

## UPPER VOLTA/BURKINA FASO

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**PARKE D. MASSEY**

**Consul  
Abidjan, Ivory Coast (1957-1958)**

*Parke D. Massey was born in New York in 1920. He graduated from Haverford College with a B.A. and Harvard University with an M.P.A. He also served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946 overseas. After entering the Foreign Service in 1947, Mr. Massey was posted in Mexico City, Genoa, Abidjan, and Germany. While in USAID, he was posted in Nicaragua, Panama, Bolivia, Chile, Haiti, and Uruguay. Mr. Massey was interviewed by Morris Weisz in 1992.*

MASSEY: From then I was transferred after a brief period in Washington for training to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, as the American Consul where I opened the first American Consulate in the Ivory Coast and was responsible for the Ivory Coast and what was then Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. Theoretically because that was still a French colony I was accredited to France and my boss was the American Ambassador in Paris. To the best of my knowledge, he was totally unaware of my existence and I did nothing whatsoever to change that situation.

Q: *You reported directly to Washington without going through Paris?*

MASSEY: I reported directly to Washington with a copy to Dakar and a copy to Paris but without having to go through them and without them having any control over the content of my reporting. In other words, I was a small, independent mission. Three people.

Q: *This would have been in the early 1960s?*

MASSEY: No, this was the late 1950s, 1957 to 1958 approximately.

**THOMAS S. ESTES  
Ambassador  
Upper Volta (1961-1966)**

*Thomas Estes was posted to Greece, Washington, DC, and the Upper Volta as a Foreign Service officer. He was interviewed in 1988 by Ambassador Dwight Dickinson.*

Q: *Absolutely. Well, Tom, did this administrative experience, as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations, lead in some way to you being appointed to Upper Volta?*

ESTES: Oh, I suppose it must have. I'd been assigned to the Senior Seminar in Foreign Policy--the third one. It is something else now--the Executive Seminar, I think. Mr. Carpenter, my immediate boss, had left the Department but had recommended me for that training before he resigned. I welcomed it because I wanted some kind of training on my record while I was in the Department for the third time. It would be my last chance because I had just been promoted to Class I. Right in the middle of my studies John Jova, who later would be Ambassador to the

OAS--Organization of American States, and to Mexico, telephoned me to say that I had to take a French examination. I was outraged. I told him I hadn't been asked to take a test in French since my oral exams. He said, "Tom, don't ask questions, just go take the damn examination." I did but I was quite upset. I felt that I was being treated like a junior Vice Consul. After I took the exam, Aaron Brown...

*Q: You sound upset now!*

ESTES: Well, I was. As I said, Aaron Brown, then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel, called me to his office after I took the exam. He told me that the President had approved my nomination as Ambassador to Upper Volta. I suppose it was at least partly my record as Deputy Assistant Secretary and perhaps my wartime experience that may have led to it. I didn't ask 'how come'--I just expressed my appreciation.

*Q: Well, Tom, you were in Upper Volta for five years. I remember thinking that you were the Permanent Ambassador to Upper Volta. How did you happen to stay so long, and how did you find the time, given my belief that our government isn't very interested in West Africa? It should be, but it isn't.*

ESTES: I think part of it may have been the close personal relationship I established with the President of Upper Volta, Maurice Yameogo--its first president--and partly the Salk vaccine project--or partly because Upper Volta was anti- communist and usually voted with the United States in the United Nations. It was seated between the US and the USSR in the UN and Ambassador Frederick Guirma used to tell me he was seated between two giants.

As I said, the Salk vaccine project may have been a major factor. The Minister of Health had asked if I could help obtain the new Salk vaccine that prevented measles and smallpox. He wanted to vaccinate the children of Upper Volta. About three out of five children between the ages of 1 and 5 died every year during the "cold" season (November-January when night temperatures went down to 50 degrees F.). They would be weakened by the measles or smallpox and then catch pneumonia or some other fatal illness.

*Q: But it also was a Salk?*

ESTES: Dr. Salk also developed the polio vaccine and then this one which had been used successfully in the US. Naturally, I consulted with the Department which let me know it would be my decision if the vaccine were to be used in Upper Volta. After consulting with experts from the World Health Organization, who agreed to undertake the project if it were extended to all of Africa, I agreed provided that the teams doing the vaccinations should include Voltaic, French and American Technicians. If the project worked well in Upper Volta, the other African countries would welcome it. I wanted international representation, especially the French. They came and they used the then new air gun. I remember at the ceremony for the vaccination of the first child, President Yameogo said, "America brings the only kind of guns we want in Africa." About 300,000 children were vaccinated, as I remember it. We had to send for more vaccine. The leftist press called me a poisoner of African babies and wrote that Africa didn't want American poison. We continued the project which proved to be an outstanding success--not a

single child who had been vaccinated died during the next cold season. For the first time the government knew how many children there were in the country. It is interesting to recall that a couple of years later Vice President Nixon represented the US at a ceremony in Ghana marking the 2,500,000th Salk vaccination of a child. Nothing was said about that it was Upper Volta that started the program. Today smallpox and measles are almost unheard of anywhere in the world thanks to Dr. Salk--and Upper Volta.

Recalling your comment on another subject about the Republic of China in the United Nations, the story of how Upper Volta came to recognize that country may be of interest. There was no Chinese representation there then--neither mainland China nor Taiwan. But the Republic of China sent a Charge, Mr. Bernard Joei, and in spite of his best efforts, the president would not receive him. The Department instructed me to assist in any way possible to have the president recognize Mr. Joei. Our Fourth of July reception came along about that time and, of course, the diplomatic corps attended, including Mr. Joei, and President Yameogo came. At an appropriate moment when I had the president alone, I asked (innocently) if he had met the Chinese Charge and beckoned to Mr. Joei to join us. The president gave me a dirty look but then he laughed and shook hands with the Charge. A few days later he was officially recognized. It was good for Upper Volta which received a great deal of aid-- rice planters, medical supplies and, I have reason to believe, some direct financial assistance.

*Q: Well, Tom, you know something? You and I are old friends, as I said, I think, in my introduction. You've left out an important part of that Salk vaccine story. You didn't just get the vaccine that easily. The most interesting part of that story you've left out.*

ESTES: Well, I really didn't have a personal hand in getting it. Once the World Health Organization understood the situation in West Africa based on what could be done in Upper Volta, and that it probably could apply to much of the rest of Africa, there was no problem getting the vaccine. Once I'd made the decision to go for it, the Department backed me up.

*Q: But I thought you had to go to President Kennedy. Where did I get that idea? Is that another story?*

ESTES: That's another story but it fits in here. At the end of my second home leave, Charlie Darlington and I--Charles Darlington who was Ambassador to Gabon, were waiting for appointments with the President to make our farewell calls. He was very busy, of course, and farewell calls are not a high priority. Finally I proposed a two-for-one, both of us at the same time. This found favor and over we went at 9:00 or 9:15 on the morning of November 21, 1963. We had to wait and I played with John-John, the President's son who recently graduated from college. Eventually we were ushered in and welcomed by the President. He sat in his rocker and we sat on a sofa. He presented me with his photograph which he had inscribed. He asked us to tell him what was happening in our countries and Darlington made a brief report on Gabon. Knowing we only had a half hour or so, I reported briefly on the Salk vaccine project. The President sat right up in his chair and pounded his fist on his thigh and asked very sharply: "Why don't I hear about these things? This is the kind of program I want to know about-- the kind of program we should be doing everywhere." I'm not sure I'm quoting him exactly but that was the idea. I told him I could only report to the Department and couldn't get my reports from there to

the White House. He looked at his watch and said, in effect, that he wanted me to stay in Washington until he returned from a trip to Texas and when he returned he wanted me to give him a full report, telegrams, results, future plans, the whole deal. He was really quite upset. Naturally I said I'd stay. He said he was sorry but he had to leave. A photographer was moving around the Oval Office and I have a photo of that occasion on my study wall. I never expected to see it. I went back to the Department to alert AF (Bureau of African Affairs). Some of them did not seem overly happy about it. That, of course, was the highlight of my entire career--not just my assignment to Upper Volta as Ambassador.

As you may recall, President Johnson asked all Chiefs of Mission to remain on duty and he invited President Yameogo to make the first State Visit of his presidency. That is another story. After that, in my fifth year, there was a coup d'etat instigated by the labor unions. They persuaded the Chief of Staff of the Army who had been a Major in the French Army when I arrived to be president. He rose to that rank from a private. With independence he was made Chief of Staff of the Voltaic Army. We were good friends and got along very well, but I thought it was time to end my mission.

*Q: Well, it seems to me that was a long five years. Tom, you haven't mentioned the Peace Corps. As you know, I was in West Africa too, and the Peace Corps was a tremendous asset to us in those small countries as were self-help funds. Did you also have the same experience I had?*

ESTES: I did not have the Peace Corps in my country, nor did I have Marine Guards. Having been a Marine, I had enough troubles without having Marine Guards. But I did negotiate the agreement for the Peace Corps to come to Upper Volta before ending my tour. We did, however, have a Peace Corps- operated language school in Ouagadougou where African youths from all the French-speaking West Africa countries came to learn English during a twelve-week summer course. It was a very, very good school and I had a very high opinion of the Peace Corps people.

**WALTER J. SHERWIN  
USAID Operations Officer  
Ougadougou (1965-1967)**

*Walter J. Sherwin was born in 1931 in Germany and was educated at the University of Wisconsin. He served in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Senegal, Niger and Guinea. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

SHERWIN: It was a very unusual arrangement. As I said, I went into the Foreign Service in July of 1965 and was transferred to Upper Volta as AID operations officer. My boss was Bill Gelabert, the former mission director in Upper Volta who had become the area operations officer, based in Washington. He was responsible for several countries. Later he transferred to some other post, and Harry Petrequin took over. Harry had been director in Madagascar.

*Q: So in this year you left Washington, you joined the Foreign Service, you made a transfer. That was possible at that time?*

SHERWIN: Yes. In the late '50s and early '60s, things were a lot more open for movement and advancement than was the case later.

*Q: Why did you go to Upper Volta?*

SHERWIN: I had visited Upper Volta, Niger and Dahomey while serving on the desk in Washington. I made several field trips to those countries. The first opening occurred in Upper Volta, so that is why I was transferred there.

*Q: What did you find in Upper Volta? What kind of development situation were you faced with?*

SHERWIN: It was a desperately poor country struggling to consolidate its independence and make its way in the world. As in the other francophone countries, we had a rather small program. One project involved a ranch we were trying to carve out in the near-desert area in northeastern Upper Volta at Markoy to raise cattle and restore some of the ground cover in a fenced-in area.

*Q: Was that working?*

SHERWIN: I don't think that project worked out. I was transferred after two years and I really don't know what transpired with that project. We did have a livestock specialist and an agronomist up there and built some facilities. We collected some cattle and raised them on the ranch.

*Q: What kind of project was it? Was it a demonstration project?*

SHERWIN: It was a demonstration project.

*Q: So artificial. It was not a commercial investment kind of thing.*

SHERWIN: No. It was an attempt to demonstrate how to make cattle-raising more feasible and sustainable in a very dry and fragile area where the savanna meets the desert. Other donors, the French, the European Economic Community, were groping for solutions too, to protect the grasses, find water, vaccinate the cattle, improve breeds, provide training to nomadic herdsman. I don't think that any of those efforts had much success in the long run. Too many cattle, repeated droughts, conflict with farmers pushing northward — it was very difficult to strike the right balance.

*Q: What other projects were you working on?*

SHERWIN: There was a health education project, a well-drilling project, and a telecommunications project where we put up telephone poles and laid wire over long stretches, all the way to Niger, as I recall. I devoted a good deal of time to negotiating and overseeing the logistics of a food relief program that was mounted in the wake of a severe drought in 1966 — the first of ever lengthier droughts that would hit West Africa in the late '60s and '70s. We provided 15,000 tons of grain at a cost of \$2.5 million — a tidy sum in those days that far

exceeded our budget for regular development activities.

Another project that took a lot of my time was the Heavy Equipment and Vehicle Maintenance project. Similar projects were mounted in the other countries where we had dropped heavy equipment in '61 or '62, because we discovered that the capacity was not there to keep the equipment running. Repair crews were not well trained, stocks of spare parts ran out, and equipment was deadlined. So, it was decided to send maintenance specialists to train the crews, provide spare parts for repair of deadlined equipment, and improve management and budget systems. But before we would sign on to the agreement to carry out the project in Upper Volta, I insisted that the various ministries consolidate their motor pools into one. It would have been impossible to work with five or six separate shops. The consolidation was resisted, but was finally accepted, and we did create a unified, government-wide motor pool. We then brought in a team of specialists and got the project underway.

*Q: This was heavy equipment.*

SHERWIN: Well, it was basically heavy equipment, but I think smaller vehicles were involved as well. Some of the equipment was so far gone that it was “cannibalized” for good parts that could be used to make other less damaged or less inoperable vehicles usable. Of course, we procured a lot of new parts as well. This project, I think, got off to a reasonably good start, and it continued after I left Upper Volta, but I don't know what the final result was.

*Q: Do you recall a Regional Heavy Equipment Training Center? Was that a spinoff of this?*

SHERWIN: That's right, yes. It was based in Lomé, Togo and we sent people there for training. Other AID posts that had similar projects also sent trainees to the center.

*Q: Other projects?*

SHERWIN: Yes, the smallpox eradication and measles control program was up to full scale in 1966, I think. A pilot measles vaccination campaign had been carried out a couple of years earlier, and a full-scale program was established throughout the region, with CDC providing the technicians. I did some of the negotiating with the regional health organization that was based in Bobo Dioulasso, Upper Volta, called the OCCGE, a French acronym for a regional health organization to fight endemic diseases. The OCCGE served as a sponsor and regional coordinating mechanism. Ultimately, the project resulted in better control of measles and the elimination of smallpox. WHO did a great deal of work on smallpox on a worldwide basis that was well-publicized, but I feel that the U.S. never got full credit for what it accomplished in a good part of Africa.

*Q: It was AID people working in Upper Volta with this.*

SHERWIN: Well, they were from CDC, medical people, who worked through AID under what was called a participating agency service agreement, or PASA, the equivalent of a contract.

*Q: Well, are there any other projects that come to mind that you felt you had a role in?*

SHERWIN: Oh yes, we had an English language training program. It brought people in for English language training from all over West Africa.

