

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

JAMES L. TULL

Interviewed by: Raymond Ewing
Initial interview date: May 31, 2001
Copyright 2024 ADST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	
Born and raised in Iowa	
U.S. Navy	
University of Colorado at Boulder	
Entered FS - 1958	
State Department - Inter-American Affairs	1958-1960
Cali, Colombia - Vice Consul	1960
President Kennedy visit	
“La Violencia”	
Terrorists	
London, England - Staff Assistant to Ambassador	1960-1965
Ambassador David Bruce	
Skybolt	
Elections	
Vietnam	
Churchill death	
State Department - Bureau of International Organizations	1965-1967
Non-Proliferation Treaty	
Joe Sisco	
State Department - Latin American Affairs - Special Assistant	1967-1969
Montevideo, Uruguay - Political Officer	1969-1973
Terrorists (Tupamaros)	
Security	
Economy	
AID	
Government	
Elections	

Military	
National War College Vietnam John McCain	1973-1974
State Department - Office of Personnel	1974-1976
State Department - European Affairs - Executive Director	1976-1978
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic - DCM Hurricanes U.S. programs Political parties	1978-1981
Nicosia, Cyprus - DCM AHEPA Greek-Turkey issue Narcotics Beirut evacuation Denktash Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus	1981-1984
Bogota, Colombia - DCM Narcotics Security Environment	1984-1985
San Jose, Costa Rica - DCM Iran-Contra Oscar Arias Environment	1985-1987
State Department - Career Development and Assignments – Deputy Director	1987

INTERVIEW

Q: This is an oral history interview with James L. Tull. It's May 31, 2001. My name is Raymond Ewing. This is being conducted for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Jim, it looks like you entered the Foreign Service about 1958. You were born and raised in Iowa. Tell me how you came to be interested in the Foreign Service. I assume you took the written examination at some point along the line.

TULL: My first recollection of interest in the Foreign Service came as a result of an article about 1949 in the Saturday Evening Post magazine. It spoke generally about the service and some of its training programs. The more I read about it, the more it seemed to become the main focus of my attention as I looked toward college. At the same time, I had long been interested in municipal government and administration, too. But gradually that took second place. I did hedge my bets a bit by taking a masters in public administration, knowing how chancy entrance into the Service could be. But urban affairs soon became my fall-back.

Q: A city manager?

TULL: Something like that.

Q: You were in the Navy. Did you do overseas service on a ship, or were you in the States?

TULL: I was in an enlisted air rating for four years, so I did more flying and flying-related work than I did aboard ship. I was at various training facilities here from Feb. through Dec. 1951, served about a year and a half overseas, and then was assigned in the San Francisco Bay area until my discharge in early 1955.

Q: Then you came back and finished at the University of Colorado in Boulder?

TULL: Yes, first I finished my undergraduate degree in political science and then, having plenty of GI (Government Issue) bill left, I completed my masters. I think it was in late 1956 just before I received my bachelors that I took both the Foreign Service written and oral exams at the old federal courthouse in Denver.

Q: And you passed them the first time?

TULL: Yes, and entered the Service just after receiving my masters in April, 1958 with about twenty-five others.

Q: You did your initial training at the Foreign Service Institute, then located in the underground garage of the Arlington Towers apartment building in Rosslyn.

TULL: Yes, I was a language-probationer so I did the regular, four-month Spanish language course there after the A-100 course, and then early-morning language studies for about a year. At that time, the State Department was short on travel and housing funds so all of my class was assigned to jobs in Washington. I was very lucky to be assigned to the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs as its junior post management officer for South America. We had to back-stop about twenty posts and it was excellent management training. I learned that Foreign Service administration could be a very useful and valuable tool, rather than something to be shunned and avoided- an excellent first lesson for any new officer. I stayed there until mid-1960.

Q: Then you went off to our small consulate in Cali, Columbia as a vice consul.

TULL: Yes, three officers, one American secretary, and seven Colombian staff. It was an excellent little post in a beautiful city. Years later when I was DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in Bogota, we wanted to go back to Cali to visit friends, but unfortunately because of the drug-related security problems in that area, our RSO (Regional Security Officer) simply would not permit it.

Q: The consulate in Cali was closed at some point.

TULL: Yes, both Cali and Medellin were closed in the 1970s and still have not reopened because of the narco-guerilla security problem.

Q: But at the time you were there in the early 1960s, you probably did both consular and administrative work.

TULL: Yes, and quite a bit of commercial work too. The all-around nature of the work was nearly ideal for a new officer at his first post. Jack Ohmans was our consul and officer in charge; Harrison Sherwood was the other vice consul during my tour. We had a good sized AID (Agency for International Development) program headquartered in Cali which ran our education effort for the whole country, and a small USIS (United States Information Service) operation, too.

Q: Shortly after you arrived in Colombia, John F. Kennedy was elected president. He placed a lot of emphasis on Latin America.

TULL: He visited Colombia about midway through my tour and I was fortunate enough to get called up to Bogota to work for our DCM, Henry Dearborn, who was control officer for the visit. I worked for Henry for about a month prior.

Q: A presidential visit at any time can be both exciting and demanding. Did you stay through the visit?

TULL: Yes, until wheels up and for a couple more days of dismantling things. You're right, it was really demanding on all the staff, but heady too. It was my first glimpse at the effect of presidential power on any event and it was well beyond impressive. We were never short of anything we needed and there was usually six of everything instead of just one.

Q: The announcement of the "Alliance for Progress" was actually made in Bogota?

TULL: My memory might be faulty, but I recall he announced it during a speech at a new workers suburb we were building which the Colombians named, "Barrio Kennedy." Of course a number of months earlier, he had announced the formation of the Peace Corps. I think because of his visit, Colombia (and luckily for us) and the Cali area received the

first group of volunteers assigned anywhere in Latin America, “Colombia One.” A superb but overtrained group of young people who badly wanted work, not more preparation!

Q: In your notes, you reminded me that while you were in Cali, there was something going on called “la violencia.” What was that? What, if any, experience did you personally have with it?

TULL: For many years there had been a history of spasmodic violence and bloodshed between the adherents of the Liberal and Conservative Parties in Colombia. Finally, in Bogota in mid-1948, the very popular Liberal leader (and possible president) Jorge Eliecer Gaitán was assassinated. The country simply blew up. Over the next decade and a half, a quarter million or more men, women, and children were slaughtered in waves of violence that touched nearly every family in the country. This went on until both the Liberals and Conservatives agreed to rotate the presidency of the country between the two parties for a fifteen-year cooling off period. The first president appointed under this scheme was a Liberal newspaperman, Dr. Alberto Lleras Camargo, who was also a very wise and wily politician. He really held the country together and was finishing his term when I arrived. By that time the political violence was dying out but being replaced by an equally bloody siege of banditry and murder particularly in the rural countryside. Many of the best known bandits had nicknames, such as “La Mosca” (The Fly) and “Sangre Negra” (Black Blood.)

When we got to Bogota years later, the GOC (Government of Colombia) was heavily engaged in battles against several terrorist groups, of which the largest was the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.) Its senior leader was one Manuel Marulanda whose name struck a distant but familiar note to me. It took me several months to remember that during my Cali tour, he had been just another bloodthirsty bandit named, “Tiro Fijo” (Sure Shot) sneaking about the countryside, stealing coffee and murdering peasants. But now he was Don Manuel Marulanda, a very respected guerilla leader. Time flies.

Q: So the violence was subsiding during the time you were there.

TULL: Yes, but it was still dangerous in the countryside after dark and possibly fatal if you were accidentally caught in it.

Q: But in the city of Cali, day-to-day, normal activity was friendly.

TULL: Absolutely. Cali was a lovely city of about 700,000, 3,000 feet up in the Cauca Valley not far off the equator. It had a dry and temperate climate, almost spring-like all year around. It was one of the nicest climates we’ve ever experienced.

Q: Anything else we should say about this first assignment in Colombia?

TULL: No, except the work I did for Henry Dearborn prior to the Kennedy visit got me my next job in London.

Q: How did that happen?

TULL: Shortly before the end of my tour, a representative from personnel in the Department visited Bogota. Among the things he mentioned to Henry was that he was looking for some officer with staff experience to replace Jackson Smith as staff aide, the junior of two such jobs, in the ambassador's office. Smith wanted the junior political position then vacant to Bogota, but London would not let him go until PER (Personnel) could find a replacement. Dearborn replied that by coincidence, he happened to know of such an officer ready to go in Cali, and that's how my transfer happened.

Q: Colombia to London. So you became a staff assistant to Ambassador David Bruce, already by that time a highly respected and strong figure in American diplomacy.

TULL: And one of the most interesting persons I have ever known. He had this long period of both private and public service in Great Britain that went back many years and a host of close friendships from that service. Prior to World War II, he had headed the Red Cross for western Europe; during the war he was in charge of OSS (Office of Strategic Services) operations in western Europe; he knew the royal family and the Queen from the time she was a young girl; then-Prime Minister MacMillan had been a war-time colleague- it had been "Major MacMillan and Colonel Bruce"- and many other acquaintanceships at the top and bottom of British society which gave him an unusual entre into it. For the USG (United States Government), he had already served as a Marshall Plan representative and ambassador to France, West Germany, and Italy.

Q: You worked directly for him the whole time you were in London?

TULL: No, Al Wells was the senior of the two staffers- he had already worked for the ambassador in both Bonn and Paris. He worked full time for Ambassador Bruce while I split my time between him and the DCM, first Lewis Jones and then Phil Kaiser.

Q: Al Wells is the husband of Melissa Wells, several times an ambassador. At that time, was she an economic-commercial officer in London?

TULL: No, she was in Port of Spain as I recall. Later she was transferred to Paris in the economic section and after Al retired, to London.

Q: Why don't you discuss some of the policy issues you saw in London?

TULL: I made a note about "Skybolt" as that was the main problem and policy issue we had with the British when I arrived in February 1963. Skybolt was an air-to-air missile we were developing with the British. They were enthusiastic about it as it promised to add years to the operational life of some of their aging U.S.-built air fleet, plus be a major weapons system on a new, all-British first line fighter-bomber, the TSR-2, then on the drawing board. Our enthusiasm, however, was on the wane as development costs climbed higher while problems continued to mount with the weapon's guidance system. Finally,

Secretary of Defense McNamara and his Whiz Kids team announced that Skybolt development was canceled. The British were devastated. Not only were their hopes dashed, but they felt they had not been consulted on a project in which they had been partners. Later on, they also felt forced to cancel their TSR-2 plans and believed we had unilaterally left them high and dry. This caused a tremendous dustup in the UK (United Kingdom.) And President Kennedy was also upset, this coming soon after the strong criticism he suffered following the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba.

