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JOHN M. REID

Interviewed by: Charles R. Beecham
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Bob (Charles R.) Beecham, on Wednesday, September 4, 2002, talking to my old friend, John M. Reid, about his experiences during some 30 years of service with the U.S. Information Agency. Our purpose is to produce an interview transcript suitable for inclusion in the Department of State – USIA (United States Information Agency) oral

history collection now being administered by the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training.

Okay, John, let's begin this with a chronology of your assignments, both overseas and in Washington. Also, what were you doing prior to joining USIA?

REID: Well, after an undergraduate degree in physics from Virginia Tech, a year in Hong Kong working for the International Committee of YMCAs (Young Men's Christian Association) and two years in the army, I finished my master's degree in international relations at Columbia University in 1964, when I was 24 years old. After that, I came right into USIA as a junior officer trainee (JOT). After a couple of months of JOT training in Washington and six months of Thai-language study, I headed for Thailand in March, 1965. After I finished my JOT training in Thailand, I spent some time in northeast Thailand, in Udorn and Sakolnakorn. In 1966, I came back down to Bangkok and worked as distribution officer and assistant executive officer.

In June 1970, I went to Vietnam on direct transfer, where I worked for about a year as distribution officer and spent my final five months on detail to the political-military unit in the U.S. embassy's political section. In 1971, I went to Vientiane, Laos, and ran the binational center there until January 1974, when I returned to Washington and took on an assignment as special assistant to the director of IPS, USIA's Press and Publications service.

USIA sent me to Harvard for the 1975-1976 academic year, where I was a fellow in the Center for International Affairs. After Harvard, I returned to Bangkok for a four-year assignment as deputy Public Affairs Officer. That was followed by a year of Arabic-language study and a two-year assignment in Beirut as PAO (Public Affairs Officer).

After Beirut, I returned to Washington, in 1983, to be deputy director in USIA's Office of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. From 1986 until 1990, I was PAO in Seoul, Korea. This was followed by a year as diplomat-in-residence at the University of Virginia and another year as deputy director in the Office of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. From 1992 until 1995, when I retired, I was back in Bangkok as PAO.

Q: I want to ask you here whether or not you arrived at your first tour in Bangkok with a good understanding of the program you were getting into.

REID: To some extent not, although this soon changed. The training program in Washington had focused on main-stream USIS (United States Information Service) activity. On the other hand, I knew that Thailand was a big post and that its size was related to what was happening in Vietnam. I think that, although I wasn't fully prepared for what I encountered in Thailand and may have been a little confused a first, I soon understood the character and importance of the Thailand program.

Q: Why don't we talk about your initial break-in period as a JOT in Bangkok?

REID: I was involved in some very traditional USIS activities and in some things that I did not really expect. I arrived in Thailand for the first time on March 3, 1965, and Mark Brawley took me in and introduced me to the PAO, Jack O'Brien. That was a Friday, and, on Monday, I began seven weeks with Ivan Campbell in the radio section, then located above the U.S. Information Center on Patpong Road. I liked this assignment. The radio program was large, and we produced a lot of material, mostly in Central Thai, for local placement. Then, as I recall, I came over to USIS headquarters on Sathorn Road and worked with you in the press section. I spent a lot of time editing Wireless File copy and, from time to time, I drafted something original. I was always pleased to see a media release I had written, however anonymously, appear in one of the local papers. During my first months in Thailand, my "big brother" was Paul Blackburn, who had arrived in Thailand a year earlier as a junior officer. Paul did a wonderful job of explaining things to me and keeping me pointed in the right direction.

After my time in the press section, I moved upstairs for a couple of weeks in the field operations office, which was run by Howard Biggerstaff ("Bigg"). I think it was at this point that I discovered that my training was preparing me for an assignment at one of the branch posts. Following my initial contact with Bigg, I made my first branch post visit—a couple of weeks in Udorn, where the branch was run by Ed Schulick, an outstanding officer who later became one of my closest personal friends. Ed did an excellent job of showing me the ropes and getting me involved in branch operations.

Q: Were there many Americans stationed on the air base there at this point?

REID: Officially, the base was Thai with a Thai commander, and we were allowed to use it. Actually, by that time, we had a very large U.S. Air Force presence in Udorn, as well as on Thai bases at Ubol, Ta Khli, Khorat, Nakhon Phanom and U-Thapao. From the end of 1964 until sometime in 1968, our presence on these bases rose from about 6,300 servicemen to about 45,000. I don't recall how many Americans were stationed at Udorn, but there were a lot, and, in addition, there was a significant Air America operation flying covert missions.

Eventually, USIS had branch posts in towns close to the bases at Udorn, Ubol, Khorat and Nakhon Phanom, and a considerable part of what those posts did involved base relations. In Udorn, Ed Schulick was very effective in facilitating relations between the base and the local community. Ed had military experience in Vietnam, and this gave him credibility with the important people on the base. He was also well connected locally, partially thanks to wife, Duangduen, who came from a prominent Thai family and who well understood the role of the local governor, his deputy, the local educational community and important people at the provincial, district and municipal levels.

Q: But what did you do? You went to Udorn for a training assignment. Did you simply follow Ed around?

REID: Actually, it was unintended, but I got a pretty intensive dose of base-community relations. When I got to Udorn, I found that Ed had been involved in a rather serious

vehicle accident, which kept him out of action for a couple of weeks. Ed had been working with the American consulate in Udorn and with the base to host a big July Fourth function to be held on the campus of the local teachers' college. Invitations had already gone out to prominent Thai in the local community, but there was still a need for considerable coordination among the various Thai and Americans, on the base and in Udorn. Ed asked me to take it on and arranged for me to extend my stay in Udorn so I could finish the project. Subsequently in my career, I must have been involved in dozens of July Fourth functions, but this was my first, it was a challenge for me, and it went well. I recall it as a highly instructive experience, and its success helped my junior-officer morale considerably.

Q: So then you came back to Bangkok?

REID: After I got back to Bangkok, there was another abrupt change of course doing work under Nelson Spinks, the experienced and distinguished head of the Cultural Affairs Office. Then I had some more up-country experience, particularly in Ubol, where Rob Nevitt was branch director and Paul Good was his deputy. I did my first actual trips out into northeastern villages with Paul, including a couple along the Thai side of the Mekong River. By this time, Paul had been in Ubol for a while. His Thai was fluent, and he understood what was happening in the villages and with the Thai officials we accompanied. He was careful in explaining things to me, particularly in helping me understand the requirements and limitations of my role as an advisor.

Q: Did you get any training in the executive office?

REID: Yes, I did. It was under Jack Zeller, and it was very thorough and useful. Unfortunately, however, it lasted only a few weeks. Nevertheless, Jack managed to give me some understanding of what was involved in supporting a large, expanding field program. After I worked in the northeast program, I returned to Bangkok, in 1966, and worked directly under Jack's supervision as assistant executive officer and distribution officer, and I think I then, more than ever before, understood the problems he had to manage.

Q: Maybe this would be a good point to sketch out the special character of the USIS field program in Thailand.

REID: USIS Thailand was a very large operation with, at one point, more than 50 Americans and 200 Thai employees staffing the Bangkok headquarters and as many as 13 branches, eight in the northeast and five elsewhere in the country. The traditional USIS programs—international visitors, the information center, radio placement, publications, press—were large and, to some extent, supported what was happening in the field. The U.S. military presence in Thailand attracted a large U.S. media contingent, as you know better than anyone, so the press operation was very important. Thailand had a lot of VIP visitors, including President Johnson twice and President Nixon once. On the other side of it, however, was the essential, articulated purpose of the Thailand program; that is, supporting and enhancing the ability of the Thai government to communicate with and

inform the Thai public, particularly the part of it in geographic areas most vulnerable to the communist insurgency. This was consistent with what the U.S. mission in Thailand was doing on a broad front—trying to develop within the Thai system a capability to deal with a serious domestic insurgency.

Q: And actually to urge the officials to get out and maintain contact with people in the villages, right?

REID: Yes. In Bangkok, the focus of the mission, particularly USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development), was on institution-building—developing regular budget processes within the Thai government and establishing a training institution for junior local administration officials, for example. What USIS was doing in the field, however, was encouraging Thai officials to get out into the villages and to interact with people at the local level. Our part of it was information. We went out into the villages with the Thai officials, we showed films, we distributed publications and we talked to people. Our media focused on a few essential messages—the efforts of the Thai government to improve the lives of people in rural areas, for example, and the institution of the Thai monarchy as a unifying symbol for all Thai. It was a big program, and it required a lot of very intense personal effort.

Q: Was there much Thai-produced material available?

REID: Virtually none.

Q: Were there problems in terms of supply and distribution? Were you able to get what you needed up there?

REID: Certainly in terms of quantity.

Q: What about relevance and quality?

REID: It was a continuing struggle. Howard Biggerstaff very much favored the field determining content. He was enough of a bureaucrat, however, to want to be on very firm ground when confronting the people producing the media. I think there was always a conflict, probably very natural, between the professionals in Bangkok who wanted to call the shots and the end-users out in the field.

Q: This was not unusual in USIA operations as a whole, of course.

REID: No, it was something I encountered many times in my career, at all levels of USIA.

Let me go back to something you asked earlier, whether or not I was prepared for the USIS program I encountered in Thailand. Before I went back to Bangkok to work for Jack Zeller in 1966, I was very involved with the program in the northeast—first going on village trips as a trainee, then working with Ed Schulick in Udorn for about four

months before going over to Sakolnakorn to open my own branch post. I spent a lot of time in villages in the company of Ed and Khun Tiewtawat, his senior information assistant, and later in that of Khun Prayong, a Thai information assistant who worked for me. Conditions in the northeast were dreadful then. The drive from Udorn to Sakolnakorn which today takes about 40 minutes on a well-maintained road, in those days took at least three hours on a dusty laterite road and could take as long as five hours in the rainy season, when all that dust turned into a sea of slippery red mud. When the mud dried out again, the surface of the road buckled and looked like a washboard. At certain speeds, the ripples in the road would make vehicles very difficult to control. This was especially true for our boxy old jeep station wagons which had a very high center of gravity. There were frequent accidents. I was involved in two, one of which got me evacuated to Clark Field in the Philippines.

The only way into villages, accessible today by paved roads, was on rutted ox-cart tracks, barely navigable with four-wheel drive vehicles. I remember going into a village in Nakhon Phanom once, and there were virtually no young males between the ages of 15 and 30. They were all up in the hills with the insurgents. Children were dying of dysentery everywhere in that village.

Q: Maybe you should provide here some general background about the political and social environment in which you and other branch directors were operating.

REID: Of course, I am now speaking from the viewpoint of 2002 and not on the basis of what I thought in 1965. People left the villages to join the insurgents. Conditions were terrible, and I believe there was generally a tremendous feeling of alienation in the Thai countryside, particularly in the northeast, toward the Thai government and its bureaucracy. Many of the northeasterners were the descendants of Lao forcibly relocated away from the Mekhong River by the Thai after their victory over Laos in the 19th century. They had no sense of their own history, but their culture and language persisted. They spoke Lao, although most central Thai still insist that it is a dialect of central Thai. At best, they were treated indifferently and arbitrarily by the Thai centralized bureaucracy and, even worse, were sometimes exploited by corrupt officials. The communists could say to them: Okay, you are alienated, you are rejected, and you have no stake in this system. We can provide you with an alternative. I think this was tremendously attractive for a lot of these people. As a consequence, I think some more thoughtful and aware people in Bangkok were looking at what was happening in Vietnam and just beginning to run a little bit scared. What we had to say to those we found prepared to listen was, you have to build roads, you have to provide clean water, you have to bring public health services to the villages, you have to build and staff schools, and you have to communicate with the villagers, however insignificant you think they are, and tell them what you are doing, because, if you don't, you may very well lose it. I think this was a very useful and credible message. And, in a very perverse, paradoxical way, I think the communists probably did Thailand a great service, because they scared the hell out of some people in the central government, and these people began to react and do some of the things that needed to be done.

Q: How about the leadership and organizers of the insurgency? Were they Thai, or were they Vietnamese?

REID: I am probably not qualified to deal with this question. If anyone in Bangkok had the answer, it did not get to us in the field, and, so far as I know, it is not part of the record. I can only speculate. In the early 1960s, there was an organized Communist Party of Thailand, controlled, I think, largely by Sino-Thai, some of whom had been in China and some of whom had close connections with the mainland. I don't know what kind of relationship this party organization had with the insurgency in the countryside, but I suspect not very much.

On the other hand, there was a large group of Vietnamese who had grown up in northeast Thailand and who had been repatriated to North Vietnam in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Under an agreement with Hanoi, the Thai had allowed North Vietnamese Red Cross offices to be established in northeastern Thai towns to handle this repatriation. When the Thai began supporting South Vietnam, Hanoi terminated the repatriation before it was complete, but some of the North Vietnamese Red Cross offices still existed in places like Udorn and Sakolnakorn when I first went there. Most of the people who were repatriated spoke excellent Thai and had connections to the Vietnamese settlements in northeast Thailand. And, of course, there were Lao from across the Mekong who spoke the same language as people in northeast Thailand. Certainly, the ideology of the insurgency was foreign-inspired and, most likely, foreign-controlled, and there were channels available for its introduction.

I recall that, on Christmas day, 1965, Khun Tiewtawat, Khun Prayong and I had been out on a village trip in Nakhon Phanom, and we were in the district officer's house. Someone came in with a pamphlet, which had been given to him by communist insurgents who came into his village the night before. When they distributed the pamphlet, they said they would come back in 24 hours, collect it and discuss the content. This guy had taken a tremendous chance bringing the thing in, and we had only a little time to look at it before he had to take it back. The pamphlet text was question-and-answer format. It was in northeastern Thai, but was written with the standard central Thai alphabet. We read it into a tape recorder and then later transcribed it. The questions spared the monarchy, which the communists refrained from attacking, but there were very real attacks on the military government headed by Field Marshal Thanom and General Phrapas and the Americans who supported them. The answers were articulated in highly ideological terms, and they read like quotations from Mao's little red book.

Eventually, the ideology helped defeat the insurgency in Thailand. Later, in 1976, when the Thai military cracked down on the students, and the students ran off into the jungle to join the communists, what they found was that the whole insurgency was very ideological and was not at all responsive to conditions in Thailand. The communists weren't a bunch of reformers, they weren't really interested in improving conditions out in the countryside; what they really wanted to do was change the political and social system in Thailand.

Q: Are we still talking about your early assignment in Thailand?

REID: We jumped ahead. I am just saying that the mid-1970s marked the final end of the insurgency and that the increasing irrelevance of the communist ideology to Thai conditions was a significant factor in that. Of course, a principal contribution to the increasing irrelevance of the ideology was the fact that the Thai establishment had been responsive to conditions in the countryside.

Q: Did military confrontation with the insurgents contribute to decline of the communist movement?

REID: I think the U.S. mission saw appropriate action by the Thai military as very much part of the overall response. We had a very large military advisory group in Thailand, and they were very active outside Bangkok. As for USIS, we had some contact with the Thai military, and our message was that information and civic action were essential parts of any military suppression activity.

One of the trips I did after moving over to Sakolnakorn early in 1966 was for 30 days with the Thai military. I was there at the insistence of the provincial governor, and there were no other Americans, not even the local U.S. military advisor. The operation I accompanied was a real suppression operation, and there were engagements in which the Thai took some casualties. We were joined at various points by people from the provincial and district offices, who participated in some of the civic action.

Q: What did you have to offer?

REID: It was very much a standard village operation for us—with the film showings, the publications and the personal contact. The Thai military commander generally wanted my Thai team out doing its thing, but he discouraged me from going with them. I think he was concerned about the possibility of a security incident involving an American, but I also think that, for very good reasons, he wanted the operation to be a Thai thing. My role was to make sure my people did their job, which they would have done anyhow, and to be aware of what was happening.