*Q: It wasn't just for Upper Volta?*

SHERWIN: No, it was a regional center based in Ouagadougou, and English Language Services was the firm that ran the program. I don't know if they are still in existence. I also carried out a small program under which date palms were imported by air from Niger to Upper Volta. A technician by the name of Lewandowski shepherded that project. He oversaw the planting of the palms near Dori, a town south of Markoy in northeastern Upper Volta.

*Q: Were the palms assigned to farmers or some sort of a plantation or what?*

SHERWIN: As I recall, the date palms were not assigned to individual farmers or to a state farm, but the local authorities and the government ministry concerned were responsible for maintaining them.

*Q: How did you find working with the French?*

SHERWIN: I found working with them really very good. I guess there was resistance at the upper levels of the French Ministry of Cooperation. But working relations were fine with the people at OCCGE and with the head of the French mobile medical teams in the country. In Ouagadougou, we worked very closely with them.

*Q: In the livestock area and English language training and things like this?*

SHERWIN: There I think we had less contact with the French, but we worked closely with them in the health area.

*Q: You say you were involved with this regional office in Washington. How did you find that worked?*

SHERWIN: It really worked pretty well. Of course, we didn't have E-mail or very fast communications in those days, but by the standards of those days we maintained pretty good communications through the use of cables and airgrams, which were written papers transmitted by air pouch, and there were frequent visits from Washington by the area operations officer, first Bill Gelabert and later Harry Petrequin.

*Q: Did you have authority to approve anything?*

SHERWIN: I had to keep Washington informed of anything I was doing of policy significance, but they gave me quite a bit of leeway in the case of the heavy equipment maintenance project. I did the negotiating, kept Washington informed, and didn't have to wait for Washington to take the lead.

*Q: You were operating a small mission although you had to go to Washington for approval for most everything?*

SHERWIN: Yes.

*Q: Did they allow you to get involved with the development strategy?*

SHERWIN: We had to submit our annual program and budget. Whatever long-term strategizing was done took place in Washington. I believe the strategies worked out in those days were much less detailed and analytical than the programming systems installed by AID ten or 20 years later.

*Q: Did you have any staff?*

SHERWIN: I had a secretary and not enough assistants in the office. I had to work 60 hours a week and 6-7 days per week. There was an unbelievable amount of paperwork and numerous big and little things to keep track of. We never had enough staff, and there was too little time for field trips to see what was actually happening on projects outside of the capital. But we had a good batch of technicians on the various projects. I was very pleased with those.

*Q: You were there from what years?*

SHERWIN: I was there from '65 to '67.

**OWEN W. ROBERTS**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Ougadougou (1965-1968)**

*Ambassador Owen W. Roberts was born in Oklahoma in 1924. He received his A.B. from Princeton University and his M.I.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army. Ambassador Roberts entered the Foreign Service in 1955, serving in Egypt, the Congo, Nigeria, Upper Volta, Ethiopia, Gambia, Seychelles, Chad, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.*

ROBERTS: I remember also telling the Nigerian in charge of American affairs that I was reassigned to Upper Volta. And he said, "Oh, yes, the Volga River is one of the most famous rivers in the world, and the Volga is a tremendous part of Russia, and I've always wanted to go there. You'll be very happy in Moscow."

I explained, "No, I'm going to Upper Volta; it's an African country, just one over from you." "Oh," he responded, clearly thinking it a second-class appointment. It's unbelievable now how provincial the English-educated Africans and the French-educated Africans were about each other. They had had very little contact.

*Q: You left Lagos on a direct transfer, then, after a relatively short time there.*

ROBERTS: Well, we were there about a year and a half. I was sent on short notice to Ouagadougou in Upper Volta as DCM.

*Q: Which is now Burkina Faso. Was this a welcome assignment? How did you feel about it?*

ROBERTS: Well, it was very difficult; more difficult than I realized at the time. I learned only en route that the Ambassador in Upper Volta had had a falling out with his DCM, largely because the two wives didn't get along. When the DCM went to South Africa for a month's vacation, the ambassador, Tom Estes, proceeded to get the Department to recall the DCM to Washington and pushed for an immediate replacement. The personnel system offered me the job promotion of DCM if I would go there on direct transfer. The ambassador reportedly wanted to leave shortly on consultation to Washington.

So, on about three day's notice, my wife and I packed up our house and our children, got aboard a U.S. DC-3 that delivered supplies around West Africa, and flew into Ouagadougou. However, when we climbed on the plane at Lagos airport, who should be getting into the plane but the vacationing DCM. We didn't know who he was; Estes hadn't mentioned anything either. The four of us sorted it out as we bumped along in this old DC-3. I repeated what I'd been told, that the ambassador had emphasized that the Department was asking for him on a special, urgent basis, that he had acceded to the Department's wish, and that I was coming up on very short notice.

*Q: Oh, boy.*

ROBERTS: It turned out that Tom Estes was really an agreeable person to work with, but it was only briefly. After we'd been there about two weeks, he went off on consultation/Christmas holiday back to the United States. While he was gone, there was a popular revolt against the Voltan President, Maurice Yaméogo. This was one of the first traditional uprisings against a one-man authoritarian government. It was exceptional as other governmental turnovers had been military, such as Eyadema assassinating Olympio in Togo and taking over.

In this case, Yaméogo had simply affronted his people too much. He'd had affairs with various senior men's wives. Then his own wife, while visiting in Paris, had a well publicized affair with the chauffeur. Most embarrassing, it was being widely carried in the French newspapers. So Yaméogo called her back and banished her. The chauffeur was beaten up and disappeared for good. This was also publicized. The Voltans felt humiliated. It was the last straw.

With no public notice, or apparent organization, they overthrew him as some tribes had always "de-stooled" an unsatisfactory chief. People left their offices, their homes, their businesses, their fields. They plucked green tree branches and walked the streets. There were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs people; there were the Interior Affairs people. The numbers grew and grew during the day and into the night. Yaméogo was isolated in his mansion. Even his staff walked out. Everyone had the word, including the Ministers who had at first been holed up with him in his palace.

*Q: So this wasn't the sort of coup where you're holed up in the embassy.*

ROBERTS: Not in the least.

*Q: So where were you, out on the balcony, watching?*

ROBERTS: Not at all. The mood was restrained and serious. There were occasional shouts, but mostly just the low gabble of a moving crowd. We watched from the curb, shaking hands with those we knew, and they reached out to us. It was a brand-new experience and kind of difficult to assess. The French ambassador, who had been there several years, met with the Voltan government, labor, and school officials and became a political broker. About ten o'clock that night, in the central square, it was announced that Yaméogo was resigning and that Colonel Lamizana, who was head of the army, would be taking over the government.

But in no way was it a military coup. Lamizana was very reluctant to do this. He was a thoroughly professional soldier; I think he had been the secondmost senior African in the French military. He'd served twice in Vietnam and had been a major during World War II, serving at the end in Alsace-Lorraine near my armored division in the Seventh Army. Our reconnaissance unit had had some liaison with the French army, and I had driven up and down the same roads along which Lamizana had been leading his black troops. That became a professional tie. Lamizana later explained to me that the French talked him into doing it because he was the only existing authority. There were no opposition political parties, the labor unions were very small, there was no university, there was no alternative leadership. And so, quite reluctantly, Lamizana became president of Upper Volta.

*Q: Well, what were American interests in Upper Volta at the time?*

ROBERTS: We had no special interests, just the standard ones for small posts: representation, humanitarian aid, reporting, and a small amount of consular and commercial work. Probably the most important representational function is simply being there, acknowledging a small country's existence. What in turn is most important to us is getting support for our positions on international issues, particularly at the United Nations.

A great many things happen at the United Nations other than meetings of the Security Council. All the regulatory agencies are involved there. If Washington is interested in radio wavelengths, because at some particular meeting the U.S. wants to keep its large share of broadcast wavelengths, we must get world votes. And there are a lot of small states with votes, particularly at the United Nations. If you're going to have Geneva Conventions on warfare, if you're going to have major votes on disarmament, if you're going to discuss airline regulations and international flights, if you're going to discuss the plimsoll line on ships, and rights of passage around the world, all these things come up for votes in technical commissions. The small states all vote on these issues, without having much knowledge or interest in many of them. If the US does not have some presence, particularly immediate friendly access to the most senior people, it is not possible to get active support (i.e., instructions sent) by the Foreign Minister or President. The

main job of a small Embassy is delivering votes on a very wide range of international activities in which the U.S. is involved.

*Q: I had one interview with someone who was in Mali trying to get support for our Save-the-Whales resolution in the United Nations, and having to explain what a whale was to somebody in that landlocked place. The Mali official assured him that if a whale ever appeared in the Niger River up that way, he'd do something about it. When you were dealing with these United Nations things, such as the plimsoll line on a ship (I mean, after all, Upper Volta is also landlocked), would they look more to the French, or would they really be interested in what we had to say on these things?*

ROBERTS: It depended greatly on whether we had a presence there. If we were interested enough to have an ambassador, and to recognize them and to accept their ambassador in Washington, they were willing to listen seriously to us. I have been given far more time and support by the leadership of small African states than the Department was able to reciprocate in Washington. It didn't matter how big our Embassy was as long as it was there. You lost much of your influence if you tried to represent the U.S. from a regional Embassy with a visiting officer of whatever rank.

A second factor is being involved even on a small scale with their problems. It made a difference if there was a small AID mission. You would regularly be talking with the government about something that interested them: an agricultural activity, or research into new seed systems, or hopefully arranging to bring in eight or ten really good mechanics on TDY to repair heavy road equipment their Ministry of Transport couldn't fix. Then when you wanted something -- whales, Antarctic rules -- it was not a one-sided relationship. Having a million dollars of AID activities does help create a friendly attitude that opens the doors of top officials.

I also learned that there was an even more fundamental means of effective contact. In a small African country, senior officials are under the strongest ethnic pressure to provide jobs for family and fellow tribesman. Any job -- chauffeur or house guard at American pay and benefit levels -- might mean as much to a Foreign Minister as a US project. We also used rental housing for establishing contacts. Instead of leaving rentals to the administrative section, who generally did business with Greeks or Lebanese for commercial leverage, our front office reviewed available leases in terms of political influence with ministries and officials that mattered to us. We used every small bit of advantage we had, such as jobs and houses, as well as diplomatic presence.

*Q: You had two ambassadors while you were there: first was Tom Estes and then Elliott Skinner. How did these two ambassadors work, both in running the embassy and dealing with the Upper Voltans?*

ROBERTS: They were totally different people. Tom Estes was a straight Midwestern American boy with lots of ability. He rose through the State Department administrative area, managed the contract for the building of the new State Department, did a fine job, and was sent out to Ouagadougou. There wasn't much to do for an active person, so he focused on improving embassy facilities, including wangling a motorboat for the tiny city reservoir/pond. (This is one reason why small embassies tend to get larger: active, capable men often get their first Chief of

Mission posting there.) Estes was straight forward, friendly and eager, but with no finesse. At the airport, with the diplomats lined up to greet the arriving/departing President, Estes would step out of formation, take out his Polaroid camera, focus on the president shaking hands three people up, snap a shot, crank his camera, step back in line, and then when the president came up, hand him a picture. Now that's marvelous Americana. But from an African point of view, their president is as august on formal occasions as ours. In the United States, an ambassador wouldn't step out of the diplomatic line and take a picture of our president as he's coming along to shake hands. So, in a way, Tom Estes was very much himself, but at the same time he didn't appreciate the sensitivities and structure that really exist in an African society. He worked very happily, bouncing back and forth, in and out, and across problem areas. Because he was transparently honest, he was accepted. The Voltans learned something about Americans.

After Yaméogo was overthrown, I served as chargé for several months until the new ambassador, Elliott Skinner arrived. He seemed an excellent choice as he was an anthropologist and had done a very good study on the Mossi people. They were one of the major tribes in Upper Volta and had an oral history going back 1,100 years with a culture that emphasized order, procedure, and seriousness. Skinner was very sensitive to that. He was just the reverse of Tom Estes; in fact, he was more attuned to the Upper Voltans than to Embassy personnel. He was also an American black who had suffered much discrimination, had not lived with whites, and was uncomfortable among them. As, with one exception, the mission was all white, this created problems. He also deeply distrusted women, suspecting them of trying to manage their men's offices from the home front. Finally, he was handicapped by never having had a position of managerial power before. He was just the reverse of Estes.

*Q: Where had he been, at a university?*

ROBERTS: He'd been a professor at Columbia University and had no Washington or general political experience. One of the very first issues that Skinner handled was an AFL/CIO project for a regional public relations/press office in Ouagadougou. The AFL/CIO had chosen Upper Volta as it was central to their West African programs and was relatively cheap. The State Department had approved it and Estes had gotten general Voltan approval. We then got instructions to formalize the agreement to build a small, four-room labor library/public relations place. Skinner asked me if we had questioned the government about their preferences in labor projects or just informed them of the AFL/CIO's proposal. When I replied the latter, he noted that it wasn't a particularly productive or helpful activity for Upper Volta and went to ask the Minister of Labor what he wanted.

The Minister wanted a paramedical clinic for workers. I agreed with Skinner that this was much more suitable than a public relations center, but argued that the AFL/CIO, wanting a propaganda center, had deliberately decided on it for Ouagadougou instead of a practical project, and we had instructions to arrange it for them. Also, the Department regarded the AFL/CIO as a significant political organization group with which it didn't argue much. We, the Embassy, and the Voltans were in comparison minor concerns. Skinner didn't appreciate this, and wanted to know if I supported him or the AFL/CIO. I assured him of my support, and agreed that a clinic was a better project, but that in an argument the Department would back the AFL/CIO rather than a little

African Embassy. Skinner was unconvinced and wrote a cable presenting Voltan wishes and his recommendation.

We had an immediate answer. Wham! "The center has been carefully considered and approved. It is in the broader US interest. Please proceed with previous instructions forthwith." Skinner was dumbfounded. "But I talked with President Johnson; he told me that I represented him, that as Ambassador I was the US spokesman for my post!" It was a real shock to him. It was hard to explain that Ambassadors simultaneously have great power and none at all. It depended on the circumstances.

*Q: Well, this seems typical of problems when an Ambassador has "localitis." It may happen particularly in cases of academicians.*

ROBERTS: Well, I had to respect Skinner's general approach. He made me much more sensitive to the local culture and to the strength of its institutions. A lot of our American colleagues operated blithely in Africa without much appreciation, as Tom Estes had done. Because we had so much power, and because we were bringing in some aid, we often were not chided by our hosts. Skinner went too far the other way, however. He later ended up among the leaders of a black minority group in the African-American Association who held you had to be black to understand Africa and to work there. He was a black racist; it took me a while to appreciate this, and made for difficult working relations.

