids don't realize they are walking examples of foreign relations. And so I start -- I just pointed to this kids shoes and got to joking with him about them. And then I asked him if he knew how they were made. Well, of course he didn't. And so I walked him through my first tour of a shoe factory in Vietnam that had been brought from China by a Korean company; and some of the machines were from an even different country. And, and then I walked him through the different materials, the polyurethane, the little plastic petroleum based pieces, which who knows where that petroleum came from, could have been Venezuela, could have been Nigeria, could have been the Middle East. The cotton, probably Egyptian, but then there are other places that grow cotton. And the medals, you -- Malaysian tin mines. And we went through -- by, by the end of the, the -- well, at the end and I got a really good question and answer section going. And these kids -- and kids are pretty -- they pick up on things quick. They pretty soon got into the oh, you know, you're right, I mean we're -- there's nothing we do that's not touched by other countries --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And there's nothing that can happen that might not have global implications, and I explained to them, for example, that when I was in Cambodia and there were the anti-Thai riots that caused the Cambodians and the Thai to shut their respective borders, it impacted the amount of goods on the shelves at Gap stores in San Francisco because a huge percentage of Gap's production line is produced in Cambodia. And if the borders are shut it doesn't move. At the end the principal came up and said something to the effect of, you know, Nixon had his ping-pong diplomacy, but I had just come up with sneaker diplomacy. Which became my signature talk when I would talk to high schools and even some college classes after that. That was the highlight of being a diplomat in residence. It was very, very low pressure, almost to the point of boredom sometimes.

Q: Well, the -- did you get any feel for racial representation in Texas? You would think that the Hispanic one would be certainly as important, probably more important, than the African American one there.

RAY: Depended on where you went. I mean, you know, Texas is not as homogenous as people think. I mean when you're in the Rio Grande Valley south of Victoria Texas and down south of Corpus Christi, yeah, the huge percentage of students, huge percentage of people you run into are in fact Hispanic. Many of them are people whose families have lived in that area for four and five generations.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: But, but when you're up in the, in the Houston area, the area of north of Houston, then you get a, you get a significant Caucasian African-American population mix. When you start going west toward San Antonia and that area, you start running into some small areas that are predominantly Caucasian.

Q: And German.

RAY: And German or Czech.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So you get a pretty homogenous mix.

Q: Yeah. I know. And of course I mean it's not fall flat desert land there.

RAY: No, you've got a -- I mean even in, even in Southeast Teas, you've got a lot of variety in terrain. You go northeast of Houston, you get -- you start getting into swamplands and cypress trees.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Texas legislature?

RAY: Mm-mm.

Q: In other words, the political process in Texas which apparently is one -- I mean it's --

RAY: It's a unique process. Even though I grew up in Texas, I've never fully understood it.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: That was actually -- it was interesting -- I grew up 190 miles north of Houston. That was the first time I had been back in the state for any extended period since I left in 1962. And while the racial dynamics had changed in a lot of the places, particularly going up into, up into East Texas, the demographics had changed with, with not just an increase in Hispanic presence in areas in the northeast where they hadn't typically been, but also you had South Asians, you, you had Vietnamese, you had other Asian populations and you had a huge -- Houston, for example, had over time developed a huge Russian population.

Q: Ooh, yeah.

RAY: And so, so you had the changing demographics. And some of the bigger changes I saw change, sort of physical change, more, more modernity. And then you get into some of those towns going up U.S. Highway 59 going north toward Arkansas and some of the little towns there hadn't changed in 50 years. And it was -- it's an interesting place. I mean I, I found -- Texas has always been a -- even growing up there I always found it

strange. It can be the friendliest and the most unfriendly place you've ever been. I mean people tend to be a little wary of strangers, but capable of being very warm and welcoming to them. Some towns you do not want to be in when the sun goes down, other towns you don't want to leave.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So it's a mixed bag. I spent as much time I guess getting reacquainted with my home state as I did acquainting people with the State Department.

Q: Did you run into any informed or ill-informed reaction to America role in the world, particularly at that particular time?

RAY: Mm. Not really, not as such. I mean, like I said, most -- you had a small group of people in almost every place I went that had a little bit of understanding of the outside world. Not a really in depth understanding of how we played in it, but at least an interest in what was going on. The bulk of the people I'd met though were not only not too aware of what was going on in the outside world, but didn't really seem to care that much.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: You know, the -- things like war, the occasional terrorist incident would be a flare of interest, and then very quickly back to is there going to be a sale at the local K-Mart? I find this right here in the Washington area. I live out in Montgomery County, and a lot of my neighbors aren't that concerned with what's going on inside the Beltway.

Q: (laughs) Yeah.

RAY: But they're only a few miles outside it. So no, I didn't.

Q: Well then, so you were there for about a year. But what sort of things were boiling up in Washington vis-à-vis you?

RAY: Well, during that -- after I got there, I mean after the, after the East Timor position fell through the first time, I got to Houston and they put my name back in the hopper because they figured, okay, there'll be this one-year extension and at the end of my time in Houston I can go back through the process. Well, it, it fell through again. And at that point I decided this is it; I'm not going through that again.

Q: I wouldn't think East Timor would be very interesting.

RAY: Well, to me it was because, it was a newly independent country and we were trying to get a new embassy set up. And they were facing a lot of problems. East Timor had a lot of under-population, AIDS, poor economy, etc.

Q: Oh yeah, well I mean that little enclave sitting in the middle of the third or fourth largest country in the world as far as population.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: And the area.

RAY: Yeah, , it was a challenge. And, at that time, the bureau felt that I was up to meeting it. They just didn't feel like fighting a political appointee. Which, unfortunately I have to say, seems to have been typical of the department for my entire time in the Foreign Service.

Q: I knew Peter Galbraith at one point, and he got involved -- I'm not sure if it was ambassador or as UN representative.

RAY: It's probably when they were working up to independence.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

RAY: Yeah. But at any rate, so that, that kept sort of flaring up. I gave up on it. And I was contacted in December of 2005 by the executive director of the League of Southeast Asian Families of the Missing, Ann Mills Griffith and, and asked if I had any recommendations for someone to be the deputy assistant secretary of defense for that function, and to run the office responsible, because the person who had -- was doing it at the time, one, had fallen out of favor with all of the family groups and was also ill and unable to work. We had a few emails back and forth. I really couldn't think of anybody. And in one of the emails she said, you know, "If your rank wasn't so high, and having been a former ambassador, you'd be the perfect candidate."

And I thought, you know, "Here I am being jerked around by the State Department system for my next job. Here's a, here's a mission that I have been interested in for a long time, being a Vietnam vet, and have been involved with sort of on the periphery."

So I got to her and I said, you know, "As far as I'm concerned, rank has nothing to do with it. If DoD and the families think that I'm acceptable for the job, I'd certainly be willing to ask the State Department to allow me to take the detail to do it." Well, that got a whole other chain of things rolling. And, Ann Mills Griffith, who's sort of a force unto herself and a legend in the accounting effort, started reaching out to people. It turned out that the Department of Defense was pretty willing to take me. And the personnel system, the HR (Human Relations) system at the department was perfectly happy, because that meant they didn't have to worry about --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- finding me a job.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: And so that started rolling into 2006. Around April or May things got really messy in Timor. Apparently Ambassador Rees had done something that made even the department willing to stand up and, and push back. And so I got this call saying that they were going to yank him out of there, was I still interested. And of course I don't have to tell you, at that point I said thank you, but no thank you, and besides I already have a job. So that went away. I had to come back up in June. They wanted me to chair a promotion board. And since the school year ended at the end of June, I just decided to come back and stay doing briefings and interviews for the job at DoD. And at the, the, the, the promotion board went through June of July, I basically -- and then I did a few more odd jobs for HR performance standard board and then some other thing. And then in early September I got a call from the Pentagon asking me to report for work at my new job as the deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Prisoners of War and Missing Personnel Affairs the next day. And I did that for three years.