Q: I don't think I have ever heard this discussed very much. I don't know whether you want to get into the existence of controversy among some of the USIS officers assigned to up-country posts. My recollection is that some of them resigned or were moved to other positions because they disagreed with this and other aspects of the field program in Thailand.

REID: Definitely. Also, hindsight is always 20-20, but I was young and inexperienced, and I really didn't know that much about what USIS was supposed to be doing. I liked being out there in the boondocks, however, eating sticky rice and sleeping on temple floors, talking to the village teachers about local problems, having a few drinks in the evening with the Thai officials and working on my Thai. It was exciting, fun and, I thought then and still think, useful. At the same time, I recall a question in my own mind.

It was an intellectual question—a little paradox. If the object of this thing is to show that the Thai government is responding to a situation, what is the impact of my ruddy, foreign face appearing in the middle of things?

Q: But wasn't it the judgment of the Americans who were running all of this in the embassy and back in Washington that this would not have happened without Americans present in the field as a catalyst?

REID: That was their judgment and I think it was correct. In most cases, particularly early on, I don't think the district and provincial officials would have been out in the villages if we weren't there as well.

Q: In any event, it went on for ten years. You say it ended in 1976, during your second tour there?

REID: I think the insurgency ran its course sometime after 1976. Our own disengagement from the counterinsurgency program was much earlier. It was well underway by the end of my first Thailand tour, in 1970. Let me try to get the chronology correct.

Nixon was elected for his first term in 1968. Up until that time, Washington had supported the maintenance and expansion of the field program. Immediately following Nixon's stop in Thailand in the spring of 1969, however, we were visited by a team from the NSC (National Security Council) which did a very comprehensive review of the program. I recall that Lynn Noah came out to serve as our liaison with the team. Clearly, that was the turning point. It may have been Lynn, but someone told me that Kissinger had decided that we were going to get out of the business of doing the Thai government's job for them. Being just a little guy on the ground, I did not understand the implications of this at the time.

Q: Was that related to the idea of getting out of Vietnam too?

REID: Yes, I am sure it was, but, again, that wasn't so clear in 1969. We now know that the whole direction of our Vietnam policy under Kissinger and Nixon was Vietnamization—trying to get the Vietnamese to do the job.

Before we move on, let me say just one final word about the effort to support counterinsurgency in Thailand. Ultimately, I think the failure of the insurgency was due to the fact that the insurgents found themselves increasingly marginalized, largely by an irrelevant ideology but also significantly by the fact that the Thai establishment had addressed pressing issues in the countryside. Our contribution to this was very important. I think it paradoxical, however, that the most important consequence of our work, particularly that of USIS, may have been one we did not anticipate. I have been amazed over the years by the number of Thai who have told me that the first time they ever saw a motion picture was when USIS teams came into their villages. We were part of the opening of traditional society to the world. One may argue whether or not this was a good thing, but I think it was inevitable, and I think our role in it was constructive.

Q: Now, this brings us to another question, that of so much friction between Agency officers in Washington and USIS officers in the field, in Bangkok and upcountry. Wasn't there a period when there were great arguments between Washington and Bangkok about whether we were going to preserve parts of the program? Was this on your first or second tour?

REID: The confrontation between the field and Washington raged during all three of my tours in Thailand. USIA never did a good job of explaining to people in the field what was happening back at headquarters, how things were going. If it had, we might have been able to accommodate change and manage things more rationally.

I recall that, by the end of 1969, our PAO, Lew Schmidt, and the area director in Washington had gotten involved in a very heated and, I think, emotional exchange over the field program. The people in the field had worked hard and thought they had done their job. Yet, it seemed, very arbitrarily, we were being told to liquidate operations in which we had made major investments and to dismiss talented, loyal staff who had served us well. If someone had said to us, this is the way it is in Washington, this is the way it is in Vietnam, we have to get from point A to point B within two years, now let's come up with a rational plan—we might have managed with much less friction and anguish.

I was more fortunate than many of my colleagues in Thailand. By the end of 1969, I was in Bangkok, serving as distribution officer. We had devised a very successful means of getting our publications to every village headman, every primary and secondary school and every government office in Thailand. I think we probably distributed over a million pieces of paper a month, and we could document that almost all of it was going where we intended. At the same time, we ran a very successful program for our monthly Thai-language magazine, Seripharb, getting it to about 43,000 paid subscribers. Our distribution contractor used the subscriptions proceeds to finance a book translation program, which produced a new title each month, with sales of each copy amounting to about 7,000, principally a result of promotions through the magazine. In response to the pressure from Washington, we began working with the Thai, early on, to take over the free distribution to Thai institutions. This involved an investment in equipment we gave them, transferring some of our people to their payroll and providing extensive training and advice. They assured us that they would be able to produce the material for the system once we went out of the business. I don't know to what extent they were ever able to manage that. In the meantime, however, we continued, on our own, paid magazine and book distribution. Thus, I was able to maintain a significant, successful part of the distribution program, and, in this, I think I had a happier experience than some of my field operations colleagues, people like Ben Fordney, Rob Nevitt, Ed Schulick and the people at the branches...

Q: Don't you think that what you encountered then in Thailand was partly the inclination of bureaucrats to assert their authority, especially if they are in Washington dealing with subordinates in the field.

REID: Absolutely. Thailand was always a target for Washington bureaucrats looking for easy cuts, and the cuts seemed always to occur in a highly arbitrary and contentious fashion. I encountered the problem on all three of my tours there, particularly my last, when I returned as PAO in 1992 and stayed until my retirement in 1995.

Let me give you an example. From the time of my first arrival in Bangkok in 1965 until my final return in 1992, our binational center in Bangkok, the American University Alumni Language Center, AUA, had been the paradigm for such operations throughout the world. It enjoyed the support of a distinguished group of Thai. It ran a highly successful language program, teaching English to thousands of Thai students and professional people while generating significant profits, some of which were used to finance activities of direct interest to USIS. On its own, it ran a highly successful cultural program. Our state-of-the-art library was located on the binational center premises, while the center, from its own resources, helped staff the library. Initially, we had made a major investment in the binational center infrastructure, but, in later years, our contributions were limited. We provided some support for specific programs, and we supported the library with acquisitions, technology and some staff. The center director was a USIS officer, and a USIA specialist ran the language program.

For 30 years, the reputations of my predecessors in the Bangkok PAO job had been burnished and enhanced by universal esteem for the American University Language Center. After my arrival as PAO, however, I was visited by an area director from Washington who confronted me with a new view of things: "Look at this place! Why are we involved in this? Why are you doing this? It's a total anachronism!" Worse, this area director was no less confrontational when meeting some of the prominent Thai who supported the center.

I was shocked. What had changed? Now I know that USIA, under all kinds of pressure, had made the decision, I think very unwise and unfortunate, to get out of the library and binational center business. This was never clearly articulated to the field, however, or, in any case, to me. If it had been—if someone had said, USIA no longer has the resources to support this, but we will support you while you work with these people to recruit their own director and language specialist, and to become self-sufficient—it would have been much less contentious and much easier to manage. Eventually, I was able to work with the Thai through the problems of recruiting a director and a language specialist. In fact, today, the center runs a highly successful and profitable language program, and it still maintains a cultural program. The library is a sad business, however, since Washington told us to withdraw our own staff and major equipment to form the basis of a separate information resource center within the USIS operation. Nevertheless, I find it interesting that the binational center outlived USIS as an institution.

Let me tell you another little story. On one particular Monday, I had an early-morning engagement, so I did not go directly to the office. When I got to the office around ten o'clock, there, in the center of my desk, was an unclassified cable from the area director in Washington. It told me bluntly to implement, within a relatively short period of time, a

major cut involving, as I recall, three American positions, several FSN positions and a big piece of our annual budget. By the time I got to the office, photocopies of the cable were all over the building. A little heads-up on the cut and a classified cable for PAO eyes only would be helpful. It was enormously difficult to deal with a cut like this, but having people lined up outside my door wondering whether or not they would lose their jobs didn't make it any easier. Anyhow, that's the way things were done.

Q: What else do you consider important about your final assignment in Thailand?

REID: My two previous PAO jobs had involved some very hard work under very difficult conditions, but I was pleased at the extent to which my efforts and those of my colleagues had been recognized. In Bangkok, I thought we did some significant work as well—like the annual economic seminars, which involved the ambassador and senior embassy people in week-end sessions with the most important economic policy people within the Thai government. No matter how well we did in Bangkok with the economic seminars or with anything else, however, I never felt that anyone back in Washington paid the slightest attention. Overall, the experience seemed a disaster. Nothing constructive was acknowledged, and the core of the matter was that, for three years, I seemed to spend most of my time fighting with Washington.

Q: In other words, you felt that the experience and skills developed over the years weren't being used. You were given a situation where what you had to offer didn't apply. What was the role of the embassy in all of this? How did the ambassador feel about it?

REID: That is a very interesting question. I was in Thailand, as you know, three different times. During my first tour there, Graham Martin was ambassador, long before he went to Vietnam. Martin was extremely supportive of what we were doing in the field. When he left, Leonard Unger came, and I think he was basically indifferent to the USIS program at a time when the PAO, Lew Schmidt, was under tremendous pressure from Washington.

When I returned to Thailand for my second tour, as deputy PAO, Charlie Whitehouse was ambassador. I had known him in Laos when he was ambassador there and I was binational center director. I liked Whitehouse, and I think he understood USIS and supported what it did. He was succeeded, however, by Morton Abramowitz, whose only interest in USIS, in my view, was whatever exposure it could provide to the international media.

This was at a time when the PAO, Bob Chatten, was having his own share of the unending ration of difficulties with Washington, and I don't think the embassy was at all supportive. The area director at that time did not like the Thai program, and our branch post in Khon Kaen, among other things, was on his hit list. He came out to Thailand, assembled the USIS Americans, and spent three days telling us how we would fare under the "new agency" being promulgated by John Reinhardt and company. Among other things, there was to be a centralized, worldwide magazine to replace the local one-country magazines, including Seripharb, which we were still producing in Thailand. In fact, the whole thrust of the presentation, as I recall, was more centralization and less

autonomy for the field posts. In this case, the message did not go down well, partly because of the way it was communicated. It gets back to your earlier point about Washington bureaucrats asserting their authority over field subordinates. Eventually, we did lose the branch in Khon Kaen, and we got no help at all from the embassy on this, but I think many of us would have felt better about it if the whole business had been handled with a bit more collegiality.

To finish this one off, I should say that, when it was my turn to be PAO in Bangkok and deal with Washington, I received excellent support from the embassy. David Lambertson, the ambassador, had been DCM when I was PAO in Korea. We were friends, and he understood USIS and appreciated what we could do. I got along well with the DCM, Matt Daley, and I had good, mutually useful relationships with my other embassy colleagues. David was a regular participant in our programs, and he was particularly distressed by Washington's treatment of the binational center.

Q: Before we leave this, I wonder whether you should talk a bit about the impact of all of this upon the Thai, the people who had supported USIS over the years and with whom it had good relations.

REID: USIS had established a tremendous presence and reputation in Thailand over the years, particularly among an older generation of Thai. On my last tour, I met the Thai prime minister, a former IV (International Visitor) grantee, at some function. When I was introduced as the USIS director, there was a definite quickening of interest—a comment something like, "USIS, it has done a lot of good in Thailand." On another occasion, I heard Surin Pitsuwan, who later became foreign minister, talk about USIS. Surin was a Muslim from a poor village in south Thailand. He came to Bangkok for high school and, in the late 1960s, started hanging around the binational center, where he befriended several of the American staff. He also befriended Wright Baker, one of our USIS colleagues whom you will remember. Wright helped Surin fix a severe tooth problem and later helped him get into the American Field Service exchange program for high school students. After his AFS year, Surin came back to Thailand from the U.S., got his law degree from Thammasat University and went on to Harvard for his Ph.D. Afterward, he went to Cairo for a couple of years to learn Arabic and do Islamic studies. Surin is one of the most promising, most admired politicians in Thailand, and, recently, he has been very helpful in moderating anti-American sentiment within the Muslim minority in Thailand. I think Surin might actually become Thailand's first Muslim prime minister. He very specifically says that, had it not been for USIS, he would probably still be living in that poor south Thailand village.

I think people like this regret the decline and demise of USIS. When I had to tell the board of the binational center that we could no longer support them as we had done before, there was tremendous dismay. Unfortunately, the people who remember us and who feel they profited from our efforts will pass from the scene.

Q: I have one more speculative question to ask you about this thing in general. Is it conceivable, given whatever direction we are going in relation to the Middle East, that

we could eventually find ourselves deciding we need in one or more countries of the region a presence and capability patterned after those of USIS in Thailand in the 1960s? There is a lot of talk now about a need for a larger, better American public diplomacy effort as a consequence of general anti-Americanism abroad, particularly in the Arab countries. The talk is all rather abstract and shallow-minded, it seems to me, as if public diplomacy can succeed simply through television, radio and other electronic media messages. Rarely is anything said about an on-the-ground American presence or the cultivation of mutually beneficial personal relationships on a much broader scale.

REID: To the extent that I did a good job in Lebanon, I did so because I really worked at relationships. I had good, intense relationships with all kinds of people—Maronites, Sunnis, Shiites, government, media, education, religion, arts and, at one point, even a senior Palestinian. When I was in Korea, the effectiveness of what I did, to the extent that it was effective, depended on me being there and maintaining relationships. To do the kind of thing we did in Thailand requires a lot of local compliance and acceptance, and we probably don't have anything like that now in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in a country like Egypt or Jordan, if we sent someone to the Ministry of Education who said, "I have a little budget, and we'd like to open a little center where we could teach some of your people English, where we could have a library and where we could invite some people in from time to time for discussion or whatever," I think that might work, and would be as cost-effective and useful as anything we could do.

Q: Before we move on, I have always been curious about the time you drove in an auto race from Vientiane to Singapore. Can you tell me about that?

REID: It was actually an auto rally, and I did it in April 1969. I had done the drive solo from Bangkok to Singapore the year before, in my Volkswagen, but the rally was much more of an event. I think there were about 170 vehicles participating. We started in central Vientiane, drove to the Mekong ferry, crossed to Nong Khai, spent the night and then drove directly down to Bangkok. After a few hours there, we headed, non-stop, for the Malaysian border. From there, it was a straight shot to Singapore. The whole thing took about 48 hours. Aside from myself, my team members were John Fredenburg, an American colleague, and Vara Suyanond, the Thai mechanic who managed the USIS vehicle repair facility—and someone very useful on an expedition like this. We did it in my Volkswagen, and the idea was to pass checkpoints at specified times without exceeding legal speed limits. Points were awarded on this basis. We didn't win or even place, but we had a great time. There was, in fact, paved highway all the way, but things were much less developed then than now.

None of this involved work, although I did write a piece on the experience which was used by Free World, the USIS regional magazine published in Manila, and by Seripharb, the USIS Thailand magazine.

Q: Now let's talk about your assignment to Saigon in 1970.

REID: I had studied Chinese in graduate school, and, throughout my career, I hoped to get assigned to a Chinese-language post. Bob Clarke, who had been deputy in Bangkok, had gone to Taipei as PAO, and, in 1970, as the end of my first Thailand tour was approaching, Bob said he could find a job for me. It was decided in Washington, however, that, since I had been distribution officer in Bangkok, I should go to Saigon and try to repeat my success there.

Howard Biggerstaff had returned to Washington by this time and was working as a post management assistance officer, and Lynn Noah was in Saigon as research officer. In March 1970, after my assignment was announced, I went over to Saigon to discuss the job with Bigg, who was in Saigon on TDY, and with Lynn. We agreed that, with Vietnamization, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) would eventually get out of the massive publication airdrops in Vietnam and that the priority should be development of capability for regular direct mailing of printed material to a list of appropriate Vietnamese.