*Q: Local resentments may have been building up.*

ROBERTS: Over time. But I think the Africans also had to learn that there were countries like the United States and the Soviet Union, for whom Africa was of minor interest and its countries generally of small concern. Under international law all states are equal, and at the UN they all have one vote in the GA, but reality is very different elsewhere.

I remember the Foreign Minister in Upper Volta mentioned once to me that he was on his way to New York, and that President Lamizana had given him a letter to present to President Johnson. I thought to myself, "You know, there is no chance of Upper Volta's Minister getting in to see President Johnson to give him such a letter. Maybe the Secretary of State would see him up at the UN and accept the letter." So I cabled back, suggesting this, and the Department approved. Problem solved. But when I informed the Foreign Minister, he replied: "Oh, but that's not my instructions. Lamizana has given me the letter to give to President Johnson. If you received a letter from your government to give to my President, I would immediately make an interview available for you, as I frequently have, and you would deliver the letter."

I tried to persuade him to accept the compromise, but ultimately had to advise the Department that he was determined on a personal presentation. Secretary Rusk kindly met with him at the UN and offered to deliver the letter to Johnson. But the Minister refused, saying he had asked his Ambassador in Washington to arrange the appointment and it "was in process." So he was going to Washington.

The "process" continued for several days to no avail. Secretary Rusk met with him a second time, but the Minister preferred to return with an undelivered letter rather than not upholding his President's expectation of communicating directly with our President.

When I commiserated with him in Ouagadougou, he said, "Well, I now understand what the relationship between our two countries is. After I met your Secretary of State, I visited the Office of Upper Voltan-American Affairs. As they took me through the building, and I saw all those office doors, and I asked, 'How many doors are there in the State Department?' And they said, 'There are about 6,000.' Then I realized that the Office of Upper Voltan-American Affairs was one of 6,000 offices in your State Department, and, furthermore, there were five other countries listed on the door of that one office." He came back a more experienced man, and our relationship was never the same.

*Q: Well, it was a learning process, particularly as this was in the mid-60s, still the first decade of the real independence movement in Africa.*

ROBERTS: It was particularly difficult with the French speaking Africans. Because of France's continuing "special relationship" with its ex-African colonies, their presidents were given meetings with the French President, and there were frequent African-French meetings at the presidential level. The French Africans expected it would be much the same with us. It wasn't and still isn't.

*Q: Other than the peaceful change of government that happened when you first arrived, were there any other major events in dealing with Upper Volta while you were there?*

ROBERTS: No. There were various droughts but no political or bilateral issues. Perhaps the main development for me was slowly realizing that our main AID project, a demonstration cattle ranch, was being successfully completed but would be a white elephant. I had helped AID with staff and other support problems, but hadn't at first felt responsible for the soundness of the activities. That was AID's business. But I came to see much too late that the ranch was not self-sustaining, that we had misspent about two million tax payer dollars, plus the Voltan contribution, and that State officers had to assume part of the responsibility for others agencies' projects.

The ranch was a range grass/cattle program. This seemed sensible as two thirds of Upper Volta was grazing area and cattle raising was both a major source of livelihood and the biggest export activity. The concept was that we would put a ranch up near the desert in a typical area, fence off pasturable land, and stock it with the right amount of cattle so that they didn't overgraze. This would demonstrate proper range management. Our AID backstoppers in Washington were relatively sure, though not positive, that if the indigenous grass were left alone and wasn't overgrazed it would come back and take care of itself. The demonstration ranch was to prove that special grass seed, fertilizer, and technical inputs weren't necessary if overgrazing was controlled.

So we built the ranch, had two AID people living up there, and fenced off about two thousand acres. We found, slowly, that we had to use bigger and bigger fence posts and more and more

wire, because the hungry native animals would come right through ordinary fencing in order to get at the better grass behind it. Ultimately, we were importing nine-foot posts from Ghana, stringing six strands of wire, and it was costing us several hundred dollars an acre just in fencing.

A year after the ranch had been finished, I arranged a visit by the Minister of Agriculture. As we approached from the air, we could see, in the midst of the vast, dusty, dry, sub-Sahara area, one lovely rectangular patch of gray-brown, which was the ranch with its stand of grass. The Minister was much impressed. Then we visited the ranch. Nothing elaborate or technical: just two small houses, some stockyards, and three wells. There were also some cattle and sheep dipping basins and a vaccination program for all interested herders. The main attraction was a windmill, the only one in Upper Volta, pumping water for the cattle. Then we got in a Jeep and drove around inside these fencings, which were subdivided so that you could move cattle from one to another and not overgraze. Everybody could see that the number of cattle and the grass were evenly balanced, and that the cattle were fat and the grass was holding up.

The minister immediately said, "How many cattle have you got here?" And we said, proudly, "About 150." He replied, "But we have four and a half million cattle. How are we going to get areas like this for all of them?" I realized then that we had done proved a point, but in no way was it a solution for Upper Volta. As the minister said, they had too many cattle for their fenceable areas and even for a reduced area the fencing was prohibitively expensive.

I'm afraid that happened to a lot of our AID projects. We have spent a lot of money, with the best of intentions, and asked the local countries to participate about ten to fifteen percent of costs, and their money as well as ours has often been wasted.

*Q: Owen, we were talking about AID programs. I think this is a major theme that one should explore in dealing with our efforts to play a role in Africa. AID was always one of the major activities of American missions there. I take it that although that ranch was a small undertaking, for Upper Volta it was a major project.*

ROBERTS: Yes, for both the Embassy and the Voltans it was a major project.

*Q: Wasn't somebody reviewing it? You have experts and all these program evaluators. Wasn't somebody looking beyond the fence posts and saying, yeah, but there are four million cows and bulls out there, what do we do about that?*

ROBERTS: That was the weak part. The concept was that we would show the Upper Voltan government that range management was the best way to handle their cattle problem, that you had to balance the amount of grass as against the number of animals. The Upper Voltans would then realize that they would have to find some technique, such as our combining fencing with government range management of public land. Of course, the Voltan nomads had always moved flocks around in complicated annual patterns to follow rainfall. This was an effective form of range management but it had been interrupted by the creation of national boundaries. It was thought that the ranch would serve as a stimulating example to the government while helping the herders by vaccinating the cattle. A very reasonable-sounding project.

The project planners didn't imagine that we would have to put fence posts four feet deep, have six strands of wire, and that the costs would go up so much. But once you're launched on something like this, and your two technicians have come all the way from Oklahoma, and you've got the government to agree to give you the thousands of acres, you've built two little houses and the windmill is going, it seems reasonable to finish off the fencing in spite of the increase in cost.

Even without the extra fence cost, it was not a self-sustaining project. Back at inception, we should have considered what would happen once we had proved our point. By defining it as a demonstration ranch, we made it reasonably feasible for us; but it wasn't duplicatable by the Voltans. And that was the fault of everyone from Washington down the line.

Next door in Niger, for instance, AID attacked the problem of the cattle a little differently. One of the sub-Saharan problems is that there isn't enough water. The nomads traditionally move their herds around from low spot to low spot where sporadic winter rains create some grass and shallow ponds. By late spring it is all gone and the nomads must retreat south and to the fringes of major rivers like the Niger. At this point, they compete with the village farmers, and then there's trouble. So AID's idea was to dig wells widely throughout the sub-Saharan so herders could disperse their cattle over large areas and avoid overgrazing or infringing on farmers. This also only expanded on local practice. The villagers, and in some places the herders, had hand dug their own wells. These went down 80 to 90 feet through hard desert laterite. The nomads and others hauled the water up with a rope, dumped the water into big gourds, and the people and cattle would drink from them. The was very slow and labor intensive, but it worked. However, with the water sloshing back and forth in the bottom, the wells would cave in and have to be dug out after six to eight months. This could be done only a few times because the cavity at the bottom would have been greatly enlarged and was likely to collapse if further disturbed. So the well would have to be given up, which was a big loss as it took three men three months to dig a well 90-feet deep. When you look down one you realize it is an incredible undertaking. AID's idea was to replace these short-term wells with permanent drilled ones. Very sensible.

The next problem is how do you get the water up? An American thinks of windmills, either mechanically pumping or generating electric power to pump. But this would be expensive and not maintainable. AID reasonably decided to have hand pumps.

It turns out, however, that it's even hard to have hand pumps made reliable. There may well be 2,000 strokes a day, and sooner or later pump parts wear out. Then, way out in the middle of scrub desert, what can be done about it? Mostly it means donor or government servicing, and the wells do not become a self-perpetuating institution. But this is something that everybody who puts in wells knows about.

The crippling problem, however, was that it worked too well. The nomads learned about it very rapidly and brought all their cattle as expected. Then they proceeded to stay in the area, bringing their cattle to the water point as needed. They were able to range more cows than before and did. But they overgrazed the water points. After two years, you could fly over Niger and see these great white bare blotches on the landscape, absolutely round. They were about 20 miles in diameter and in the center of each was one of the American wells. We had over 50 of these wells

scattered around that could no longer be used -- another idea which was inherently sensible but in practice didn't work out.

I think that often our ambassadors know the broad purposes and budget dimensions of other Agencies' activities, but do not go into their details sufficiently to judge their merits. Like a manager of a big, multi-conglomerate, you should get into the profitability of each subsection. One of the more important Ambassadorial/managerial oversight responsibilities in Africa should be assuring that the USAID projects become self-sufficient.

Later, in Togo when I was ambassador, there was minimal US political interest so I spent most of my time on our AID-Peace Corps-USIA projects trying to see that they were in fact viable. This was plenty challenging.

*Q: At this time, during the sixties, some excuse could be made, because this was still a time of experimentation. But weren't there any people either from AID or the General Accounting Office asking hard questions about the megapicture in the countries and saying, "What does this really mean?"*

ROBERTS: Yes and not exactly. Much of the criteria for a program's success is built in at the beginning. There are also a lot of other general or Congressionally mandated criteria, such as no component of possible Bloc origin, so much percent US materials, host country participation, and minority participation. AID program managers and its auditors/evaluators certainly visit projects widely. But they use the original criteria laid down, particular or general, which often do not include self-sustainability and practicality. Both the range and Niger well projects would have passed most evaluations--up to final bitter experience. It is surprisingly frequent that basic assumptions are wrong and take time to appear.

The World Bank has also been trying to promote development, with about the same results as AID. I remember talking, in Ethiopia, with a World Bank man who had spent 30 years working on cattle projects in Africa. He had ultimately decided that the nomadic system, if unimpeded, was the best possible balance of forage and animals. Most Western efforts in this area had been either less effective or outright failures. It was probably better to put funding into other fields. He was probably right.

## **ELLIOTT PERCIVAL SKINNER**

**Ambassador**

**Upper Volta (1966-1969)**

*Ambassador Skinner was born and raised in Trinidad, West Indies. He came to the United States in 1943 and served in the US Army in World War II. The Ambassador earned his Bachelors degree at New York University, and his Masters and Doctorate at Columbia University, where he later was Professor of Anthropology. Author of a number of books dealing with Africa and US policy, he was named US Ambassador to the Republic of Upper Volta in 1966 and served*

*there until 1969. He died in 2007. Ambassador Skinner was interviewed by Celestine Tutt in 1981.*

SKINNER: And so I got in. I saw the Secretary and he said, "How are things at Columbia, Professor?" We started talking; we talked. He was a professor, and it was very professorial. And then he said, "President Johnson would like you to consider serving the United States as Ambassador to Upper Volta. What do you think?" I said, "Well..." He said, "You don't have to think about... you don't have to give me the answer right away. You can discuss it with your wife and family and talk to me about it. "Well, no, I can... I think it would be an honor to do that and I can give you the answer now." He said, "Fine. We'll be getting in touch with you."

But, of course, he called his secretary and sent me back to National in the longest car I had ridden in for...ever before, and I felt, well, no, this is not bad. And, of course, I saw nobody on the way to the airport. So no one knew then I was in this big car. Anyway, I got back and began to... Well, the people at Columbia I suspect knew what was going on and they were quite supportive, which was surprising in the sense that the anti-war movement had one of its major headquarters here at this university, and the Department of Anthropology almost led, with a few people in Political Science, led the opposition to the Vietnam War.

I think they were thrilled because of a number of things: one, I was their friend, is one thing. But the other thing was that this was an honor for the department and for the university. And it had nothing to do with their views on Vietnam, which was very gratifying to me and very interesting, because I would not have suspected their reaction. Anyway, they were contacted by the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), and they... they would always report to me saying, "Elliott, people are talking, asking nasty questions about you and we told them that you beat your wife and all that; you had difficult relations in Africa and so on. It was quite clear that they were excited. And finally, the FBI couldn't find out what I did one summer. I was working that summer ...I worked at Globe Mail, where we were addressing T.V. Guides, and they couldn't find out what I did that summer. So finally, (slight laugh) they came and said, "Professor, we couldn't find out what you did. Could you tell us what you did that summer?" I said, "Well, yeah." So they went and checked and they called me up and said, "Thank you very much. Our dossier is complete."

And the next thing I heard, again, another day I was in the office, and I think it was on another Saturday, and I got a call saying, "This is the White House. We just got the agrément from the Upper Volta for you as Ambassador. What are you? Are you a Democrat or are you a Republican? Not that it makes any difference, but we just want to know, because we want to put this on the air." I said, "Well, no, I'm a Democrat."

Then they ... about ten minutes later, I got a call from the Secretary of State saying, "Well, you know, Dr. Skinner, just wanted to make sure that you haven't changed your mind." I said, "Nope." "Okay," he said, "don't say anything yet, but the White House will announce sometime in the next two or three hours that you will be our next Ambassador to Upper Volta."

Well, that was that. The question then came as to what to do. And I didn't get down to Washington until around July and was ...I went through a month's briefing at the Foreign

Service Institute, where I got a line on... again, I was very surprised by the nature of the power of the United States, the power of the Soviet Union, the responsibility of an ambassador and... Being involved with the power structure of the United States was awe-inspiring, because you tend not to understand what this country is all about until you begin to visit the military bases, see the hardware, counter-insurgency, the nature of the fight in Vietnam, and just the real power of the United States was frightening, all against the backdrop of difficulties fighting the Vietnamese.