Q: All right. Let's talk about the situation. This sounds like a, you know, for somebody looking at this maybe in today's age, you'd think well, yeah, that's a job, but this was such a hot button issue.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: You know, I mean I can recall going around, I still some places see the missing in action flag flying from firehouses and --

RAY: Well, you know, that's a congressionally approved symbol that is flown from a lot of government buildings in September during POW/MIA Recognition Day and on holidays like Memorial Day.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: By act of Congress, it is the official symbol of the effort to account for the missing. You know, you'll see motorcycles with the symbol, you'll see people with it on their jackets. It was a sensitive issue, primarily because of Vietnam, because of impressions people had that the government wasn't being totally forthcoming about the situation involving the unaccounted for after Vietnam. And the government effort to account that resulted in the formation of the Defense Prisoner of War Personnel Office grew out of that. And initially it was just Vietnam War missing. When I took the job in 2006, I think that was at about 1,700. Over the years, there was -- I guess you'd call it mission creep. I hate to use that word because it sounds negative, but it had expanded from just accounting for the Vietnam War missing to, to the Korean missing, and then to certain South Pacific air losses of World War II. And it just kept growing. By the time I took the job it literally included Vietnam, Korea, all of World War II anywhere in the world, and the responsibility for policy relating to search and rescue. We came up with two terms, the accounting for the missing, and finding their remains, and identifying and repatriating

became personal accounting. The search and rescue, recovery of hostages and other prisoners was personnel recovery, and I had both, I had both portfolios.

Q: This must have been -- I would have thought that you'd get to Department of Defense and they say -- I mean they'd be so happy to hand this over and say, "You're -- you take all the lightning because you've had distraught families who are," --

RAY: Well, in effect that's what it was. I mean my boss, who was the -- I had two or three different bosses -- I was under the undersecretary for policy, and then you had assistant secretary, and I -- we, we shifted -- I can't remember who -- which, which, which assistant secretary I was under, but I wound up under the assistant secretary for International Security Affairs. And basically my charge was keep these people out of my face and you run your shop as long as you don't violate --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- you run your shop the way you want to. I mean I had my own congressional liaison office, I had my own public affairs office. I literally ran my own budget. I had, I had -- I wasn't in the Pentagon, I was in, I was in -- I had a, I had a -- one entire floor and a suite of offices in a building in Crystal City where I was the senior governor official and consequently the commander of, of U.S. government and DoD forces in that building. The, the office -- I mean I, I act -- I actually was dual-hatted. I was under the -- I was in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as the deputy assistant secretary, but I was also the director of an independent field agency, the Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office, or DPMO. Which is a, which is a strange lash up. I had about 120 people sort of under me directly. But because of the dual-hattedness,- I had policy responsibility for some 600 or 700 people worldwide involved in the effort, including a joint prisoner of war-missing in action accounting command in Hawaii, - a forensics lab in San Antonio, an air force lab that did forensic analysis of aircraft components and equipment, a DNA lab here in Rockville, Maryland, and sort of tenuous policy oversight of the casualty assistance officers for all the services. Eight times a year we would do a dog and pony show in a different part of the U.S. for families of the missing where we would walk them through what we were doing overall, provide an opportunity for people who couldn't make it to Washington to actually come in and discuss their certain cases. We did two major family things every year here in Washington, one for the Vietnam War families and one for combined Korean War-World War II families. We did outreach to all the veteran services organizations. In that job I was on an airplane every 12 to 15 days going somewhere in the U.S. or somewhere in the world. We also, we also worked with -- I negotiated with the Russians on, on air losses from Korea and World War II and Far Eastern Russia, and negotiated with the Indians on, on China Burma India Theater air losses in World War II in Northeast and Northwest India. Northeast India. With the Chinese on access to Chinese on access to the PLA (People's Liberation Army) archives regarding both Vietnam and Korean war losses.

Q: How about the Burmese?

RAY: No. We didn't deal much with the Burmese. Relations with the Burmese government were lousy for my entire tenure.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: They wouldn't talk to us. We'd had had operations going in Burma. And when the junta took over they booted us out and wouldn't deal with us. We had tenuous relations with the North Koreans. We had one or two contacts with them, but we could never get the hardliners in our own government to relax enough to allow us to reach out to the North Koreans to do something about the 6,000 or more still unaccounted for in North Korea in the Chosin Reservoir area.

Q: Mm-hmm. Well now, what was the -- break this down -- first place, a family has a young member of the family missing. And obviously, you know, in World War II, do they get a pension from the guy? I mean what happens? I mean --

RAY: No. There are -- I mean the whole, the whole concept of missing in action is very complicated. My -- the ones from Vietnam have all been declared legally dead, killed in action, body not accounted for, or body not recovered. So any -- you know, when a, when a, when a U.S. military member is a prisoner of war in addition to continuing to draw their salary, continuing to be promoted at regular intervals, they're entitled to per diem for every day they're in captivity. The per diem is usually held in an escrow account. The other pay goes to the, the registered next of kin. We don't really have that problem with the missing from Vietnam and back. World War II, all of those who are unaccounted for, the known unaccounted for, have been listed as, as killed in action, remains not covered, or they're in a national cemetery. They're, they're really not that -- well, it's actually quite a few, a few from Korea, a few more from World War II, not really so many from Vietnam who are truly listed as missing in action, whereabouts unknown. We have a -- we have a vague idea roughly somewhere in the world where most of them are. In many cases it just -- you know, deep-sea losses are unrecoverable. And some of the Vietnamese losses, because it was high-speed aircraft, because of the toxicity of the soil, recovering any remains is probably impossible. I mean so you, you, you try to put together the best narrative that, that you can about the possible fate of that person, thus the, the various facilities I mentioned that I had. The, the Life Sciences Lab in San Antonio had people who could literally from fragments of a plane crash reconstruct the moment of impact of a cockpit of an airplane telling you who -- how many people -- not so much who, but how many people were in it and probably what their condition was. I was amazed at how these guys could take a rusty piece of medal and reconstruct an aircraft cockpit from it. I mean, you know, it made watching CSI on TV a little boring. The, the DNA lab for -- for the Vietnam missing, if we could get a large enough piece of remains to extract mitochondrial DNA then, then that, that was a help in, in some cases. We didn't have DNA on everybody in Vietnam, although if we had some idea of who they were we could contact family members on the mother's line and get DNA for comparison. But I mean that's, that's sort of the, the general overview. More specifically, during that time -- as I said, we -- our mission had expanded. There were about between 15 and 1700 from Vietnam still not accounted for, not, not located and identified, 8,000 from Korea, and

around 78,000 from World War II. Of that number, we assessed that about 30 to 40% were unrecoverable. But it still left us for having to try and put together the best explanation we could for the families and for the files of, of, of what happened. And, and that, that was basically the mission.

Q: I would have thought that a significant number of the ones from World War II would have been naval.