Q: What was finally done about it?

TULL: There was a lot of hand holding and quiet apologizing. The president invited the prime minister and his cabinet to a summit meeting in Bermuda where joint defense policy and how to manage it was the main topic. For my first six months or so, the ambassador was fully engaged in calming things down and soothing bruised feelings-tasks at which he was superb. But then Kennedy was killed- a stunning blow for the British as well as ourselves. We were much involved in all of the ceremonies of remembrance and mourning that were held there.

Q: They felt very close to President Kennedy. Was this partly because of his father or more for what the president represented?

TULL: His father was never popular there because as ambassador in 1940-41, he had been very skeptical of the British ability to survive Hitler's onslaught. I think the president was attractive to them for many of the same reasons he was to us: superbly intelligent and prepared as a leader, personally attractive, witty, quick on his feet and personable. Their sense of loss was nearly as deep as our own. But all in all, it was an exciting time to be in London: economically, things were excellent with Prime Minister MacMillan, called "SuperMac" by a grateful public; his Conservative Party appeared firmly in control of the government; in the pop music world, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones arrived on the scene; Mary Quant ruled British fashions while in the cultural area, John Osborne was leading a new wave of writers and playwrights. Unfortunately, however, a new, major sex scandal also arrived, headed by HMG's (Her Majesty's Government) minister for the army, John Profumo, who then committed the truly unforgivable sin of lying about it to the House of Commons. MacMillan and his cabinet soon resigned and although replaced by another Conservative regime, national elections were shortly called and the Labour Party of Harold Wilson won a substantial majority. All of this in the space of less than two short years.

Q: Was David Bruce on good terms with the Labour government?

TULL: Unsurprisingly, yes. As a matter of fact, before the election when Wilson was shadow prime minister, he occasionally lunched privately with the ambassador at the embassy. Also, our newly-arrived DCM, Phil Kaiser, found that he had been college mates at Oxford with Wilson's new minister of defense, Denis Healey, Foreign Secretary George Brown, and several other key Labor officials. So we did not lose a beat in the contact area- to be expected, I guess, given the ambassador's span on acquaintances

across political, economic, clerical, and press and broadcast lines. However, the Labor government became increasingly critical of our role in Vietnam and its relationship with Lyndon Johnson, which was cool at best. At one point early in 1965 Wilson was returning from a visit to the far east and we picked up that he planned a very critical speech upon his arrival. The foreign secretary by coincidence was due for an official visit to Washington a few days later. I was awakened in the middle of the night with a personal message from the secretary telling Foreign Secretary Brown that if the prime minister made that speech, the secretary would definitely not find it “convenient” to receive Brown as planned. Wilson thought better of those remarks.

Q: Did you have a visitors office at the embassy or did you have to do all of that?

TULL: Fortunately for me, we had probably the best organized and most efficient person I have ever had the pleasure of working with in the person of Miss Joan Auten to run our busy visitors operation. She ran it with precision and a level of contacts probably no one outside the ambassador possessed. For instance, she had “holds” on a half a dozen seats on every U.S. carrier flight out of London which she kept until about forty-five minutes before flight time. Ohio Congressman Wayne Hays was the scourge of Foreign Service administrative sections around the world, but he always gave Joan plenty of advance notice prior to arriving and stepped very lightly around her while visiting.

Q: Winston Churchill also died while you were in London, didn't he?

TULL: Yes, in 1965 as I recall. He was by that time quite old and afflicted almost permanently with a depression he had suffered from for much of his life that he called his “black dog.” He did, however, get a brief lift when Congress voted to declare him an American citizen and Ambassador Bruce delivered to him “Honorary United States Passport No. 1.” But a short time later he passed away, quietly in his sleep.

Nevertheless, even death could not catch Sir Winston off guard. A number of years before, Churchill had planned his own funeral in meticulous detail and named it “Operation Hope Not.” When the time arrived, all was in readiness. The ceremonies involved everyone from the Queen down and lasted all day. At last a caisson towed by Royal Navy enlisted men arrived with his casket at the Tower of London, to be transferred across the Thames and then by train to Blenheim Castle for his burial. As his body was being carried to a waiting river launch, pipers ringing the battlements of the White Tower struck up the Scottish lament, “Will Ye No Come Here Again?” A heart-stopping moment the like of which I’ve not seen since.

Q: Where did you go from London? To your second assignment in Washington?

TULL: Yes, for some work in the field of multilateral diplomacy. I was assigned to Assistant Secretary Joe Sisco’s Bureau of International Organizations in the office of United Nations Political Affairs (UNP.) My boss there was Elizabeth Brown and my particular brief was the then-draft Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Q: That was in 1965. What was the status of the Treaty then?

TULL: It was still in the negotiating stage but quite far along at that point. By the time I finished up in UNP in 1967, I believe it had been signed by all the principals, plus the Outer Space Treaty, too.

Q: Did you go to some of the negotiating sessions?

TULL: No, these were mainly handled on our side by senior negotiators from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) and the legal advisor's office. But our work in UNP was closely tied to ACDA and I did some other delegation work in both New York and Geneva.

Q: Was the United Nations Disarmament Committee (UNDC) still meeting in Geneva at the time?

TULL: No, the UNDC had closed and its duties were being taken up at New York in Committee One, the political committee of the UN General Assembly.

Q: So you were primarily preparing position papers, analysis, and instruction for our delegations?

TULL: Yes, mine was a desk officer position in UNP but for multilateral rather than the usual bilateral, country-to-country affairs. Plus a few odds and ends. For instance, I drafted Justice Arthur Goldberg's remarks for his confirmation hearings as our ambassador to the United Nations and accompanied him to meet with Senator Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Q: And he was confirmed?

TULL: Yes, as he humorously told Joe, "Despite everything Tull could do!"

Q: Say a few words about working for Joe Sisco.

TULL: I admired Joe although there were many who did not. He was tough and could be very demanding, almost to the point of being unfair and rude. He really knew how to make a bureaucracy produce and he drove himself as hard as anyone who worked for him. He also was a whirlwind of activities and ideas. His interplay with my boss, Elizabeth Brown, who headed the UNP office, was fascinating. Elizabeth, who I always felt should have been a chief of mission, was every bit as bright and determined as Joe. When they collided- about once a week- you could read a newspaper from the sparks and fire. But she did not give an inch if she felt she was right and I think Joe respected and even enjoyed that. They were good friends.

Q: They both had very strong backgrounds in the UN. I think then Joe was a Reserve Officer- I don't think he ever served abroad.

TULL: I think you're right. He was often talked about for an ambassadorship but I don't think he was very interested- my guess is that he saw his main opportunities in Washington. Of course, Mrs. Sisco had an outstanding career in her own right.

Q: Yes, she was the vice president of the Woodward and Lothrop department store. I think Joe was also very much involved with and knowledgeable about the Middle East. Was that your recollection?

TULL: I think that might have come later but of course, the Middle East did not loom as large for us then as it does now. Wasn't there also what was called a "Sisco Plan" for settling the Cyprus problem?

Q: Yes, in 1974 and probably to some extent earlier too. But especially in 1974. I think he was under secretary of political affairs by that time. Anything else about this assignment to UNP?

TULL: No, I enjoyed learning a bit about the multilateral side of the house. It was a good tour for me.

Q: IO (International Organizations) has always been a good office in Washington in terms of getting involved in a number of important issues. I wanted to ask you a bit about the relationship between UNP (United Nations Political) and the U.S. (United States) mission to the United Nations (UN); how did the two get along in those days? You noted you drafted Goldberg's confirmation remarks.

TULL: The relationship was no better than it is now- highly competitive for control of our policies and positions. The UN ambassadorship is not a cabinet-level job, whatever President Johnson promised Goldberg, and I think the justice was foolish to give up his seat on the Supreme Court for it.

Q: Where did you go from UNP then?

TULL: Dr. Coby Oliver, a law professor from the University of Pennsylvania, was a non-career appointee (and old school teacher friend from Texas) of President Johnson. He had been on the job for a little over a year as assistant secretary for inter-American affairs and his special assistant was transferring. From somewhere, Covey got my name just as I was finishing up in UN political and called me over to talk about this vacancy. I was a bit reluctant- I recalled Ambassador Bruce once saying that while staff jobs could be perfectly good positions on the career ladder in the British Foreign Service, for American officers about one, or a maximum two, were all any career could stand. But I really wanted to get back to Latin America affairs and Johnson (and thus Oliver) appeared to be on his way out due to Vietnam, so I accepted. And that was the way it worked out.

Q: So you went there in 1967 and were special assistant, as opposed to staff assistant, so you didn't have to do quite as much paper shuffling as you had in London.

TULL: Correct, I had a staffer working for me and stayed about a year and a half.

Q: Did you do much traveling with the assistant secretary?

TULL: Some. I went with him several times to Central and South America. At one point, the president wanted the Peruvians to buy F-5's instead of French Mirages, so he gave us a plane and told Covey to go try to convince their president, Fernando Belaunde Terry (unsuccessfully). We also attended some NATO (North Atlantic Trade Organization) and other meetings in Europe.

Q: Did you stay on in ARA (American Republic Affairs) after Oliver left?

TULL: Just briefly. In early 1969, Nick McCausland, the chief of our political section in Montevideo, resigned and Bob Sayre, who had been Covey's deputy, was now ambassador and asked me to take over the section, so that's where we went.

Q: Why don't we talk about your role in the embassy as head of the political section? How many were assigned to the section?

TULL: It was a four-officer section: a chief, a deputy, a junior officer, and a labor officer, plus two American secretaries and one Uruguayan political specialist. At that time, Montevideo was a little Mexico City in the sense that Uruguay was the one country in South America where all the Communist Bloc nations were represented. The Soviets had a huge mission and we believed they operated many regional political programs from there. So our section was fairly good sized while our intelligence offices were several times larger. I served there almost five years with three different station chiefs. On the whole our relationships were pretty good, but there was always heavy competition in political reporting and analysis.

Q: But your main interest was not so much bloc and other embassies and missions, but more Uruguay internal.

TULL: That's right. Uruguay had had a highly developed democracy for a long time so traditional political reporting and all occupied much of our time. The new element was the effect on the political scene of an active urban terrorist group which also targeted us and other missions friendly to the GOU (Government of Uruguay) to some extent. We of course had seen this before- Ambassador John Gordon Mein had been killed several years earlier from some Guatemalan guerrillas who later kidnaped Labor Officer Sean Holly; a Brazilian group had also taken our ambassador, Burke Elbrect, for a time. Now, however, we faced what I believe was the best organized, most determined, and most effective urban terrorist organization thus far in the National Liberation Movement (MLN), also called the Tupamaros after the 17th century Peruvian Indian rebel leader Tupac Amaru.