Lynn said that, to get JUSPAO to commit itself to this, I would have to develop a program proposal and budget and get it approved. Before I went on home leave, I went over to Saigon for three months and worked on this—a proposal encompassing scope, objectives, budget, staffing and equipment. At the same time, Lynn introduced me to a Vietnamese research contractor who was able to begin developing lists of key Vietnamese, names and mailing addresses, in specified occupational categories. It was very much like the distribution and record systems which all USIS posts maintained in later years. Within the three months, I completed the proposal, presented it, got it approved and went on home leave. While I was away, the research contractor continued working on the lists.

When I returned from home leave, I moved myself out of JUSPAO headquarters in the Rex Hotel building and, at the invitation of Frank Phillips, JUSPAO Logistics Officer and a good friend, across the river into the JUSPAO warehouse in Khanh Hoi. This is where the publications were actually handled. At first, getting the project going was quite challenging and required a lot of supervision. We had to organize the information from the research contractor and use special equipment to engrave it onto lead plates, used for printing the addresses in those pre-computer days. Once we got that going, continuing with the project was a fairly mechanical thing. As we completed the work, group by group, we did commence the mailing. I think it was a surprise to everyone that the South Vietnamese postal system worked quite well.

About the time when the distribution project was becoming routine, Frank Scotton visited the JUSPAO warehouse to see a Vietnamese employee he knew. I had met Frank in 1970 when we were both sent to Kuala Lumpur to work on the visit of Vice President Agnew. Frank was back in Vietnam, I think as a special advisor to Ambassador Bunker. Frank saw me hard at work and asked me what I was doing. When I explained it to him, and he looked at our information, he expressed some surprise and astonishment that anyone was doing a project like that in Vietnam. Frank later told me that he conveyed some of this back to the leadership at JUSPAO. In any case, a few days later, Brian Battey, one of the

JUSPAO deputy directors, summoned me and asked how I'd like to work for a while in the embassy political section.

I accepted the offer and was sent over to the embassy for what was supposed to be a three-month detail. I worked for Steve Winship, political-military officer in the embassy, and Steve put me in charge of POW issues. The NSC had tasked the embassy with doing a paper on repatriation issues—what would be the legal, political and practical issues if there were ever an agreement to repatriate Viet Cong and North Vietnamese prisoners held in South Vietnam in exchange for the release of American POWs. At that time, as I recall, there were about 23,000 Viet Cong prisoners and about 10,000 North Vietnamese regulars held in camps in South Vietnam. I was able to travel around and look at most of the camps including the largest, on Phu Quoc Island, off the south coast of Vietnam.

I worked very hard on this study, and I think Steve liked what I did. I liked and got along well with the people in the political section. The study got sent to the NSC, there were some questions, and we answered them. The study never surfaced again, as far as I know, and the way the war ended made the prisoners a non-issue.

I was supposed to have gone back to JUSPAO after three months, but I liked what I was doing, and no one said anything, so I didn't either. After spending an hour a day with my Vietnamese tutor, I was getting fairly proficient with the language, and, at some point, someone waved the BPAOship in Hue in front of me, but the offer never surfaced again. Since the distribution job had become a routine mechanical thing, I didn't want to go back to JUSPAO. At the same time, my friend, Frank Albert, who was in Laos, began encouraging me to take the job of binational center director in Vientiane. I made my bid, and it happened.

Q: Tell me a little about Laos.

REID: I got to Laos and began working as binational center director in November 1972. The center, the Lao-American Association, was a smaller version of the American University Alumni Association in Bangkok, but it was pretty significant by Lao standards. As LAA director, I reported nominally to a 12-man board. The six Americans on the board included the USIS CAO (Cultural Affairs Officer), some very good people from USAID and Frank Manley, the only American businessman in Laos. The six Lao were prominent people—the prime minister's son who directed the national airline, a prominent doctor at the only real hospital in the country and several senior government people. There was a lot of traffic in and out of the center, and we had about 2,000 language students enrolled—again pretty significant by Lao standards. Our director of courses, hired locally, was Penny Khounta, who had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand and who was married to a prominent Lao. Penny was very professional and hard-working, and she supervised a staff of about 50 teachers. We had a Lao activities director, Somsanith Khamvongsa, whom I liked very much.

There was a small LAA branch in Savannakhet and another in Luang Prabang, the royal capital. Both of these had absorbed whatever resources were left behind when USIS branch posts closed.

LAA had a very high profile, and we maintained a pretty lively schedule of activities. Of all the things the Americans did in Laos, LAA was probably one of the most highly regarded. It was a good job, although it could be very frustrating sometimes. The local talent pool was pretty shallow, and, when things went wrong, we couldn't call GSO (General Services Officer), and it was sometimes difficult to find the right kind of help.

When I got to Laos, the ambassador was McMurtrie Godley, and I think USIS was pretty peripheral to his interests. The secret bombing was continuing, around the Plain of Jars and in northern Laos. Most of it was done from bases in Thailand. I didn't have that much to do with Godley, but I think the bombing was his principal interest. To the extent that he had any use for USIS, I think it was the degree to which the press attache could help him with the international media and keep them away from the bombing story. He did appear at some LAA functions, however, and he showed some interest in what we were doing.

Q: What did you learn from the experience in Laos?

REID: Running the Lao-American Association was the first time I had ever been fully responsible for a relatively large organization. Unlike U.S. government offices, LAA could receive and bank income, using the money subsequently to pay its expenses. This was a new kind of responsibility for me, and, fortunately, I got a lot of help from Frank Manley, the American businessman on our board, who taught me what I needed to know about budgets, balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements. A large part of our revenue came from USAID teaching contracts, which required detailed negotiation.

Sometimes the board members could be a bit prickly, and, very quickly, I had to learn some diplomatic skills which did not come easily to me. It was important to keep everyone in the loop and to do the necessary lobbying and stroking. Including the teachers, we had a very large staff and I had to learn to deal with salaries and standards of performance. These were skills and experiences which I found very useful later in my career.

I didn't realize it then, but I also learned something about what happens when the U.S. involves other people in pursuit of its own interests and then abandons them when its interests change. When I left Laos in 1974, there was already a coalition government, and the Soviets and Chinese were airlifting Pathet Lao troops into Luang Prabang and Vientiane. In 1975, it just fell apart, and the communists took over completely. It was very sad.

I made my first trip back to Laos in 1994, and I have been back a few times since. Of all the people I knew there, the only one there now is Penny Khounta, living with her late husband's Lao family and working as a teacher, which is what she loves to do. All the

others have left—they're now living in France, Australia and the U.S. The country still grinds along under the one-party communist regime that took over in 1975. The U.N. ranks it as one of the ten poorest countries in the world.

When I went back in 1994, I stayed with Vic Tomseth, a good friend who was, at that time, our ambassador in Vientiane. As I walked around, I had the sense that the whole country had died for 20 years and was just beginning to come back to life. Although it was depressingly seedy, a few little stores were beginning to open, and a few people were beginning to fix up old buildings. A year later, it was better. Most Lao depend on subsistence agriculture, and I didn't see anyone starving. In fact, people were very friendly and gracious. The Lao are very nice people.

When I went up to Luang Prabang, I had a very poignant experience. Luang Prabang is a beautiful city which you can easily cover on foot. I walked around and then found a little restaurant on the riverbank from which I could watch the sun setting behind the mountains. As I was having a beer, a Lao family—father, mother and small son—came and sat at the table next to mine. When the son heard me speaking Lao to the waitress, he became very excited. Finally, the father walked over to my table and asked if he could sit down. We talked, and he wanted to know who I was, why I spoke Lao, when I had been in Laos before, and what I had been doing then. I explained the whole thing to him, that I had been director of the Lao-American Association from 1971 until 1974. He laughed and said, "You know, during those years, I was in the Pathet Lao army and up on the Plain of Jars. I was 16 years old. Every night, the American bombers came over, and I was terrified. I have never been so terrified in my life. When the bombers came over, we would run outside and start shooting at them with our rifles. So far as I know, we never hit anything." It was an amazing conversation, and there was no rancor, no bitterness at all. We were just there, two middle-aged guys drinking beer and exchanging experiences. At that time, he was a major in the Lao army, earning 50 dollars a month.

Q: From Laos, you went back to Washington. What was your reaction to that?

REID: Working in USIA's Press and Publications Service was a great learning experience. I was assigned as special assistant to Lyle Copmann, director of the service, and my job gave me almost unlimited license to get into everyone's business. I learned a lot about what was going on, although there were probably people around who would have preferred to see less of me.

I had the great fortune to be working with three very fine professionals: Lyle, you and Bill Keogh, the policy officer. One part of IPS, in those days, produced the magazines, worldwide and regional, most of them in English, but also including America Illustrated in Russian and al-Majal in Arabic. The other part, the Press Division, produced the Wireless File. The Wireless File functioned like a regular news service in that it had regular correspondents covering Congress, the White House and the State Department. Among other things, this meant that the File had someone on the plane, as part of the Department press corps, to report Kissinger's briefings, always attributed to "a senior official on the Secretary's plane." Our posts told us that it was very useful for them to

know what Kissinger actually said at these briefings, as opposed to how the briefings were reported in the media. The Wireless File was a great piece of work, and this is just one example of its value.

Within IPS, there was also a very large technical division, responsible for short-wave transmission of the regional versions of the Wireless File—there were no computer modems in those days—and for three large overseas printing plants which actually produced the magazines and other publications.

I was doing this job during Watergate, and every morning I would sit in on the policy meeting in the Press Division. Ed Devol, division chief, would chair the meetings, which were attended by people from the units who produced regional versions of the File, by policy people and by specialists like the economic writers. People would talk about what had happened with Nixon, what Rodino had done and what the House Judiciary had done. The focus was on how the Wireless File would present the information and on how much it would carry. In the background, there was always the thought that we are part of the government, we take the king's gold, and we serve the king. On the other hand, however, we have an obligation to tell it like it is and give our people overseas what they need to do the job. There was a delicate balance to maintain, but the discussion was responsible, intellectually honest and very searching. All of those people were very professional, and I thought it a great privilege to be part of that.

Q: Yes, I think it was much more difficult for them than for the people at the Voice of America who had more independence. They were more detached, and the Charter protected them. The IPS people, on the other hand, had the impulse to be journalists, to the degree that they could be, but they recognized, as you say, that there were restraints. Yet, they had a responsibility to the field officers to keep them informed about what was going on.

REID: Then came my year at Harvard, as a fellow in the Center for International Affairs. It was a very good program. There were 18 Fellows, some of whom were very senior people. They included six Americans and the rest from other countries—Korea, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Japan, among others. Most of the group were government officials involved with foreign affairs and public policy. There were a few journalists and people from the private sector. Among the Americans were people from State, CIA, myself and Trudy Rubin, a journalist for The Christian Science Monitor.

We were allowed to audit anything we wanted at Harvard, although we reviewed our activities with our program director, Ben Brown, who gave me some very good advice. Fellows were assigned responsibility for presentations at weekly meetings over lunch, and some of our presentations focused on major papers we were supposed to write. Mine was on Thai-U.S. relations during the Vietnam War, and I found it a great opportunity to back off and look at policy directions which had so much impact on my experience in Thailand and of which I'd been pretty much unaware. There were quite a few social things, and the Canadian government invited the group to Canada for a very good little tour. At the end of the year, we had a trip to several U.S. cities.

One little bonus for me was the fact that the Center found me an apartment on the top floor of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's house in Cambridge. Moynihan was still ambassador to the U.N. and, in fact, came back to teach at Harvard for a semester before running for the Senate. Moynihan allowed several of us to sit in on an undergraduate seminar he gave during the semester he was at Harvard, and I had a couple of evenings with him, one accompanied by Ed Schulick, who had come to visit me. Ed had worked for Moynihan when he was our ambassador to India, and Moynihan clearly had very high regard for him. Moynihan was away most of the time, but I saw his wife, Liz, almost every day. Liz was a very interesting person, a very intelligent lady, and she had interesting things to say. I may have been one of the first people outside Moynihan's family to know when he decided to run for the Senate.

It was one of the best years I can recall. One thing that distinguished it was new friendships. Trudy Rubin reappeared in my life several times—in Lebanon and Korea. The Korean Fellow, Kim Hyung-ki, later became a senior person at the World Bank and visited me in Korea. Adnan Abu-Odeh, when he was Jordanian Minister of Information, sent me a beautiful message after the Beirut bombing. Cavan Hogue, the Australian, is still close. When he was Australian DCM in Jakarta, I visited him, in 1979, I think. He was Australian ambassador in Bangkok during my last tour there, and we saw each other from time to time. Cavan is retired now. I visited him last year in Sydney, and he put me in touch with some people at the Australian National University Thai Studies Center in Canberra.

Q: How did the Harvard year come about?

REID: USIA offered a great many mid-career training opportunities in those days. Sometime during my IPS tour, someone gave me a list of programs and suggested that I apply for something. I selected the Harvard program, applied for it and, to my considerable surprise, got it. I had considered it such a long shot that I never really told anyone about it, including Lyle Copmann. When it happened and I discussed it with him, I think he was a little surprised, but he was a real gentleman about it. I learned a lesson there about keeping the boss informed, and I was lucky to learn it from a very decent man.

Q: From Harvard, you went back to Bangkok in 1976 for your second tour, as DPAO (Deputy Public Affairs Officer). Have we covered it, or do you want to revisit?

REID: After Ambassador Abramowitz arrived, the U.S. mission in Thailand was very much focused on the refugees—thousands of them coming across the border into Thailand from Laos and Cambodia, and Vietnamese boat people pitching up on the beaches of South Thailand. The refugees were a Thai problem and a U.N. problem, but the refugees were there as a consequence of a war in which we had been involved, so there was a feeling of responsibility. The mission was screening refugees who wanted to go to the U.S., and it was trying to facilitate the work of NGOs who were working with the refugees. To coordinate all of this, there was a very large refugee office within the

embassy, which really drew resources from everything else. When we assigned people—junior officers, for example—to the refugee operation, it was sometimes very difficult to get them back.

There was a lot of international media interest in the problem, and, Bill Lenderking, the press attaché dealt very capably with this, which appeared to please Abramowitz. Beyond this, it was very hard for us to fit into the mission priority. The refugees weren't a USIS audience, and, since the Thai were already managing the problem, there was nothing we could say to them about it. On the other hand, there were important things we could be doing—and did—but they weren't related directly to the refugees who were Abramowitz' principal interest.

One of the things we did was to get some free advertising calling attention to the refugee problem in some major international media. Bob Klaverkamp, a senior editor from Reader's Digest, was a friend. Bob was in Bangkok with some colleagues from Time and Newsweek for a meeting. After seeing a story about the terrible situation of the refugees on the front page of the Bangkok Post, these people, together, made an offer of free advertising space to call attention to the refugee problem, if someone could come up with copy and sponsorship. Lintas, a local advertising agency, immediately offered to produce the copy, but when I approached the foreign ministry with the offer, I was told that the Thai could manage the refugee problem quite well without help from anyone. A good Thai friend of USIS, however, from field operations days, Winyu Angkanarak, who had been a provincial governor and had worked with Ed Schulick, Rob Nevitt and, to a much lesser extent, myself—was now the senior career official, the permanent undersecretary, in the Interior Ministry, which had overall responsibility for the refugees. When I approached him, he immediately seized upon the offer and assigned someone from his staff to work with me on it. Subsequently, there was a lot of to-and-fro among the Thai, our embassy, the advertising agency and the NGOs, to whom we were attributing the advertisement. Eventually, however, we got everyone headed the same way, and the ad—a very effective piece—ran in the three magazines for several weeks.

Q: From Bangkok, you went into Arabic language training to prepare for Beirut. How did that happen?

REID: I was winding up a tour as deputy PAO in a large post, and I thought it was time to try my hand at a PAO-ship. I started bidding on all the PAO jobs within my range—Canberra, Lisbon, East Berlin and so on. After each bid, personnel came back to me and said, Director Reinhardt has to approve all PAO assignments, he might not approve one for you, so you should bid on something else. My consistent response was, I want to be a PAO, so why should I bid on something I don't want? At one point, they encouraged me to be IO (Information Officer) or CAO in Moscow, to which I delivered the same response. Finally, one night, I got a call from the area personnel officer who said, "If you want to be a PAO, we have the place for you." They had me. If I didn't take Beirut, I might never have another chance to be a PAO.