RAY: A significant numbers were. I mean you had burials at sea, you had --

Q: But you know, I mean you lose three cruises off Savo Island.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: I mean, you know --

RAY: Yeah. No, that's true. In many cases though when ships went down, the navy has pretty standard procedures. Ship goes down with all hands, they know who was on it. It's declared a memorial. And those people in a certain sense are accounted for.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: Their ship sent down, they went down with it.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And it's down there somewhere. It's too deep to get down to recover remains. I don't say that they account for the largest number, but a large number. Then, there are the air loses; the air losses in all wars can be really complex ones, whether it was Vietnam, where it was high impact where, you know, a jet with a full load of aviation fuel hit the side of a mountain and vaporized --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- or a P-50 in World War II or Korea that went into the drink and who knows how far it drifted before it sank to the bottom. Those are difficult -- we have literally thousands of aircraft that went down in the South Pacific. Some in deep water, some in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, some, some in shallow lagoons trying to locate and, and find all those is a pretty huge task. You're talking thousands. Then you have the China-Burma-India Theater where planes were lost flying over the hump. Airplanes that went down in the Himalayas. We learned of an aircraft called 'Hot As Hell', and I dealt with the families of the crew on the board that plane. This plane had gone down in the 1940's in India and completely vanished until an avalanche uncovered the skeleton of the plane smashed into the side of a mountain. In an area where the Indians found it difficult to locate recent plane crashes because planes would plunge into those glaciers and disappear under tons of snow. So it's that kind of complication. You're dealing with

situations like World War II. We had, air crews lost in the Far East;. you had soldiers who were lost where the Russian and American fronts came near each other. We had one case of a sergeant who'd been a prisoner of the Germans and had died or been killed in Poland and had been buried with a bunch of Russians. Now you've got a real complication -- his family would like him back, but here you've got his remains mixed in with 30 or 40 sets of Russian remains in a memorialized burial site in Poland, so you've got to negotiate on the one hand with the local government and on the other hand with the Russians. And you've got the family breathing down your neck wanting answers. And believe me, one thing I learned, it doesn't matter how long ago the loss was. In some cases the World War II family members, some of whom weren't even born at the time the loss occurred, felt it even more deeply than recent ones.

Q: Tell me a bit about dealing with this. Because these are, these are, you know, it's difficult. I'm a consular office and I know dealing with families. But I mean you had politicians, among other things, using this as a, a gimmick --

RAY: Yeah.

Q: I mean I hate to say the term, but I mean it really was.

RAY: Oh no, there's --

Q: For political purposes.

RAY: Yes.

Q: Raising this and all. And I mean you're -- it's one of these things that no matter what you do, unless you're completely do whatever the, the people want, you're lacking --

RAY: Well, no, you're right. I mean it's a, it is a, it is a touchy situation. What I found worked for me was to be aware of but not let myself be diverted by the politicians. To, to, to not get overly sensitive -- you know, we -- the -- the other thing that that whole mission spawned was the conspiracy theorists, you know, the bamboo cages and --

Q: Oh yes.

RAY: -- the government's, the government's conspiring with communists to leave our prisoners in -- I mean I was accused of, of -- within weeks of taking the job I was accused of participating in this massive cover-up.

Q: Well, of course. And you were in Cambodia too, you know.

RAY: Well, and Vietnam.

Q: You were right in the --

RAY: Yeah.

Q: -- right in the meddle of the --

RAY: Yeah, so, so, you know, you get that. The key was not to let that distract you. And I saw my job in two ways. One, of managing the mission, of, of managing the resources, both money, money, equipment, and people to best effect. And then dealing with the, the, the -- they're not, they're not real clients -- but dealing with the people, the families, the veterans groups, and understanding, at least having some empathy for their position.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Being, being open with them, not -- telling them what they -- I thought they needed to know to give them sense of -- that we weren't snowing them, that we were doing the best that we can. I mean the main thing was being accessible. This was one of the big issues that led to me being asked to take the job in the first place, is that, is that my immediate predecessor didn't feel that it was his job to be spending time listening to or talking to the family members. Not sure what he thought his job was. And, and when you got people who've, who've got the sense of un-reconciled loss, who feel they're being given a bureaucratic run-around, that's not a good combination. When they are also politically connected, politically active, and politically savvy, it's not smart. And I had just as many disagreements and arguments with the family groups as, as anybody, but it was always ore of they felt that they could actually sit there and argue with me and I was listening. I mean I tried to create that impression. For instance, the -- as I said, we did these eight family update sessions every year in, you know, we did it all over the country. And we, we had the country broken down in regions and we would go to like Dallas or Sacramento or Salt Lake City, and everyone within a 150-mile radius could come. We'd do these things on a weekend at some local hotel or conference center, which meant flying out on Friday, doing our thing on Saturday, flying back to Washington on Sunday and -- right? I opened every one of those personally. I mean I, I -- no matter what else was going on, I, I'd drop it, I'd get on a plane, I'd fly to the city, I would be there to open the session. I stayed all day on Saturday accessible to family members that wanted to talk to me. I mean I couldn't talk to them about any specifics about their cases, but sometimes people wanted to just to sit there and vent. Which was, which was something that neither my predecessor nor my successor liked doing, was very good at, or did with the amount of regularity that I did. And it turned out that actually meant all the difference. Because most of the families were -- they weren't -- they, they had to express their anger in terms of not getting their cases resolved. But in fact most of them I think understood that their cases were complex and might take a long time to be resolved. And what they were really angry about was not having someone to listen to them.

Q: Oh yes. Yes, this is -- well, did you find conspiracy theories going around a lot, or?

RAY: Oh yes. I mean every -- a month didn't go by when, when a new conspiracy theory didn't pop up. I mean there were -- and they were usually involving -- I mean there were

one or two involving Korean War. Mostly they were involving Vietnam, which was -- that seemed to be a cottage industry.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And a lot of them I had, I had -- how should I say -- historical connections to. For instance, there was the story that came up of, of this, this, this town in, in Vietnam, Tay Ninh, west of -- sort of west of Saigon. I can't remember if it was northwest or southwest, but it, it was -- it's, it's the, it's the center of the Cao Dai religion, big temple and everything.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And this story came up that there were 150 to 200 American prisoners being held in this basement under the parking lot at the Cao Dai Temple. And I think when it hit my desk I couldn't help but laugh. Because, because just a few years earlier I'd been consular general in Ho Chi Minh City, had been to that temple a number of times, and I found it ludicrous to think that they could have 200, 100, 200 people under the parking lot of an area traversed by thousands of tourists every week and not have anybody else notice it.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: That was one. There was another, was, was a guy whose name had come up several times when I was in Thailand in the '80s in fact, had come up again when I was in Vietnam, and had come up when I was in, in Cambodia who, who'd been a crew chief or a gunner on a helicopter that had gone down. And he'd supposedly survived a mid-air explosion of a helicopter, had been trapped in the jungle for all these years, so long in fact he'd forgotten how to speak English. And, but he'd been found and, and no one ever explained why if he'd been found why they didn't just bring him back to -- bring him to -- in fact, I guess they did. In fact, took him to the embassy in Phnom Penh just before I became ambassador, where a, a blood test of this individual who was brought in indicated not only was he not a missing service member, but he wasn't even Caucasian, he was a Montagnard from somewhere up in the hills. And the reason he didn't speak English was because he'd never lived in the U.S. And, and he didn't even know what he was being paraded around for. These things come up all the time. I mean it just, it's, it's -- there was the case of the, of the woman who insisted that her brother didn't die in the crash, because he was a pilot, Air Force. And she insisted that her brother didn't die in the crash, despite the fact that remains were found at the crash site that were later identified through DNA as him. She -- and this was a really complicate done because the, the woman -- the sister and her mother, who I think had probably died by the time I took the job, didn't like the wife of, of the missing service member. Was really a nice lady. And so the sister sent phony DNA samples when, when we asked for mitochondrial DNA, she sent DNA that came from a male, not from a female. And so, and so when, when, you know, there couldn't be a comparison with the DNA sample she sent in with the, with the DNA from the remains found. What -- how they actually identified it by DNA was not, was not mitochondrial DNA, but nuclear DNA, because they got the service member's

DNA from the glue from envelopes that he'd licked sending love letters to his wife from Vietnam *(laughs)*. And, and we -- and that -- but I mean this woman, the sister actually threatened to sue me when we announced the identification and we had a service in Arlington and everything. She, you know, vehemently denied that, that this was her brother and that, that he wasn't dead. It -- you get that. That's -- that was part of the -- you had to, you had to deal with those with a, with a, with a certain amount of sensitivity.