Q: Were they aiming their effort at the U.S. or mainly at the Uruguayan government?

TULL: Their principal aim was to weaken and eventually bring down the democratically-elected Colorado Party administration of President Jorge Pacheco Areco. Part of that effort was to attack us and other embassies supporting the Pacheco government, such as the British and Brazilian, in the hope that other nations would withdraw their support and put such pressure on the GOU as to further weaken it. The Tupamaros were radical Marxist, almost anarchist at times, in ideology and were convinced that the country's democratic institutions were corrupt to the core. They themselves- doctors, lawyers, writers and others in the arts, university students and the like. They often spoke and wrote- they were prodigious writers and pamphleteers- of the need to awaken the "revolutionary consciousness" of the common people who they viewed as easily led and sheep-like- on occasion they referred to them as "cascariaje" or "floor sweepings." This was definitely not a popular, mass movement. They viewed the Soviet Union as too bourgeois!

Q: You had your family there and had to take certain precautions, I suppose?

TULL: Yes, it was difficult and confining- most of all I think for our single people who didn't have a family group to depend on. After the head of AID's public safety office was killed, we placed guards on all our apartments and houses, but with a bit of difference from the normal- our guards were inside rather than out, because too many outside guards were being attacked by the MLN. Also, unlike their Montenero counterparts in Argentina, the Tupamaros were always careful to avoid attacking or harming children or women. So in order to stretch our limited security money as far as possible, guards were in our homes only when the employee was there- the guard left when the employee did. We did this with eyes wide open but I know we all had some sleepless nights thinking, what about our wives and kids if we guessed wrong?

Q: Was the Tupamaro movement well underway when you arrived, and was it confined mainly to Montevideo?

TULL: Yes, it was underway but had, at that point, limited its attacks to a few non-lethal back robberies and arms thefts from police and military depots. The serious kidnappings and murders did not begin until later in 1969. The MLN, or "Orga" as they liked to call themselves, was classically organized into small, mainly independent cells in a loose hierarchy designed for maximum security and independent action at the lowest risk. There were some cells outside the capital, but even Uruguay's few interior cities of any size were too small to give much cover.

Q: Uruguay was a well established democracy, the so-called "Switzerland of South America." Was the government of that time pretty liberal or weak?

TULL: The short answer is that the administration of Jorge Pacheco was so fearful, weak, and- there's no other word for it- stupid, that it played directly into the Tupamaros' hands by weakening the country's free institution to the point where the military finally took over and democratic government, as MLN had hoped, collapsed. What the Tupamaros

did not realize was that the price of their success would be their ultimate defeat. But there is some necessary history here. Uruguay had been living well for nearly fifty years through two world wars and Korea on ever-increasing prices for its three main exports: meat, wool, and hides. Out of this had come an advanced welfare state supporting a large and pampered middle class. In those days-and for years and years- it really was possible to retire at age forty on a full salary. But in the mid-1950s, world prices for its goods spiraled down, never really to recover. The nation lived on its reserves until they disappeared, but neither the public nor their politics were willing to take the hard steps necessary to cut back and live within their means. Inflation outstripped salaries and living costs, the middle class became impoverished, and all the blame was placed on the "government and the corrupt politician." And I believe from the dinner table conversations of woe by formerly economically well-off middle class parents came the young and embittered Tupamaro youth.

Q: As political section chief, you had lots of contacts in the legislature and the government.

TULL: Yes and on all sides. Uruguayans are usually very open and gregarious, which made it easy to do our work. We even had a couple of very tentative, second-hand contacts with the Tupamaros themselves, but these never came to anything really useful. We all had contacts throughout the administration who were highly intelligent and much to be admired but Pacheco himself, a former boxer and failed politician who took office from a dead-end position as vice president only upon the unexpected death of his popular predecessor. Pacheco could not bear criticism and viewed increasingly harsh and repressive measures as the only acceptable response to MLN attacks. Except for his closest supporters, our contacts could only shrug in resignation.

Q: To what degree did the Tupamaros get support or were influenced from outside Uruguay?

TULL: Ideologically, I think they were the closest to the Maoist Chinese or the Albanians. I believe they did get some material help from the Cubans and maybe some training too. Che Guevara was after all an Argentine who grew up only forty miles away across the Rio de la Plata and at that time, was still a tremendous hero-figure for much of Uruguayan youth. But there was no doubt that this was an indigenous movement.

Q: Before we talk about the election, the military takeover, and the end of the Tupamaros, why don't we discuss the embassy's AID program and the problems that developed out of that?

TULL: Our AID program was not particularly large- in the thirty-five to forty million dollar range of loans- nor did it have any unusual elements for Latin America at that time. We had efforts in the education, health, and agricultural advisory areas, but like many AID groups in the area we also had a public safety program devoted to helping modernize the woeful Uruguayan police.

Dan Mittrioni arrived in Montevideo about the middle of 1969 to take charge of our three-man public safety unit just as murders and assaults by the Tupamaros were on the rise. Originally, he had been chief of police in Richmond, Indiana, and had just completed a public safety tour of duty in Brazil. It did not take long before MLN pamphlets began to appear charging that Dan had been sent to teach the police “torture,” a double irony. First, modern police methods are the antithesis of personal mistreatment and second, it is ludicrous to think that any Latin nation which suffered through the horrors of Spanish colonial administration would have anything to learn from anyone about mistreating opponents. Nevertheless, as the Pacheco regime pressed for more and more hard police measures, even Dan and his fellow officers began to wonder about the viability of their program. Then one day in mid-1970 he was forced from his car, beaten, and hustled away by a dozen or so MLN assailants. Despite a massive manhunt, a few days later, he was found dead on a suburban street, hands wired behind his back and shot four times in the back.

Almost immediately a further wave of violence broke: in short order, Brazilian Consul Gomide and British Ambassador Jackson were both kidnaped and held for over a year; our cultural officer Nate Rosenfeld was beaten by a Tupamaro gang as they kidnap his car-pool mate and our junior economic officer, Gordon Jones, who was pistol-whipped nearly unconscious. Nevertheless, he was able to leap bound and blindfolded from the back of a pickup truck and escaped; and finally an American soils specialist, hardly known to any of us, named Claude Fly, was kidnaped from an Uruguayan agricultural laboratory and held until he suffered a heart attack and nearly died.

Q: Who was Claude Fly and why was he kidnaped by the Tupamaros?

TULL: These were exactly the questions we asked when we heard about it. As it turned out, Fly was not an AID employee or even employed directly by the USG, but had been hired by the Uruguayan ministry of agriculture with funds from an AID agricultural loan. By that time, our security guard was up pretty high. Fly’s office in the country had no protection and the MLN probably realized that one American was about as valuable as another for kidnapping purposes. A number of months after Fly was taken, the only portable electrocardiogram machine in the country suddenly disappeared. The reason for this became clear one night when Fly was delivered to the steps of the British hospital in Montevideo with a full diagnosis of his heart attack and an electrocardiogram record pinned to his jacket! A gift, we thought, from our friends at the university’s faculty of medicine.

Q: So this was full blown crisis management. How was morale at the embassy?

TULL: Of course people were scared and precautions were tight. The ambassador made it clear that no one had to stay and that anyone could seek a transfer without prejudice. A couple of newly arrived single people did, but Dan’s murder made it difficult to bail out. And in the end, we just hunkered down and rode it out. Here I should say a word about Ambassador and Mrs. Adair. They were superb, without peers in this tough spot. Mrs. Adair worked especially hard to set up the residence as the recreational refuge for our

wives and kids, and this proved a wonderful aid to morale. What a lovely pair!

Q: Talk a bit more about the embassy's philosophy and approach in dealing with the kidnap and hostage situations. To what extent at that time were we trying to deal directly or negotiate with the Tupamaros, or were we dealing only with the GOU and/or trying to locate third parties?

TULL: As you can guess, we took our line strictly from Washington and it was a very rigid, "no negotiations/no ransom" approach. But looking back on it, I doubt it really mattered; I saw nothing about the MLN that led me to believe they had the slightest interest in negotiating with us or the Brazilians or the British or any third party. Their fixed aim was to destroy the government and its institutions. Like most radical extreme movements, there was very little flexibility in their goals and objectives, once decided upon.

Q: You mentioned earlier a conservative government, beset by public order problems and relying upon repressive measures to reply. Speak a bit about these and their effect upon civil society, the press, the culture at that particular time- was it still fairly open?

TULL: The Pacheco administration relied almost completely on the limited state of siege measures granted to the executive branch under the Constitution "medidas prontas de seguridad" (fast measures of safety)- for periods of up to ninety days. Although designed to be temporary, President Pacheco, by a rolling series of back-to-back decrees, made them nearly permanent for about three years. Under the Constitution, the Senate and Chamber of Deputies could jointly lift these measures at any time. However, continual partisan battles to prevent any party from gaining an advantage, plus the closeness of the 1971 national elections in which no politician wanted to appear "soft" on terrorism, plus increasing nervousness about the intentions of the military in the face of legislative weakness, all combined to render the legislature impotent in the face of Pacheco's determination. The "medidas" (measures) fell most heavily on tight control of the press and broadcasting, freedom and public protest, as well as causing increasing timidity among the public in the exercise of freedom of speech. Looking back upon it, however, I'm amazed to recall how free we felt, certainly not like eastern Europe.

Q: Talk about the 1971 elections and how the embassy viewed them.

TULL: We- those in my section- at the outset decided with the ambassador's full blessing to go flat out in both Montevideo and the campo to cover every phase, party, and party faction we could. It seemed to us that things were headed for some kind of crossroads and that the elections might be "make or break," though it appeared to be late if democracy were to be saved. There were three main parties at play: the more liberal Colorado Party centered in Montevideo and the country's few other urban areas; the conservative and rural-based Blanco Party, then in opposition; and a new leftist and mainly urban coalition party, the "Frente Amplio" (broad front) composed of a number of different groups including the legal Communist Party, radical labor unions and some student groups plus overt elements of the Tupamaros although not identified openly as such. The leaders of

the “Frente” hoped to wrestle control of the city government of Montevideo from the Colorados who had held it for many years.

Despite the state of siege measures, the contest was very hard fought and wide ranging. Rallies were massive, no verbal quarter was asked nor given and in the end the vote was open, fair, and honest. Unfortunately for the nation, the Colorado faction headed previously by President Pacheco won narrowly and elected a wealthy rancher, Juan Maria Bordaberry, who took office in early 1972 and whose administration proved even less competent than his predecessor. For us the only bright spot was that we had succeeded in calling the election on the nose- Colorado's first in Montevideo, followed by “Frente,” then the Blancos; a Blanco win in the countryside but not enough to make up their urban losses, followed by the Colorados, then the “Frente.” So we got a nice pat on the head from Assistant Secretary John Crimmins- John was a bit bearish and tended to dole out praise in pretty small doses- but things looked bleak for Uruguay.