If the Harvard year was one of the best of my career, the year studying Arabic at FSI was absolutely the worst. The FSI facility was crowded, dirty, poorly maintained and downright squalid. We rotated among Arabic instructors whose teaching was uncoordinated, and techniques for student motivation ranged from none at all to Prussian authoritarianism and public humiliation. I have always done pretty well at languages, but Arabic is difficult, and most of the students were younger than I. I was very fortunate to have one of the best Arabic instructors during the final weeks of my miserable little year; otherwise, I would not have done nearly so well as I did. Arabic was then a two-year program with the second year at an FSI branch in Tunis. USIA gave me only the first year, so I wasn't really prepared for anything, particularly when I found that the Arabic I had managed to learn at FSI wasn't the Levantine Arabic spoken in Lebanon. Nevertheless, I found a tutor in Beirut, studied with her for an hour every morning before work and eventually got my three-three.

I think my experience at FSI was not untypical. It was pretty much the same when I went back several years later to learn Korean. FSI now has moved to a new place, which I haven't seen. I hope it has gotten better. If the foreign service is serious about its officers learning languages, it can't treat them like peasants while they do it. A few years later, I did a Thai brush-up in a private school run by Chick Sheehan and John Ratliff, two former foreign service language specialists. They had clearly given a lot of thought to the environment and instruction style, and it made an enormous difference.

Q: It is my impression that your tour as PAO Beirut could hardly have been more eventful. It was hazardous in the extreme, certainly, and challenging in other ways, I am sure. This seems a good time and place to put on the record a more or less detailed account of your experiences there.

REID: When I arrived in Beirut on August 3, 1981, the Lebanese civil war had been going on for years. Beirut—indeed, all of Lebanon—was divided into enclaves controlled by various militia groups, although there was nominally a national government which had very little actual authority. The largest enclave, all of East Beirut—and much of the Lebanese territory north of Beirut—was controlled by the Christian Phalangists, while West Beirut and areas south were controlled by groups loyal to various Sunni, Shiite and Druze politicians, or by the Palestinians, who controlled the territory around the U.S. embassy. To get from one group's territory to another—and especially from West Beirut to the east and back—you had to pass through checkpoints maintained by armed militia who were generally poorly trained, aggressive, unprofessional and sometimes hostile. Sometimes, there was small arms fire from one enclave to another, and there were regular artillery exchanges between East and West Beirut. Parts of the city were ruined, parts appeared almost normal, and the green line, separating east and west, ran right through the former financial district, which was totally deserted and devastated. Before going out at night, we'd check the local radio stations for bulletins on where the artillery was falling—just like weather bulletins. If we were going to Ashrafiya and the radio said shells were falling there, we'd call our hostess and convey regrets.

When I got there, a decision had been made to close the USIS information center, and we lost six of our 18 FSN staff positions within a couple of months of my arrival. The American secretary left, and the position remained vacant for a long time because no one would accept the assignment, and USIA personnel would not assign anyone who did not want to go. Eventually, Beth Samuel, who had been the PAO's secretary during the first part of my second Bangkok tour, called me and said she'd do anything to get out of Washington. "I'd even work for you, honey, and even in Beirut." Shortly afterward, Beth appeared with her Filipino husband, Leonardo. Both of them were great people and great friends, and I don't know that I could have gotten through the two years in Lebanon without them. No matter how bizarre or terrible things got, Beth could always find something in the situation worth a good laugh. As for Nardo, he taught me every karaoke song I know.

The American ambassador was Robert Dillon, who arrived in Beirut a few weeks before me and who was there throughout my tour. Bob provided superb leadership during crises that would have overwhelmed most people. We had a very free and candid relationship. I considered him a friend and admired him. In my career, I worked with two, maybe three, ambassadors with whom I considered it a rare privilege to serve. Bob was one. Aside from the ambassador and DCM, I probably worked most closely with Ryan Crocker, the political counselor, who later returned to Lebanon as ambassador, and with Tom Barron, the admin counselor who was very helpful to me, even when he had plenty of other problems to worry about. I also worked with Bill McIntyre, the USAID director. Bill was a friend, and he was killed in the 1983 embassy bombing.

My first priority in Lebanon was to determine what I could do, given the limitations of my resources and the environment. My twelve-person FSN staff included two librarians and, eventually, we were able to get a small, public-access library and research facility going on the ground floor of the embassy. I was able to get some good people into the IV program, and someone once told me that the best favor I could do anyone was to get him out of Lebanon for 30 days. If there was one little blessing, it was that I could manage the small Fulbright program in Lebanon without having to deal with a local commission. I could decide on the grantees myself, and, through the Fulbright program, we managed to get some very effective, very helpful grantees into Lebanon.

The Lebanese soon let me know that cultural activity was important to them, and, in fact, some of the European embassies and cultural centers—the Germans, the Italians, the British and others—managed to stage cultural activities. This was one way we could show our flag, but none of the performing groups sponsored by USIA wanted to come anywhere near Lebanon. Eventually, I was able to identify a few good solo performers who were willing to take the risk. One, in particular, Bill Matthews, a classical guitarist, came twice and gave some very well attended, well-received performances. Bill was a very good guy who really like Lebanon and made a lot of friends. With Bill, as was always the case, we had to do separate performances in East and West Beirut, since nobody wanted to cross the green line. Bashir Gemayel, who was later elected president and subsequently assassinated, once surprised us by showing up at a performance Bill gave at the Maronite university in East Beirut.

One thing we began doing was a series of regular background briefings for resident American media. At that time, there were about 12 or 13 American correspondents based in Beirut, including Tom Friedman for The New York Times, Bill Stewart for Time and Peter Sherman for CBS. These were all very professional, knowledgeable people. We would do the briefings at Dillon's residence in East Beirut, and Ryan Crocker was always on hand. The discussions were very candid and very honest, and I always left them feeling I had learned as much as anyone there. The sessions helped us build a good relationship with a very important core group of American journalists, and this served us very well later. Eventually, as more American journalists began appearing in Beirut, the briefings became unmanageable, and we had to stop.

I think I had just about convinced myself I had established a pattern for my two years in Lebanon, when the Israelis invaded in June, 1982, eventually coming as far north as West Beirut, where the embassy was. As soon as the invasion began, however, before the Israelis reached West Beirut, the embassy evacuated dependents and so-called non-essential staff. Dillon asked that I stay, but Beth and her husband left. At that point, I think both Bob Dillon and I believed I would be needed to help deal with foreign journalists, but there were surprises ahead.

Within a few days after the invasion began, Ambassador Dillon called me in and told me there were reports that Americans—a lot of them—were in Jounieh, in the Christian area north of Beirut, trying to get out of Lebanon. With the Israeli blockade of the Lebanese coast, they were trapped. He asked me to go to East Beirut, find out what I could about the situation and report back. At this point there was much less international media focus on the embassy than we had expected, and neither of us thought I would be dealing with the problem of stranded Americans for more than a few days. I remember a hair-raising ride across town, with RSO (Regional Security Officer) armored vehicles in front and behind, me driving the PAO car at breakneck speed along the Corniche Mazraa, while Palestinian antiaircraft guns blazed away from traffic islands in the middle of the road.

Once I was in East Beirut, I was on my own. It was amazing. West Beirut had been a city at war, with Israeli planes bombing the southern suburbs and Palestinian artillery shooting back. As I drove north along the coastal highway, however, things became more and more normal until I actually saw water-skiers in the Mediterranean just south of Jounieh.

The one person I knew better than anyone else in East Beirut was a former IV grantee, Father Jean Thabet, the priest who ran the Maronite university near Jounieh. I surprised him, and, when I explained my situation and what I was doing, he offered me hospitality for a few days. I actually spent three or four days living with the Maronite priests. Unfortunately, some of the Americans in East Beirut heard there was someone from the American embassy at the university, and they began showing up. At this point, I had no help to offer, and my visitors began to be a serious problem for my hosts.

Then I began to get a little lucky. I had studied Arabic at FSI with Lisa Piascik, one of the consular officers in Beirut. As I was leaving for East Beirut, Lisa gave me the home phone number of Bedros Anserian, a senior consular FSN stranded in East Beirut. Within a very short time after I got to East Beirut and called him, he was on hand. He stayed with me throughout the entire time I was dealing with the American evacuation, and we functioned as an effective team. The second bit of luck was that the mayor of Jounieh offered us some office space in the Jounieh city hall. Actually, Bedros and I were at one end of a long table in the mayor's conference room, with people from the Canadian embassy at the other. Third—and this may have been a mixed blessing—I connected with some of the local Phalangist people. Whatever their politics, they were very helpful to me, finding me a place to stay and, eventually, helping get American citizens and green-card holders through the Israeli blockade. Bob Dillon and Ryan Crocker accepted the necessity of this arrangement, although I am not sure they were entirely happy with it. Another break was that the Italians sent a naval ship to withdraw their nationals and kindly offered to accommodate any Americans who wanted to go. By this time, there were quite a few anxious people waiting, and getting them all onto the Italian ship solved the immediate, most pressing problem.

I don't know where all of those people came from. A lot of them were people of Lebanese descent who had American passports or green cards, but they kept coming. After the Italian ship left, I found a local ferry operator in Jounieh who was willing to take people to Cyprus—charging an outrageous fare, of course—but the problem was still the Israeli blockade. Initially, I tried to work out an arrangement with Ryan Crocker, whereby I would pass passenger names and passport numbers to him so he could, somehow, clear the passengers with the Israelis. The phones weren't working, however, and my only contact with Ryan back in West Beirut was by a little portable two-way radio which was very cumbersome and unreliable. I remember driving to a mountain behind Jounieh, where I could get barely passable reception, and trying to communicate 50 or 60 names to Ryan, having to spell most of them using the military alphabet: "Waheed; that's whiskey, alfa, hotel, echo, echo, delta," and so on. Eventually, with the Phalangists, we were able to work out an arrangement where I would tell one of the Phalangist people that I had checked the documents of passengers and that there were no Palestinians among them. They then worked things out. I never asked how. Finally, a U.S. navy ship came to take people out. By this time, so many people had left that I wondered whether we would fill it. We did.

While I was dealing with the problem of stranded Americans, most of the embassy staff, including Ambassador Dillon, relocated from the embassy chancery in occupied West Beirut to the ambassador's residence in East Beirut, some distance from Jounieh. Regular consular officers began dealing with stranded Americans, and I began spending much more of my time at the ambassador's residence, where most of the embassy functions were now located. Phil Habib was on hand, negotiating an Israeli withdrawal from Beirut, contingent on a Palestinian withdrawal from Lebanon, which he was also trying to arrange. The eventual arrangement included a provision for U.S. Marines, as well as troops from Italy and France, to be in Lebanon guaranteeing the security of the withdrawing Palestinians. The imminent arrival of the Marines attracted tremendous

international media interest, to which I was trying to respond with the help of Edgard Khouri, one of our FSNs who had joined me in East Beirut and Sami Sfeir, a former Radio Lebanon newsman, a friend, whom I somehow managed to pay from petty cash. Eventually, I was joined by public affairs officers from the Marines, the Sixth Fleet and even the Pentagon. Under the circumstances, arranging for these people was difficult, but, eventually, they were very helpful. They knew a lot of the journalists and players on the American side, and I was able to get them around locally. We worked well and effectively together.

With the withdrawal of the Israelis, we were able to move back to West Beirut. When I first went over to East Beirut, I'd thought I would be there a few days, but, actually, it was about three months.

I think I should say something about the Israelis. I was not impressed, and I think most of us weren't. To my eye, and I think to the Lebanese, they appeared unkempt and undisciplined, particularly alongside people like the U.S. Marines. Also, they appeared arrogant in dealing with the Lebanese—and they were deliberately provocative, as when they erected Israeli flags at intervals along the road leading to the Lebanese presidential palace. Once our Marines were on the ground, I know of one serious confrontation which attracted media attention and which, I was told, almost led to some shooting. Under cover of darkness, Israeli troops moved some markers which were supposed to distinguish an area they controlled from one controlled by the Marines. The situation was only resolved the next day when the markers were repositioned by a group comprising the Marine commander, the Israeli commander and the American DCM. I haven't mentioned the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, when the Israeli troops surrounding the camps allowed Phalangist militia troops in to do the killing. The commander of the Israeli troops was Ariel Sharon, now the Israeli prime minister.

I think it was sometime during this period, before we returned to West Beirut, that Ryan Crocker asked me to take a trip through South Lebanon with Senator Paul Tsongas. Tsongas was in Beirut and planned to drive south to the border, where he would cross into Israel. Our little motorcade would then return to Beirut. I sat in the rear seat of an embassy sedan with Tsongas and one of his aides, who had studied at the American University of Beirut and who was very knowledgeable about Lebanon. I found Tsongas easy to talk to, and he asked very good questions. There were three incidents during this trip, however, that I recall vividly. In Sidon, our first stop, we were supposed have lunch with the mayor. When we arrived at the mayor's office, however, we were confronted with a group of English-speaking Israeli officers who tried to engage us. We had been briefed to have nothing to do with the Israelis if this happened, and we did our best to ignore them. I remember that one of the officers had an American accent, and, above his uniform pocket, there was a name—Cohen, I believe—that could have been American. Sometime later, Trudy Rubin was visiting Beirut, and, when I told her this story, she said it was probably an American anthropologist, a specialist on South Lebanon, who had dual citizenship and who was serving with the Israeli army. The second incident was when we got to Tyre and were taken into a neighborhood where the Lebanese told us a school had been shelled by the Israelis. We walked through a ruined neighborhood that reeked of

decomposing bodies, and, in the basement of the school, encountered groups of partially decomposed bodies covered by lime. These, we were told, were civilians who had taken refuge in the school and who had died during the Israeli artillery barrage. The third incident occurred just before the Israeli border, where Tsongas asked the motorcade to make an unplanned turn into a road leading to a camp where the Israelis were detaining prisoners. When we reached the camp gate, Tsongas delivered his name card and asked for the camp commander. When the commander appeared, Tsongas asked to go inside. The commander's angry refusal was caught by a CNN crew which had been tailing our motorcade, and, when one of the Israeli soldiers saw this happening, he began beating the cameraman with his rifle butt. There was a scuffle in the dust, after which we withdrew. We accompanied Tsongas on to the Israeli border and then returned to Beirut.

Shortly after the embassy moved back to West Beirut, the Palestinians left, and our Marines, having completed their mission, returned to their ships. Media activity appeared to subside a bit, but, if I thought things might now be normal, I was mistaken. With the assassination of President-elect Bashir Gemayel, we moved back to East Beirut again for a few days. Shortly after that and the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, our Marines returned. It is interesting; I don't know why, but I was part of the embassy group that met the military advance party and surveyed the building and area that the Lebanese offered for the Marine base. It was an unused civil aviation building near the airport—the building that was bombed in October, 1983, when 241 Marines died.

Habib left, and, although the Israelis had withdrawn from Beirut, they still occupied Lebanese territory south of Beirut. Morris Draper, who had been Habib's deputy, assumed responsibility for dealing with this problem, and, for a time, he negotiated with the Israelis and the Lebanese at a hotel right on the edge of Israeli-occupied territory, south of Beirut. Morris Draper asked that I accompany the U.S. delegation to act as spokesman.

For about two weeks in December, I think, I spent my days in a conference room listening to negotiations. At the end of each day, everyone would agree on some sort of routine media statement which the Israeli spokesman, the Lebanese spokesman and I would go outside and read in Hebrew, Arabic and English respectively. Doing this job was taking all my time, but my only responsibility was to read a daily statement, usually a couple of short paragraphs. Meanwhile, work was piling up on my desk, and my staff was receiving no direction. I talked to Ambassador Dillon about the problem and got myself relieved of my spokesman's responsibilities. These were assumed by Chris Ross, an Arabic speaker and a very good officer, who was a member of the U.S. delegation.