Then I remember meeting Frank Williams, who had come back from Ghana right after the fall of Nkrumah. Frank then was under a cloud as the function of what people here felt about that episode. This is something that I have to discuss more fully in another context. I had never met Frank before, but I had remembered when I saw him that a long time before that he had called me when I was at NYU (New York University). He was then head...involved in the Peace Corps, and apparently he was trying to recruit blacks. And he'd called and he wanted to talk to me about possibly joining the Peace Corps. I don't think I was interested in that because after all, I was a professor. I had... I was a scholar and I didn't feel that I wanted to get involved at the level of Peace Corps director or anything like that.

But I wanted Frank to send me a letter. He never did send the letter. (laughs) And I think he understood very well that the letter would be very important for my own career, but I don't think it would have been important for his. Anyway, he never did. But he was in town and Hugh Smythe was in town.

And one evening they took me at the home of Jim Moss, who is now professor at Adelphi. Jim at that point was working at the State Department. I had been in contact with Jim before that. He had called me up once about what it was like being a black professor -- I think he was working on blacks who were professors or something like that -- and I didn't respond. Something had happened. I didn't like his approach or something like that. I think he was at Union College then or some place like that. But I felt then -- it must have been around 1959 or '60 -- I felt that ... if you work hard you could be a professor, period. I didn't feel discrimination. I was still an Assistant Professor and I felt that I wasn't prepared then to start talking about our discrimination. I had been to school; I had a specific kind of experience. My feeling then was, if you worked hard you got ahead. And you know, discrimination, yes, existed, but I didn't feel that I was giving... I didn't think I was a victim of discrimination in the sense that I had no difficulties in doing my work. I thought that people at Columbia were crazy to have let me go down to NYU, but ... and I was sort of angry about that, but I felt that I didn't want to get involved in what was ... appeared to me then to be ... part of the tradition: saying that we can't make it.

Anyway, despite that, I don't even know if Jim remembered that. Hugh Smythe, of course, we were buddies from way back. I first met him at Ted Harris' house where he ... he got me involved with the black ... black bourgeoisie or elite, or whatever. I had never met those people. But Hugh sort of plugged me in to that. So I knew Hugh Smythe well and both Hugh, Jim and Frank Williams spent about two hours with me one evening giving me advice as to what the issues were about being an ambassador. I may have that tape around somewhere, and if I do find that tape, that tape can become part of this record.

They were very helpful. I began to look at Frank now in a different way now, because I'd come out of a different environment with respect to the whole Ghanaian situation. But I remember that these three individuals were quite helpful. They said, well, this is what you've got to do, and they decided that they had to tape it, because they wanted me to listen to it.

And then the time finally came for the swearing-in and George Ball, a man I saw last night at a reception... no, yesterday at the reception for President Sadat of Egypt. Ball was the one to swear me in. I remember this patrician smiling benignly at this young professor. (laughs)

And the thing that I remember about that swearing-in is the... I was very much concerned about relations with Afro-Americans. I knew about all the problems of the Afro-American with the West Indian as stranger. I myself grew up in a home in the West Indies, in Trinidad, where as a born-Trinidadian I did not like, did not appreciate my mother's family which came from Barbados but had no... no love for Trinidadians. So my feeling then was that they should go back to Barbados.

So I understood, basically, the feeling of Afro-Americans to West... toward West Indians. . This was structural and I understood it, and I thought that I should say something about that relationship within the context of my swearing-in. Of course, I made the proper noises about the role of blacks in America's foreign policy. I don't know where that speech is. The speech was recorded, but I... I just made a few notes, and I remember Jim Moss was very helpful in helping me prepare that speech.

Anyway, I came back to New York and I was feted by Columbia; Columbia was quite pleased. Then I went off to Upper Volta. By that time, I began to get a different view of the Foreign Service. Going through the bureaucracy was a trip. I noticed a number of things. I noticed the cold eyes of people in the Foreign Service. That struck me.

*Q: Cold eyes?*

SKINNER: Yes, very cold. The eyes were cold, not out of hostility to me, but they were cold with power. And that... I began to sense that with power comes a kind of formality... decisiveness and arrogance, which I think characterized many Foreign Service people. I don't think I felt that way, but I couldn't help noticing that.

Oh, apropos of this, I remember that (slight laugh)... I had come down to be looked at by the Inspector General of the Foreign Service. And on my way to see him, I stopped into an office which must have been the... the Office of Equal Opportunity. I saw a young man there who told me his name was Eddie Williams. He said, "Dr. Skinner, uhm, you've got to see the Inspector-General." I said, "Yes." He said, "Your name is not on my list." I said, "Well," I said "Oh?" He said, "No." He said, "You are coming through the White House." I said, "Well, is that right?" He said, "Well, I..." He started to fake. I said, "Look, I'll tell you what it's all about (laughs). I'm being considered as Ambassador." He said, "Oh!" He said, "Well, I didn't know."

Eddie Williams is now the president of the Joint Center for Political Studies Among Blacks. But

that's the first time I met Eddie. Eddie was sort of concerned that my name had not come through his shop. I was being imposed upon the folks by the White House.

But the briefing in Washington was interesting in many other ways. Not only did you get some feel for the power of the United States, but I presented a problem for the briefers in the sense that they expect you to know nothing about anything, and every person has his or her hour with you. But I posed a problem for them. I was a specialist on Upper Volta, and many of them would have felt silly talking to me about the politics or what have you. The result is that everyone sort of held off. So in a way I was the worst briefed ambassador to have gone out there. I remember one day I went into a man's office and spent about, oh, twenty minutes with the man and up to today I don't know why I went in there. But (laughter) I know that I spent twenty minutes just talking, you know, generalities, (laughs). So it was a very interesting situation.

Then the question came up as to how I should go to... to Upper Volta. Ambassador Palmer, who was Assistant Secretary of State, wanted me to go through the Ivory Coast. Now I knew enough about the Upper Volta to feel that the Voltaics would not have liked me to go through the Ivory Coast, because they were trying to get from under the Ivory Coast as their spokesman vis-a-vis the United States. So I told Palmer that I didn't want to go through the Ivory Coast.

*Q: Why do you think they had an interest in your going that way?*

SKINNER: Because I think they saw the Ivory Coast as more important than the Upper Volta. They saw the Ivory Coast as head of the what is called the Conseil de l'Entente, the Council of Understanding, with Houphouet being very important. But I knew in terms of work on migration that the Mossi especially didn't like the fact that their people were being exploited in the Ivory Coast and they wanted to get from under Houphouet. I also knew that since Yaméogo, had fallen from power and Yaméogo was a friend of Houphouet, the new government might not have liked me to have gone through the Ivory Coast prior to coming to them.

So I decided that I wanted to go through Paris. But later on, for some reason, I changed my mind. I think I may have wanted to go through Dakar to hook up with Ambassador Cook -- I think it must have been that -- and then go on down. But at that point in time, Palmer, who was convinced by me that I shouldn't have gone through the Ivory Coast, vetoed.

So I went into Paris, made contact with people in Paris, then went down to Ouagadougou. I arrived there five o'clock in the morning and was met by the chief of protocol. The Americans were all there. I remember that I was surprised that the car was small; it was a new Chrysler Newport. Of course, I expected a big car. I never had a car, but I thought, my God, you know. The car was brand new but small. I said, "Well, what kind of post is this?" Anyway, I arrived and set up shop.

Now one of my first visitors was Conombo. Now I went back, way back with Joseph Conombo. I was in the village where I worked in 1956 when Conombo came down to --politicking there and I introduced myself to him and he said, "Oh my God, are you American?" I said, "Yeah." He said, you know "That's fantastic. Are you here in the village?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Oh, I

see.” Well, later on when I went back to do my work in Ouagadougou, Conombo was Mayor of Ouagadougou. I think Conombo was always intrigued by me and he received me very well when I was working in Ouagadougou. And about two days before I left, he, had my wife and I over to the house for some champagne for farewell and he said, “You know, your country is very bright.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, you came here as ... and worked in the rural areas; now you’re working in Ouagadougou and they’ll make you ambassador next time.” I said, “What?” I said, “But I’m not sure that I would want that.” He said, “Well, if they ask you to be ambassador, you accept it.” So when I got there (laughs)... I saw Conombo the first day. I had gotten in at five o’clock and I think I went to bed after going over to the Embassy (the flag was up for the first time in months), tested out the chair, and then I went home and went to bed. About five o’clock one of the servants said, “Dr. Conombo is here.” And I went down and he said, “Skinner (laughs) ... you Americans ...I told you (laughter)...” I said, “How should I know what would happen, but that’s the way life is.” “You know, you Americans are formidable,” he said. Of course, he couldn’t have known that.

In a very interesting way he was wrong and he was right, in the sense that societies are structured; they are not idiosyncratic. Yet there is no conspiracy. I’d gone out as a Ford Foundation Fellow; Jim Robinson may or may not have gotten money from the Ford. Jim at one point in time was with Congressman Vito Marcantonio in opposition to the status quo. That was to haunt Jim later on, because he was bitten by the African bug and felt that Crossroads was a way of linking up young Americans with Africa. He never did live down his past with Vito Marcantonio, the American whatever, progressive part. But Jim was not part of any conspiracy.

Going back to do work in urban Africa, Jim Bohannen sent me because he had seen an article of mine in Africa; he thought that I had done rural work, that I knew the culture, that I should go back and do the urban study. I don’t think Jim was part of any conspiracy, but these were all Americans. And for America at this point in time, the feeling was that Americans should know more about Africa and this was shared by both black and white Americans. So in a way there was a consensus in the society that something should be done about preparing blacks or preparing Americans to deal with an emerging Africa. So in a way then, American society as an entity, yes, had conspired to train a number of young Americans to relate to Africa, and I was in that group. But Conombo was wrong about his suspicion, his deep suspicion that we were ... that I had been recruited very, very early and that I was being carefully groomed by Washington to come and serve as ambassador. That wasn’t the way it was at all. But again, as part of a larger pattern, he was actually correct.

Now the question came about presenting my letter, my letters of credentials to the President. This turned out to be a bit of a problem. I wasn’t aware of many aspects of it. I got there, and I suspect normally, one presents one’s credentials in a matter of days. I didn’t present my credentials until about two weeks later. And Robert Owen, who was my DCM, a man who was here at Columbia, he got his Ph.D. here on his way to the Foreign Service, was very concerned about this and he thought it represented a slight. Then one day I went to...he was pushing me to push the Foreign Office to be able to present my letters, but I was in no hurry because I didn’t, I didn’t feel threatened---but Owen began to push. So I finally went to see Pierre Ilboudou. Now Pierre was Foreign Minister. I had know Pierre when he was Second

Secretary of the Upper Volta Mission to the United Nations. I was at NYU; he lived at Washington Square Village. I used to go over at least once a week and have a great time, talk, talk. He would talk Mossi culture knowledgeably because he was working on his French degree in Paris, and at that point in time, I was emerging as the, one of the Mossi specialists; and we talked. And later on Pierre got married to the sister of Fred Guirma, who was the Upper Volta Ambassador to the United Nations and a man I had met almost the first day I had gotten to Ouagadougou in '55. He was working in the local library of Institut Française d'Afrique Noire and when I told him I was an American he said, "Are you a pastor?" I said, "No." He said, "You're not a pastor?" "No, I'm an anthropologist." "Ah!" And myself and Fred we became very, very friendly. I knew his family and I became a great friend of his mother, who always used to give me an African millet beer when I was in Ouagadougou, just being an anthropologist.

So I knew Pierre. When I was studying the urban scene in Ouagadougou, Pierre had gotten married, and I was at his wedding. We're great buddies, but I saw Pierre then in his role as Foreign Minister. And he was very, very stern! He said, "We are sort of having to wait to present your letters because we are very concerned about the behavior of you Americans." I said to myself, I'll be damned! (laughs) "What do you mean, you Americans?" I said, "I've just gotten here." "Well," he said, "the President is very concerned about the behavior of your predecessor." Apparently Ambassador Estes made his visits of farewell throughout the country without notifying protocol that he was traveling. And Pierre said to me, "Of all the embassies in Ouagadougou, the American Embassy is the only embassy which does not respect us." So I said, "Well, this is a new ambassador and we will see." And he said to me, "Mr. Ambassador," he was very, very formal, and he said, "The rule is that whenever the American Ambassador or Americans are leaving Ouagadougou, they should notify us three days in advance, because we would like to provide the appropriate welcome for them as they travel around the country." I said, "Well, thank you very much, Mr. Foreign Minister," and I asked to leave and he walked me to the door. And I think I got back to the Embassy pretty ticked off and Owen Roberts said that I should immediately write the State Department saying that if we are being restricted, we should tell Washington and subject the Voltaic personnel to the same strictures. I said, "Nope, let's overload their circuit."

And before I forget, let me tell you what I meant by that. I meant that the Americans ... we are more efficient than they are, because we have more people, we tend to be more modern than they are, and my plan was to, in a very interesting way, overload their circuit. And I think what I had in mind then but didn't put into effect until about two or three months Later on, was to ... on Wednesday morning my plan was to send protocol letters, about five to ten letters, dealing with the weekend plans of members of the Embassy. And we were to go to various parts within two or three hours drive of Ouagadougou for picnics, or bird-watching, or to visit something. And they were, of course, to notify the local people that we were to arrive. Some people did go and some didn't, but for those who didn't go, we sent the proper regrets. Of course, babies had colic or dysentery, or the wife didn't feel very well, of course, you know. American women are very independent. If they don't feel like going, their husbands don't go. We did that for awhile. Then Pierre came from, from

Kombissiri, a town about, oh, then about an hour and a half drive from Ouagadougou but now about only twenty minutes.

And one Saturday morning I was in my office, even though we didn't work on Saturdays, we didn't work on Saturdays but they did, and I received... somebody came with an invitation for that evening -- a 'Red Cross dance. So I called him up and I said, "Well, look Pierre, I'm caught in a bind. I want to go to your village to... because you'll be there, I understand, and only the high patronage of the Foreign Minister, and you're my boss and I would like to go on down there to attend, but the invitation came this morning. So what, what do I... I can give you three-days' notice, but I would miss your ball tonight." He said, "Oh, come on, I'll see you tonight."

I joked about that, but the point was that from that day on we did not have to send messages. In other words, once we had respected their right, showed them the courtesy of not going around the country without letting them know, I think we were safe. Of course, whenever I planned extensive trips, I would always let them know.