Q: And that presumably was what the military leaders saw too. Were these the leaders that later took over the government?

TULL: Yes, it was the army's leadership by and large with support from the tiny and ill-equipped Air Force. The navy, the most professional of the three services, initially opposed the coup but could not in the end stand alone.

Q: But the military services did not take action immediately after the election.

TULL: No, the Brazilian and Argentine military were both in power and encouraging particularly the army to move, but it held off for nearly a year until February 1973.

Q: Had there been any history in Uruguay prior to this of military activism?

TULL: No, not for many years, all the way back to the late 19th century. By the time I arrived in 1969, the military services were almost a joke so far as effective organization and command and control were concerned. But by three years later, that certainly was not the case.

Q: Were the Uruguayan military getting a lot of help from us?

TULL: No. We had a small military group, but it was mainly devoted to selling spare parts for the navy's ancient World War II-era destroyers and the Air Force's propeller-driven trainers. I don't recall that we did any sales to the army, certainly not weapons. Most of the outside help was coming from Argentina and Brazil.

Q: And the Uruguayan political leadership was encouraging the military to be firm and strong?

TULL: No, quite to the contrary, they were afraid of the military. They were no fools- they could see, as with their neighbors, that any military move would be at their expense

and personally dangerous for them- and they were right.

Q: To what extent did you, the embassy, and the ambassador see the military takeover coming?

TULL: By the end of 1972, Bordaberry had been in office nearly a year, but it was no secret that the military was becoming increasingly unhappy with his ineffectual regime and was not going to tolerate the Tupamaro situation indefinitely. It was later that month that a middle grade naval officer, presumably on the orders of his bosses, told first our naval attache, then the ambassador and several others of us, that the army would move within ten days. And they did. During the sunny morning hours of the first of February, the army locked the legislative palace and began to empty and shutter the various civilian ministries of the government.

Shops and stores closed, but being Uruguayans and it still being summer, most people headed not for the shelters, but for the city's beaches. President Bordaberry began calling friends and supporters and urging Montevideans via brief radio announcements to rally by his side. By early afternoon, several of us viewing the port from the ambassador's office watched a dramatic scene unfold. Thirty-two years after the German battleship "Graf Spee" had begun its ill-fated charge out of the neutral port of Montevideo, there came boiling down the harbor channel at flank speed the navy's three old destroyers- the ROU (Republic of Uruguay) Artigas, Uruguay, and Montevideo. Reaching the channel mouth near the still visible but scuttled remains of the "Graf Spee," the three swung about and abruptly halted, leveling their guns point-blank on the army vehicles then pouring into the port area they had just left. A gallant but futile gesture.

After a tense, hour-long standoff, cooler heads prevailed and the ships returned quietly to their moorings. Almost dismissively, the army then sent a small body of troops to shoo away the 200 or so supporters gathered at the president's home, while the city's beaches in Pocitos and Carasco remained relaxed and crowded. As the afternoon wore on, the reality of nearly a century of Uruguayan democracy slowly faded- poof!- to a dream. It was all very sad.

Q: You mentioned earlier that after the military takeover, they did have success against the Tupamaros and basically ended that movement.

TULL: They wrapped it up one Sunday several months later, in mid-1973, with a combination of a tragedy, good police work, and a whole fistful of luck. An army colonel happened to be standing with his family outside a church after service when he was shot in a Tupamaro ambush. The army, which had joined a number of police units conducting clandestine surveillance of a dozen or so suspicious houses and buildings, ordered all of them to be immediately hit and everyone arrested.

One in the suburb of Carasco, not far from our home, happened to be the main Tupamaro radio and records center. In fact, the last message logged by the Tupamaro operator was to all cells, warning that a major military-police operation was underway but that its

target was unknown. The military was soon able to arrest senior MLN leader Raul Sendic and several of his top lieutenants. Some of them talked and more were arrested.

By the end of 1973, the “Orga” was effectively destroyed. However, the roll up of the Tupamaros also became the signal for widespread attacks and arrests of people deemed MLN supporters and sympathizers. This was personally tragic as I lost a number of friends and acquaintances: the president of the chamber of deputies, Ernesto Gutierrez Ruiz, was murdered as was Senator Zelmar Michelini, both of the Colorado party; Blanco senator and presidential candidate Wilson Ferreira escaped by launch to Buenos Aires but only narrowly missed an assassin’s bullet there. “Frente” presidential candidate, retired Army General Liber Serengni, was lucky to make it alive to a military prison, while former President Pacheco’s foreign minister and a leading Uruguayan banker suffered broken arms and other injuries during his interrogation.

Q: This was during the Nixon administration. What was the general response of the United States government to the military’s takeover? Was it at all controversial as far as the embassy was concerned?

TULL: The Nixon administration was very supportive of the hard line taken first by Presidents Pacheco and Bordaberry, then later by the Uruguayan military. I left in July 1973, but prior to that time I don’t recall hearing a single negative word out of Washington. As always, the embassy took its official line from Washington but on a private and personal basis I think many of us believed it might have been able, if not to save democracy in Uruguay, at least to have prevented many of the horrors and excesses which took place over the following decade.

Q: Anything else you want to say about this difficult assignment?

TULL: Only a brief PS. Democracy was finally reestablished in Uruguay in July 1985, but its economic situation remains difficult as the country continues to feel the fallout from financial problems in both Argentina and Brazil. The current president, Jorge Batlle, was also an unsuccessful candidate in the 1971 election. He is the grand nephew of the fabled founder of modern Uruguay, Jose Batlle y Ordoñez, who was also a very successful duelist.

Dueling was still legal when I served there and we had several which were set up and run under strict rules by a military court of honor. One of these involved the current president. None during my time were fatal. The leftist coalition, the “Frente Amplio,” still exists with a somewhat different name and a legal, thus far more peaceful, Tupamaro party. The “Frente” has the largest single bloc of members in the Senate which forces the Colorado and Blanco parties to work together- they still don’t like it. And the “Frente” really does expect to win the mayorship and control of the Montevideo city government this time, in the national elections of 2004. Finally, I think nearly five years in this boiling pot got me my next assignment in 1973.

Q: To senior training.

TULL: Yes, I believe Uruguay was enough of an attention-getter in Washington to push my name onto the list of students selected to attend the National War College for the academic year 1973-74.

Q: I usually find with these interviews that I prefer to move fairly quickly over the junior officer training here at the Foreign Service Institute and later at the War Colleges, but I think there is something you ought to say about your year at Fort McNair.

TULL: When our class gathered there in August 1973, among our military classmates were eight very special ones. Until April they had all been POWs (prisoners of war) in Vietnam and had only left the Hanoi Hilton five months earlier. Among this group was then-Lieutenant Commander and now U.S. Senator Johnny McCain who, like the others, saw this year as a chance to recover from some severe injuries. All were in pretty bad physical condition. This would be a difficult year for them in other ways too. Our year happened to coincide with the Watergate investigation and ultimately the resignation of President Nixon, which left them all conflicted. On the one hand, the revelations of wrongdoing and illegalities were perfectly clear to them as to all of us. At the same time, they believed Nixon literally saved their lives- by Christmas 1972, all were at death's door, certain they could not last more than a few weeks. Nixon's decision then to resume the bombing of Hanoi- "Linebacker 2"- had driven the Vietnamese back to the negotiating table and resulted in the POWs release and salvation. McCain said that the first bombs hit late at night, without warning, near the prison and shook it severely. Their cells lit up like mid-day and they all cheered and screamed, certain that we had dropped nuclear weapons on Hanoi, though they would have died from the effects.

The class was naturally reluctant to ask many questions about their imprisonment, though the eight encouraged us to do so. Finally, at the end of the year, they got the commander's approval for a day of special lectures which they gave the title, "Vietnam: A Beginning Assessment."

Q: And they talked about their experiences?

TULL: Not only just those. They all had strong opinions about the way our participation in the Vietnam conflict had been managed both in Washington and in the field. They were very knowledgeable in their criticism and didn't pull any punches.

Q: Did you travel with any of the ex-POWs?

TULL: I elected to take the African trip and I recall that most of them went to the Middle East. You'll recall the 1973 Yom Kippur War had only ended a few months earlier. The night before the Middle East group was due to leave Cairo, President Sadat asked them to delay and meet with him. After meeting in his office the next day, Sadat decided to take the members on a personal tour of the Sinai battlefield, so off they went to the Suez Canal!

Q: To what extent have you kept in touch with your National War College class?

TULL: That particular group, the class of '74, fragmented quickly upon graduation and never has really gotten together again. I see a few of the civilian members every now and again.

Q: And you see John McCain on television.

TULL: Yes, that was a particularly interesting but painful year for him. After he bailed out of his plane, he landed in the Hanoi equivalent of our reflecting pool and broke about every bone on the left side of his body. He claimed his year of therapy in Alexandria with a private physical therapist was more painful than anything his Vietnamese captors thought up, but by July 1974, he was walking without crutch or cane, had gotten back his pilot's status, and was assigned as commander of a fighter squadron in Florida. All of these were men of tremendous will and determination.

Q: This is the second session. Today is June 15, 2001. We were talking last time about your year at the National War College.

Q: Where did you go from Fort McNair?

TULL: I had hoped for an assignment to head the small politico-military affairs office in the Latin American bureau. It seemed fairly logical after Montevideo and the War College. But then Mr. Kissinger's new Global Outlook Policy (GLOP) was announced, apparently aimed at broadening officer expertise by assignments to wholly new fields outside of one's experience. It was clear that this policy had succeeded brilliantly in my own case when I arrived in the Bureau of Personnel.

Q: So you went to the Personnel, but you were still involved with Latin America as head of the assignments branch for that bureau. Anything in particular from that first exposure to personnel?

TULL: Another world with its own arcane rules, but it turned out for the best. I had already begun to think about how to prepare myself for deputy chief of mission jobs, and naturally, keeping a post's vacancies filled, evaluating job needs versus employee skills and counseling officers about their career futures, are all part of a DCM's job. So this was an excellent start for what was to come.

Q: You were there for two years, from 1974-1976. Then what happened?

TULL: I still had two years of Washington duty to finish, and I continued to think about how I could get ready for a management job in the field. So I sought and got the position of deputy in Executive Director Joan Clark's office in the European bureau.

Q: The Executive Office of a regional bureau provides administrative and management support both for the bureau's Washington headquarters and its overseas posts. Joan was a very experienced senior officer and went on to a number of other top jobs.

TULL: Yes, she was an assistant secretary, director general of the Foreign Service, and held several other key positions.