The first three months of 1983 were probably my best time in Lebanon. Beth returned, and, for the first time, it was possible to move freely about Beirut. I remember one night Beth and I drove over to East Beirut for pizza, and people in the restaurant were absolutely astonished when we told them we'd come from the American embassy.

I had become very friendly with Commander Pete Litrenta, the Sixth Fleet Public Affairs Officer, and Pete helped me arrange ship tours for my Lebanese contacts. The ships were

just off the Lebanese coast, they attracted enormous interest, and the Lebanese considered the ship visits and souvenir baseball caps a great perk. I took everybody out there I possibly could—TV people, newspaper people, university people, Maronite priests, cultural people, everyone I could think of. One evening, the Sixth Fleet commander hosted a very elegant dinner on his flagship for senior embassy contacts. Pete Litrenta worked with me on this one, and, when I discussed it with Ambassador Dillon, we agreed that he, I and a few other embassy counselors would each invite two people. I invited the Minister of Information and the head of Lebanese television.

During this period, I think the United States enjoyed a broad base of trust and friendship in Lebanon. People on the right gave us credit for getting the Palestinians out. People on the left gave us credit for getting them out safely and for getting the Israelis to withdraw. The Marines in Lebanon and the Sixth Fleet off-shore were regarded as a neutral presence providing security and stability.

Sometime early in 1983, I received an unusual caller in my office, an Egyptian professor from the Beirut Arab University. Beirut Arab University was the one Lebanese university with which I'd had no contact. It was off-limits. It had a very radical student body, mostly poor Shiites and Palestinians, and I think it got its funding from the Libyans and Syrians. My caller explained that he was one of about six Egyptians from the University of Alexandria, teaching at Beirut Arab University. They were funded by a program which had begun when Nasser was Egyptian president and which still continued. My caller then suggested that there might be some areas where we might cooperate, and he proposed that I have lunch with him and his colleagues to discuss this.

Since he'd told me I could bring an embassy colleague along, I checked with the ambassador first and then invited Ryan Crocker. I think Ryan was quite taken by all of this and quite surprised that it was happening. We were treated to a lunch in a good Lebanese restaurant and to good conversation. Subsequently, the Egyptians invited me for a tour of Beirut Arab University. Since they didn't want me showing up with American diplomatic plates on my car, they sent the university president's limo to collect me. They gave me a comprehensive tour of the place, including the basement garage where armored scout cars were parked, and the bookstore, where the hottest item was a color poster showing Iranian students burning an American flag.

After a discussion of cooperative programs, I began asking USIA's help in identifying some American academic authorities on Islam who might lecture at Beirut Arab University. I was surprised that USIA was able to recruit several good people who were able and willing to come. We did a whole series of lectures on Islamic studies in the U.S. and scholarly American views of Islam. My objective was to show that Americans respect Islam and take it seriously and that Americans can contribute to serious discussions of Islam. The lectures were well attended and successful. One morning, I got a call from one of the Egyptians who asked me if I'd seen the front page of the morning edition of al-Nida. Al-Nida, the communist paper, was so consistently hostile to the U.S. that I had given up on it long ago. This morning, however, the front page was filled with

a write-up on one of our lectures, a picture of our speaker and some very favorable editorial content.

A few months later, one of the Egyptians came to see me and said that, although he and his colleagues would like to continue our cooperation, he did not think conditions were right. I told Ryan Crocker about this, and he remarked that the embassy had gotten several signals like this. It was not so clear then, but it is clear to me now that our situation in Lebanon had changed. Among other things, we had come down solidly on the side of the Lebanese army, who were fighting with Druze militia in the hills behind Beirut, and ships of the Sixth Fleet had shelled some of the Druze positions. We were no longer neutral. A few weeks later, on Monday, April 18, at three minutes after one, a truck loaded with TNT crashed into the front of the embassy and exploded.

Did we ever know anything about who was responsible for the bombing? A young friendly embassy security guard, Mohammed, used to stand outside the embassy every morning at seven o'clock when I went in to meet my Arabic tutor. He'd greet me, "Good morning, Mr. John," and I'd reply, "Good morning, Mohammed." It turned out later that Mohammed was a captain in the Palestine Liberation Army, one of the most radical Fatah spin-offs, and that he had stood outside the embassy and given the signal for the truck with the TNT to start moving. One of the purposes of the attack, apparently, was to kill the American ambassador, and Mohammed's job was to signal when Ambassador Dillon reentered the building.

Shortly before I left Lebanon, I asked Ambassador Dillon whether or not he could tell me anything about who was responsible. He said that there were so many layers of control, so many anonymous exchanges of information and instruction, that we would probably never know who was ultimately responsible. I knew a USAID officer, however, Anne Dammarell, who was badly injured in the bombing, and Anne has maintained contact with many of us and spent a considerable amount of time on this question. According to her, there is conclusive evidence that, through Hezbollah, the Iranian security service funded and directed the whole operation.

Just before one o'clock in the afternoon on April 18, I'd thought of going down to the embassy snack bar for a sandwich but decided to use the quiet hour to focus on a particularly difficult office chore. If I had gone for lunch, I would surely have been killed, because, when the bomb detonated, propane tanks in the kitchen exploded, killing all but one person in the snack bar.

I was at my desk, facing the office entrance from the area where Beth sat. To my right were floor-to-ceiling windows looking out over the Corniche, a broad street running along the Mediterranean coast. When the bomb detonated, I was about to turn around and begin typing something on my typewriter to the right of my desk. If I had already done so when the bomb detonated, I probably would have been blinded by flying glass.

The room suddenly seemed to turn white and begin changing shape. My next realization was that I was on my back beside my desk, and, looking up, I could see the wall behind my desk beginning to crumble and fall—very slowly, it seemed—toward me.

The wall landed on me, and I don't recall feeling anything. I was covered in debris—bricks, plaster, mortar—almost up to my neck. I knew that something bad had happened, and I didn't know what, but I recall that I felt pretty rational. I thought I could hear small arms fire, and I smelled tear gas—I found out later that the Marines had stored tear gas canisters in the embassy basement, and these ruptured in the explosion. I remembered my army training and, to escape the tear gas, turned my head and pressed my nose as close to the floor as I could.

The first thing I heard was Beth in the office next to mine, shouting "John, are you all right?" I replied, "I don't think so." A lot of blood was running from my scalp and face, I could see out of only one eye, and I was pinned to the floor.

I then heard some military officers who had been having lunch in the Marine mess, next to Beth's office. They shouted, "Beth, are you okay?" I heard Beth answer, "I'm okay, but I don't think John is." Someone shouted, "John, where are you?" I answered and then heard some noise before someone shouted, "John, we can't find you. We'll get help and come back."

I waited and then decided I couldn't stay where I was. I freed my arms and threw rubble off my body. I was eventually able to grab a radiator pipe behind my head and begin pulling myself free. I was concerned about possible spinal injury, but, when I had worked myself free, I pulled myself to my feet. Nothing was broken, and I knew then that, no matter how bad it was, I would probably be all right.

I found my way out of the office; I remember that everything seemed to be rearranged. When I came out into the hallway, I encountered Maha, one of our Lebanese staff. My clothes were torn, and I was covered with dust and blood, and Maha began screaming. I remember shouting, "Maha, shut the hell up, and let's get out of here." As I looked down the corridor, I recall that it seemed brightly lit, something I had never seen before. In fact, I was looking into the area where the center of the building had collapsed, now illuminated by direct sunlight. Later, when I returned to my office, I found that the fracture had actually occurred in the center of my office floor, and the falling wall had actually been brought down by the collapse of the building center. If the blast had not thrown me across the desk, I would probably have been buried in the collapse.

Maha and I took the stairs to the first-floor corridor, behind the consular section. It was chaos. Glass and blood were everywhere. Partially dressed Marine security guards were running around with their firearms, shouting, "Where are they? We'll get'em! We'll kill'em!" Injured people were lying around. At this point I didn't know what else to do, and I sat on the floor, leaning against a wall. One of the embassy janitors, a very friendly man to whom I had always spoken, knelt beside me and began mopping blood from my face with brown paper towels from an embassy bathroom. One of the consular

employees, Mary Agopian, came staggering down the hallway. The front of her body and her face looked like they had been shredded, and she was screaming, “Somebody help me; help me!”

The embassy security officer appeared and told us to form a single line, that he would lead us out of the building. I took Mary Agopian under the arms, someone in a uniform took her feet, and we began carrying her. Our single file moved through some hallways and offices and then stopped. The lock on the emergency gate had rusted shut, and we had to reverse the whole column and find another exit. Eventually, we came to a wall at the north end of the embassy. Some of the younger guys from the political section were on top, lifting people across. We handed Mary up. Lebanese began crowding around us, trying to escape, and, rather than get into the scuffle, I backed off. Someone shouted, “Okay, John, it’s your turn.” I raised my arms; they pulled me up and dropped me across.

When I dropped to the other side, Lebanese Red Cross workers took me by the arm and walked me to a waiting ambulance. I sat on a seat beside an American woman who was already inside. Two Lebanese then came running up with a stretcher on which there was a dead Lebanese lady, her face black and her swollen tongue hanging out of her mouth. The ambulance started with a lurch, and the stretcher with the dead Lebanese lady rolled out onto the ground. They hadn’t strapped her in. The Red Cross people got the body back into the ambulance, and we started up the hill toward the AUB hospital. French paratroopers lined the street; they had sealed off the entire area.

When I got to the hospital emergency room, I spotted Beth, whose face was cut and bleeding. After a short time, someone gave us a quick examination, said they were dealing with some really serious cases and, since ours could wait, would we mind? Of course not.

After a short while, I saw the hospital director come in with the Lebanese Minister of Public Health, whom I knew. I spoke to the minister, and he introduced me to the hospital director as the U.S. embassy spokesman. The director asked for my help. The hospital switchboard was so flooded with incoming calls from news media in the United States that no one inside the hospital could make necessary calls out. Would I mind taking the calls and dealing with them?

I began taking the calls, working out a little statement: This is John Reid, the American embassy spokesman. I can give you 60 seconds; is your recorder on? I am at the American University of Beirut hospital, there are people injured, at this point, we don’t know how bad it is, and so on. Once people had the sound bite, they were satisfied.

Afterward, when I found the hospital director and told him that things were under control, he offered to introduce me to one of his best plastic surgeons so I could begin getting my face and head repaired. I asked him if the offer could include Beth, and he agreed. The young doctor who looked after us, Usama Hamdan, was a superb physician and an excellent person. We became good friends, and we still are. Today, he and his wife, also a doctor, have a practice near Boston.

When I first arrived at the emergency room, I began looking for some of our Lebanese staff, but I couldn't spot anyone. Someone then told me that Elias Kawar, our senior FSN was right outside the emergency room. I went outside and found Elias, Maggie Teen and a few other people. Among us, we were able account for eight of the twelve Lebanese on our staff. Before I could pursue this, I saw Peter Sherman with his CBS camera crew headed toward me, and I didn't want to be doing any on-camera interviews, so I retreated inside.

After Beth and I had gotten the glass picked out of our faces and our cuts sewn up, we left the AUB hospital. It was early evening, and we really didn't know where to go. At this point, we were both extremely anxious to let our families know that we were alive, and we recalled that one of Beth's friends, a German lady, had a telephone from which it was possible to direct-dial international calls. We hailed a cab, whose driver was very reluctant to take us, bandaged as we were and covered with blood, dust and the water used to wash our wounds. The driver relented only after I promised a very generous tip. When Beth's friend opened her apartment door, she began screaming, "The radio said you were dead!"

Beth and I each had a couple of large whiskeys and made our calls. When I got through to my father, he told me that Sam Courtney, NEA area director in USIA, had phoned to tell him he had heard me on the radio and that I was okay. I was grateful then and still am for Sam's consideration.

When Beth and I began walking back along the Corniche to our respective apartments, a U.S. Marine passing in a jeep gave us a ride. When I got to my apartment, I encountered Phil Habib. I had never had much to do with Habib, and I wasn't even sure he knew who I was. He did. "John, are you okay?" he asked. I was. "That's good," he said, "because you look like hell."

My apartment was on the ground floor of a building a short walk away from the embassy, and, with the embassy ruined, it was the closest available space where various embassy operations could set up shop. Eventually, I had to move out of the apartment and into a rented room, and, by Tuesday morning, April 19, what was left of the consular section had already occupied my living room. There was a small room in the apartment which I had outfitted as an office and a study and in which I had provided myself with desk, phone, typewriter and other essentials. I was able to hold onto this room, and this was where Beth and I worked for the remainder of my time in Lebanon. Early Tuesday morning, I was in this room, with Beth and a few of the Lebanese staff, trying to account for everyone. We had been able to account for eight of the twelve Lebanese on Monday, and, sometime on Tuesday, a ninth appeared.

As this was happening, Bob Dillon and Ryan Crocker came into the room. It was the first time I had seen Dillon since the bombing, and I did not know that he also had been injured. Bob and Ryan told me that there were about 200 journalists in front of the

embassy building, and they were asking for some kind of statement. Would I get something together?

I had lost my eyeglasses in the bombing and hadn't found my spare pair. Even if I had, the right side of my head was so swollen that I couldn't have worn them, and my right eye was swollen shut. I touch-typed a draft statement which I couldn't even read. Bob looked at it and said, "It's okay. I want you along. Let's go."

Bob and I walked the short distance to the embassy, where there was an enormous crowd of journalists. As we approached, there was an explosion of flashbulbs and TV lights. It did not occur to me how much attention my swollen, bandaged head was attracting, but this was where the picture was taken that appeared in so many U.S. papers. Dillon read the statement, which sounded good, and began taking questions. At some point the questions became repetitious, and I tugged Dillon's sleeve and said something like, "Sir, I think this is getting a little too chatty. Let's get out of here."

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Beth and I had to go back to AUB to see Dr. Hamdan. On Tuesday, I showed him a large gash on my left leg which had begun to heal. To prevent a scar, he had to reopen the wound before he sutured it.

Three of our Lebanese staff were still unaccounted for. Edgard and Hassan staffed our small press operation and had been in the office immediately next to mine. Riad was one of two librarians who worked in the small library on the ground floor. Edgard was Lebanese Christian, Greek Orthodox, and married to a Danish lady. Hassan was Egyptian, a former employee of the USIA printing plant which had been in Beirut. Riad came from a Lebanese Christian family. By Wednesday afternoon, relatives of all three appeared at my apartment. Edgard's Danish wife was very distressed but under control. Hassan's wife seemed resigned. Riad's wife happened to appear when I was with Bob Dillon and became extremely emotional. Fortunately, our chief FSN, Elias Kawar was able to talk to her and help deal with the situation.

At about eleven o'clock Wednesday night, I was lying, fully clothed and awake, on my bed in the PAO apartment. Christine Crocker, Ryan's wife—also his secretary, tapped on the door and said, "John, they've found Hassan." With Christine, I walked back to the embassy, where, under floodlights, people were working with machines and shovels to clear debris. Someone helped me climb the debris, and, as I watched, Hasssan's body was pulled out first. His face was black and barely recognizable, but he and Edgard had given me a press briefing shortly before the explosion, and I knew how he was dressed. I made the identification. Shortly after one o'clock Thursday morning, Edgard's body was pulled out. When I called Edgard's wife and gave her the news, she was very calm. She said that, a short time before, her phone had rung, and, when she picked it up, there was no one on the line. She had wondered if Edgard had somehow gotten trapped in the embassy and was trying to reach her. I said that it wasn't possible and that I was sure he had died instantly. She thanked me for calling and said she would let Edgard's family get some sleep and give them the news in the morning. My memory of how Hassan's family responded was less clear. Hassan's wife didn't speak English, and I am sure that this was

something I did not want to handle in my far-from-perfect Arabic. I may have called on Elias Kawar for help.