But what I discovered later on was that Ambassador Estes was quite close to Yaméogo. The trip he got together, and all that, to the United States. And when Yaméogo fell... Estes apparently didn't like that and the new government was suspicious of what that meant in terms of U.S. policy. I found out later on that when they received the agrément request that I show up as Ambassador, they really thought that America was going to check them out carefully. Apparently they talked at length about what's, what's the meaning of this appointment. This man knows our belly, as they say. He lived in our belly, so America's very concerned now that we overthrow Yaméogo so they are sending who, in their view, must have been a heavy, because he understood More, he understood the culture, so watch this guy. He is potentially a very dangerous guy, because America is taking special care to send not anybody; they're sending a specialist. So Pierre then... I suspect that the two weeks or so that elapsed between my arrival and presenting my letters were designed, I think, to make... to try to find whether or not I can maintain my cool, whether or not I would be arrogant in terms of demonstrating America's power. But I carefully, in a very interesting way, innocently showed good manners, what the rules are, how does one act before one has presented one's letters. There are certain things that one could do. One would go and pay some courtesy calls on one's fellow ambassadors. One could not show up at formal affairs representing the flag, with the flags flying and all that sort of thing. But one was free, relatively free to receive visitors and so on and so forth. But one had to play cool. And then, of course, the big day came and I presented my letters. The people from Abidjan came up with the plane. It was a very good letter, and that I went on and I started my task as Ambassador.

*Q: You went then as an expert to begin with?*

SKINNER: Right.

*Q: Upper Volta wasn't new to you. You knew it very well. But you were seeing it through different eyes when...*

SKINNER: that's right...

*Q: ...you were there before. In addition to this awkwardness that was created by this delay in your being able to present your letter, can you think... I'm sure you were beginning to see Upper Volta in different eyes, or were you as the Ambassador?*

SKINNER: Yes...

*Q: Can you think of any other specific examples of ... of the difference in Upper Volta for you as the Ambassador to Upper Volta?*

SKINNER: Well, it was quite clear -- look. One of the differences, of course, was that the members of the staff could not... the Americans couldn't deal very effectively with a person who knew Upper Volta. They were all programmed to do certain things for the Ambassador and his wife, so that when Roberts would arrange for me to see certain persons and, of course, ignoring completely that I knew these people very well, and in many cases the Mossi are so hierarchical that they went along with a lot of this. Because you see, one of the things is that they have a concept called NAM, N-A-M, which means the NAM is that power which God... is a power that God gives to a man that makes him superior to every other man. What it really means is that today you are an ordinary individual. But once you get the NAM from the King, people will come and shake your hand, people will come in droves and shake your hand the day before you receive the NAM because the next day they can't do that; they can't touch you. Once you get the NAM you are transformed. So I had the NAM. I had a NAM from the United States. And this meant then that people did not expect me, the local people did not expect me to hobnob with them because I was in a different position. I was in a way different, and this is something we have lost in the Foreign Service now, because as I read the early letters sent with our ambassadors to Liberia, apparently the formula then was that one was sent to sit, to stay near to a government. That was the formula. You were sent to stay near to a government. That was your official designation. So the person would say, "I'm sending you to sit near to, or stay near the Government of Liberia." So the Mossi had that. It was part of their tradition. So I was sent, and it's part of their tradition that you ask a woman about, you know, why do you get married or whatever, or if a woman is talking to you in the villages about her problems, she would say, "My father has asked me to sit here, and I'm sitting here with this man, this husband." In other words, she is sent by her father to sit there and that's her role. So that in a very interesting way the Mossi have no problems with my having the NAM now from, from (laughs) -- I'm laughing because they would say to me, "Zeba néré," which means the place where you are sitting or standing is beautiful. That's the greeting for the chiefs. In a very interesting way, all sorts of jokes went between myself and the Mossi in terms of my having the NAM. So Conombo would come and say, "Naba," you know, or the American -- I would show up -- or the American chief has come, the American, the American Naba. And it was this kind of thing. So that was one aspect of it.

The second aspect had to do with invitations. Who was invited? And I played it. You invited me or you invited the American Ambassador. Well, we invite the American Ambassador. If you

want to come, come. So (laughs) ... in other words, the American Ambassador was invited, and very often I would play on this. In a way it was fun but not fun in the sense that if, for example, if I were invited ... people would invite me. I would be invited to things that the other ambassadors would not be invited to -- a baptism or a wedding -- by persons who would not deem it proper to invite the Ambassador of France. So I would be invited. And I recognized that I was invited ... let's put it this way. When I was in Ouagadougou as a researcher, I would have been invited. I would have gone. I was in Ouagadougou now as the American Ambassador, and this was a dual invitation. I was invited in my status as a friend. But if the American Ambassador came, that was an honor to the child or the bride and groom, and so on. So I did a lot of that. It meant, also, very often it meant what kind of cars, what car I drove. I had a little Volkswagen and sometimes on a Sunday morning I would just get up and decide to go see Roger or go on by Conombo. And I'd get in the car and I'd drive myself. Other times I would be driven and the flags would be flying and that. Sometimes I would stop. I used to blow their minds; I would stop the car. I would meet -- there was a woman called Josephine. She was a very interesting friend, because she was a social worker, and I was working with her to kind of understand juvenile delinquency. And I, of course, when I became Ambassador, a person like Josephine would never even... I don't even know what she would have to do to come and see me. I guess she would have had to go through the ministry and all that sort of thing. I hadn't seen her. One day I was ... one day I was just being driven and I saw her on her bicycle, and I stopped the car. Well, she didn't get down on her knees, which is typical, but apparently that made the rounds. You know, there was a big man, you know, and he didn't forget, you know. He stopped, and you know and ... and, of course, she told her husband and, you know, he told everybody, "You know he's all right." But that's ... that's the difference.

*Q: That must have endeared you to a lot of people?*

SKINNER: Yeah ... well, you know, I hope so.

*Q: Did it ever hurt you, do you think?*

SKINNER: Uhm, Uhm...

*Q: Were there any ... because of this dual role it'd be in a sense, you think...*

SKINNER: There was one place I didn't go, and did I feel a little embarrassed by that? And if I had to do it again, I would have. I would have ... people would come and I would see them. I mean I saw everybody who came to the Embassy. Of course, sometimes my staff was shocked. The people from the rural areas would come with their hoes on their shoulders. They wanted to see the American chief or something like that, and I would say, come on in. And Nancy, who was my secretary, her eyes would get big. But then as you'd come in and they would be sitting on their... they would be kneeling and sitting down on the ground and this-and I'd be talking to them.

But there was one woman, she owned what is called a cabaret, a millet bar, and I used to go there because I was interested in the economics of millet beer preparation. People used to get drunk and people used to warn me even as an anthropologist that it wasn't very good to go there,

because when Mossi get drunk, sometimes they get out of line and they would approach a big person such as I was -- you know, with a Ph.D. and all that -- and they would lose their heads. And they were very, very careful of that. And I don't think that I would have... it would have been infra dig for me to have gone there, and that woman had no way of coming to see me. She wouldn't have come; she was a woman of about fifty-five, sixty. But you see... I should have invited her to ...I couldn't have invited her, I don't think, to any of the affairs, because she couldn't mix up ...she couldn't be mixed up with the Government.

But I should have invited her to visit me, because my old friend Elisa did, an old Muslim Koranic teacher who died, incidentally, and I went to his funeral. I went to his funeral; I went there and met ministers there and I went there and, you know, I even was part of the cortege to where he was buried. So he used to come on his donkey, very funny...(laughs)... used to come on his donkey and this woman she would have -- I don't remember her name now -- she could have come because one day I remember seeing her all dressed up when I was doing field work -- and I said, "Where are you going?" And she said, "I'm going to my father's house." So I knew that there's a pattern that she could, if I had sent a message saying that, come and visit the house, she would have done that; she would come dressed up and all that. And, of course, the Mossi or the Voltaic ministers didn't have to be around. So these are the things.

But by and large, no, I had no problems (laughs) ... no problems at all in the sense that I was very ...uh, I exploited the ambassadorship to find out more. For example, anything that happened in town, anything, a bicycle race or a Red Cross ball or boxing, or whatever, in a small community the ambassadors would be invited as a matter of course. Well, I would show up. And very often I was the only ambassador there or sometimes the Ghanaian Ambassador, who was an African, or Mali, but by and large the French, Israelis or the Germans, they wouldn't come. But I would go because I was interested; I was interested in the people. I was also interested in getting another view of Ouagadougou from an official standpoint. The other thing, of course, is that something I had discovered earlier is that there were questions I could not ask when I was in the village, Nobéré. But when I met people from Nobéré in Ouagadougou, when I was doing my field work in Ouagadougou, I would say, "Look, remember so and so happened and I didn't find out what happened? What was it all about?" They'd say, "Oh, yeah!" Then sometimes they would smile because they knew that they wouldn't tell me when I was in the village.

So I also discovered that from the perspective of the ambassadorship, I could ask questions about Ouagadougou that I could not have asked before.

*Q: Very interesting.*

SKINNER: And later on, when I left, after I left Upper Volta to come back here, (I never visited the President's house informally when as Ambassador, because he, again, he was not Mossi; he was a Samogho. And, of course, his Minister to Washington is also Gurunsi) -- about three or four years ago -- I was visiting Ouagadougou and the President said, come over to the house. And there were two of us. And we were talking ethnology. And it was interesting because we were talking as ... there was no question of my being the anthropologist; they knew that. And one of the things I find difficult with many white anthropologists is that they can't have...they can't have normal conversations with Africans, in the sense that if you have a

Frenchman talking to a German and Italian, they will talk to each other about their different customs, exchanging ideas. White anthropologists don't work that way with Africans. There's no freedom, there's no free exchange. In other words, the whites tend to ask questions. They're doing all the work.

Whereas that night we were talking about the Samoghos; we were talking about the Gurunsi, I was providing information on Mossi and also America. We were talking as friends about many things. You know, of course, they still called me Mr. Ambassador, Ambassador, you know, you understand that, but that's not what you do in this guy's house. And I would laugh, because the Mossi, Mossi, Mossi and you know, those other people...

But it's interesting the kind of information you can get, you didn't get it as a function of being the anthropologist. You got it as a function of being a friend who is interested.

The other thing I did, of course, I would always go to the meetings of the Voltaic section of the Society of African Culture. There's a Voltaic section. I would always go to their meetings and that taught me something else, which was that they wanted to hear about my experience in Nobéré and Manga. That's all. They were Mossi; they're Mossi from Koudougou, Mossi from Yatenga, Mossi from Boulsa. They would never conceive that I was a specialist on all the Mossi. They said, "Yes, you lived there, right. Now what do they do there?" And I would say, "Oh, is that right?" "Yeah, but those people down there are backward." Then I'd say, "What do you mean by backward? Come on!" you know. But it was that kind of ... I was an ambassador, also a specialist, but not on the Mossi. "Yeah, you know, those people down there where you, where, the people down there, yeah, you even talk like them." That's the kind of thing that you get. That was good I thought, that they accepted my expertise and I sort of discovered something which was in a way very humbling, but I think it's correct, in a sense that they accepted my books on Mossi as almost the last word, but only dealing with outsiders. In other words, I learned, I mean I discovered then, I think, that if they wanted to tell somebody about Tioffi, they'd say, "Well, you know what Dr. Skinner says. Read The Mossi of Upper Volta. But I suspect, and I didn't know that, but I discovered that in reading my books, they would say, "Yeah, this is the Mossi of Nobéré. What he's written is true but only for that area." But they would never tell this to me to my face nor will they tell an outsider about that.

*Q: Do you think it's because they feel nobody really knows?*

SKINNER: I don't know. I think that they felt that- I think it's a question of levels, that for the generality... in other words, it's like, you know, if a person speaks English for example, if you met a person who speaks English in contrast to a person who speaks French, we are so eager to talk to the person we're not going to say, "Well, you're from where?" In other words, if we went, if we went to, oh, shall we say Venezuela or something like that and we saw an English-speaking person, we would not be very specific in the ... well, you know, you don't say 'to-may-to'; you say 'to-ma-to'.

In other words, those little differences become insignificant in terms of the larger problem in terms of communication. So I think this is how they saw my work. My work gave the larger picture. But when it came down to specifics, they would say, "Well, yes, but you know we really

say to-ma-to, not to-may-to.” So that’s the difference between how they saw my work. And I think it was very good, because it... it also gave me another view of how anthropologists should not do things, that a lot of the fighting that takes place among anthropologists is due to having studied different regions within the same area. And there are local differences. And they fight, stupidly, as though one is right and one is wrong. In other words, we tend to ... and it comes from an old tradition, where one man would go and nobody else would go back and that’s almost carved in stone through all time. The world is not that way, and I learned that from that experience.

*Q: I would like to ask you to talk a little about U.S. presence...*

SKINNER: Okay...

*Q: ... in Upper Volta.*

SKINNER: The United States ... the problem... I got there at a point when the United States had made its big thrust, because we had made our big thrust in ‘60. Here were these countries becoming independent and we wanted to win them over from the Russians. We were against the Russians and we did a number of things. For example, we gave them weapons, we gave them trucks, and so on and so forth. We even gave them a certain kind of protection against the Soviet entrance. For example, one of the things that I had in my control was telecommunications equipment which would permit the President to be in contact with the capital and his ministers all the time. The stuff had just come into the Embassy about, oh, about two months after the President fell, and one of the things that I was told was that I could pass this ... to check this situation out and if I wanted to give this equipment to the new President, I could.

So we were trying to, from 1960 on, we were trying to get ourselves there. Now in terms of the presence we had ...I had a staff of about ten officers, including a Peace Corps, USAID, Peace Corps, U.S. AID, that is, of course, members of the Embassy. I had no military attaché. My CIA man was this guy Stockwell, who wrote the book criticizing Kissinger for his attempts to take over Angola. He’s a bad boy, but I found him, as a CIA, he would... I found him ... well, let’s put it this way. I was reading Le Carre’s books on spies and all that, and one of the points that Le Carre made was that the CIA believes that it has the... it has seen so much evil that it trusts nobody. Nobody is to be trusted, even the President of the United States, and that the CIA’s task is to protect the nation from itself. So I always assume that the CIA had a view of American society that the CIA felt was superior to everybody’s view.

Eisenhower had written a letter saying that the Ambassador controls. Apparently that didn’t work. When Kennedy was President, he also sent a letter saying that the Ambassador had control. But it’s ... coming from my perspective, being a CIA agent was an occupational hazard. It’s like as a student ... we talked about bureaucratic personalities, a person who governed his job -- I should say Liberian personality, too -- but, anyway, the people who are so built into their job that it takes over the entire personality, so that the railroad man at his house, he still goes by the clock, and all sorts of crazy things. And I always assumed that the CIA people were ... their relations were structural and it had nothing to do with personalities. It meant that it was their task to protect the United States. So that I did not trust Stockwell to tell me, to be truthful with me,

because I thought that if it became necessary, it was almost his duty to protect the American interest even against the American Ambassador.