Q: Other than your time in Personnel, was this the first time you had been exposed to budget and other kinds of administrative work?

TULL: Effectively yes. My first tour had been as a post management officer, but at the EUR/EX (European Exchange) level, it was basically all new. Joan was extremely thorough and as a teacher, comprehensive and detailed if not always wholly patient. She simply knew so much more and could do everything so much better than anyone around her.

Q: You started there in the summer of 1976. The Cold War of course was still on and a lot of things were going on in Europe. Were there many problems at that point with the support and backstopping of our embassy in Moscow?

TULL: We and the Soviets were beginning to discuss a potential chancery and residence building program there and of course we had concerns over the potential serious health problems which the Russians might cause by their high voltage bugging and jamming devices. Their continued insistence, as with other bloc nations, on our dealing with their foreign ministry second-hand via a "diplomatic service bureau" greatly complicated our logistical supply program, but this had been going on for many years. Joan left the office on rotation after a year and was replaced by Don Lidel, who I count as a good friend and from whom I learned a great deal, too.

Q: And from EUR/EX you went abroad?

TULL: Yes, Ambassador Robert Yost was just finishing up his tour as a senior inspector and had been named as chief of mission to the Dominican Republic. I had put my name out and was lucky enough to be selected by him as his DCM. I was particularly fortunate as Bob himself had had several DCM-ships- with his experience as senior inspector, I really received comprehensive training in a lot of very basic areas with any No. 2 must have.

Q: He did not have experience or background in Latin American affairs, did he?

TULL: No, he had earlier been our ambassador in Rwanda and had substantial African and European experience.

Q: How did you prepare yourself for this assignment? You had Spanish. Did you go to the DCM course?

TULL: Yes, and it was a very good one- two weeks in the Virginia countryside with nothing else to do but plan and study for the job ahead. I also took some Spanish brush-up. Language does not come easy to me and it had been five years since I left Montevideo.

Q: So you went down to Santo Domingo about the same time as Ambassador Yost?

TULL: Yes, we both arrived in August, 1978, just a few days before Antonio Guzmán Fernández was inaugurated president of the Republic. He was the leader of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, the PRD, with which we had not had a very happy relationship. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson, claiming the country might become “another Cuba” if the PRD succeeded in ousting the existing military government, ordered American forces to intervene. Our 101st Airborne Division fought several pitched battles in the streets of downtown Santo Domingo against determined PRD forces. So I anticipated a touchy “getting to know you” period. But the PRD went forward without a frown or grimace and we got along just fine.

Q: Do you think that this was due to the Carter administration? That it made a difference in terms of their perception of our attitude toward them?

TULL: Absolutely; in fact they had just had a graphic illustration of this. A short time before we were to leave for Santo Domingo, some elements in the Dominican army tried to intervene and halt the election vote count as they had done so many times before. Via the CAS and directly, we really raised unshirted hell about this, the military backed down and the voting proceeded, sealing Guzmán’s victory. I’m certain this blotted out or at least dimmed some of the bitter memories of 1965.

Q: Did we hold back in terms of aid to see what their reactions would be?

TULL: No, the USG already had a fairly substantial AID program up and running when we arrived, and a small military assistance program, too. If anything, these increased in the first year. Then in August 1979, hurricanes “David” and “Frederick” struck within a week of each other. Disaster relief grew enormously, and this went on for another twelve to fifteen months. So we certainly supported them as best we could.

Q: Was there was a great deal of damage from the hurricanes?

TULL: The destruction was tremendous. The “eye” of David passed about twenty miles west of Santo Domingo and both the city and the countryside were devastated. They stopped counting the dead at 2,000- electric power was not returned in Santo Domingo until November, and there were many more months ahead of black-outs in the campo. Winds were 140-150 miles per hour, and stripped the land bare. Our house was on a small rise about a mile or so from the ocean- when David finally moved on, we had a broad ocean view!

Q: What sort of assistance were we giving? Relief or reconstruction?

TULL: While I was there, it was mostly immediate relief – food and medicine initially, then temporary shelter as quickly as we could. The hardship was awful. But there was no looting. When relief supplies started to pile up, our AID director sent two of his drivers out to see if any was reaching the “black market,” if they could purchase any on the street. They never could, not once, and Santo Domingo is a city crowded with poor even in good times.

Q: Besides disaster relief, what other types of things was our AID mission engaged in?

TULL: The same kinds of programs found at any AID mission- basic human need goals: health, education, agricultural assistance, some financial assistance mostly in the form of loans, and maternal child care. As I mentioned, we also had a modest military assistance effort- again, mainly loans and training, no MAP (Military Assistance Program), plus a full array of the other USG agencies which are part of most embassies.

Q: Peace Corps?

TULL: Yes, I recall we had about 100 volunteers, mostly stationed on small agricultural projects in the west near the Haitian border.

Q: Was the border with Haiti closed?

TULL: In a strict sense, no. The ambassador made one trip over and back, but permission signed personally by both presidents had to be obtained first. I don’t know of anyone else who undertook this, but there was a large amount of illegal contraband of all types moving across the border daily.

Q: But there have been times when the border was sealed and almost nothing moved.

TULL: Yes, during frequent periods of tension between the two. There is a long and bloody history between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In 1937, the dictator Trujillo had 17-20,000 Haitian cane cutters massacred for encroaching on the border and in colonial times, Haiti invaded the Dominican Republic twice. Relations were always a little nervous.

Q: The Dominican Republic, in terms of its foreign relations, always looked to the U.S. quite a bit. What sort of relations did it have with Cuba?

TULL: The PRD was a member of the Socialist International (SI) and its secretary general, Jose Francisco Peña Gomez, was head of SI’s Latin American office; so they did have frequent contacts with Cuba, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua at that time, and other parties we were not particularly happy with. Frictions arose from time to time, but these never became a major factor in our relations with the Guzmán government.

Q: You mentioned Trujillo. He left in the early ‘60s prior to the U.S. intervention?

TULL: He left feet first- assassinated in 1961. We had broken relations a year earlier, but maintained consular ties and a consulate general, headed by Henry Dearborn who you'll recall was my DCM in Colombia and had gotten me my job in London. We were very active in the movement to oust Trujillo and in fact, had, via the consulate general, provided the weapons that eventually were used to kill him. I have always felt- and this is strictly personal- that Henry never received the ambassadorship he deserved as neither the Kennedy nor Johnson administrations wanted to expose him in confirmation hearings to questioning about this. It was several years later during hearings that Senator Frank Church held that the full story of our role in Trujillo's death was finally revealed. Even twenty years after his death, when Trujillo's name would come up, Dominicans would all begin to speak in hushed voices and cast furtive glances around.

Q: At the time you were there, there was a large Dominican community in this country. Was there a lot of pressure on the embassy for visas?

TULL: Enormous pressure, every day and at every social function. The early morning crowds on the visa line were huge; one of our busiest consular offices was out fraud unit. We even had a former U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic hustling visas for a group of Chinese and Dominican businessmen. Yost had to call him in and warn him not to use his courtesy diplomatic passport to clear them and their luggage through customs!

Q: Was there a large American community in the Dominican Republic?

TULL: I'd estimate the business community at around 300-400 in Santo Domingo proper, with an Alcoa plant and a number of off-shore textile factories scattered about in the countryside.

Q: Of course, there are a special category of Dominicans that come to the United States: the baseball players.

TULL: And there are a host of these, especially from the small village of San Pedro de Macorís, about thirty miles east of Santo Domingo. In a baseball-mad country, in Macorís they are particularly mad. It is a grubby little town, distinguished only by the mansions which hometown boys now in the Major Leagues build for themselves and their families. The game was introduced by our military during the early days of the 20th century and the Dominican Republic, along with Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and some other Central American countries, have a winter Caribbean League in which some American players and managers participate in our off-season. My team was the "Aguilas," or Eagles, which Tommy Lasorda of Dodger fame managed for a couple of seasons.

Q: Did you have quite a bit of contact with President Guzmán and his top people, or did the ambassador do that himself?

TULL: Early on, we decided to split the contact work as follows: the ambassador would take the president, vice president, cabinet officers, and military chiefs; I would do the

rest. This of course was not “hard and fast” and looking back, I think our convenience played a big role too. I knew the president and his family pretty well and never felt constricted in my work. Guzmán and his PRD group were bright and eager to succeed, although I understand that later on, the old Dominican bugaboo, corruption, really got out of control. Tragically, Guzmán committed suicide a few days before the end of his term because of corruption charges against members of his family.

Q: Where did you go at the end of your tour in Santo Domingo in 1981?

TULL: I left the Dominican Republic in July without an onward assignment. In the course of my consultations in Washington, I ran across Ray Ewing. He had just been named as ambassador to Cyprus and was looking for a DCM. Events took their course.

Q: I should emphasize that I had known you before when you were deputy director in the European bureau's executive office.

TULL: Yes, and during my tour there you had been director of the office of southern European affairs, then deputy assistant secretary in the bureau.

Q: So, we had known each other before. And as someone who had never served as a deputy chief of mission, I thought that I probably ought to have a DCM who knew a little bit about what that job was all about.

TULL: I recall when we first talked about this, I told you, “Ray, I don’t know anything about Cyprus at all.” After all the years you spent on Greece-Turkey-Cyprus problems, you replied something to the effect that you really weren’t looking for another Cyprus expert! So we arrived in Nicosia in September 1981 while Jack Eaves was in charge.

Q: It was October when we arrived. And you did get to know something about Cyprus over the next three years.

TULL: Yes, it was impossible to live and work on that little island for any time and not come to know quite a bit about the “national problem,” as some Greek Cypriots called it. Basically, a serious NATO problem, arising out of the collision of Greek and Turkish national interests which finally resulted in the 1974 Turkish invasion and the division of the island. For me, it was a refreshing issue- at last, I didn’t have to deal with development economics and all its social and political problems which are so central in Latin American countries.

Q: But we still had an AID assistance program although it was an unusual one.

TULL: Really unique in my experience. Partially run by our single economic officer but basically administered by the representative of the UN high commissioner for refugees because he had easy access to both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.

Q: But there was a very strong internal political rationale in the U.S. for the program, as

well as a foreign policy justification in demonstrating our continuing interest in the Cyprus issue.