I was still very concerned that we could not account for Riad, and, on Thursday, we were told that search-and-rescue operations would be suspended because a high-level Washington delegation was expected to visit the embassy site Friday morning. The group would be headed by Larry Eagleburger, and Jock Shirley, agency counselor, would represent USIA. I recall that I was extremely angry, furious, that the search was suspended because of this. I remember Dillon saying, "John, when something terrible like this happens, the American people feel they have to show something, to make a gesture, and this is what they are doing."

During this period, I gave several media interviews, including one on-camera for NBC. Bob Dillon had told me to use my own judgment and not worry about clearance or guidance in on-the-record discussions of the human-interest aspects of the bombing. This gave me a lot of exposure, more than I realized and certainly more than I cared about, but I thought it was important to be open and responsive and to make the point that the embassy was functioning and we were carrying on, doing our jobs. To the extent possible, I also wanted other people to be seen by the folks back home. On one occasion, I was able to arrange coverage of a group of consular officers—Dundas McCullough was one of them—trying to make identifications by examining personal effects recovered from the embassy.

Preparing for the VIP visitors on Friday took organization, because I knew there would be a lot of media interest. To the extent that we could, we laid out the area in front of the embassy and decided who was going to be where.

My recollection is that the group choppered in, either from Beirut airport or from the Sixth Fleet. I was still pretty angry that this was happening. One of the first people out of the choppers was Larry Eagleburger, who was leading the group. Eagleburger had a brief exchange with Dillon and then walked directly over to me, took me by the elbow and said, "John, I understand you've really had a tough time." It was the perfect gesture. I still have a photograph of the moment.

Jock Shirley was a very good presence during this visit. I still controlled the kitchen in my apartment, and, for several days after the bombing, I had my Lebanese cook provide lunch for the Lebanese staff, Beth and myself. It was a way to get everyone together and to share whatever it was we were feeling. I think it may have been important for all of us; I know it was important for me. Jock joined us for lunch in my kitchen on that Thursday, and he was very low-keyed, interacting with everyone.

Edgard's funeral was that afternoon, in a Greek Orthodox church. There were so many funerals then. Bob Dillon had gone to one, and sent his wife to Edgard's. Jock sat at the front of the church with Mrs. Dillon, and Beth and I sat farther back with our Lebanese colleagues. A Greek Orthodox priest presided over the service and spoke English. It was very moving. When I left the church and greeted Edgard's wife, I lost it. I sat on the steps

in front of everyone and started sobbing, and a Lebanese journalist I knew helped me to the car. Later in the afternoon, I went to see Hassan's widow.

That night, I accompanied Jock to a reception and dinner that Ambassador Dillon was giving for everyone. I recall standing out on the terrace with Jock, having a conversation, and looking out over Beirut. Jock said that he thought that both Beth and I ought to have a break from Beirut as soon as things settled down a bit and we could manage it. He said he'd get USIA to provide each of us with consultation orders so we could get back to the U.S., have a little time with our families and do whatever we wanted to do. He suggested that we both start making plans and stay focused on this as we dealt with whatever faced us in the coming weeks. It was a very generous, welcome offer, and, in fact, I think Jock's initiative may have prompted State to make the same offer to its people who stayed in Beirut after the bombing. Jock said he also wanted to get back and look at possible opportunities for me after Beirut.

The next day, Saturday, after the delegation left, the recovery operation at the embassy resumed, and around eleven o'clock in the morning, someone asked me to come down to the embassy and identify a body that was probably Riad. I was directed to an ambulance, and someone in a U.S. Navy uniform told me to go inside by myself and take as much time as I needed. The body was on a stretcher, draped with a cloth which was removed. Riyad had always been a careful dresser, and I was struck with the incongruity of his grey suit, seemingly immaculate white shirt and grey silk necktie underneath his black, bloated face. This was the second and last time I lost it. I remember screaming, "The bastards! Those rotten bastards!"

That afternoon, I called on Riad's widow and family.

The next month was a very tense and exhausting time. Secretary of State George Shultz came out and began shuttling among Jerusalem, Damascus and Beirut, trying to work out some kind of arrangement on Lebanon. His stops in Beirut were unpredictable and came with very little notice. I was trying to get the staff back together and engaged in the program. At the same time, I was trying to salvage whatever I could from the embassy. I was particularly concerned to get the Wireless File equipment out, set up in my apartment and operating again. Bob Dillon was asking for the File, and I really needed the statements and background to deal with the media.

The people from the Marine public affairs office would offer help. They would send trucks and people over and begin moving things, and I would have the staff together to help organize and decide where things would go. Then, suddenly, someone would come rushing up and say, "Shultz is coming; they want you at the airport!" I would drop everything, and Elias and I would go running down to the airport. From the airport, we'd go to the presidential palace where we'd be cooped up in a room with the journalists traveling with Shultz. They were tired and not very pleased that the Lebanese weren't letting them get closer to the action. A couple of them were extraordinarily bitchy. Every time somebody said something publicly, Elias and I would record it, and Elias would take the tape back to Beth so she could do a transcription for a cable. Then the cable had to be

cleared with everybody. This would go on for a couple of days, and they'd leave for Jerusalem, Damascus or someplace. Elias and I would go back to the embassy. The staff would be gone, the marines were gone, the trucks were gone, all our stuff was sitting around someplace. I would start all over again, getting everybody together, moving in the same direction, and Shultz would come back. I really don't know how many times this happened.

On May 6, the embassy organized a memorial service in the AUB chapel, which was filled with people. I drafted a little speech for Bob Dillon, and it was something that came easily for me, really from my own heart. As Dillon finished reading it, he choked up and started sobbing. When I walked out of the chapel after the service, Elias Kawar, who knew I had done the draft, looked at me and asked, "What have you done to our ambassador?"

One other incident from this period stands out in my mind. The Marines provided security for Shultz at the airport, and, one evening, after Shultz, the journalists and everybody else had flown off into the sunset, Col. James Mead, the U.S. Marine commander said, "John, let's go back and I'll buy you a beer." Mead was a very impressive guy, about six-and-a-half-feet tall, very smart, and he had a tremendous presence—I understand he later made general. Anyhow, we went back to the building where the Marines were bivouacked, the one that got bombed later, in October. The Marines had set up a little area where they hung out, and they had supplied themselves with draft beer. Everybody was tired, exhausted, feeling a little angry and frustrated, I think, and I am the only civilian in there drinking beer with all those Marines wearing combat fatigues. At some point, Mead said to me something like this: "John, I've been there, and I know. Some people go through their entire lives and never face a real trial. Some people face the trial and can't cut it. Others, though, face a terrible trial and do the necessary. John, the day after the bombing, when I saw you standing out there with your ambassador, you faced the test, and you did your job. You can be proud of that for the rest of your life."

Sometime around the end of April, Jock Shirley phoned from Washington and said he had found the perfect job for me. At first, he wouldn't tell me what it was because he said he wanted to work things out. A few days later, he phoned again and said he'd like me to come back and be Deputy Director in the Office of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

I was pleased. After Beirut, I welcomed the idea of getting back to the U.S., and the prospect of being involved, once again, with East Asia was very attractive. Furthermore, Rob Nevitt, the office director for whom I would be working, was an old friend for whom I had great respect.

I communicated this to Jock and then told him I had two reservations. First, I had told Bob Dillon that I would stay in Beirut another year if he wanted me. I would have to find out from Bob how he felt about releasing me from this commitment. Second, I wanted to ensure that Jock had talked to Rob and that Rob was happy with this arrangement. Jock assured me that he would talk to Rob. Later, however, when I told Rob about this

conversation with Jock, Rob told me that Jock never discussed the assignment with him before it was announced.

When I told Bob Dillon about Jock's offer and asked how he felt about me leaving at the end of my second year in Lebanon, he said, "Look, John, enough is enough. I may not be hanging around that much longer myself."

Sometime in May, USIA sent somebody in—the PAO from Doha or someplace—to look after things for a few weeks so I could get away. When I left, I really felt that I needed a little break before I faced my family and friends. I stopped in Athens, and Dick Overturf, who was assigned there, arranged for me to go down to Rhodes. Nick Gregorio, director of the VOA relay station in Rhodes met me and got me installed in a hotel. Nick and his staff were very hospitable to me, but they respected my privacy.

My dad met me at Dulles and drove me down to Staunton. After a few days at home, I drove up to Washington, went into USIA and found Jock, who took me right in to see Charlie Wick. In my presence, Jock sprang the proposal for the EA deputy directorship on Wick, and Wick said, "Consider it done." After that, Wick always remembered who I was. I would meet him at a reception at the Chinese embassy or someplace, and Wick would haul me around, introducing me, "This was our guy in Beirut." The Chinese would look at me, wondering what Wick was talking about.

I did see many friends on that visit, including Ed Schulick, who was already sick undergoing treatment at Sloan-Kettering. In any case, I didn't stay in Washington very long, because I wanted to get down to Virginia and be with my family.

When I got back to Beirut, things were about like I left them, and I pretty much kept on doing what I'd been doing before. USIA had assigned another officer to Beirut, Carol Madison. Carol was very bright, competent and hard-working. She had a great personality and made many friends. I think she was genuinely shocked by what she encountered in Lebanon, but she was tough enough to deal with it. I couldn't see any major clouds looming on the horizons, and I felt only moderately guilty about leaving Beth and Carol behind. Beth was scheduled to leave soon, and USIA was supposed to be sending someone in to succeed me. I left for the last time on August 3, 1983, two years to the day after my arrival. The Beirut airport was closed, and a friend in the military attaché's office got me onto a chopper headed for Cyprus. Once I was in Cyprus, I had to hang around for a couple of days before I could get a flight on to London and Washington.

Q: Being back in Washington, in the area office, was that a frustrating experience?

REID: I was glad to be out of Lebanon, but it was very hard to let go of that experience. People I had known in Lebanon would show up and call me, and it seemed very strange to be dealing with a different set of problems, totally unrelated to what I had been doing.

I spent a large part of my career being deputy to one person or another. The deputy's job can be very frustrating, but I never had that problem with Rob. I think we worked well in tandem. I liked Rob: He had a great sense of humor, he was a quick study, he was logical, he could make decisions, and he was good with his staff and knew how to use them. He may not have been happy about having Jock thrust me upon him without first talking to him, but I think Rob trusted me. It is a good feeling to know that your boss trusts you, that he relies on you to do the right thing.

We had some very good people in the office. Dick Stevens was brilliant as executive officer. We also got good cooperation from some people in other parts of the agency. Pat Hodai, who was area personnel officer for East Asia, always showed great style and ingenuity in dealing with some very vexing personnel problems.

It was great to be dealing with Asia again. I got to take a couple of trips that took me to parts of the region in which I had never been involved—the South Pacific, other countries in Southeast Asia and North Asia. Getting to China for the first time was something I particularly liked. Lynn Noah was PAO in Beijing. It was a time of tremendous change in China, after the Cultural Revolution, and Lynn really understood what was happening.

On the other hand, I think that, for a field person, being back in Washington is always frustrating. Everything has to work through so many layers. There are so many people around who seem to have no relationship with and no understanding of what is happening in the field—political appointees, equal opportunity people, staff people in the director's office, congressional liaison people, people in the general counsel's office and so on. If you have been out there scratching around for resources, some of it seems very wasteful.

Looking back from a distance of 20 years, I think Charles Wick was probably the most effective USIA director I can recall. On the other hand, his style could sometimes be tremendously frustrating.

Wick at one point told his special assistant, Bob Earle, to go directly to the field posts and ask them what they needed, how things were going. Rob was off on a trip when this stuff all started coming in from the posts, and, of course, it got sent right down to the area office, where we had to deal with it. It told us nothing we did not know already, it was redundant, and dealing with it was very distracting.

Another time, USIA got a new inspector general, who decided that inspections were going to be a big thing. Rob was away, and the inspectors came to me and said they wanted to send a team out to Kuala Lumpur. As I remember, they wanted to send something like eight guys out there and keep them there for about six weeks or two months, and there were only four or five people at the post. It was ridiculous, and I decided to dig in on the thing. There was a lot of huffing and puffing, but eventually they backed off. That's the way it was.

Q: In that period, of course, you did have plenty of resources and a pretty active program, right?

REID: One of the best things about Wick's directorship was that we pretty much got everything we needed. As for the program, even though the locus of action had moved away from Southeast Asia, we maintained very active programs there, and some of the North Asian posts, China in particular, were dealing with big issues. For many of the posts, economic and trade issues were looming larger on the screen.

We got a lot better at dealing with Wick's style. When Wick traveled in the area, he wanted detailed schedules; he did not like surprises. We had to have briefing books and schedules, and everything had to be there. Producing these, getting drafts from the posts, and getting things cleared with Wick's office required tremendous back-and-forth. Cables would come from the posts. We'd use these to type up proposed schedules to send up for approval. These would come back with comments, and we'd have to retype these as cables to send back as posts. Posts would try to make changes and send back revised schedules in cable format, which we'd have to retype and send up in briefing book format again. Sometimes this would go on for weeks, typing and revising this stuff.

Everybody does these things now, but people didn't focus on technology then. I had just finished a Wang course, and I knew that it was possible to send text back and forth by modem. I talked to Dick Stevens about this; he checked it out and then got on the phone to the posts telling them what to do. Pretty soon, we were whipping this stuff back and forth, computer to computer, and it saved a tremendous amount of work. We were afraid that someone would start complaining about communication without proper clearance, so we didn't tell anyone what we were doing, and, for a while no one seemed to notice. Then, a while later, people from outside the area started asking what we were up to, and the cat was out of the bag. By that time, though, there was no stopping it.

Q: It's amazing how far behind the curve the Agency and the rest of the government were in terms of such new technology.

REID: And USIA was much further ahead than the State Department.

Q: And what were you looking at beyond all of this?

REID: I still had not gotten that Chinese-language post, and I wanted to be PAO in China. I was under-grade, but there were no at-grade bidders, and it appeared I would get the job. At the last possible moment, McKinney Russell submitted a bid. He had the grade, so I was left high and dry. The only other viable opening in the area was Korea. I had been to Korea and liked what I'd seen, although I knew there were some tremendous problems there. Again, though, I really didn't know what I was getting myself into. That seemed to happen to me a lot.

I have always thought it very important to know the language of the country where I was assigned. Korean is a very difficult language, even more difficult than Arabic, I discovered. Normally, at FSI, it was a two-year program, the first year in Washington and

the second in Seoul. USIA didn't want to give me the full two years, so the compromise was that I would do six months in Washington and go out to Seoul for the rest of the year.

I really worked at Korean for the six months in Washington and then packed my things and went out to Korea. When I got there, my predecessor, Bernie Lavin, greeted me with the news that he was leaving post early because his wife was sick. He said that he had already discussed the problem with Dixie Walker, the ambassador, and he and the ambassador had agreed that I would cut short my language study by three months and move directly into the job. Unfortunately while they may have agreed on this, I wasn't particularly pleased with it; I felt I had a commitment from USIA on language study, and I had always considered language ability very important for the job. When I tried to insist on getting the full year, a real confrontation developed between Walker and myself. At one point, Walker called me into his office and showed me a cable he had drafted to send to Wick, saying, I don't want this guy, send somebody else. I told him that I didn't care whether he sent the cable or not, but, if he sent it, he would be making a big mistake. I said, you have some serious problems in this country, and I can help you deal with them. I will be happy to stay here and work for you, and I can do some things that will make this a lot better for you, but, if you don't want me, I can be on an airplane tomorrow.

Anyhow, he backed down, and the thing got sorted out, as I knew it would, with me having to cut short full-time language study and move into the job. At one point, though, Walker said to me, "You will never learn Korean. You don't need it. When you go someplace, your FSNs will go along to manage the Korean for you." I wasn't about to let that one pass. Francis Park, the director of the language school in Seoul, was very sympathetic and very good about setting me up with materials, and, for the next four years, Kim Young-baik, probably the best instructor at the school, met me every morning in my office for an hour beginning at seven o'clock. I would then study a bit throughout the day—ten minutes waiting at red lights or waiting in somebody's office, for example—and work on it whenever I could. When I left Korea, I could read newspapers, follow conversations at our meetings with students, and I scored three, three-plus.