Q: Yeah, I --

RAY: Particularly if family members are involved. You had some people -- I mean you have some people though who, who are just con artists. I mean there's a couple of --

Q: Well, there were the bone factories too.

RAY: Yeah, those. I mean that's people back in Southeast Asia.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I mean you had con artists here in the U.S. who were using this too make money here. And, and those I just, I just avoided. I mean I, I just try my best to not come into contact with them.

Q: Did you -- were you running these digs and --

RAY: The digs, the actual, the actual excavation operations are run by the command in Hawaii, they're called JPAC, J-P-A-C, the Joint Personal Accounting Command in Hawaii. They actually are the ones who have the anthropologists and the technicians who, who go out to the sites and who actually do the physical recovery of, of remains and artifacts. The office here in Washington, Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office, is the office that does the collection, coordination and analysis of information that helps to try and identify sites and to come up with a narrative what happened. It is the office that has the primary responsibility for outreach too and with the families, along with the service casualty office.

Q: Well, I would imagine by being over at the Department of Defense you would be completely out of sight/out of mind with the State Department.

RAY: Pretty much. I mean it, it -- yeah, I mean it -- yeah, unless you, unless you were really part of some tight-knit group of good ol' boys at the department, like one or two of our detailees were, when you're on detail you, you were out there. I mean I --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: During the three years I worked at the Pentagon, at the end of it I, I got a -- the Secretary of Defense's Medal for Meritorious Civilian Service. During that three years I

did not get one performance award, nor did I get any, any indication from the Department of State that I'd done anything worthwhile.

Q: Actually, you'd acted as the, the flack-catcher for all the people who were stationed abroad or --

RAY: Yeah, but, you know, the department -- just to give you an example, my -- when I got to Houston for that assignment was also the year I was promoted to minister-counselor and I got a performance award. Now, this was all for my Cambodia service. And, and the people at HR were just shocked that a diplomat in residence would get promoted while a diplomat in residence. You know, it's like this doesn't happen. I know the promotion precepts for the department encouraged people to do these type things, but the system doesn't really seem to, to, to take much note of it. Or at least didn't.

Q: Yeah. No, you just feel like you're working for a big, not very caring organization. Unless you belong to a club.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: Like the Chrysanthemum Club or the --

RAY: Yeah. No, I mean it just --

Q: The China Club.

RAY: The China Club, yeah. If you were part of some clique then, then, you know, you would -- but if you were just a person doing your job --

Q: Yeah (laughs).

RAY: And, and I suppose -- I mean over time, even though I did more tours in Asia and other places, I really didn't get identified with a bureau. I mean I'd done -- I'd done an Africa tour before I did my last tour in Zimbabwe. I had done a few East Asia tours. I did the tour in PM. But then I, I mean I'd done, I did two almost back-to-back long-term training assignments. I did War College, did an assignment, came back, and did the Senior Seminar. I mean in a way that was sort of unprecedented.

Q: Well, when you finished with the missing people's job where did you go?

RAY: Went to Zimbabwe for my final tour. In fact, I got an email in the summer of 2008 from Ruth Davis, who at that time was the Special Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, asking if I would be interested in a 2009 chief of mission position in Harare. And really I hadn't paid much attention to Zimbabwe up to that point, but it sounded sort of interesting. So I said yes and went home and told my wife and she immediately said I was crazy. Because we'd been talking about retirement. I mean, in

2008 I was 63, two years away from mandatory retirement, with another year to do on the job. And I didn't see myself doing a one-year shuffle papers around the department.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So I pretty much had been planning to finish my three-year stint at DoD and just retire. And we were enjoying being in Washington and being in our house after, after so long. But I -- there's just something about the idea of take this one last crack at it, I mean I started reading up on some -- well, actually I mean I answered yes within an hour. And I started reading up on it and I, and I realized that this was a place that would be, would be fascinating for, for a while. So, and this was under the Bush administration. So I took it. Well, of course as you know, November came along and there was no more Bush administration. So I started mentally rehearsing my retirement plans. Until oh, just before the -- just before Christmas, I got another call from the department saying that the transition team, the Obama transition team, had gone through the, the list of upcoming appointments and had decided to retain my name for the Harare slot, if I wanted it. So I said OK. And so I actually transitioned from being a Republican nominee to a Democratic nominee. Which led to some interesting situations later.

Q: Well, did you -- I mean at that point you were a professional Foreign Service Officer so this didn't -- did this have any --

RAY: It didn't -- I don't think it really had -- I don't think it -- I don't know, you know, I wasn't a fly on the wall when these discussions were held.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So I don't know what the criteria was. My assumption, my assumption was that yeah, I was a Career Foreign Service Officer. I had served, you know, all -- I, I didn't have any particularly specific political leanings. I hadn't been identified with any clique. And I was willing to go to basically a thankless post in a troubled country at a time when the embassy was facing some internal problems. So why go looking for someone else, you know? We've got Mikey, let him do it. I figure -- this was sort of my thinking is that it wasn't a political thing as it was a this is not going to be an easy post to staff --

Q: Yeah, I was going --

RAY: -- and anybody who's willing to do it --

Q: -- I was going to say that knowing the history of the place --

RAY: Yeah.

Q: -- it doesn't sound like a fun, relaxing retirement post.

RAY: It wasn't as unrelaxing as people think. But anyway, so, so I stayed on the list and went through the whole, whole process. And come around to, to July of 2009 and a -- the 31st of July was my last day on the job at the Pentagon. And then I reported the next week over to State to start processing. I have to say one thing on the Pentagon thing. The most, the most -- to me I think one of the key highlights of that other than the fact that I actually introduced budget discipline to an organization that had been in existence for 15 years without it, was to -- I don't know if you're familiar with the Speicher case? Scott Speicher was a naval aviator who went down in the first Gulf War and had been unaccounted for for a long time. Very, very, very complex case. Almost like a soap opera. Well, the month before I left the job, after we -- the case had been reinvestigated, remains had been found, they were undergoing analysis on the Fri -- it just happens that my last day was Friday. And on my way out of the office saying goodbye to all my staff they had said they expected to get an announcement of the DNA examination of his remains. And the next morning on Saturday I woke up and I opened up my email and there was an email saying that the remains had been conclusively identified. So we solved the mystery of Scott Speicher on my watch, which was, which was, which was a pleasant thing. Finally got that put aside.

I get over to the department and I start getting over to my new job. Now, the complication of being this -- despite being career -- of being held over from one administration coming in to, to the next is I actually got my paperwork through the system before the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs who was one of these retirees called back to, to take a job, which has generated a bit of controversy because of the way it sort of marginalized active Foreign Service people, who had himself formally -- at one time been ambassador to Zimbabwe. I never met him. I mean I knew his name, I knew of him, but I'd never met him. Who I think resented that he hadn't had a say in my selection. Well, I mean I was selected before he was. Who --

Q: Why would have a say anyway?