TULL: True, but I have always felt that the fifteen million dollars which Congress appropriated every year with no request from the Administration was a kind of payoff to powerful Greek lobby groups on the Hill, such as AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Foundation) and others. I recall that while you were on home leave in 1983, we finally succeeded after years of trying, in getting a congressional delegation to come out and see what their fifteen million a year in refugee aid was buying. And it was an important group- Chairman "Doc" Long of Maryland and his house appropriations subcommittee. We took him to several projects in Larnaca which had been constructed with U.S. funds for the Greek Cypriot refugees from the 1974 invasion, including a hospital and housing project. Apartments at the latter were large and well-appointed. Long asked our Greek Cypriot guide what monthly rent was charged on the largest of these; the guide looked surprised and said, "They're for refugees so of course they are free." It was Long's turn to be surprised and several times in the next couple of days he mused about "...those free apartments we built which are a heck of a lot better than the places my constituents in Baltimore live in."

Q: Why don't you mention some of the other significant issues with which we had to deal?

TULL: Of course there was the Fulbright program which Dan Howard, head of USIS, had a major role in guiding. It was, I believe, the only remaining bicomunal activity left on the island, at least one of the very few.

Q: And it was funded under this fifteen million dollar refugee assistance grant – the Cyprus-American Scholarship Program- as well as from the traditional Fulbright program. The two were combined to some extent.

TULL: It was one of those rare occasions when both the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots voluntarily sat down together- on "neutral ground" at the old Ledra Hotel- and actually worked out something with an agreed result. It says something about both communities that the opportunity for scholarships for their children overcame, in this one instance, their mutual suspicions and hatred of each other. But far more important was our work with the special representative of the UN secretary general who was working on behalf of the SYG (Secretary General) to promote a peaceful reuniting of the two communities, separated along the Green Line since the civil war and Turkish invasion of 1974.

Q: Yes, it was Hugo Gobbi, an Argentine from their diplomatic service who had most recently been Argentine ambassador to Spain. I think you knew him well, but you also knew his deputy, Jim Holger.

TULL: Yes, Jim was a Chilean who had left their diplomatic service when General Pinochet took power. He was my opposite number in Ambassador Gobbi's office, so he and I were particularly close. When democracy was re-established in Chile, he resumed

his career and I believe went on to become Chilean ambassador to the Soviet Union.

Q: Shall we also say anything about our relations with the British high commission? We spent a fair amount of time with them, partly because the United Kingdom has a long and special relationship with Cyprus historically, first as its colonial ruler and then with independence as a guarantor power. The United Kingdom also retains two major military sovereign base areas on the southern coast at Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

TULL: I can't recall any other time in my career when we were so close in our working relationship with another mission as we were with High Commissioner John Wilberforce and his deputy David Dain. David and I literally worked out of each other's files and I doubt that either Washington or London had any idea how closely we coordinated and cooperated. And of course it was our exchanges with Hugo and Jim on a very quiet basis which made it all possible.

Q: Can you recall any signs of progress in this dispute that might have taken place in the period that you were there, 1981-1984?

TULL: Sadly, no. I have no information on the current state of play between the two communities, but I doubt that they are any closer today than the day you and I arrived. This was after all a civil war of the most savage and brutal kind, topped by foreign invasion. The leaders now on the scene went through all of that and if it's possible for any of them to forgive, I doubt that a single one can now forget.

Q: Why don't you say a few words about the structure of our embassy in Nicosia? Among other things we had a defense office and attache.

TULL: First of all, it was a very small mission. We had a Greek-language officer who was in charge of the political section plus a Turkish-language officer; a single economic officer and sole consular officer and two Americans in the administrative section, an administrative officer, and general services officer. Our accounting was basically handled by Cypriot employees. I've mentioned we had an American head of USIS. Our largest single American component might have been in the office of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). FBIS is essentially an unclassified radio monitoring service and with Cyprus' position next to the Middle East, it was an important listening post for the USG. And of course our defense attache's office headed at that time by LTC (Lieutenant Colonel) Dick McCall. He had the unenviable task of trying to handle both the Greek and the Turkish languages. His grasp of the latter appeared to cause a bit of mirth among Turkish military officers, but Dick was no fool and made certain that he ended every speech in Turkish with, "And we must never forget the words of the immortal Attaturk, 'Peace at home, peace in the world!'" This invariably evoked cheers and applause.

Q: I think we also ought to mention security. Roger Davies, our ambassador in 1974, had been assassinated and our regional security officer had important responsibilities for the protection of all of us.

TULL: Yes, our security problems were not of the direct kind that I saw at my next two posts, but rather more of an offshore variety. Cyprus had the reputation as a “neutral” area in the Middle East, so all sides seem to show up here. I remember one rumor that had several members of the Japanese Red Army holed up here for awhile!

Q: We also had a small office on the Turkish Cypriot side of Nicosia.

TULL: Yes, we had three Turkish Cypriot employees representing us in that community. They performed some limited consular and information services for us, as well as a large amount of contact and representational duties in their community. The senior of these who was in charge was Doghan Taskan, who set up this small office in the garage behind his home in Nicosia. Doghan knew everyone on the Turkish Cypriot side from “President” Rauf Denktash on down; he was the one we would go to first on any matter involving his community.

Q: He did a daily summary of the Turkish press and worked closely with our Turkish-language political officer at the embassy. He also had one of the few direct telephone connections across the Green Line, which divided the communities.

TULL: Yes. I believe all or most other lines went through Denktash’s office. As an example of the work Doghan did for us, we faced numerous complaints from both the Greek Cypriots and pro-Greek lobby groups at home about alleged enormous poppy fields in the Turkish-controlled area and significant drug activities there. Unfortunately, our DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) officer was of Greek ethnic origin which made contact nearly impossible. But finally after a great deal of delicate negotiation, Doghan succeeded in arranging a meeting for me and the DEA officer with in effect the narcotics control officer of the Turkish army in Cyprus. Our meeting was perfectly friendly and it at least enabled us to assure all concerned that we were in productive contact with the relevant Turkish authorities.

Q: In Cyprus, our narcotics interest was party on the island our also in Lebanon and Greece.

TULL: Cyprus was more important as a potential transshipment point from Syria and the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon than as a growing area. At the time we were there, I don’t believe there was much flowing through, although we always suspected there might be more than we guessed.

Q: When the Israelis invaded Beirut in 1982, there were lots of things that impacted us in Cyprus- the evacuation of the PLO to Tunis, the earlier bombings of our embassy and then the marines, plus the two evacuations of Americans from there, too. What do you recall of that period?

TULL: I don’t think I’ll ever forget how the British reacted to the attack on our marine contingent. Even before we could request it, they had a medical transport plane in Beirut

with doctors and emergency personnel. They loaded it to the gills and brought all the wounded back to the Princess Anne hospital at their Akrotiri sovereign base area. I think all of this happened before our own evacuation to Germany could take place. We lost only one marine from that group. I always felt it was a marvelous thing for them to have done. The evacuations of Americans from Beirut were unusual because they were basically handled in the port of Larnaca by our wives and kids and embassy employees receiving the refugees. And then Larnaca airport or at least a part of it became our helicopter staging area in and out of Beirut when its airport was shut down.

Q: Do you remember much about the arrangements we had to make for those helicopters to move back and forth? It went on for some time.

TULL: Naturally, it could only have been done with the full cooperation of the GOC. But sensitive to their neutral, “non-aligned” status, I recall them making clear to you that it had to be done quietly and without undue attention. And amazingly it was- we had a full ground crew to service our group of about a dozen aircraft under pretty close scrutiny by the Cypriots, and brought it all off without major incident.

Q: One of the things that has developed since we were there is that the current Greek Cypriot president is Glafkos Clerides, who in our time was an opposition leader in the Parliament of some structure and influence, but still on the outs with everyone in the government.

TULL: Interestingly, he was the only Greek Cypriot that I can recall who Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash ever spoke well of. He once told me, “Glafkos is a man I can trust. He is a man of his word and I could work with him.” I don’t think he was, but they do go back a long ways together, to their days as student lawyers at Greys Inn in London. Glafkos, for his part, claimed that Denktash couldn’t hold his beer and that often he would have to carry him back to his digs after a night of pubbing.

Q: You met with Denktash yourself on a number of occasions when I was tied up or away. Why don’t you talk a bit more about your appreciation of him and also how you worked on the Turkish Cypriot side of Cyprus?

TULL: The vice president of Uruguay, a man of Lebanese descent, named Alberto Abdala, is the only politician I have known even remotely similar to Rauf Denktash in cleverness, deviousness, and crafty skills. I was never quite certain of his goals or who he trusted. He was his own party and it was the majority one in his community. With Louis XIV, he too could say, “I am the state.” He had several times been elected president of the Turkish Cypriot community, but he could go no higher, so I never believed he would be a willing partner to anything but the weakest possible confederation of the two communities which he would co-head. Personally, I found him agreeable and affable and delighted with jokes at others expenses.

Much of my official dealings in the north were with Denktash’s “foreign minister,” Kenan Atakol, a youngish, well-schooled, and highly intelligent lawyer who I found

unfailingly friendly and helpful. Another major force in that community was Turkey, with whose ambassador and embassy we enjoyed cordial relations and with whose army of about 35,000 we had little contact.

Q: When Denktash and the Turkish Cypriots declared the independence of their community as the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,” do you recall whether or not that was a surprise for us?

TULL: Yes, there is no way around it, this particular timing was a surprise. We had no advance warning of any kind, although it was a move Denktash had been threatening for some time, claiming “We might have to do this to be taken seriously by others.” When we told him the USG would not recognize any such “state,” he would shrug and reply, “Well, you refused to recognize Communist China for twenty-five years, but eventually you came around. We are prepared to wait you out, too.”

Q: After that, the United States condemned this action, supported a resolution in the U.S. Security Council deploring it, and discouraged other countries from recognizing it. But on the island of Cyprus, we took the position that nothing had changed.

TULL: And really nothing had. Turkey of course recognized the new “TRNC” (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) while everyone else ignored it; the border across the Green Line reopened within a day, and life went on as before. The Greek Cypriots were naturally very upset and I think they would have liked us to be more so too. But our feeling was that we still had business to do with the Turkish Cypriots and that we also had not given up on Ambassador Gobbi’s intercommunal talks and hopes for some progress toward settlement.

Q: Maybe we should say a few words about our physical facilities and our thinking about a future new building.

TULL: We basically had our main offices and your residence in two decrepit old three-story apartment buildings which were still standing only because they were leaning on each other for support. It was a GSO’s nightmare. Toward the end of our tours, the Kiko Monastery of the Cypriot Orthodox Church agreed to give us a long-term lease on a several-acre olive grove behind their abbey in Nicosia’s western suburb. You remember the lease signing ceremony at your residence. The abbot and his officials each signed, then reached in their cassocks and pulled out a piece of a seal- I recall it was in seven pieces. The abbot then put them together in some kind of a screw handle, inked and sealed the document, then unscrewed the pieces, and returned each to its owner. I take it this made the lease legal in the sight of God as well as man!

Q: Anything else about Cyprus? You enjoyed your time there?