Q: What did you mean when you told the ambassador that he had problems and you could help him solve them?

REID: Walker had strong opinions, and he didn't care who heard him articulate them. After he was nominated for the job in Korea, when he was still back in the U.S., a Korean journalist asked him, on the record, what he thought about Korean student protesters, and he referred to them as "a bunch of spoiled brats." He never lived that one down. Walker's contacts seemed to be senior government and establishment people. He didn't like the students, he didn't like journalists, and he didn't even want to be seen with Kim Dae-jung, one of the two major opposition politicians. I knew that, if I could get a handle on his public appearances, write his speeches, manage his media exposure, I could do him some good. Also, anti-Americanism had become a major problem in Korea. About six months before I got there, students had broken into and occupied the USIS library in Seoul, demanding that the U.S. apologize for the Kwangju incident in 1980. Younger Koreans were demonstrating against us, and older Koreans seemed embarrassed by the

whole thing. The Korean media reported everything we did to support the government of Chun Doo-hwan, who had come to power in a military coup, and everything the Chun regime did to fix us with responsibility for the Kwangju incident. At the same time, they were beating us up over trade issues and demands for market access. We had always taken for granted Korean gratitude for our role in the Korean War, for our security commitment and for all we did to help them recover after the war. The anti-Americanism seemed to take everybody by surprise. Ambassador Walker appeared to have other priorities, and nobody else seemed to know how to address it.

Q: What about the rest of the embassy staff? Were they just letting the ambassador do what he wanted to do?

REID: Walker could be truly intimidating. Also, within the State Department, I think there is almost a cult of loyalty to the ambassador, the President's sovereign representative. You can advise him, but you don't cross him. When I had the disagreement with Walker over language study, the political counselor, Harry Dunlop, was involved, and he told me bluntly that I was out of line.

Well, overseas, my first loyalty has always been to my ambassador, and, even if you don't like the guy, and you think he is dead wrong, you do the best you can for him. I was able to manage Walker's exposure, to some extent, to write his speeches and statements, some of which I think he liked, and to keep journalists away from him, which I know he liked. There were still surprises. I remember once reading in the papers that he had gone down to Cheju, a big island off the south coast of Korea, and given a speech to some people he knew down there. I didn't even know he'd left town. Walker was there for about a year after I took over as PAO. I don't think he ever liked me, but I think he finally realized that I could do useful things for him.

I remember that, sometime during this year, Flora Lewis came to Korea, and she picked up on Walker and his problem right away. She invited me for coffee or lunch, and she really gave me a going over. It was off-the-record, but some of her questions and observations made me very uncomfortable. She was concerned about what was happening in Korea, and she didn't think the embassy was responding. Finally, she gave me some good advice, like trying to get a better handle on what the embassy was saying and trying to get some focus on what was happening in Korea.

Once Harry Dunlop saw what I was trying to do, what I could do, we became very good friends. Harry confided to me that he was very concerned about how things were going for us in Korea. We had major interests there. This was not so long ago, but we saw China and the Soviet Union as major security threats in North Asia. North Korea was a dangerous, secretive, aggressive and highly militarized country, and we had 43,000 troops stationed in the Republic of Korea. Korea had become a major trading partner, and Koreans resented our demands for free access to Korean markets. Chun's military dictatorship was extremely unpopular, and Koreans accused us of supporting it. Jim Matray once made a very insightful observation to me: When we accepted the Japanese surrender in Korea in 1945, Koreans held us responsible for everything that happened in

Korea after that. Our troop presence in Korea, especially the U.S. headquarters on a former Japanese base in the center of Seoul, reinforced that view. We were beating on Koreans to take cheap American beef and cigarettes, instead of nutritious and tasty Korean products, and this was seen as a threat to the livelihood of poor, toiling relatives back on the farm, one more example of our insensitivity, arrogance and selfishness. At the same time, radical students, chanting slogans about American imperialism and Kim Il-sung's paradise in the north, were taking to the streets to oppose an unpopular dictatorship which people thought we were supporting. Middle-class Koreans and intellectuals were beginning to think the students might have a point.

Harry and his staff wrote four cables, to which I contributed. The first three cables analyzed the causes and nature of anti-Americanism in Korea, and the final outlined an aggressive mission plan to address it. The cable concluded, as I recall, with about 14 specific actions, and almost all of these involved USIS.

One of the first things we did was try to define the problem. We commissioned some research which showed us that liking for the United States was even less than we had assumed and that, central to this, was the perception of U.S. support for the Chun regime. We found that we were even less popular in southwestern Korea and in Kwangju, where the 1980 massacre occurred.

We also asked USIA for a research project to determine what Korean school textbooks said about the United States. USIA recruited Stephen Linton of Columbia University to do the study. Linton's conclusion was a little startling. He said that the important issue wasn't the little that students were taught about the U.S., however negative. It was what they were taught about Korea, a very ethnocentric view with the idea that all of Korea's problems resulted from external rather than internal forces. It was a view of Korea as an ideal, Confucian, paternalistic society, where collective welfare was the supreme value and which had been corrupted and degraded by years of foreign encroachment.

Central to what we said in our cable was the idea that we—the U.S. mission—had to be seen as more open, more accessible and more willing to engage a broad community of Koreans, not just those with whom the embassy usually dealt. We had been seen as aloof, and we had to communicate at least the perception that we were more open and more willing to take Korean views into account.

We started doing a series of regular evening meetings with students, with younger journalists, with academics and with younger dissident politicians. Sometimes I would host these, sometimes Harry would do it, and sometimes we could get someone else in the embassy to do it. The Koreans would ventilate, and we would respond. We'd serve drinks, and sometimes the Koreans would be very emotional and confrontational, and, for us, going through something like this after a full work day, was exhausting business, especially when we did it a couple of times a week. When I went to visit our branch PAOs—in Taegu, Pusan and Kwangju—they would set me up for the same thing—the big guy from the embassy coming down to talk to the local folks. We produced a briefing

book, which we regularly updated, giving the questions the Koreans asked most frequently and suggesting the best answers.

At USIS, one of my senior Korean colleagues was Park Seung-tak, who had earned his own journalist's credentials during the Korean War. Very soon after I took over as PAO, Park Seung-tak got me personally involved with an interesting group that met over drinks and dinner in a local Chinese restaurant every couple of weeks. Most of them were well-regarded Korean journalists who had gotten into serious trouble with the Chun regime. Almost all of them had lost their jobs as a consequence of government pressure on their publishers after they refused to toe the official line. Some of them got by as free-lancers, and USIS occasionally helped out with translation jobs. They weren't all journalists. One of the group, Nam Jae-hee, was a government-party politician, but he was very moderate, very unhappy with some of the things the government was doing and very good about keeping open lines to the opposition. Another of the group, Han Hwa-gap, was a principal assistant to Kim Dae-jung, leader of one of the two major opposition parties, and, under the Chun regime, Han Hwa-gap's position had earned him some time in jail. Conversation at our sessions was pretty candid, and I was regularly asked to explain the U.S. position on one issue or another. For some of these people, USIS was an extremely important source of information. We would regularly pass them whatever we could get for them, particularly Wireless File playback of U.S. media reports on Korea and U.S. editorial commentary on Korea and Korean-U.S. relations. The government controlled information from overseas very effectively; there was no Worldwide Web in those days, and, for these people, USIS was the only place where they could find this information. I sometimes thought that Han Hwa-gap practically lived in our information section. It is interesting what happened to many of the people in this group after Chun left the scene and Korea became a more open country. Several of the journalists started successful publications or moved back into main-stream journalism as important columnists. Nam Jae-hee became a cabinet minister in the government of Roh Tae-woo. When Kim Dae-jung became president, Han Hwa-gap became parliamentary floor leader for the ruling party, and, after Kim Dae-jung resigned the party leadership, he became head of the party. I saw him a few months ago in Korea, and he is still outspoken in his gratitude for USIS support during his lean years.

Social life in Korea was pretty intense. It was quite common for people to meet for drinks after work, and, being single, I could take the time to be with American studies people, journalists and other people important to us. It paid off. If we had a media problem, I pretty much had instant access, and I could almost always find someone to help us sort things out. During the 1988 Seoul Olympics, we ran into one particularly intense period of U.S.-bashing, and Nick Mele, Park Seung-tak and I spent one whole Saturday going from one newspaper office to another, schmoozing with editors and discussing how we might calm things down a bit.

On another occasion, Ambassador Lilley gave an off-the-record interview to a U.S. journalist who violated ground rules and attributed some very troublesome remarks to Lilley in his syndicated column. One of the Korean papers, JoongAng Ilbo, had a Washington correspondent who picked this up from the Baltimore Sun and reported it

back to Korea. When the report appeared in JoongAng Ilbo, very distorted, we got to the editor right away and negotiated an arrangement for a clarifying piece under Lilley's byline. The piece ran with some favorable editorial back-up, and we came out looking pretty good.

When we dealt with hostile media, my principal rule was, you can take them on publicly over the facts, but you don't want to get into public arguments over their opinions. If you can prove they have it wrong, you can force them to back down. If you didn't agree with what they think, it is much better handled informally. Occasionally, I would have a little trouble over this with embassy colleagues who didn't appreciate that if you don't escalate these things into public confrontation, they will generally die of their own accord.

We started—and this idea came from Carl Chan, our assistant information officer—a student newspaper, Sisa Nonpyong. This one took a lot of planning and work. We decided to do the thing mostly in hangul, the Korean phonetic script, with very few Chinese characters. The format was pretty austere, with no photos. We got some help from USIA with commissioned pieces from U.S. writers who were knowledgeable about Korean issues, and we did some of the writing ourselves. The subjects included a whole range of problems the students like to argue about: U.S. trade policy, tobacco imports, the Kwangju incident, an uprising in Cheju that had occurred during the U.S. occupation, the U.S. and Soviet roles in the division of Korea and so on. Later, when we started doing telephone hook-ups with people in the U.S. talking directly to Korean groups, we sometimes included transcripts of these, and when we started getting some good speakers, we included reports on what they had to say. One of the best features was a letters-to-the-editor column, which attracted some very provocative correspondence. I think we did something like 200,000 copies of this thing, not nearly enough to reach an entire Korean student population amounting to millions, but the thing was out there, and people knew it was out there. Some of our academic contacts helped us place it. We knew that some of the copies were trashed, but some were read, and there was feedback.

I mentioned the phone hook-ups, and we did a lot of these. USIA had a small staff working on this—unlike the staff and resources devoted to interactive television. These people in USIA were remarkably resourceful in tracking down Americans who could address our issues—including some who had actually participated in the American occupation and the Korean War. We would usually have about a dozen people—students, academics or journalists—on our end of the hook-up, and the sessions would sometimes run for as long as an hour. Essentially, the cost was the phone bill, which was insignificant compared to the cost of a satellite video feed. It was a very economical and effective program.

In our meetings with students and dissidents, one of the things we kept running into was references to a book, Origins of the Korean War, by a University of Washington professor, Bruce Cumings. Cumings had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Korea, he knew Korean, and he could cite Korean sources. His book was long and very difficult, but it was meticulously researched, and the research made it credible and persuasive. Cumings concluded, essentially, that the United States had connived in the partition of

Korea to incorporate Korea into a system aimed at opposing Soviet and Chinese expansionism. This argument, advanced by an American scholar no less, was meat and drink to people looking for someone to blame for their problems.

We found another author, James Matray, who wrote a book called The Reluctant Crusade, which analyzed U.S. policy toward Korea during roughly the same period covered by Cumings. Matray's conclusions, however, were very different from those of Cumings. Matray's conclusions were often critical—that our policies were sometimes uninformed, misguided, poorly implemented—but they were sound and persuasive, and they gave us some credit for good intentions. We enlisted the help of USIA in bringing Matray out to Korea to talk to some of our audiences. I am not sure how many people he disabused of Cumings' interpretation, but I am certain that he persuaded some people that there is more than one way of looking at a problem. Furthermore, his presentations formed the basis of some good guidance we could use in our own discussions.

When Walker left, he was succeeded by Jim Lilley. Ambassador Lilley was a former CIA man, a Republican political appointee in the first Bush administration. I think he was an exceptional ambassador and just the man needed in Korea at that time. He agreed with our analysis of what was happening in Korea, that we were seeing an intersection of radical ideology espoused by the activists and general, more pervasive dissatisfaction with the Chun regime. He also agreed with what we were trying to do about it. That was certainly sufficient reason for me to like him, but there was more. He was careful, thoughtful and willing to take some risks. Immediately, he began putting some distance between himself—between us—and the Chun Doo-hwan establishment. He began talking to leading dissidents and opposition politicians. He engaged himself actively in what we did. Sometimes, we'd be meeting with 20 or 30 students in my living room, and Lilley would drop by for half an hour or so, put in a cameo and take a few tough questions.

Lilley was the first ambassador to go down to Kwangju, since the 1980 massacre, and to meet with dissidents there. It was a very tense, confrontational session. Some of the Koreans there had lost relatives and family members in 1980.

When Harry Dunlop left, he was succeeded as political counselor by Chuck Kartman. Chuck was a very different person from Harry, but his view of what needed to be done was no different from mine. I liked Chuck. He was younger and even less patient than I, quite ambitious, and he could be very confrontational. He was smart, well organized, decisive and intellectually honest, however. I enjoyed working with him. He was tremendously helpful to us when the radicals forced a temporary closure of our branch in Kwangju, and I credit Chuck with one of the most effective things we did while I was in Korea.

Perhaps the central theme in the dissident complaint against the United States was a view of our role in the 1980 Kwangju incident. This view was actively encouraged by the Chun regime to deflect criticism from themselves. There had been a lot of confusion about the Kwangju incident, principally arising from some deliberate distortion on the part of the Korean government, and most of the distortion centered on the command

relationship between U.S. and Korean forces in Korea, which was poorly understood. There was—and probably still is—a Joint Forces Command, headed by an American general with a Korean deputy. The command existed only to deter external threat to the Republic of Korea. For this purpose, the Korean government assigned designated units to operational control of the command, but, like the U.S., it retained what was called sovereign command authority over its own people. What this meant was that the Koreans could notify the American commander and then withdraw their units whenever they pleased.

In 1980, Chun Doo-hwan was in the process of consolidating an illegitimate coup. He had declared himself acting director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, and this precipitated demonstrations throughout the country, in Seoul, Kwangju and elsewhere. Chun responded by declaring martial law, which provoked even more demonstrations, and, in Kwangju, troops moved in, injuring and killing some people. There was a violent reaction, with up to 100,000 people in the Kwangju streets, burning radio stations and seizing arms and military stockpiles. After police sided with the demonstrators, the troops withdrew. Then, other units moved back in and conducted a very brutal crackdown. It was a very bloody, nasty business, and, while there are all sorts of assertions of how many people were killed or who simply disappeared, there were at least several hundred.

Our problem was that, before the troops went back into Kwangju, the Koreans approached U.S. Ambassador William Gleysteen and General Wickham, the U.S. commander and asked permission to move specific units into the city. Gleysteen either concurred or said he did not object. In fact, the units the Koreans used to do the work had not been under Wickham's operational control, and our approval or concurrence was irrelevant. Nevertheless, the Korean authorities did everything they could to make people think that we had approved what happened, even the killing. They had set us up, and we couldn't shake it.

Since the Kwangju incident had assumed such major importance in the radical criticism of the United States, Lilley, Kartman and I agreed that we had to do something about it. One of Chuck's political section colleagues was a young officer, Lynn Turk, whom Chuck assigned to the project. Over a period of several months, Lynn worked with the State Department historian's office to produce a definitive, official account of the Kwangju incident from our point of view. I reviewed various drafts of the statement, as they appeared, but Lynn did the work. It was a very detailed, well-documented piece. USIS prepared the Korean translation, and our translators were sworn to secrecy. I think the statement, when we finally released it, was a bombshell. We distributed it to Korean media, published it in the student newspaper, sent it out to all our regular addressees and got it to everyone we could. Korean papers carried extensive excerpts, and Kim Dae-jung had it reproduced and distributed to his party membership. Ambassador Lilley consistently approved and encouraged what we were doing.