RAY: Well, as assistant secretary he'd have some input in to, to it. But like I say, I had been selected --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- and everything was done before his name had ever even come up. But I don't think that, that didn't dawn on him. I mean it just -- he felt, he felt left out of the process. Two, because I had not grown up in the Africa Bureau he didn't know me. He felt -- I think he and many other of the senior people in Africa Bureau resented an outsider getting that job. I mean that was considered not the plum job in the Africa Bureau, but certainly one of the key jobs because of the situation. And so there was, there was that little tension. And I remember my first meeting with him when he, when he, he, he ejected the country director and desk officer from the room and then proceeded to, to give me this, "I don't know how you got this job, because I don't know you. You didn't grow up in the bureau and I've had people in the bureau come to me and question your seriousness about the job," which just totally pissed me off.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: I held my temper, but it was like I have never in my life been talked to like this. And then so I just simply look at him and I said, "Well, you know, for your information, I gave up my retirement to take this bloody job."

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: I have never not given my full attention to a job. And so if someone has a problem with my credibility, I would say to them first, look at my record, and secondly, get the hell out of my way. Let me do the job. And if I'm not doing it right you can always fire me. And I walk out of his office. We had strained relations for the entire first year. In fact, our next meeting was more than a year later. Because he -- I think he literally -- and then there was always that he'd had the job before, so of course no one could possibly do it as well as he did. And therefore, anything that I did in the job was, was measured by what he would have done or what he did. And so it, it was, it was a bit, it was a bit strained there for, for, for, for a while. It wasn't helped by the fact that I said to, to them when, when they first offered the job is, "I -- I literally don't want to be micromanaged. I will not be micromanaged. If you're going to send me out to do the job, give me an idea of what it is you want me to do and then I will do it. But if you've got to try and micromanage me find someone else." And I find that that never goes down well with the bureaucracy in the department. I mean they, they, they resist people who resist micromanagement.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: So, so my first year there I actually had pricklier relations with the State Department than I had with the Zimbabweans.

Q: I'm wondering, do you think Zimbabwe would be good for a full session? How long were you there?

RAY: Just under three years. And I can actually sum Zimbabwe up in a, in a -- fairly succinctly. You had a situation where two previous ambassadors had been flogging the regime change, we don't deal with these guys because we don't like them, poke our finger in their eye at every opportunity tactic. Which had clearly not worked.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: We had thrown our lot in with the opposition, completely cutting ourselves off from Mugabe's element of the government, which was in a way counterproductive because by, by being seen as so close to Mugabe's opposition, we were actually weakening them. Because one of his key propaganda points was they were toadies of the west and puppets and we were pulling their strings. So the key in my view was first, try and identify key U.S. interests in the area, which, which one of the first thing I discovered

during my, during my consultations before going was we didn't have a very clear policy on Zimbabwe because nobody in Washington agreed on what it was we were trying to achieve there. I mean I -- the regime change thing of the previous administration really was stupid. I'm sorry. I just have to say there's -- why we should have the hubris to say we should go around saying which regimes need changing when there is no clear threat to us never made sense to me. Let the people in the country decide who should be their government. And, and I have to tell you. I actually did the almost three-year tour and I never got a clear statement of U.S. policy because Washington never could come to terms with what it wanted to do in Zimbabwe. One of the things I did right away was I, I basically said to the country team, "We don't take sides, we, we stand for certain principles. We stand for rule of law, we stand for respect for human rights, we stand for respecting the will of the people. Those people who are willing to go along with us on that we deal with. I don't care what party they belong to. Those people who don't, well, we deal with them if we have to, otherwise we don't." I made it a point, for instance, when I traveled in the countryside and I went to every one of Zimbabwe's provinces, if I went to a project or a district that was primarily opposition, my next visit was to a project or district that was part of Mugabe's party. I would talk to anyone, I would go -- I got asked for courtesy calls on every government minister there to include some who frankly made me want to go home and bathe in lye soap after meeting them. But you know, my view's always been you can't do your job if you, if you, if you, if you're shutting the door in people's faces who have any information you need to do your job. And nobody's all bad or all good. I mean even the bad guys have some motivation. That took a while for -- to sink in there. I don't know that it ever totally sank in here in Washington that I was even-handed, that I wasn't siding with anybody, that I was siding with -- you know, my, my mission was to promote U.S. interests, to protect U.S. citizens. And frankly, who won Zimbabwean elections didn't matter to me as long as those elections were conducted properly. There were a few interesting incidents. I mean I, you know, Mugabe is a very interesting figure.

Q: You might explain to somebody coming to this for the first time what was the situation there.

RAY: You had a situation of the, the Zimbabwean Army of National Unity, slash, Patriotic Front Party, which was run by Robert Mugabe who'd been the country's prime minister/president since independence in 1980, had a -- for a long time had an iron lock on the political power and control. Very weak idea of how to run an economy and had driven the country into literally bankruptcy. They had hyperinflation. I have a, I have a calendar at home that has one of their bank notes on it, a 80-octillian dollar bank note, which was worth about five U.S. dollars. There'd been political violence, millions of the population had fled to neighboring South Africa and other countries. The economy had basically ceased to function. The commercial agriculture had been almost destroyed. And a, an opposition had -- and there'd been land seizures. A lot of the publicity was about the seizure of white-owned farms, but in fact farms of people -- of black landowners had also been seized, some violently. And the country was just not functioning properly. And its opposition party was created, which actually gave Mugabe the first credible opposition to his long-time role. I think it shook him when an opposition could be created and

overnight win an election. So using the army and the police it made it impossible for him to take power. The first time. Which would have been in I think 2004. 2008, they had another election which was also bloody, which the opposition also won but not by enough to constitutionally take power. Mugabe called a run-off and called out his dogs and it got really bloody until the South Africans stepped in and forced him to, to form a coalition government of the opposition in Mugabe's party. And that's what I walk into. Oh, and they switched to the U.S. dollar. Which stabilized the economy, which got rid of hyperinflation. Got rid of people's assets, but got rid of their debts as well.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RAY: So when I arrived you had -- they -- the coalition government had been in place maybe nine months. The U.S. dollar had been the official currency for about nine months. Some sanity had returned. There were still occasional acts of violence, but nothing like 2007, 2008. Goods were back on the shelves. And I won't say that things were normal, but things were relatively peaceful. And as I said, the first year was difficult because none of the hardliners in Mugabe's party actually believed me when I said I would talk to anyone. And there, there were efforts to provoke me into some kind of reaction. I mean I would, I would be attacked in the press. I mean I was called an Uncle Tom and House Nigger and, you know, war criminal. I was -- I mean I got the embassy in Zimbabwe because of my success in brutalizing Vietnamese during the war. And it was just another, you know, American war criminal sent out -- oh, and my expertise in destabilizing governments. I'm not sure where that one came from.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: And there would be -- these would flare up now and then and I'd basically just ignored them. I started doing little opinion pieces that we would put on our embassy blog, our embassy website, Facebook page. And this happened to occur about the time that the independent press was starting to come back. And a lot of the independent press would occasionally take my little commentary on things like the role of the military and what is leadership and what is democracy off of our website and would run them as op-eds in their -- in the independent press. And this became such a regular thing that the government got a little upset by it and they started accusing me of being a journalist in the pay of the, of the, of the independent press. Then we started -- Secretary Clinton had had a big push on outreach to young people. And we, you know, more than 60% of Zimbabwe is under 35. So of course outreach to young people was a big part of our program. We had a very active program of going around the country and meeting with groups of young people and discussing things of importance to them, the economy of -- their education, of improving their, their future chances. Which the government didn't pay much attention to at first. And then when they noticed that we were getting larger and larger crowds at our youth outreach programs started trying to disrupt. Very skillfully, I might add, they would never try and disrupt a meeting once I got there and started a meeting. I mean they would send people in to, to, to like ask provocative questions or try to bate me in to saying something, but they would never come into a meeting where I was actually conducting the meeting and make people leave. They would try to get their