TULL: Very much so. It was one of our most comfortable and enjoyable tours.

Q: And you learned a lot more about the Cyprus issue and intercommunal negotiations

there than you ever probably expected to.

TULL: Yes indeed, but there was sadness, too. I wish we, or someone, could somehow do more to help them reunite than we've found possible so far. But the horrors of civil war won't fade for many years- some, it seems, are trying to prevent this from ever happening. You'll recall the priest who headed the Greek Cypriot refugee organization, Papa Cristophoru. He never lost an opportunity to keep the bloody wounds of remembrance open and flowing among those in his community who had lost family or loved ones; for his part, Denktash never failed to encourage visitors to stop by a small house near his office which had been converted into something called "The Museum of Savagery." There one sad large black and white atrocity photos of Turkish Cypriot babies bayoneted and torn to shreds, women grossly abused and murdered, and piles of males machine gunned and butchered. That remains an enormous impediment to any reunion of the Cypriots.

Q: Where did you go from Cyprus?

TULL: To Bogota, back to Colombia but this time as DCM. Our ambassador there was Lewis Tambs, a professor of Latin American history at Arizona State University in Phoenix who had been active in the Republican party and appointed by President Reagan about two years earlier. His deputy was Alec Watson, who had just been named ambassador to Brazil. We did not know each other, but Tambs selected me and we arrived in Bogota in July, 1984. In the twenty years since we left Colombia, two major new issues had arisen: the first was the rise of the leftist guerrilla groups from a scattering of ex-bandits and disaffected university youths to well-organized and armed rural militia of several thousand whose skilled leadership usually enabled them to emerge the winner in any of their frequent firefights with the police or Colombian army units; the second was the even more spectacular rise of the major drug lords such as Pablo Escobar and Carlos Lederer and their international narcotics cartels. Worse still, about the time we arrived, a symbiotic relationship was developing between the two, with the guerrillas providing protection for drug laboratories while Escobar and his like paid huge sums of money which bought them arms and equipment.

In Washington, too, the "War on Drugs" was in full bloom and focused on Colombia as the main supplier of illegal narcotics to this country. For his part, Ambassador Tambs was determined not to fall prey to the intimidation the drug dealers had used so successfully against their foes- rather, on every available public and private occasion, he attacked them head on and personally. In speeches and the media, he condemned their ruthless and bloodthirsty ways, he ridiculed their attempts to appear "friends of the poor" by sponsoring youth clubs and building soccer fields, and he demanded their extradition to the U.S. to face persecution and "hard time" federal imprisonment.

Q: Were there threats against Ambassador Tambs?

TULL: Yes, from DEA, police, and military sources we received almost daily warnings of attempts against him. Terrorists- "narco-guerrillas" was the term he coined for them-

set one bomb off near his residence and a large car bomb next to the embassy, fortunately without injuries to embassy personnel, but as all too usual in these cases, with the death of one lady waiting outside the embassy for a visa.

Q: Were we giving the Colombian government a lot of support and help then?

TULL: By that time we were doing a lot of intelligence coordination and cooperation; material support especially for the police and Army was on the rise. Years earlier, the government had decided it really did not need an assistance program of any kind, so this had to be rebuilt from zero. But, in addition, I personally believe that the ambassador's strong, "outfront" approach helped a great deal. Until then, the narcos had the upper hand in the sense of appearing unbeatable. He took them on fearlessly and even over the short time I was there, I could see a stiffening of spine in the police, the ministry of justice, parts of the media, and in the presidency. Certainly President Belisario Betanour, who became a good friend of Tambs, changed from a fairly wishy-washy figure on this issue to one who led the fight for the first successful extradition of one of Escobar's top lieutenants in the Medellin cartel. But it was a dangerous tactic and ultimately his security situation became so difficult that Washington ordered him and his family back to the States in December, 1984.

Q: You were in charge of the embassy from that point until you left the following summer. Were there a lot of threats against you? You had less visibility.

TULL: I can't say that I was ever targeted personally in the way the ambassador was. But as we learned in Montevideo with soils specialist Claude Fly, the kidnaping or murder of one American can cause about as much difficulty as another, so we took very careful precautions. Still today, when I'm driving and hear a motorcycle pulling up behind me, I take a pretty close look. That was a standard assassination method in Colombia- a masked shooter on the back of a motorbike.

Q: Were your wives and families able to stay on there?

TULL: Only those without dependent children. Shortly after the ambassador left, DEA picked up some intelligence to the effect that the narcos, frustrated by our security measures and armed personnel convoys, were beginning to discuss plans to attack the Abraham Lincoln International school, which most of our children attended, and take hostages. I knew we must head off any possibility of that, so over the 1964-645 Christmas break, we very quietly moved the kids back to the U.S. as well as any parents who wanted to accompany them. At the same time, I was glad some wives and "babes-in-arms" mothers decided to stay on- I remembered from our time in Cyprus that a whole- sale Beirut style evacuation of dependents can result in a lot of morale problems. I thought if we could keep at least a semblance of community life, it would be easier on all; it seemed to have turned out that way.

Q: The DEA was an important part of the embassy staff. Were they kind of off on their own?

TULL: When I arrived, they had offices across the street from the chancery. But after the car bomb, others in their building grew so nervous about them being there that we decided it best to move them into our spaces, so we reconfigured the vacant garage into offices. And you're 100% right, they were a vital part of the embassy and it was a very dangerous assignment for the dozen or so agents stationed there.

Q: Anything else about Colombia?

TULL: Only to say that despite it all, we still were able to keep all the usual activities which were important to both Colombia and the U.S. moving along at a pretty normal pace, especially in the trade and commercial areas. The embassy staff was a very strong and resilient group, the kind one needs close by in such situations. Even when we had to send a third of them home, the remainder never missed a beat. Afterwards, Tambs always referred to them as "Los Valientes," the Brave Ones.

Q: You left Bogota after only a year because Ambassador Tambs asked you to accompany him to Costa Rica, again as his DCM.

TULL: Yes, I had thought that his leave of absence was nearly over and that he would be returning to Arizona State- it was important for him to retain tenure there as someone with a large family and fairly modest means. However, the Reagan administration wanted him in Central America so he was given an extension and he asked us to come with him.

Q: Then you must have had a good relationship in Colombia.

TULL: Very much so. He and his wife Phyllis remain two of our closest friends.

Q: There were a lot of things going on with regard to Costa Rica and neighboring Nicaragua at that time.

TULL: Yes and most of these had to do with our support for the Contra forces which went on until the fall of 1986. I should say at the outset that the names and programs involved in this- once very highly classified- are now in the public record, so I'm breaking no confidences. We arrived in San Jose directly from Bogota in early July, 1985, followed by the ambassador and his family about a month later. Within a day or two, he summoned Joe Fernandez, our station chief, LTC John Lent, our Army attache who had just arrived from Nicaragua, and me, to his home. He said at one of his final briefings at the White House, LTC Oliver North of the National Security counsel had told him to give high priority in Costa Rica to finding ways to support the armed opposition group, the "Contras," then fighting the communist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Tambs also said this instruction was repeated to him by his assistant secretary, Elliot Abrams, at the State Department.

We had been sending assistance of all kinds to the Contras since 1981, but in mid-1984, congressional opposition had resulted in the Boland Amendment to the Foreign

Assistance Act, which in effect made such aid illegal. The ambassador went on to say that opposition to Contra aid in Congress was very strong and that we therefore had to hold this instruction and any actions we took from it very closely. Even then he expected leaks and a firestorm of criticism to occur- therefore knowledge of this was restricted to the four of us to protect other embassy employees when the inevitable occurred.

At that time, the Costa Rican government of President Alberto Monge was in an uproar over Sandinista military incursions into northern Costa Rica and the deaths of several of their policemen. There were no Contra effectives inside the southern part of Nicaragua then, nor did we have any support programs except for debriefing stations for fleeing Nicaraguan dissidents and troops. I did not realize then that it was Washington's intention to retain all initiative and control of USG aid to the Contras tightly in its own hands.

Q: So they in effect were running the whole show. You mentioned the NSC and State- where else was this control lodged?

TULL: Operationally, almost everything went in and out of the agency's Central American task force headed by Allen Fiers. For us, north, Abrams and Fiers were central, the "Anillo" (the ring) we called them. Of course others were involved too- the president even proclaimed himself a "Contra" at one point; bud McFarlane as NSC director, later Admiral John Poindexter, Richard Armitage at defense, Otto Reich of Abrams' office of public policy at State, retired Air Force General Secord, and others. But for us it was these three. Because we never knew for certain which of our visitors knew what, we never could volunteer any briefings ourselves. This led to some awkward moments- for instance, our Foreign Service inspectors arrived but never had a clue as to our principal substantive effort; NSC (National Security Council) members from outside North's staff clearly knew things were happening but not what and we stayed mute; congressional staffers regularly visited with questions we would not answer; and, most painful to me, even Ambassador Phil Habib, who the president had appointed as his special envoy to Central America, visited San Jose and other capitals often but obviously had never been brought into the core of things by Washington. It was difficult.

Q: And what kinds of things were going on while you were there?

TULL: First, it is important to keep in mind that most Contra activity and therefore support was going on along the Honduran border with northern Nicaragua. There, one could talk about thousands of Contras; in southern Nicaragua, the Contra forces of Pedro Chamorro at no time numbered above a few hundred. They were, however, closer to Managua and in the area of the vital Managua-Blue Fields port supply line. Our first effort was to try to reopen a disused airfield in northern rural Costa Rica for use as an emergency refueling site for charter aircraft making airdrops of food and supplies to Chamorro's small forces. We also were involved in Washington's plans for a communications intercept and eavesdropping facility to be jointly manned with Costa Rican intelligence personnel, naturally directed at Nicaragua. Plus we shipped medicine, food, and supplies to southern Contra forces whenever we could.

Q: Let's talk a bit more about the embassy's relationship with Oscar Arias and the political climate in Costa Rica. It's a unique country with no military forces and such.

TULL: Costa Rica indeed has a unique history in this area. It was settled not by gold seekers or treasure hunters, but by Spanish farmers who brought their families with them to live and work. The region also was quite isolated and difficult to get to, so it grew up nearly self-governing from its beginning and was really not part of the Spanish colonial administration which so influenced the rest of the countries of this region. "Ticos," as they call themselves, are rather proud of the fact that their independence simply arrived in the mail when the rest of Central America broke free; until then they hadn't noticed. So the "Ticos" emerged as a hard working, successful people with a considerable history of self government and a special pride in what they had been able to build and accomplish, particularly when they saw the mess their neighbors had made of their own histories and countries. Unfortunately, they are also convinced that they have important lessons to teach others in the arts of living peacefully and conflict resolution.