I will say this, and I will re-emphasize this: I never once found him crooked, never once. He always asked permission to come up to Ouagadougou, always touched base with me when he got there, always reported to me when he left, and I had confidence in him.

Now, I think there's something else to be said about that. I had the right to have or not to have CIA visit Ouagadougou. My colleague, a white man, who was in Niger, didn't want any CIA people, and apparently didn't have them. Now I don't know too much about this, but I remember that when I got there, as I said, I did not go on down to, I did not come through the Ivory Coast. Our station chief, the station chief, for that whole area was stationed in the Ivory Coast and Stockwell was working for the station chief. And I remember saying to somebody that, no, I don't want anybody to come up until I could check with the Station Chief.

So I remember going down to the Ivory Coast and being introduced to the Station Chief and that man gave me the once over. I remember vividly he had deliberately come to check me out because I had said, no, I wanted nobody to come up until I had come down to the Ivory Coast. So I ordered the plane to take me down to the Ivory Coast on an official visit, and then he asked me when Stockwell should come up. And I said, fine, Stockwell should come up. So we had that.

Now, in terms of the other presence, we had missionaries, an Assemblies of God Mission. I had had a falling out with them, because in one of my articles I said they were not doing very well. They were not making very many Christians. They were upset. I understand from one of my servants who was recruited by them as a Christian, that they felt I did not like the missionaries, but I am... they were Americans. They represented an American presence, and I remember telling them that I shall be visiting their church, and I formally visited their church. And then after they had ...they had... I had given them a month's notice or something like that, and they pulled people from all over.

And this is what I mean by "cold eye." It was quite clear that I was the United States Ambassador and that ... that was that. This is what I mean by the kind of arrogance that you get. In other words, I didn't care what they thought. I was the United States Ambassador and it was my duty, if they were to be evacuated, it was my duty to protect them. I don't know what would have happened if... if they were disrespectful to me. But they, but again its, its, its, its, fascinating. Because the American Ambassador was coming, they brought their people, they brought their people out. They were racists; I know they were racists. And talking about this, I knew there were people in the Embassy who were racists. They would break the glasses used when they served Africans. I knew that because my people reported it; my servants did. But I knew that I had to dance with them when we had things at the Embassy, and I did. And that was my role.

There was one party I went to and, again, talking about American presence, there were people from the ... the Near East Foundation had a project, and I'll talk to you a little bit more about that, and the people there had a party. And in a small post, people who work on projects funded by USAID, they become part of the American community. And, of course, protocol calls for a

certain kind of behavior in the sense that, and I'll talk to you more about this, in the sense that you are always an ambassador in dealing with Americans. So that if you are invited to a party, and even though you're having a great time, your DCM would come and say, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, some of the ladies are getting tired, which means then, look Buster, these people, if you want to be a bastard, you can be a bastard and they will fall ... fall out, you know, fall out. But if you're considerate, leave. And as soon as you leave, everybody leaves. No one can leave before you leave. And that used to be a trick that you could come back. You could take off and as your car leaves, you could see people just running for their cars to leave. But in many cases I had to leave a good party because, of course, people were tired. And you know, very often they didn't care. They were not having a good time, but the Ambassador's there and, you know, they've got to be there.

There was one party I went to and the woman expected me to... I got there and nobody was there to meet me. But you don't do that. When you invite the Ambassador, you keep your eyes peeled for when his car gets there. And this woman --- again I'm blaming the poor woman, I guess she was the hostess, but not only wasn't she there to greet me, but she expected me to stand in line with my plate. And, of course, my DCM, he immediately saw this and, boy, he really hustled her into line!

See, you get that kind of thing. In terms of the American presence again. We had Catholic Relief Services and they were distributing what is called PL 480. This was grain, surplus food, that we would give to people who did not have enough to eat. And the Catholics, the Catholic Relief Services they couldn't apparently find a French-speaking American to run it, so they had a little French Canadian. And although America was giving the food through the Catholic Relief Services, he was pushing Canada and the Catholics at the expense of America, and I didn't like that. This is our food; it is given by USAID. We're going to give it to you... distribute it because we know that you need it for your contact with ... with the... the Cardinal and all that sort of thing, but don't fool around. Don't act as though this food is not coming from the Embassy. And at that point in time, I represented the United States. And that's what I'm talking about: this kind of arrogance. I represented the President of the United States. And I wasn't going to have these little Catholics coming around here saying that they're doing, what? The American Ambassador has to be there because I represented all of the Americans and you guys are representing this, okay? (laughs)

The other thing that happened, it was Peace Corps and there are a lot of myths involved in this and one wonders, sometimes -- wonder about the anthropologists. Congress says that the local people must invite Peace Corps. Those are the rules. Well, the fact of the matter is that the local people very often don't care about Peace Corps. They don't need them or if they need them, it costs too much money for them. So what happens is that the Ambassador has to elicit from the local Minister an invitation for Peace Corps. And Peace Corps Washington would bug you to make sure that the local people then invite Peace Corps to come in. So you had to work your butt off trying to get an invitation for the Peace Corps.

But once Peace Corps comes in -- apparently in Washington they don't tell the Peace Corps directors that Peace Corps begs to come in -- the director comes in and he

says, "Well, they have invited us here and according to the ... the convention signed, they've got to produce ... they've got to provide housing for our volunteers, you got to do that, you got to do this. And, my problem is now, what do I tell this idiot? Do I say to him, look, come off it? Nobody, and, again, see this whole question and the black thing comes in, and I don't know how white ambassadors handle this, because what this white man Peace Corps director is saying very often is, "Look, these people are incompetent. They have said so. They have invited us and they're not doing anything." And my first reaction: "Come on man, you know. No one wants you here in the first place, you know." (slight laughter) And I'm not going to say, "No one wants you there." I don't know who is talking. If the Ambassador at this point in time is joining rank with the local people, he could say, "Look, whitey, stay away. Who wants all your nonsense?"

Anyway, it's my task to get Peace Corps there, all right so Peace Corps can do certain things, teach English, or help and so on. But Peace Corps, getting Peace Corps is part of our policy. Peace Corps volunteers should go to help as part-Peace Corps representing, in a very interesting way, a foreign policy arm of the United States.

*Q: That was one of the questions I wanted to ask you, also, about U.S. policy.*

SKINNER: Part of the policy is to get Peace Corps there. On one hand... the other thing, of course, Peace Corps is designed to respond to needs. So then you have this question, okay? And very often the people didn't have the resources to provide houses for volunteers, because who are these volunteers? By and large, okay, they teach English. Well, yes, but you need English not in schools in the bush; you need English in schools in the city. But the ethos of Peace Corps then becomes a drag on the resources. Now, very often I had to use my own resources, the Ambassador's fund, fifty thousand dollars, to provide the possibility, without letting the Peace Corps director know that it's my money that's making it possible for a local village to invite his volunteers. Okay? One problem.

The other question has to do with intelligence. A Peace Corps volunteer in a village; very often you get there and these kids are at the mercy of the local people, actually at their mercy. They're there absolutely isolated, and those are functional communities. A stranger comes in without a lot of resources even with the resources, they will subject you to their rules. And I would get into a village and I would know this kid has got to be pulled out. As I traveled around I would get there and I would sense, sometimes women, are exploited worse than that, I sensed that these kids are under the control of the local chief or politician. And I would yank them out, because if you're talking to them and they begin to look over their shoulders, "hey, out."

The other thing, of course, is intelligence. You'd go there and very often I would go just to show the flag, to tell the local people this kid is not here alone. This kid has the power of the United States in back of him or her. Okay? And these kids, you just go there and just say, "Hi. How are you doing?" and they will just tell you everything. So when you leave there you know everything that's going on in that village, in the whole little district. So in a very interesting way, when these kids are later on accused of being CIA agents, it isn't that

they're CIA agents. It is that they are human beings who are lonely, would like to talk to a high status person such as an ambassador, and they would spill their guts. So any officer who makes the rounds to visit comes back to the capital filled with information.

Now, in terms of protocol, the Peace Corps director... You see, Washington tells Peace Corps, make direct contact with the local people, because it's person to person, face to face, without understanding that you don't do that. That while Washington has one view of the world, the African reality is another view of the world. So one day I got the ... One day ... One Saturday, again -- it always happens on Saturday -- I got to the office and the Foreign Minister was on the phone. "Mr. Ambassador, uhm, uhm, I can't, well, I'm calling to tell you that, uhm..." "What?" "I'll be late, uhm, to the reception tonight." I said, "Okay." I said, "What reception?" He said, "Oh, Peace Corps vol... You know the reception that Peace Corps directors are holding." I said... I said, "Oh, that." I said, "Mr. Minister, if you're going to be late, I think the best thing to do is to ... I think I'll cancel that." He said, "No, you don't have to, but I'll be late. But you know, family and all that." I said, "Look, Mr. Minister, I think ... I think it's important enough, your visit, to postpone this until you are free." I called that Peace Corps volunteer ... director, and I chewed him out. I said, "How dare you!" I said, "Do you know what would have happened?"

*Q: He called the... He scheduled the affair?*

SKINNER: Without letting me know. I said, "Do you know what would have happened if that minister would have gotten there and I was not there and you would have been there? Look, do you know what would have happened? They would have said, yes, these arrogant Americans. This Ambassador is so big and mighty that he would subject me, the Foreign Minister, to his minions. The next time you do something like this, I'm going to send you home." I cancelled it. I said, "You could ... you know ... if you could ... You guys, you can have something, but every official Voltaic has to be contacted. It's inconvenient for the Foreign Minister and for the Ambassador." Now that's the kind of things that in terms of U.S. policy...

Now in terms of ... the big thing, of course, what the Voltaics wanted from us was AID. And we were not doing very well with that. They wanted more, and we were prepared to give. We had a three-million-dollar ranch, a place called Makoy. The Near East Foundation was running that. That started when I was doing field work in Ouagadougou, and I thought it was funny. Didn't know I was going to inherit the damn thing later on, so the last laugh was on me. The Minister of Livestock and Rural Development would usually say, "Mr. Ambassador, when are we going, when are we going to go up to the ranch?" Or, "How is the ranch coming?" And the point was it was turning into a joke, and the joke was on me. The problem, of course, was the ... Well, first of all, the Near East Foundation didn't know what it was doing, and apropos of that, in the Washington Post of three days ago, four days ago, there was a big ... there was a picture of the head of AID returning a check of twenty million dollars to Reagan. And this check had ... represented money from projects which did not, were not working and which were cancelled. Among the places mentioned as a site for cancelled projects was Upper Volta. I'm furious with that. But the point was that many of the Americans who did work had no notion of local conditions. More than that, they, for example the Makoy Ranch ... we had two individuals who were supposed to be setting up the ranch. Now the ranch was about, oh ... a day's drive, or a day

and a half's drive from Ouagadougou. And they would visit the ranch site.

*Q: What kind of ranch was it?*

SKINNER: Just a cattle ranch.

*Q: Oh!*

SKINNER: They would visit the site. I said, "Look, whenever I see you guys you're in Ouagadougou. When do you go up there?" "Well, Mr. Ambassador, we go up there ..." I said, "Look, according to your contract, you're supposed to spend eighteen days a month. I don't care how you spend that eighteen days. You can go up there and stay eighteen days, come back and spend twelve days in Ouagadougou, or you can go and come. But I want eighteen days." Boy! Their wives got upset, talked to my wife that I was trying to break up their homes. Well, I'll be damned! Two million dollars and you guys are living in Ouagadougou with your... You're becoming... You've become so part of the Embassy staff that you're always around and you're giving barbecues and your children are involved in dancing and ballet and all that and nobody is doing anything up there.

Well, finally the question came up as to the African counterpart. At a certain point in time, we were supposed to turn over to the Africans.

*Q: What was the main purpose of that ranch?*

SKINNER: To produce cattle.

*Q: For the country?*

SKINNER: Right. Now -- and I'll talk to you about another aspect about that. The point was that the Americans ... we were supposed to put in the infrastructure, get the cattle started and so on and so forth, and then, meanwhile, we were training ... an African was being trained in Paris to come down and take over.

Now, eventually there was a very interesting conjuncture here. The Americans, the Near East Foundation people, were not interested enough to put up the infrastructure because they were not living up there. Okay? And until they got the facilities up there, the African who was coming from Paris with his French wife would not even think of going close to that thing, so that the delay on the part of the Americans coincided very well with the problem of the African who didn't want, after coming back from France, to live in the bush. So I decided to push it. I went to the Minister and said, "Look, where is this man from Paris?" "Oh, well, he's coming back in two months and he is trying to stay in Ouagadougou." I said, "Well, according to the protocol, we've got to turn over one year before the end of the project. So it's getting to the point where I think I want to do that. Plus, look, I was up there about two weeks ago and there were Americans up there, and I don't want to deal with Americans anymore. You were supposed to have had somebody up there anyway from the Ministry of Livestock. So

the next time we go up there, I think I want to deal with Voltaics.” He said, “Are you serious?” I said, “Yeah.” Then he said, “Do you know you’re the first ambassador to have said that?”

In other words, this is interesting because neither the French, the Israeli or the German -- none of those ambassadors felt that they wanted to talk to the local people. In other words, their view of their work was that their people would be in charge. And when they went to the site, they talked to their people. They did not talk to the Africans! So he said, “You’re the first ambassador to-to say that.” I said, “Well, I’m sorry about that, but I don’t want to talk to Americans, because in a year we’ll have to turn this darn thing over to you. And the Americans didn’t like that, because I said, “Look, I don’t want to talk to you. I don’t want to talk to you!”

Now, I think they may have felt that it was racist. There may have been some racism, you know. But the point is that I felt that one of the problems in these projects’ failing is that, until the very last day, the Americans are there, and when they sign off the Africans don’t know what the hell’s going on. So I insisted, and, of course, we got a plane and we went up there and the Africans were around, and the Americans were sulking.

That ranch project failed, and towards the end it was quite clear that the Minister was beginning to transform it from a ranch which produced cattle to a prophylactic station where cattle would come there and would be treated and so on. In other words, the three million dollars ... What I was able to do, I did get three important buildings; I did get wells and windmills and some local electricity for our three million dollars. But my feeling was that the Near East Foundation should not have gotten any of our money, and that the next project should have been insured by Lloyds of London to make sure that it worked.