ahead of me and, and intimidate people into canceling the meeting. Which they successfully did a couple of times. So we started doing virtual meetings on Facebook. The embassy had a Facebook page and we would set up live chats. The firs tone we did had about 250 people logged on. We had over 100 comments within the first 30 minutes. When the government got wind of it they went into orbit because they didn't -- they couldn't stop it. Then a new series of attacks started. I became the Facebook or Google ambassador whose mission was to pollute the minds of Zimbabweans, young people, and they were warned to stay away from me. Which had just the opposite effect. At that point, my Facebook page -- my personal Facebook page had about 250 friends. Within three months of the government attacking my outreach through electronic media, I had over 2,000 Zimbabweans following my page. By the time I left Zimbabwe in 2012, I had reached the 5,000 Facebook friend limit and had to start allowing people to subscribe to my page. I, I think I left Zimbabwe with a bout 7,400 total friends and subscribers on my Facebook page. We did a -- we did a, an electronic book based reading club with Zimbabweans, both young and old, including government officials, which, which pulled groups together that had not been, been pulled together before. Actually start reaching out to the local business community there, hooking them up with businesses here in the U.S. Because for all the political instability, it's still a fairly good investment destination for people who know how to do, do diligence and do their homework properly. And I actually succeeded I think in, in, in making some contact with people in the government that we had lost contact with for over a decade. To include being probably the first American ambassador in eight or nine years to have more than one meeting with Mugabe.

Q: OK. Let's talk a bit about Mugabe. How did you see him -- or how did we see him from Washington before you went out and when you got there?

RAY: It depends on who you ask. Those people -- you know, there's a strange attitude, I found, or interpreted, about Zimbabwe in Washington. The people who knew or who had experience with it in the 1980's when it first became independent were some of the most viral opponents to Mugabe in present day. But when you traced their history back you found that they'd been some of his staunchest supporters in the 1980's. I think in the 1980's there was such optimism about him being one of the first black African leaders to be successful post-independence that when it was found out that he was just another big man dictator with delusions of grandeur who, who would do anything to hang on to power there was a sense of betrayal. And, and, and consequently, his actions seemed to be magnified beyond similar actions by other -- you know, give you an example. There -- if a pro-democracy activist was arrested or beaten in Zimbabwe, there'd be a huge outcry in Washington. When women were systematically raped in Eastern Congo, you didn't hear much about it. From the same bureau, same people who knew what was happening. There was a reluctance to talk to people, to him or people from his par -- I mean there were actually people in the department who, who questioned the wisdom of my talking to, to people in Mugabe's party.

Q: Well --

RAY: Go figure. I mean how do you do your job as ambassador when half the government you refuse to talk to?

Q: Did you find much competence in the government?

RAY: It was sketchy. I mean there were some ministers who were quite competent but who were politically ineffectual. There were some, some ministers who couldn't have managed a Cub Scout troop. Just -- I -- actually one of the, one of the more competent ministers was the minister of tourism who happened to be in Mugabe's party as a technocrat who -- an engineer who actually went out of his way to try and do a good job. Another very competent person who was way overstretched was the, was the opposition party minister of finance who'd been an activist lawyer before, before going into government. And the guy's brilliant, but he was wearing so many hats I don't think he ever got to sleep. It was -- it's like any government. You had some who were good, you had some who were incompetent, you had some who were frankly selfish, greedy, venal. You had a lot of them though who were just occupying chairs.

Q: Did you see a country that was running down rapidly, or what?

RAY: No, I saw a country that was running down. I wouldn't say running down -- I mean it, it had actually -- you know, if you look, if you look at the history of the whole hyperinflation, which by the way was the highest -- I mean they had the record for the highest hyperinflation in the *world.*

Q: Wow (laughs)!

RAY: Had, had, had been sort of building over, over time. There was a period near the end where really, you know, it accelerated. One of the stories that I always found amusing was people telling me that it had gotten so bad at one point that you go to the golf course, and if you got a beer before you teed off on the first hole the price of that same beer when you stopped after the ninth hole had gone up.

Q: How can people survive in that type of thing?

RAY: People coped. I mean this is the thing is that this is -- this was the thing I think that people who looked at Zimbabwe emotionally, through the lens of Mugabe is everything, missed is that in fact the Zimbabweans coped. Black, white, or otherwise, there, there is among Zimbabweans the sort of attitude of if, if I just sort of wait it out and I'm patient and I keep my head down below the berm, I can survive this and tomorrow will be better. The -- it -- they -- despite the violence, for example, I felt most Zimbabweans to be relatively peaceful and, and, and in fact look for conflict avoidance. People just got by. I mean.

Q: Well, I mean, were you able to -- well, obviously you were. But to operate in the country? I mean if you were called an Uncle Tom and --

RAY: Well, like I said I ignored --

Q: -- and all that?

RAY: Well, that's funny because, because yeah, I mean I, you know, you'd get these attacks in the paper. But then when I would go out to the countryside -- just to give you some -- just anecdotal examples. I went to a school and there were some quote, "War veterans there protesting American sanctions." Well, they were there. They had students holding the anti-sanctions banners. And there was no chanting, there was no interrupting me as I spoke. This, this guy comes up to me. Looked to be in his thirties so he couldn't possibly have been a Liberation War Veteran, even though that's what he claimed to be. I knew he was a government provocateur. And he challenges me on sanctions and starts with, you know, how sanctions were killing Zimbabweans and, you know, we were, we were evil to have sanctions against them.

And I, I just, I very calmly but very directly leapt down his throat on a lecture of the history of the sanctions and what the sanctions had actually achieved and not achieved, and the economic decline of Zimbabwe compared to the imposition of sanctions. And I ended with, "They must be really powerful sanctions to have screwed your economy up before they were enacted."

And the guy looks at me and he says, "Thank you very much," and he meekly walked away. That was the type of encounter that I had. As far as the attacks in the press, I said, I, I ignored them.

And I was at a -- I was in the second largest city in, in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, and, and one of the reporters at the end of my presentation said, "You know, how do you deal with the, the propaganda, ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front) propaganda people so viciously attacking you in the press and being so rude?"

And I thought about it for a minute and I, you know, I know there would be a, an approved department answer to such a question. But -- and I just said, "Well, you know, I treat them the same way I did my kids when they were at the age when they there temper tantrums. Leave them in a room by themselves with the door shut until they run out of steam." That just, I mean, you know, there was a flurry of my being insulting. And then, then I think they realized how silly they -- they were in fact reacting like kids throwing temper tantrums. So that died out. Then there was another, another question that came up when, when someone asked if I thought that Zimbabwe would immediately improve if Mugabe were gone. And I said, "Yeah. I mean, it would change, but you know, as, as, as important and central as he is, no country -- I mean countries are too complex to be totally affected by the presence or absence of any one individual." And I said, "Besides, the problem with Zimbabwe is it needs to be constructed preferably from the ground up, not from the roof down." Oh, that just -- this one, one propaganda -- a guy named Jonathan Moyo who I am convinced is clinically insane, went after me with a vengeance. And I found out later it was because he didn't understand what I meant from building from the ground up, but he thought I was insulting Mugabe. This went on for about a

month, month and a half, until Mugabe himself told the guy to cease and desist. Because I think he understood what, what I meant when a lot of those around him didn't, is that you have to build a foundation. You can't -- you know, a country can have the most dynamic leadership in the world, but if it has a weak foundation, it won't go anywhere. It was those kinds of things.