In my experience, even more than Argentina, Costa Rica is a country whose people are almost universally afflicted with the sin of overwhelming pride. Oscar Arias is in this regard, for me, the archetypical symbol of Costa Rican hubris. He was elected president to replace Monge in early 1975. He did not like our military aid to the Contras and the resulting mini-war, and was firmly convinced that he and other democratically-elected Central American presidents could exert sufficient moral pressure and suasion on the Sandinistas to force them to accept a democratic path. He was absolutely convinced he was right, the Reagan administration was wrong, and he never hesitated to so inform us or his visitors. Of course he was a hit with the president's congressional critics such as democratic Senator Dodd and House Whip Bonnior. It became a bit of a straddle for us, with Arias moralizing in one ear and Washington complaining about it in the other. At the same time, our relations with the GOCR (Government Of Costa Rica) remained good- we had a large and effective AID program, excellent USIS cultural and information programs, good commercial relations, and a host of American businessmen and retirees who were very happy to be there.

Q: So the mission was able to do a lot of things while a few of you were involved with Nicaragua?

TULL: Yes, we did get threats and one bomb exploding across from the embassy; we also had a cadre of young Costa Ricans who had been given commando and terrorist training in both Nicaragua and the Soviet Union- not a 100% friendly climate but we got along pretty well.

Q: I have to ask you whether or not Colonel North came down to Costa Rica.

TULL: Yes, but not frequently- twice, that I recall. CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) Director Casey also made a brief, low-key visit in his C-5 aircraft that seemed to take up a large part of San Jose's international airport; McFarlane also came through, as did Admiral Poindexter just before the Iran-Contra crisis broke, to exhort us all to keep up

the good work and assure us that Washington was fully behind us.

Q: And then the storm broke-

TULL: Yes, on November twenty-fifth, 1985, the attorney general announced that we had indeed sold arms to Iran after all, and that we had used those monies, in part, to finance assistance to the Contras. What a bombshell! The source of Contra funding was perhaps a bigger shock to us than to anyone else- we thought we knew all the secrets!

Q: So, let me make certain I know why you were so upset about what flowed from this announcement. Was it being involved in something you knew was not quite right, or was it being abandoned by those you counted on?

TULL: Certainly not the former- I was ready to do more than I was called upon to do. The Boland amendments never caused me a moment of concern- since all the controls were in the hands of Washington, I considered it to be Washington's problem, not the field's. But the abandonment which occurred over the next few months hurt. This is why the word "betrayal" comes to mind occasionally.

Q: How did that happen?

TULL: Of course Meese's announcement set off a terrific hullabaloo with the president's critics crying, "Aha, as we've said all along, they've been breaking the law by aiding the Contras," just as Tambs had predicted earlier. As the controversy rolled on, demands became louder for House and Senate hearings, then the appointment of a special prosecutor, and then possibly fines, suspensions, and even jail time for the guilty.

Q: There were a lot of people at the embassy in San Jose who as you explained were not aware of Contra aid efforts. How did they react when this news broke? Would they have liked to have known what was going on?

TULL: Clearly no, in fact I think most were grateful to use the "deniability" that the ambassador had arranged for them. They were careful not to get crosswise with Abrams' leadership of the Latin American Bureau, and I later heard some stories of animosity at post toward Tambs and me and others. But to continue, as cries for punishment of those responsible became louder, we began to hear mutterings of, "We didn't know anything about that," or "We certainly didn't authorize anything like that" on the part of some- but not all- those in Washington who had been most insistent on retaining absolute control. At that time at the end of December, the ambassador was about to depart to reclaim his tenure ship, having been told to return or lose it. At the airport he predicted, "Jim, you watch- pretty soon they won't even remember our names." I shortly found out just how true this was.

Q: What happened then?

TULL: In February, 1987, Abrams asked me to come back to Washington for a brief

consultation. We met in his office with his deputy, Bill Walker, and for an hour talked about nearly everything except Central America. Finally as we stood to leave, he said, "Well, Jim, this must be a rough time down there," to which I readily agreed. He went on, "I guess out of this has come a real lesson" and wagging his finger at me, continued, "Don't do any more favors for the White House!" This from one of The Ring!

Q: And you were doing favors for the White House.

TULL: Right. The few days I was in Washington I noticed that the word "rogue" seemed to crop up in a number of "insider" newspaper stories, referring to the actions of field personnel and posts in Central America. Anyway, I flew back to San Jose and told my wife to start packing up as I didn't think we'd be there much longer. A month later I received orders to leave. Later, back in the Department, the climate again seemed a little cool in some- but again, not all- quarters. For example, I was asked by staffers on the Senate Intelligence Committee to come by and give some testimony under oath. When I called the legal advisers office for guidance, what I got was brief and to the point: "Tell them everything you know and if you think you need help, hire the best lawyer you can afford."

Q: Anything more to say about what probably was your most challenging and difficult assignment?

TULL: Not much. As the whole Iran-Contra business wore down, grants of immunity and pardons seemed to be passed out fairly freely in Washington, but rarely in the field. A few there were forced out of their agencies and other professional reputations, if not damaged, were at least somewhat clouded. And finally, there was a bit of irony at the end of it all; with the Contras in disarray, the Sandinista regime of Daniel Ortega felt so supremely confident of their power and control in Nicaragua that they decided to confront Arias's criticism of them by calling for free, OAS (Organization of American States)-supervised national elections. They were beaten so badly and clearly that they were forced to step down. So a democratic government took office in Managua and shortly thereafter, Oscar Arias was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace! A decade and a half later, I imagine the words, "I told you so," are still echoing around San Jose.

Q: So you came back for three more years with a Limited Career Extension given to you by Director General George Vest.

TULL: Yes, and once again I went to work for you...

Q: As Deputy Director of the Office of Foreign Service Career Development and Assignments.

TULL: I'm still surprised to recall how large that Division was, nearly 80, as I remember it. I enjoyed this final assignment before retirement and I think it helped that I had had some prior experience in the area. At least I was a little familiar with our "Standard Operating Procedures" manual, about 3" thick I recall, and assignment panel operations.

Our people were great to work with as was, of course, George Vest.

Q: Basically, we tried to make the Foreign Service assignments and counsel system work smoothly. It did not always operate very well in balancing the conflicting desires of the individual and the needs of the Service.

TULL: But I always felt it should have if our 6th and 7th Floor masters would have let it alone. I'm convinced that the key to a successful system of that kind rests on its complete openness and consistency. With those factors, it should have been easy especially since of the 4,000 officers in the Service, we only had to assign about 1,500 per year. Even with all of its then-current faults, we generally had no more than 100 to 150 really difficult placement problems, jobs or unplaceable people, in each annual cycle.

Q: I would say at the time we had some really good people on our panels, doing their best to represent both the posts and the individuals. They were an absolutely essential part of the system.

TULL: And since they knew they too would be returning to that system at the end of their tours, they wanted it to work equitably.

I know the system gets a lot of criticism, but I still believe the answer is to let it alone and insulate it from outside pressures and manipulation which tend to pervert its balance and fairness. But this might be a very unrealistic goal.

Q: That's a good statement to end on.

TULL: Yes, I agree. This has been a good opportunity. Thank you.

End of interview

ADDENDA

My father, James L. Tull, served in the Foreign Service from 1959 until 1990. After his death I set about scanning his work papers. These included some personal correspondence and all of his official assignment and performance evaluations.

It occurred to me that these might make interesting reading for anyone wanting to trace the professional evolution of a Foreign Service Officer from 1959 onwards, when the Foreign Service was a very different creature than it is today. It may be of particular interest for more recent FSO's to read the State Department evaluations during this period.

The records begin with a January 1955 letter from Senator Burke Hickenlooper (R-Iowa) to Elvin J. Ryan, an attorney in Eldora, Iowa and a friend of the family. My father had

broached the idea of a diplomatic career with Ryan, who evidently had asked the senator whether the diplomatic service might be a worthwhile choice. Replied Hickenlooper:

I think this a very fine service and offers a most attractive career for any one who would really like the life. Most of the men and women in the Diplomatic and Foreign Service are fine people, able and dedicated to the service of their country. In the main they do a good job. Unfortunately, a few have gone bad in various ways and these have caused people, who don't know all the circumstances, to question the entire Service.

...

If this young man feels that he would like a life abroad, with only occasional returns to the United States, and that he wanted to dedicate his services to the foreign interest of the country, and if he has the over-all qualifications, then I certainly would recommend his serious consideration of trying to make this career.

At the time of this letter my father was finishing his master's program at the University of Colorado and he subsequently took his oral exams in December 1956. After a few hiccups in the application process (he needed a medical clearance because of a slipped disc) he was appointed in March 1958 "as Foreign Service Reserve Officer pending approval of appointment as Foreign Service Officer." In July 1958 he was commissioned as a "FSO-Class 8, Vice Consul of Career and Secretary in the Diplomatic Service of the USA."

Thus began my father's 40-year Foreign Service career. In 1960 he received his first overseas posting as a vice consul to the three-officer consulate in Cali, Colombia (1960 to 1963). In December 1961 he was temporarily detailed to the embassy in Bogotá for President Kennedy's visit.

His next embassy assignment was in London as staff assistant to Ambassador David K. Bruce. Those three years in England saw such events as the Skybolt Crisis, the Profumo affair, the Kennedy assassination, the election of Harold Wilson, and the death of Winston Churchill.

Returning to the United States in 1965, my father worked in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs' Office of United Nations Political Affairs (IO/UNP) and in 1967 he became special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Covey T. Oliver.

Dad went overseas again in 1969 as the political officer in Montevideo, Uruguay, a position he held until 1973. It was during this difficult assignment that the embassy had to deal with kidnappings and murder by the Tupamaros and the collapse of democratic government in Uruguay.

Upon his return to the United States, my father was assigned to the Office of Personnel (Latin America) from 1974 to 1976 and to European Affairs (EUR/EX) from 1976 to

1978. Prior to leaving Montevideo he was also selected to attend the National War College for the 1973-1974 academic year.

In 1978 my father began almost a decade of service overseas as the DCM at four embassies: the Dominican Republic (1978-1981), Cyprus (1981-1984), Colombia (this time in Bogotá 1984-1985), and Costa Rica (1985-1987).

After his final overseas assignment, he returned to Washington to serve as deputy director of the Office of Foreign Service Career Development and Assignments from 1987 to 1990, before retiring from the Foreign Service in June 1990. He died on March 12, 2011, at his home in Alexandria, Virginia.

Stephen L. Tull, 2024.

These papers can be found at the below links:

[Tull.James.L. 1955-1967](#)

[Tull, James.L. 1968-1981](#)

[Tull, James.L. 1982-1990](#)