Now, the other thing in terms of policy. The Upper Volta’s resources, you have ten million tons of high grade manganese. That’s their major resource of a mineral nature. And the question then was who was to exploit that? Now, the French had known about it for a long time. But the French have manganese in Gabon and the Voltaics were ... were quite sure that the French were waiting to complete the exploitation of the manganese in Gabon, holding the manganese in Upper Volta in reserve.

They asked me ... asked Ambassador Estes, before I got there, to see what could be done. When I got there they asked me to get in touch with Union Carbide. Now this was a trip, because here was Union Carbide violating the UN and supporting the Ian Smith government in Rhodesia, because of chrome. I, of course, was against Union Carbide, being a black person, I think. I know I’m black, but I think one of the reasons for being against Union Carbide is because I’m a black person not wanting to see an American company supporting Ian Smith. But here are the Voltaics asking me to make contact with Union Carbide (laughs) ... I said, “My God! Okay. Well, you know that Union Carbide is supporting Ian Smith.” They said, “Yeah, we know that, but this is our only resource and, in any case, if he becomes powerful tomorrow, we’ll

take care of Ian Smith.”

So I found myself down here in New York City on the 55th floor of the Union Carbide building talking to these people about trying to get ... get them interested in taking out their ten million tons. I felt kind of silly. I felt that ... I felt out of place. That's the thing. The incongruity of it all. And, of course, the Irish maid who was serving she saw me and her eyes almost popped out. And I smiled to myself. I said, “Well, lady (laughs), if you're surprised to see me here, I'm surprised to see me here!” (laughs)

Union Carbide decided it didn't ... it couldn't get a good deal from that, plus the World Bank felt that it was uneconomical for the Voltaics to exploit that, because it would have meant that a railroad had to be sent from Ouagadougou to Tambao and that would have cost the equivalent of the manganese. So they would have had then a railroad, a big hole in the ground and nothing to show. And, as a matter of fact, they're still talking about it, but nothing has been done.

But the question, the big question, had to do with, in terms of U.S. policy, had to do with our overall policy which is global in scope and the reality of Upper Volta. And this country finds it difficult to have scaled down its policies to meet the reality of small societies. And I think this is the real problem we have. It's theoretical; it's also practical. Sometimes I say it's like Muhammad Ali trying to shake hands with his gloves on with a baby. Impossible!

The Voltaics were waying to me, “Look, we have all this meat here” -- and it's true they have a lot of cattle -- “and the cattle is walked down to the Ivory Coast.” And they said, “Why can't you come and ... you know, we know that you don't need the cattle for, for food, but the cattle we have can be used to make corn beef.” Uhm, okay. We arranged to have Arthur D. Little come and make a feasibility study. They came ... the men came and said, “How many head of cattle do you kill everyday in Ouagadougou?” I said, “Oh, about, I think about fifty.” “That's all?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Well, thank you very much.” That's that.

In other words, the scale, the scale is so different that there's no way to articulate the business activities of the United States and the reality of Upper Volta. So, in a way then ... for example, you would get an order saying ... if it's not deemed counterproductive, will you tell the Voltaics that the United States would like so and so and so and so?

The big thing of all in that period was the two-China policy. We were friendly with Taiwan and the Voltaics were also friendly with Taiwan. We were trying to prevent them from changing their minds to start recognizing Red China. This is before Nixon and Kissinger went to Red China. The same thing was true of Korea. We recognized South Korea; they recognized South Korea. We didn't want them to break relations with South Korea to recognize North Korea. So the question then is how do we get them to do what we want them to do? They are not involved in the Chinese thing, you know, and nor are they concerned about the Korean thing. You know, those people are

far.

Now, one day I paid a visit to the King. We were talking -- of interest, I took him his champagne. You know, the chiefs are not God. You don't go to them empty-handed. So the American Ambassador took his bottle of champagne and a bottle of whiskey: champagne for him and whiskey for his guests. And, of course, it's all done, it's all done within both of our vision but at the side. So we are all aware that -- I didn't touch the stuff, nor did he touch it -- but we know what was going on and, you know, I knew about it.

So he said, "You know, you Americans are strange." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, do you grow rice in your country?" I said, "Yeah, in the South. Oh yes, we have rice all over the place." He said, "Well, why don't you then send Americans to grow rice here? Why do you use the Chinese?" I said, "Well, perhaps because the Chinese are ... we're using the Chinese?" He said, "Yeah. Yeah, the Chinese came here when your predecessor was here and, yeah, we know that you're giving money to the Chinese." I said, "Well..." I don't remember what I said.

When I got back to the Embassy and reported to the Department this conversation... Well, the point ... this was part of my ... the briefing breakdown. I wasn't briefed on that. But I got a letter from Clinton Knox. Clinton Knox was our ambassador, a black ambassador to -- he died last year and people didn't tape him before he died. But Clinton wrote me a letter saying, "Elliott, have you never heard of Project Vanguard?" I said, "No." (Because, you see, when we send a letter, when we send a telegram to Washington, we copy to the surrounding posts and very often ... we have what is called back channels. This guy, Ambassador (cannot remember his name) was fired by Haig because he was going behind Haig's back to talk about our policy in the Middle East. And very often if you read the telegram ... If Clinton Knox is saying something about what's going in Dahomey, and I knew what was going on, I would not send a telegram because very often it would have to be copied.) So I wrote him a letter. So he said, "Well, look. We have been using the Taiwanese." Project Vanguard was the device where we would give money to Taiwanese or we'd give the Taiwanese arms, or whatever. And in return for that they would send their people to Upper Volta to try to help the Voltaics, with rice, and that was supposed to demonstrate to the Voltaics that the Taiwanese were the ones who were helping them. And therefore, by doing that, we will say to the Voltaics: "Look, but Taiwan is helping you, so why then ... so we can depend upon you for the vote, can't we?" "Of course." Now the Africans knew about that, and unless you're well briefed you can make an idiot of yourself, because very often these things slip by. Now, Washington came right back and said, "Well, yes, it's true. It's true, we thought you knew about this." Anyway, Washington didn't hide this from me, but Ambassador Clinton Knox told me about it.

So that our policy then was to try to fool the Africans, to have the Africans believe that the Chinese in Taiwan were helping them and not the United States. So when, before the meeting of the General Assembly around this time, August, you get a telegram saying, "Well, the time has come again, go on in and say, well, you know the United States would appreciate it very much if you can maintain your position, because the Red Chinese have still demonstrated that,"

bla, bla, bla, bla, bla and bla, bla, bla.

Now, that was okay. What was so funny was that the Taiwanese Ambassador was chauvinistic as hell, and that blew my mind. He really considered Americans barbarians, and that got me angry! But his meals were good. Oh, my God, the meals were good! But you know that guy ... I said to myself, well, he may be Taiwanese, but he was a Taiwanese from the mainland, which was interesting. He was a Taiwanese, ... he was Chinese from the mainland. He had gone there with Chang. So he still retained that Chinese arrogance. But I thought to myself, "Well, my friend," I would say to myself, "one of these days the Red Chinese are going to take you guys." But arrogant and nasty and in a very interesting way anti-American, which was interesting to me that this happened.

The people that I had to lean on a little and got nowhere with were the South Koreans. They were giving nothing, nothing I tell you, nothing. And if Upper Volta needed anything, they needed something, something. Come on, reciprocity is the spice of life. Give something. Nothing! You can't even give an ambulance? No. Not even ... at one point in time I was trying to get the South Koreans to give them a little mill. Upper Volta produces cotton, but most of the cotton used in the hospitals came from France. You know I was trying to produce sterile cotton. I was trying to get that done. I got nowhere with that. So these are some of the problems we had in terms of the American presence and so on.

Well, again, the big thing, of course, was Vietnam. There were two things on Vietnam: one was the President of Upper Volta Lamizana was a colonel in the French army that was defeated in Indo-China. So he'd been there; he knew about Vietnam. So every once in a while you would get a telegram saying, "Well, tell the local people that we had a big victory," bla, bla, bla. And, of course, he was fascinated with the Vietnamese War, because he was convinced that we couldn't beat those people. Absolutely convinced. And I remember the Tet offensive, which was a disaster for us. Some telegram came from Washington saying that, "Tell those people over there that ... contrary to what France is saying in Le Monde, that America was not defeated." Well, I went into the President and he said, "When are you going to fire Westmoreland?" I said, "Well, what..." I said, "No, we did fairly well." Of course, I...I used to talk to him all the time about this war. All the time. All the time. And things began to fall into place for me when I got a visit from General Goodpaster

The nature of the problem became significant to me when Goodpaster came in with one of those C-5s, I think, Star Lifter, and the President wanted to see it. So we made a formal visit to a fantastic plane. And one of the officers said, "Just before we came out here, we came from Vietnam and this plane was filled with bodies." And that these Star Lifters are huge, monstrous. It's the biggest plane we have. And the President said, "What?" And that began to put things in sort of perspective.

Now at this point the President had had taken over. There was not a coup. President Yaméogo had goofed for many reasons and he was forced to resign. The President took over. And the President always felt that I had a mandate to have the

Government revert back to civilian rule. And it is true that during my confirmation hearings before the Senate, that became an issue. The Senators were very concerned that their friends, as the Voltaics told me afterwards, were not running the country. They saw all politicians as alike.

*Q: Yeah, you're talking now about the general political climate of ...*

SKINNER: Yes. The President was trying his best, but the problem was that the administrative infrastructure was too heavy for the Government. In other words, that, country could not afford its overhead; it just couldn't. And the reason for that was that during the colonial period -- the French, of course, were exploiting the Voltaics -- but they didn't have many persons there. They had, what, one officer for every sixty thousand people. That's very little in terms of administrative overhead. And these persons had a metropolitan status in that they had, they had all the perks that went with being in a very underdeveloped country and so on. And the French were exploiting and the peasants were being, you know, exploited, but the Government didn't cost very much.

Now, once the Africans began to clamor for independence, those who were clamoring for independence represented the African educated class. And the French tried to buy them off by giving them the same perks as the French were giving their own people. So the cost of administration became more and more, and the French began to put in their own money for the first time in the colonial history. Starting from 1951 the French began to pump money into these areas. Before that, they were taking the money out. As these countries became independent, the French gave them some money and we came in and gave them some money, the Europeans came in and gave them some money, but by-and-large the money that we gave, and the Europeans, was not enough to provide the basis for an economic takeoff. So, as the French began to build an infrastructure, more schools, more hospitals, better roads and everything, and all the accoutrements for a modern state, and as the African politicians began to say that this is what they wanted independence for, when they came in, they began to spend the resources.

The result was that, in a very interesting way, the peasants began to be exploited more and more, and the civil servants began to make great demands on the Government, and the Government could get no money, because the French started to say, "Look, you know, we don't want ... For example, a man called Raymond Cartier would say, "Look, we want to build a high school in Nancy; we don't want to build it in Niamey, in Africa. We want our own place. So the French Government found itself under more pressure to withdraw aid, plus the Africans were doing crazy things such as insisting on Mercedes or Citroens or Cadillacs and all that sort of thing. They were doing things like that. And it's vulgar. In a very interesting way, it's vulgar. So as the Africans and the African politicians in Paris -- they were all represented there, you know -- as they would ride around Paris in their big cars, the average Frenchman started saying, "Look, we can't have that. We can't pay for these guys to run around here." And the French began to reduce their aid and the African civil servants began to make more demands and the Governments found that they could not do it. What finally happened last July -- when was it? Last July, I think, a new government took

over. A military government took over and Lamizana was ousted, because the problem for many of these countries now is that unless they reduce their overhead, they can't make it. Because the peasants cannot, the peasants ... You need a lot of money to develop infrastructure, and this is the problem for contemporary Africa. And we were, during my period there, we were reducing our aid. In a way I became very angry, I think, with academia while there, because we were ... it was becoming quite clear then that we could not have guns in Vietnam and butter here.

The Great Society of Johnson was under stress right here. And, of course, it was under stress in terms of aid to African countries, and Ambassador Korry, who was then stationed in Ethiopia, came out with the so-called Korry Report, in which he decided to save money by saying that we cannot develop all countries in Africa at the same time; all countries in Africa perhaps cannot be developed. There are some countries which, if given a certain amount of help, could take off. Other countries, you know, are basket cases. So the so-called Korry Report had "Concentrate" countries and "Non-concentrate" countries. The concentrate countries were Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Ghana. I think these were the ... perhaps Sudan. And the result was that those were the countries that would get our aid and the other countries would have regional projects, and the Ambassador's Fund. Now the Ambassador's Fund represented \$50,000 that the Ambassador could use to win friends and influence people. The ambassadors were supposed to use those at their discretion, using it to help with a school here, a little village and that sort of thing.

Well, that's what Washington thought, but the local people became quite suspicious of that. They said fifty thousand dollars, that's nothing. Are you guys going to ... and some ambassadors, ambassadors who followed orders would try ... fifty thousand dollars meant a thousand dollars for fifty villages. And if he could use a thousand dollars throughout the country, strategically placed, you can make fifty appearances where you can spread the name of the Americans. With a thousand dollars? And once you take a thousand dollars there you expect people to ... for Christ's sake, they will spend about a thousand dollars just buying champagne for your welcome.

So, the Africans saw through that and ... well, against policy or taking local realities into consideration, I played ball with the locals. I said, "Look, three thousand dollars," you know. "Ten projects, you know, five thousand dollars apiece. That's all I can ..." and, of course, the Africans were just as bad as the State Department. They wanted five thousand dollars to go to their village. (laughs) That's the way life is. Politics, you know. "Oh, yes, Mr. Ambassador, five thousand dollars, oh yeah." (snaps fingers). You know, saying, "The old man has come, the old man, you know, the old man has come to see me, you know. Come over to the house for dinner and you know, talking about father's ..." And you know, "The American ambassador is here, has come to us, you know." And, "Yeah, we'll get you that school. Yeah, you'll get that school. Of course, we can't ... five thousand dollars will probably buy only the galvanized iron or a few bags of cement, but you've got to mobilize local people." "Yes, yes, yes."

So the day comes where the school is built and I run down and drinks and champagne and making a speech, the largess of the United States, but that's that. So that became, then, it became a drag. Then the question of regional projects, I began to lose my AID people to Dakar. Dakar became a center then for a region. And we were supposed to put some money in the region. Well, of course, the local people said, you know, you put money into Dakar and Senghor is not going to let any money come over here, and I agree with that.