Q: Did you talk much to Mugabe?

RAY: I met with him three times. I met with him on my credentials presentation, a -- and the, the, the five-minute courtesy call that you're supposed to have at the end of the official thing. Actually went for 45 minutes. I met with him again when I was about to come back to the U.S. I actually brought a delegation of, of Zimbabwean CEO's back here for a business conference. I met with him for almost an hour before that trip. And then I had just a little over an hour farewell call on him before I left. And that was --

Q: How did these go?

RAY: They were actually pretty, pretty -- I mean it was -- they were actually -- considering that I walked out on his sister's funeral *(laughs)* when he went on a rant and said, "The hell with America and Europe," very friendly. I mean my, my, my meeting before I came to the U.S. for the business conference, I took him a copy of the book on the leadership that I'd written about the things I'd learned from my grandmother. And we spent the bulk of that meeting talking about the fact that Kentucky Fried Chicken was planning to open -- to come to Zimbabwe. And he and I spent a bit of time talking about the merits of crispy versus regular chicken. And then we spent time talking about our grandmothers. And when I gave him a copy of my book, he actually had it on his lap and he started flipping through it and ignoring the meeting. I mean he sort of -- which really, really not, not bad. I mean we talked about the mutual goal that we both had of improving the economy, which in my view was the basis of their economic instability. I mean it needed to get the economy back on track before you try to build this political system. Because when people are worried about clothing and housing and being fed, they can't concentrate on the politics.

Q: Well, one of the things that -- certainly here in the States one gets the picture that OK, the white farmers were not lovely people or anything else, but that he'd turned the farms, which were really very productive, over to essentially veterans who mismanaged it. I mean it --

RAY: In some cases that happened. And in fact, they did, they did destroy the commercial -- well, they completely emasculated the commercial agricultural industry. I would --- and I always objected to that use of the term veteran. So a lot of people that got farms weren't war vets, they were cronies, they were, they -- it's -- one of the loud -- one of the war vets with the loudest mouths wasn't even a teenager during, during the liberation struggle. So he couldn't possibly have been in --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- been in on it. The real veterans, a lot of them were living in poverty. Now, true, a lot of the farms that were taken over were, were mismanaged. In many cases they were taken over by people who simply stripped them of their assets and, you know, got the money that they could from the assets. That, that whole farm thing was badly handled on both sides. Well, on all sides. I mean in, in -- I, I, I spoke on the phone to Andrew Young, who, who'd been part of the negotiations of Lancaster House, that whole, that whole -- set up the whole new government getting, getting, getting Ann Smith out and allowing elections and ending the war. And he -- Young said that in addition to the British commitment to helping fund the land redistribution program, that the U.S. also committed an amount to it, which we never paid. And then of course the British -- for whatever reason, I'm sure there was some fraud and mismanagement in the program -- but the British basically terminated it at a time when through their own mismanagement and bad decision making the Zimbabweans had gotten themselves caught up in the DRC and, and without the money to continue the program on their home, and that's when the seizures started, when they couldn't buy. Now, on the, on the side of the white farmers, you had a group of white farmers who were holding out thinking that if they held out long enough they wouldn't have to play in the game, which was foolish. So when the first few farms started being seized, some very violently, and of course we reacted typically, how dare they? I mean it -- I always found this amazing, I that, is that in 19 -- immediately after 1980 when 25,000 Ndebele were slaughtered, and their properties were taken, the west was strangely silent. The first few farms of Europeans that were taken, the first European to be damaged, killed, or hurt by it. And suddenly the international community is --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- flapping like a chicken with its head cut off. Which gave them *fantastic* propaganda. I mean all Mugabe had to say was, "You didn't say anything when black people were killed and their land was taken. But let one white guy get hit over the head and his farm taken, and suddenly you're all upset." We never had a good answer to that, frankly. And to this day we haven't really given a very good answer to that one. So you had a -- as far as I'm concerned, looking at it as a non-Africa specialist, probably the only innocent people in that were the people who weren't -- I mean you had some whites who had bought land after 1980 whose land was seized. I mean that was clearly illegal, but you, you couldn't say these were people whose ancestors had taken the land from locals. These were people who bought the land with government approval. Those I'd say were innocent. You had many blacks who owned land whose land was seized and misused. Those were innocents. Everybody else, the white farmers, the, the, the, the U.S. and, and UK governments, Mugabe's government were all at fault. I mean they were just dumb decisions and, and visceral reactions on the part of everybody that didn't help the situation.

Q: How about other -- how about the British? Were they doing anything there?

RAY: Not much. Trying to look out for the few Brits who lived in -- you know, people who lived in Zimbabwe all their lives and, you know, what are they going to do in Britain?

Q: Yeah.

RAY: They had to look -- large British population. In a sense, you know, we tried to let them be the, quote, "leader of the Western response to, to the situation there," but my, my British counterpart had so many restrictions imposed by domestic issues back in London that, that in effect first he and then she were not as effective as, as they could have been. And then they had to deal with the EU, which was a mixed bag. And so in a sense, the sort of moral leadership of the western community fell to the U.S. by default, even though we didn't want it.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: We really couldn't avoid it.

Q: Did you find being an African American made any difference?

RAY: In some cases yes, I think Zimbabweans would -- reacted to me differently than they would have, sometimes negatively, sometimes positively. One of the things I found is that, that people on all sides would look at you and they would immediately develop expectations of how you might or should or would react without bothering to look at your history --

Q: (laughs)

RAY: -- or figuring out what your, what your, what your mission was. I mean this was sort of the reaction when, when, when President Obama was elected. Well oh, we got a black president. I did an article which actually was printed on the department's website about that. And it was printed in several of the papers there and on a couple of -- I think one of the AOL sites, maybe Black Voices, where I pointed out how foolish this was. And reminded people that, you know, you got to look past the skin color and the hair texture. I am an American. I raise my hand and I take an oath to the *American* Constitution. As does the president. And therefore, we represent the interests of the United States of America. And if you're expecting me to do something simply because we share pigmentation, you're going to be badly disappointed. Because if it's not in accordance with the oath I took. And if it's not benefiting *my* country, it's not going to happen.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Yeah. I mean and that's -- when I pointed -- I also pointed out, and for people of Zimbabwe to assume that I come as a long-lost brother shows an ignorance of history.

My African ancestry -- and I point out, I not only have African ancestry, but I have Native American and European ancestry.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: But my African ancestry -- ancestors most likely came from *West* Africa and that is several hundred miles and probably several hundred tribes and a whole bunch of languages away --

Q: Yeah.

RAY: -- from you guys.

Q: And you were probably picked up by -- your answers probably sold into slavery by some --

RAY: By some other -- yeah. So I said, "You got to -- this whole attitude of," -- I said -- and I found it over the years, no matter where you go. The, the cultural connection is often stronger than the ethnic connection.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: I was in -- when I was in Sierra Leone, I got along well with people there. But I found that I got along better with the Krio in Freetown than I did any of the tribes, because the Krio were tribeless.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: But even that, it had its limits because, because, you know, we could only go so far. And then the culture --

Q: Oh yeah.