Q: How did all of this go down with more conservative Koreans?

REID: I think Chun and his people were highly displeased, since the paper was a major factor in focusing Korean anger away from us and back onto them, where it belonged. I don't think Chun and Lilley were ever very cordial, and I'm sure this made them even less so.

There was a great generational gap in Korea, between older Koreans who remembered the Korean War and younger, much more radical Koreans who did not. By the late 1980s, however, everyone had become so disenchanted and unhappy with the Chun regime that resentment and anger were pervasive. I think older, thoughtful Koreans understood that we were trying to distance ourselves from the Korean government, and perhaps the recognition that we were not supporting Chun and his friends may have encouraged political change. What happened after that was very encouraging. Korea has an elected president and has now had several peaceful transfers of power. And, in only one other Asian country I can think of, has a former president been jailed for corruption.

At one point, I was arranging for Lilley to have an on-the-record session with a rather large group of Korean journalists. We spent days preparing for the thing, going over questions and answers. At the appointed time, I met the journalists in front of the embassy and took them up to the conference room outside Lilley's office, on the top floor. I think they were a little awed. We sat around the table and they fired away. The questions were in Korean, with consecutive interpretation. The questions were tough and direct, but Lilley handled them beautifully. When we were leaving, one of the Koreans remarked to me, "No Korean official would have ever sat at a table with us and talked with us like that."

I should say just something about conditions when I was in Korea. It seemed that, every few months, one of our provincial centers would be attacked by the students. On one occasion, the Kwangju center was trashed, and some people were nearly killed. On another, our office in Seoul was attacked and set on fire, and some of our Korean employees were stoned as they were coming out on a fire escape. During the period of major anti-government demonstrations, whole sections of Seoul were under siege, and great clouds of tear gas drifted everywhere. There was a tremendous sense of unrelenting tension and confrontation and a feeling that trouble could erupt anytime, anywhere. I would wake up at three in the morning thinking about what might happen and what needed to be done. It was a tough situation and hard work, but I was lucky; I have never worked with a finer USIS staff. The Koreans on the staff were superb, totally loyal and sympathetic to what we were doing. Some became friends, and a Korean friend is a friend for life. The USIS Americans were the best USIS American staff I have ever seen anywhere—Nick Mele, Bill Maurer, Jack Sears, Susan Metcalf, Carl Chan, Judith Futch, Donna Welton, Gerald McLoughlin, Don Q. Washington, just to name a few of them. They were brilliant and creative, and they worked their butts off. We worked well—worked as members of the same team—with our embassy colleagues. Jim Lilley was a great ambassador, and Don Greg, when he came, understood what we were doing and supported it. We had good support from Washington. Hal Morton was area director, and I know I sometimes caused him a lot of grief, but he stood by me. We sometimes got into terrible confrontations with Koreans, the journalists particularly, but we had a lot of

friends out there, and, when all the hissing and shouting was over, we could sit down and have a few drinks. Korea is a place where USIS made a real difference, and I am very proud of what we did there.

When I go back to Korea now, I have a great time. Korea has opened up and become part of the world. Koreans are self-confident and cosmopolitan. Korea is a crowded country, but Koreans are better-housed than the Japanese. Korea's cities are modern, clean and efficient, yet the Koreans are probably doing a better job of preserving their heritage than any country in Asia. For a people who have suffered an unspeakably miserable history and who have no significant natural resources, what the Koreans have done is amazing.

Q: From Korea, you went back to the University of Virginia for a year, as diplomat as residence. How did that happen?

REID: As the end of the Korea tour approached, I had my eye, once again, on the China job. This time, I was at grade, and, after Lebanon and Seoul, my stock in USIA was as high as it ever got. Everyone I dealt with in Washington told me it was a lock, and, indeed, it looked that way.

My tour ended in June. By April, I was beginning to think about scheduling the packers, and there was still nothing on the China job. I then got a call from David Hitchcock, who had succeeded Hal Morton as EA area director. David said there seemed to be a problem with the China job, and he wanted to know about my Chinese-language competence. Well, I had studied Chinese in graduate school and tested somewhere around two-two in Mandarin when I first came into USIA, and I'd spoken a little Chinese, in various contexts, over the years. Also I figured I had mastered between two and three thousand Chinese characters, learning Korean. David indicated that the fact that I hadn't tested more recently in Chinese might be a problem, but he didn't elaborate.

David hung up, and I waited and waited and waited. I kept contacting friends, asking them to check things out for me, but a veil of secrecy seemed to have dropped over the whole transaction. Finally, someone called me and said the USIA director, Bruce Gelb, had decided to give the job to Frank Scotton. As I was able to piece things together later, Gelb, who, until that point in his directorship had probably never decided anything or even thought about anything very much, suddenly stirred himself and decided to focus on the issue of language. Since I was a senior officer, no one wanted to invest in more than a year of Chinese-language training for me, and Gelb was somehow persuaded that I couldn't achieve required competence in a year. I was told that Gelb asked whether or not there was someone else out there who had the language qualification, and they found Frank Scotton, who had been teaching down at Fort Bragg. Frank had not asked for the job, and, being a good friend, called me later to ensure that I did not blame him for getting it—which I certainly did not.

The packers were coming, and I was dangling in the wind without a job. I didn't want to go back to Washington and be put in charge of the Combined Federal Campaign or something equally deadly, and the only other option appeared to be retirement. Since my

annuity wouldn't suffice to maintain the magnificent Foreign Service life style to which I had become accustomed, I would have to find gainful employment. Doing something in the academic world seemed better than bagging groceries, and I began to think about that. Then, I had one of those blinding flashes that came at three o'clock in the morning. If you are thinking about going academic, get them to send you on full salary! Become a diplomat in residence! Go for reparations!

Shortly afterward, I got another of those morale-building calls from USIA personnel—we are going to have to give you loose-pack orders, we just don't have anything for someone at your grade. I might be able to help you out on that, I said, and suggested assignment to the University of Virginia as diplomat in residence.

I was told I would have to set it up, arrange it myself, and USIA might approve. Through my family, I had some good UVA contacts. I made a few calls and very shortly had a letter inviting me to join the UVA faculty for a year, with the understanding, of course, that UVA wouldn't be paying me anything. I sent a cable to USIA requesting orders assigning me to Charlottesville. I understand there was a lot more huffing and puffing about that, but, eventually, they came around because they didn't know what else to do with me.

The year at UVA was tremendous. I look back on it as the last of my really great years in USIA. While still in Korea, I communicated with Clifton McCleskey, my department head at UVA, and he said they'd like me to teach a fall-semester, fourth-year undergraduate seminar on some subject related to my experience. I did not have a lot of time to prepare, and I decided to go for what I knew best at that point, Korean-U.S. relations. Before I left Korea, I asked the USIS librarian, Kim Kwang-ho, to develop a little bibliography for me, which he did. When I got to UVA, I found that faculty could write to publishers on university letterhead and get free copies of books for examination. I wrote to the publishers of all the books on Kim Kwang-ho's list and acquired a nice little library which I used to prepare the syllabus for my course.

I went back and reread everything—Bruce Cumings, James Matray, Gregory Henderson. I really had never imagined teaching was so much work. The kids were really bright. Even if they hadn't done their work, they never failed to catch me if I hadn't done mine. It was very challenging, and, in the course of working my way through the course, I found that I was evaluating my Korean experience, putting it into context and discovering what it meant.

I was discussing this one day with Inis Claude, a retired UVA professor whom I recalled from my own graduate school days as having written one of the pioneering works on international organizations. Inis remarked, "You know, the best way to learn a subject is to try to teach it." I thought about that and decided that the thing I really wanted to learn more about was the Vietnam War. That was the subject of my second-semester course, and it was the same kind of experience. Frank Scotton, whose name comes up in a lot of the work on the Vietnam War, came down for one of the sessions. I assigned

sections of Frankie Fitzgerald's and Neil Sheehan's books where Frank's role was discussed, and, when they had a chance to talk to him, the students were thrilled.

Charlottesville was a great place for me. After four years in a very intense Korean environment, I enjoyed the relative independence, quiet and solitude. The teaching responsibility imposed some discipline, and the research, reading and writing I did were very satisfying. In recent years, I hadn't spent too much time with my father who lived not too far from Charlottesville, and I was able to see him occasionally. I also had a house fairly close by.

I was thinking about what to do next. I got along well with the people at UVA. It was clear, however, that, if I wanted to start a second career teaching there, I would have to go back for a Ph.D. That is a ticket you must punch in that line of work. One of the senior faculty members actually took me to lunch one day and encouraged me to go that way, offering to help me work it out.

At that point, the senior Foreign Service pay raise came through, and it made a lot of sense to stay in USIA for another three years and qualify for an annuity which would really support me. Then USIA personnel called me and asked how I'd like to go back to Bangkok as PAO. Actually, I was not too keen on this suggestion. Many of the USIS Thai staff were very close personal friends, I sensed that very tough times might be ahead for USIS, and I didn't want to be in a position where I might hurt people I liked. For better or for worse, however, self-interest, perhaps not too enlightened, won the argument.

The not-so-good news was that, for a year before the Thailand job became vacant, I had to go back to my old Washington job—deputy director in the East Asia area office, this time working for David Hitchcock. The less I say about that year, the better. David was a very different kind of guy from Rob Nevitt, my previous boss in the same job. David was a very determined, sometimes tenacious personality, and I do give him credit for getting me a Presidential award for what I did in Korea. That was very decent of him. Our styles were very different, however, and didn't mesh well. There were some difficult issues, one of which destroyed a friendship important to me. After the year in Washington I went back to Thailand, and the rest is history.

Q: One thing I want to ask you, if you feel like talking about it is, overall, how do you think the Agency was led at the top under recent administrations?

REID: Well, from what I have told you, you can probably figure what I think of Bruce Gelb. It was all pretty much downhill after Charles Wick, although Henry Catto had some promise, but I don't believe he was around very long. I was at a PAO conference in Hong Kong during my final Thailand tour, and, at a lunch, I was seated on Joe Duffey's left so I could talk about the program. Shortly after I sat down, Duffey's assistant bustled up and sat on his right. She had been out shopping and wanted to talk about that, and that pretty much ended my part of the conversation. Seeing Duffey at this conference was my only

contact with the man, but I did not have the sense that he was particularly interested in anything we had to say.

I spent my last three years in the field, and there it was very difficult to get a sense of what the high-and-mighty were doing back at headquarters. People would come through and tell us that morale at USIA was terrible, that there was no direction. I was familiar with one situation where a senior officer was formally disciplined for mishandling resources while overseas and was subsequently appointed to a top position in USIA. I understand that, once the facts of the case became known to people in Congress, the appointment had very negative consequences for USIA's prospects. From where I was sitting in the field, I could not be aware of the considerations leading to the appointment, but I wondered then and still wonder about the agenda of the people who made the decision. Were they focused on what was good for USIA, or was there something else? Surely, they should have known how damaging the appointment might be, and how bad it might be for morale.

Let me tell another little story. A junior officer was assigned to work for one of our section heads in Bangkok. There were all sorts of problems with this officer's performance, and the section chief, the supervisor, tried to deal with them. It was a very difficult situation; the supervisor was trying to play by the book, to counsel and to document, but things became very confrontational. When the supervisor wrote the annual evaluation, however, it was a model of restraint, although he did make one major criticism. It was something he had discussed with the officer several times and which he documented fully. Since I had also discussed the issue with the officer and had my own independent documentation, I backed the criticism fully when I wrote my review. The officer initiated a grievance procedure, claiming he had been treated unfairly. Sometime later, after I retired, I got a call from USIA personnel, asking whether I was sure about what I said in my review. I was sure. I thought the matter was finished until about a year later, when I happened to encounter the officer, and he told me, somewhat smugly I thought, that he had gone back to Washington and had managed to have all the negative material removed from his evaluation.

The point is that, in the last years of USIA, the whole system was corrupt. Officers were afraid to write candid evaluations and reviews, because they knew they would face grievance actions and the likely deletion of any negative material. Without candid evaluations, incompetence was rewarded. Whose fault was it? Agency leadership certainly had some responsibility.

Q: In your characterization of USIA leadership, do you include the area directors?

REID: Some area directors were better than others. It was paradoxical when I was in Lebanon, because, although I took an assignment that no one else wanted, there was some resentment among the Middle East hands that the job had gone to someone from outside the area. There was also some criticism of the fact that, during the Israeli invasion, I was up in Jounieh doing a consular job, trying to help Americans. When Sam Courtney took over as area director, however, he fully supported what I was doing. When

I was in Korea, Hal Morton was a great area director; I thought he did everything he could to help us. During my final years in USIA, however, my relations with the area office were terrible.

Q: Didn't a lot of that occur as things deteriorated in terms of USIA's status and prospects?

REID: Absolutely. During my final years in USIA, I had the feeling that, no matter what my priorities were in the field, there was no congruence with the priorities of the area office, and I felt that area priorities were never articulated to me. I heard from those people when they wanted to cut my budget or take staff positions, but I was never persuaded that they were doing anything to defend our resources or help us do our job.

Q: Obviously there was an opportunity at some point, I don't know where it was exactly, for senior Agency officers to unite on behalf of the Agency and make a stronger stand for public diplomacy and what the Agency should be doing—how independent it should be and what kind of resources it deserved. I am unaware of that having happened. What do you think?

REID: You aren't the first person I have heard suggest that there was this kind of opportunity. Again, however, I was in the field, and, aside from a sense of indirection, contention and unhappiness, I was getting almost no substantive communication from Washington. I don't really know whether there was an opportunity or not.

Even if there was an opportunity to make a case for public diplomacy and USIA, that kind of initiative requires leadership. Effective leadership requires the right people in the right place at the right time. The people who could have provided leadership weren't in the right positions, however, and the right positions were filled with people whose agenda appeared different. How did this happen? The Cold War was over, and a priority of the Clinton administration was balancing the federal budget. Eliminating a Cold War agency might have seemed an obvious move, and Joe Duffey might have seemed the guy to do the deed. Unfortunately, neither Joe Duffey nor anyone in the Clinton administration ever anticipated that September 11 would focus new attention on the issue of public diplomacy and how poorly we had been doing at it lately.

Maybe this sounds too much like conspiracy theory. Maybe USIA just died a natural death—an ineffective dinosaur that couldn't adapt to changing circumstances, honking and flailing around in a tar pit, a classic case of bureaucratic Darwinism. When I think about USIA, I don't even take into account its later years. For me, USIA, as I knew it, ceased to exist in 1992. After that, I really don't see much relevance to our public diplomacy needs then or now. Before that, however, I think there is a tremendous store of solutions and experience that might be applicable to some of our current problems. Unfortunately, no one making the decisions today is likely to go back and look at this. It is too bad. It is very wasteful and costly, but this is the way we do it here—the same cycle of trial and error, again and again.

Although this is no longer my problem, I feel sad about it, but life is too short for anguish over something I can do nothing about. Someone else will clean up after our mistakes, and the republic will endure, even without USIA. On the other hand, when I do look at my total USIA experience, I think it was tremendous, overall. I was talking to Pat Hodai once, and he remarked that this career was a calling, like being a missionary. I had experiences most people could not imagine. I served my country and perhaps did some good. Some of the things we did—in the early Thailand days, in Lebanon and in Korea—really mattered. I dealt with real challenges, and this recollection gives me great satisfaction. It was a great learning experience, and the learning was worthwhile for its own sake. Most of all, I have made some of the greatest friends a person could have—comrades in arms, people who have been through it with me and who know how it was. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. If I ask myself what really matters, it is the friendships.

End of interview