RAY: -- would enter.

Q: You know, Americans are --

RAY: Americans are American. I can spot an American in a crowd in a foreign country --

Q: Sure.

RAY: -- like that. By the way we walk, by the way we dress, by the way we stand. And, and Americans tend to, to sort of spot each other.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: And it doesn't matter. I mean I, I've been in -- I've been in places where I've run into an American and we, and we get to talking and I find out that I'm, you know, talking to a guy whose grandfather was the head of the local clan.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: He doesn't care. He found another American in a foreign country --

Q: Oh absolutely.

RAY: -- someone he can talk to, you know. So, so that, I mean that, that was, that was I think an issue early in my tour. But again, one of the things -- I mean I am what I am. I, I, I -- if I say this is the way I do things, then that's the way I do things. So unless you keep your eyes closed after a while you're going to find that yeah, I mean that's, that's what you get.

Q: How'd you find your staff at the embassy?

RAY: Initially the problem I had to face was -- I mean they're hardworking dedicated people. The problem was that those who had been there during the hyperinflation and violence had been so traumatized by it that it was really difficult to get them to understand that as the American embassy we didn't take sides, that we had to be prepared to deal with everybody. We had to put American interests first. That was a bit difficult. I mean some, some never got it. Some got it begrudgingly. Over time though, by the end of the second year most of those people had transferred. So there were new people. And, and I, you know, I had a -- I had a fairly good staff. Fairly good staff of locals. Some of the locals had been working for the American embassy for a long time, were well connected throughout society. I think, you know, the -- my, my best staff was my public diplomacy staff. I, I was blessed with two very active, outgoing, innovative public affairs counselors in a row who, who, who not only were comfortable with some of the wild initiatives that I came up with, but were perfectly capable of coming up with some of their own. I mean we did things that -- now it's sort of taken for granted. I think they were really considered out there then. I mean like the live Facebook chats and, and, and the electronic book reading clubs. And I would -- I mean I regularly blogged on our website, but the public affairs staff took it a step further and they would take the little things that I wrote and market them to local papers as op-eds. They, they -- and, and after a point when I'd been doing it about almost two years, the public affairs staff took a 21 or 22 of their favorite of my opinion pieces and published them in a little book that they gave out to schools and youth groups. Which quickly became one of the most popular books in Zimbabwe. So much so that they wound up publishing editions in the two main tribal languages.

Q: Oh my God.

RAY: Yeah.

Q: How about Washington? I mean I would have thought that you would have had Washington leaning on you to show the flag in their way, in other words be tougher rather than trying to live with this regime.

RAY: Well, you didn't have that many people that really cared, I think.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: One. Two, is when it was necessary to be tough, I was tough. I mean I had a, I had a -- my motto, which I actually expressed during my confirmation hearings to go to be ambassador to Cambodia was I'm perfectly willing to twist arms, but you have to permit me to take hands first. Anyone in Washington who, who wanted to say I was being too soft would have a hard time justifying that when I walked out of Mugabe's funeral very publicly. It was a cause celeb in the press for weeks. And who turned out and walked out on the foreign minister when he called me in to criticize me for walking out on the president's sister's funeral. It's not exactly someone being soft on the locals. When I made statements comparing the military people who made political statements and who were overtly political to be nothing but armed thugs to the local press. So Washington couldn't really say that I was "too soft". They weren't comfortable that I would -- I mean I tried to look for balance. If something was bad, I was willing to, to say it. At the same time, if something was not bad I was willing to say that too. And, and in time, what that did was built credibility with all the audiences in Zimbabwe, which is where I needed credibility. It built credibility with people back here who believe we should have an even-handed balance policy. It -- there was no way I was ever going to build credibility or be liked by the people who wanted to do it one way and one way only. And I never bothered with that.

Q: When you left Zimbabwe, where did you see it going? I mean obviously Mugabe is not going to be there forever, and what's going to happen do you think?

RAY: I think that there's probably going to be a few more years of instability and uncertainty. I mean the biggest question mark is what happens when Mugabe suddenly dies. Because he's not planned for a successor. I think his ego prevents that. I think that they built this personality around him to the point where they, they've gone be -- they've gone too far to, to reverse it. And so there'll be this, there'll be this period of uncertainty and instability, maybe even a spike in violence when he goes as, as, as all of the packs of hyenas circle the courts trying to figure out who gets the choice pieces. In the long run though, I think it'll, it'll even out and, and stabilize. You know, 60% of Zimbabwe is under 35. It is still the country in Sub-Saharan Africa with the highest rate of literacy. While it didn't -- while it never really had democracy as such, it did have functioning institutions and a functioning government, and you still have people who remember how things are supposed to be. And how, how to, to, to do right. I mean you have military people who while they're in an institution with political leadership that has distorted the military professionalism, remember what it was like to be a professional army and would like to go back to that. You have policemen who try to do their duty. You have judges who, despite being politicized, try to make decisions based on law. You have teachers

who even when they weren't being paid were going to classes and going to school and still trying to teach. You have doctors who without adequate medicine and equipment try to provide medical care. You have people who know -- they still have, even with a deteriorating -- not deteriorated -- deteriorating infrastructure, they still have an infrastructure. South Africa maybe is better overall or better in the places where it's modernized. If you, if you com -- if you look at Zimbabwe, it's still got a fairly decent infrastructure that a few billion dollars could, could, could pull back up. Zimbabweans -- the, the, the weakness of Zimbabweans is they don't do well in groups. They're, they're very talented individuals. They don't pull together in groups very well. If they, if they ever get the ability to function effectively -- and one of the things that makes it possible for Mugabe to stay in power as long as he has is, is he understands group dynamics. And he's dealing with people who don't group together very well, and so he is able to manipulate them and play them off against each other like the wily old character he is.

Q: Did you see any sign of his deterioration or --

RAY: Occasionally you would, and then he'd snap back. I mean he would, he would be weak and limping and looking frail and then he'd take off to Singapore and he'd come back and he'd be skipping and hopping and telling jokes. I basically told people well, we do need to have planning for what we do the day after Mugabe dies. We got to quit wasting our energy predicting when that's going to be because he'll outlive us all if we do that.

Q: Yeah. How old is he now?

RAY: He'll be 89 this month.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: His mother was 100 when she died.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: So I tell people, you know, if he's -- he's got -- he's got access to better medical care than his mother had, so prepare for another 11 years.

Q: (laughs)

RAY: The big danger there will be not so much -- I mean it'll be chaos when he dies. The real danger will be if he becomes incapacitated but is still alive.

Q: Yeah.

RAY: Because then you've got that cloud over things and it's going to be depend on who knows about that and how they're able to manage it.

Q: Well, you left there when?

RAY: Left there August 7th, 2012.

Q: And so what are you up to now?

RAY: I retired September 1st. I'm mostly fulltime freelance writing. I've published 30 books, fiction and nonfiction. I do some speaking engagements. I'm working with the Department of Defense on personnel recovery. I'm doing a -- in April I do a big personnel recovery -- international personnel recovery exercise in Arizona and in May I'm speaking at a personnel recovery conference in London. I am available as a speaker on all kinds of topics. I'm speaking on, on Vietnam this week to a group here in Washington. And then on diplomacy and technological advances in communication at New York University next month.

Q: OK. So have a nice retirement. Thank you very much.

RAY: My pleasure.

End of interview