But again, this is where I think race becomes, not even race, but race and local, local responsibility, because Frank, Frank was in Ghana, and I don't know what he said in his own thing ...

*Q: Williams...*

SKINNER: Yes. But I think that he had problems with Frank Pinder, who was his AID man. And Frank Pinder was in the Foreign Service for a long time and Frank was an old hand at AID. He probably saw everything between ... before Williams came. But Frank Williams was an imperious gentleman and. I'm not quite sure he got along very well with Pinder.

Now I wanted to work a deal with Pinder. It was a complicated deal. I wanted, because I was interested in getting some trucks to transport cattle, and I was supposed to get the trucks from Guinea. If I could have gotten ... the trucks were supposed to come through Guinea. I can't remember the details. But it was going to be a deal between Upper Volta, Guinea, and Ghana, because the trucks were supposed to take cattle from Upper Volta to Ghana. And that didn't work out because Frank Pinder was not collaborating with us, because Frank had his money -- Frank Pinder had his money in Ghana. Ghana was "Concentrate" and he was not going to share it. But during that time Franklin Williams got together with Robert Gardner, a Ghanaian, who was in charge of the Economic Commission for Africa. And Williams called myself, Knox, Gardner and another -- the Ambassador to Togo -- to Accra to have a regional meeting. And we were trying to work out something. It got nowhere, but the point was that from my perspective I saw this as -- of all five or six of us there, only one a white person -- I saw this as black ambassadors representing the United States getting together with an African who was in charge of the Economic Commission for Africa, trying to use whatever power or whatever we had to help. Again, it didn't fly.

*Q: Do you think that as a black ambassador you suffered any handicaps because of your blackness? Do you think that its not flying in some way had anything to do ...*

SKINNER: No. I never felt as a black ambassador not getting anything. I felt that as an Ambassador to Upper Volta, Upper Volta didn't have that priority.

*Q: I see.*

SKINNER: And, as a matter of fact, I can't honestly say that anything ever happened to me

because I was black.

*Q: No special handicaps?*

SKINNER: No, none, not a single one that I can think of now.

*Q: What about advantages?*

SKINNER: The advantages of ... of ... I've spoken. Well, in terms of local people, yes, no question. Access... Of course, I received the second highest ...I probably ... I'm probably the one ambassador from any country to have gotten the Grand Commander of the, you know, of the Voltaic National Order, the second highest decoration. So, and my relations are still very much ... you know, I go back and forth. So I have no problem with that.

I felt that I was there at a very difficult point. Aid was being cut back. You know, I was very conscious of using the power and prestige of the United States to help. Let me give you an example of what I mean. There's the dean of the diplomatic corp. Now, historically there were two patterns. One was that the Papal Nuncio, the Papal representative, he was the dean. He would represent the ambassadors vis-a-vis the local people. If there were problems, the dean ... If an ambassador had gotten out of line, for example, before his government would be asked to call him back, the President might call the Papal Nuncio and say, "Well, tell the man that he is overstepping his bounds of, you know ... that that lady he is seeing is somebody's wife. Tell him to straighten up." Or if an ambassador is having trouble with the minister, he will then tell the dean, "Well, you know, look, I'm having trouble."

Now, after the Napoleonic wars and those countries which were anti-clerical had no representative from the Vatican, so Papal Nuncios were not deans. It was very interesting to have Papal Nuncio, because, you know, the Pope didn't have many divisions. So that kind of in between heaven and earth they could play this mediating role, in structural terms, as anthropologists would say. Anyway, those countries which became anti-clerical and all the Protestant countries, began to use seniority of arrival and presentation of credentials for the deanship of the diplomatic corps. For example, many Latin American countries here ... Colombia ... The Ambassador from Colombia to the United States was here for twenty years and nobody ever is going to get the deanship of the diplomatic group in Washington except Colombia until that guy has to be put in a wheelbarrow and taken off. They'll keep you as ambassador forever, those countries that have the deanship because there's a certain amount of prestige. It means that you do get a chance to go to the White House. You know that if important people are coming they don't want to invite little Colombia, but they will invite little Colombia because its ambassador represents all of those who are unimportant.

Now, when the French were retreating and they were helping their people to set up foreign services and all that, they managed to get the French Ambassador as a dean, automatically. Now that wasn't very nice. Guinea, of course, didn't like that, and, of course, many of the younger foreign ministers felt that that was an imposition; the French were taking advantage. In Upper Volta not only was the French Ambassador

the dean of the corps but, apparently, I don't know where it evolved, but I suspect, I think I know how it evolved. I think that it might have evolved with the French Ambassador saying, come over for a cocktail before going to the palace. And, of course, they would line up in order of seniority after him. Well, now that ticked me off because, well, when I got there Levasseur was the French Ambassador and he was an arrogant son-of-a-gun, a pro-consul of the old school. With me the French were -- I've always sensed this even when I was an anthropologist -- the French were caught in a bind. Officially they were not racist. They thought in terms of civilized and non-civilized. The Africans were uncivilized, so the French could be arrogant. The Afro-Americans represented another kettle of fish, because, you see, we were civilized. And also, they realized that for us race was a problem. So they always were very careful to respect the fact that we were "civilized" - in quotation marks - and they didn't want to appear racists, because the French were not supposed to be racists. So I always had this very interesting thing, and plus I was from one of the great schools, Columbia, so it was ... I always ... I knew ... I knew. I had some crazy contacts with the big people in Paris. So when I got there, I presented a problem with the French Ambassador. Of course, he didn't think much of Malians or the Ghanaians or the lesser breeds. But for me it was always ... I represented the United States, plus I spoke the language. I was a professor, and Doctor and all that. So it was interesting...

*Q: But you were clearly perceived differently from the others.*

SKINNER: Yes. But, he was also racist and his racism would come out when, "You know, Mr. Ambassador, you know, these people here, you know. France, France... We're doing our best." And he always let me know that they were doing better than we were doing and that galled me no end. It galled me no end. And everyday, of course, he was at some reception where France would be turning over a few million francs and taking over, and taking the next day two million francs. But he would always be in the limelight and whenever I would do something, a little project, "Oh, Mr. Ambassador, I heard you were, I heard you on the radio. Ah, yes, I liked your speech, oh yes." He always let me know that he was on top of everything I was doing. You know, it's a very interesting position to be in, because I represented the United States. Plus I was in the war and I was in France, and to have this little Frenchman, clever, very polite, let me know, look, this is our territory here and you Americans are not supposed to be very heavy, you would know, my friend, that France is ... And I'll tell you something else about that.

Well, I accepted that because he was, again, he was my elder in the tradition. He knew more than I did and I was ... I really wanted to get ... After the initial visits of courtesy and all that, he would come over; he would call and say, "Can I come over and talk to you?" and just have you know, and let me ... you know, trying to get a sense of who I was, what I knew and all that sort of thing. And we became quite friendly. But it was quite clear he was the boss there and I resented it.

Well, when he left his new man came and the big deal, of course, was the first of January and his successor arrived there on what? the twenty-third of December and they were hurrying to get him to present his credentials so that he could be the doyen.

He represented the diplomats and so I said nothing. But the next year I told the Foreign Minister, I said, "Look, I don't like the American flag to be flying after the French flag. I don't like to be in any cortege where that flag comes before our flag." I said, "I'm going to be late." They were waiting for me. They waited for me, but I didn't show up until they had entered the palace. Then my ... I came in there, I was a little too late (laughter) ... I must tell ... That's the truth; I was a little too late. And they probably said, "Uhm, black." Anyway, the next week an order came from the Foreign Minister, to the ambassadors: "From now on they will assemble in the palace courtyard." It meant then that our flag didn't have to be seen behind the French flag. So I did that. Because the Foreign Minister said the reason for my being late is that I had gotten a telegram from Washington and having to zip over to the French chancellery, that made me late. So if I'd come directly, I would have been on time. Therefore when we meet there, fine. I did that. That's one time I was able to use the power and prestige of the United States, even in a symbolic way, not to ... to liberate those people a bit from the French. However...

*Q: ...and even symbolically that was terribly important, don't you think? ...*

SKINNER: Right, freed them. Now but I lost a number of things, and the thing I lost I think was the ... a meeting of the local West African Economic Community. They had met in Dakar and the American Ambassador to Liberia, it was reported to me, was able to get Cadillacs for the Senegalese to put at the disposal of the visiting African presidents. Now, the people in Upper Volta wanted to hold this meeting in Ouagadougou and I was all in favor of that. But there were two things. One, the French were against it.

*Q: Why?*

SKINNER: They didn't want the West African Community, that's all, because they were not yet ... they were suspicious of any grouping of West African states. Very suspicious of that. And, again, Upper Volta was also viewed with suspicion because the young Foreign Minister was seen as wanting to recreate a West African something, region or something like that. So that ... they ... they... my telegrams to ... to Washington also copied to Paris. We see the ... well, what happened was the people in Paris asked the French what they thought about that. The American Embassy in Paris asked the French Government what the French Government thought about ... what it knew about these plans.

Well, Paris contacted Ouagadougou and the French Ambassador asked for an appointment. And he let me know in no uncertain terms that Paris did not want that. Well, the thing that really killed it ... now that itself would have killed it. But, of course, I couldn't get thirty-two Cadillacs for any meeting. How can you get thirty-two Cadillacs in Ouagadougou? Fly them in? These are the things you lose. That didn't fly at all. The French were against it and our Embassy in Paris was not going to take any flack from the French Government for doing something in Ouagadougou. No

way!

So, after a while then it was clear to me then that in terms of being able to do a great deal over and above what one normally does, the point is to get to a big country with a lot of power or prestige. In other words, after two years I had outgrown Upper Volta. Upper Volta was, again, a small country, insignificant as far as overall U.S. global policy is concerned.

And this gets us today the basic problem, I think for a black ambassador. And that has to do with the nature of foreign policy -- foreign policy being, I think, an elite occupation it's always been, because it means the point at which the collectivity comes into contact with outsiders. At that point in time collectivities are represented by spokespersons who are big enough or important enough not to be constrained by local particularities. They've got to be above it all. So the sovereign is the one then who receives and sends out ambassadors to sit near to foreign governments, to be the spokesperson or spokespersons now of the president. If you are a minister you're ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary means that you have all the powers of the sovereign who sends you out. Okay?

In most cases states send out important persons... all the states used to send out brothers of the ruler or members of the Royal Family. Today we still do it. It takes Mrs. Reagan or the Vice President to represent the United States at the wedding of Prince Charles. We could not send either a senator and certainly not Moynihan. Had we sent Moynihan or Kennedy, we would have been making a statement about Ireland. Okay?

*Q: Yes.*

SKINNER: And if we had to choose, we had to send the Secretary of State, or we would have to choose if we had a Roosevelt or an Adam, a member of an old aristocratic family, as a senator, we could have sent that person. If not, nobody else is acceptable as representing the United States. It means then that in structural terms, regardless of what a president feels, unless he can find someone who represents the essence of America, that person will not be viewed with favor in the state to which that person is sent.

In this century, even if Roosevelt or Teddy, or any of those persons had thought so highly of Booker T. Washington ... to have sent a Booker T. Washington to a new African state ... To send a Booker T. Washington to these states, that would not have been accepted, because Booker T. Washington was not seen as having the kind of clout and prestige in these United States that would make him acceptable. You see, it has nothing to do with the quality of the person. It has to do with the structure. And for a long time, although Haiti and Liberia became independent, we did not send ministers, because to look at the record, the debates in the Senate, the notion that these states, and it was conceded, naturally sending their representatives would present the spectre of black ambassadors with their sabled wives, bewigged and bejeweled in the White House. And in the Senate, no way. It was only during the Civil War that Haiti and Liberia were recognized, because it was only then, and even then, we asked specifically, "Do you expect persons of African descent to serve as

ambassadors?" The Haitians said no. And, of course, the Liberians agreed. In other words, the calibre... the position of blacks within American society will, has, will always condition whether or not they are acceptable as representing the United States.

Now, one of the problems that I see, one of the dilemmas: How does one become a black leader in these United States? One becomes a black leader in the United States by having an adversary relationship with the Government. And even those black leaders who do not have an adversary relationship, the very fact that they are ... To be a black leader you have to do one thing. You have to ameliorate the position of blacks in this society. If you're not doing that, you cannot be a black leader.

There is more. There's not a single black leader, a single black person who becomes a leader, who is not trying to do something to improve the black. Now this puts you in structural opposition to the Government, whether you're Booker T. Washington or DuBois. You're trying to break caste. United as the fingers ... united as the hands attached to the fingers, he is trying to ... he is trying to break up. So black ... you see ... One of the interesting things about black ambassadors is the possibility that – I'm not talking about the career people -- at some point in time they had an adversary relationship with the Government. And this means then that their view of U.S. policy overseas has to be their view of American society. It's not good enough, not good enough. In other words, the danger for the black ambassador is ... a kind of supermoral position. We can tell this country what this country should be. In the same sense as we're trying to move this country forward in terms of, of getting more rights for ourselves here, we are pushing this country. Okay? And I think we tend to see this country's position in the world in these terms. So again and again you get the Andrew Young syndrome.

Andrew Young is a classic case. An adversary relationship? That adversary relationship puts him to the head of the class. He became Representative from Georgia, and a Representative from Georgia, ironically, the same state as the President. So the President could send him to sit in the U.N. Okay? He is acceptable. What was his behavior? Embarrassed the President no end, in Califano's book, In Governing America. The President said, "You've embarrassed me by calling the British racist." And, of course, when he thought to resign, because he said, "What kind ... what kind of nonsense not talking to the PLO? You've got to talk to them." And as Sadat told us yesterday, you've got to talk.. So Andrew Young is a classic case of that.

But the others ... the other ambassadors that I'm working on now, it's showing that they're always pushing America. Always pushing, always pushing, always pushing, pushing, pushing. And they're not satisfied with America's policy. They're always, in other words, they find themselves in structural ambiguity. I'm talking about ... Mr. Mercer Cook, I don't know what he feels. I think he resigned because he felt that he could not do his job and if he could not do that, what the hell was he doing?

So you got this very interesting situation. And I blame the black historians in failing to draw this very important theoretical conclusion from the structured ambiguity, because I think many of them feel that by saying that we have problems as ambassadors. Well we don't all have problems. Ambassador Reinhardt did not. Yet I

don't think there was a single black who was declared PNG (persona non grata). Not a single one. As far as I know, not a single state said they wanted a black ambassador out because he misbehaved himself.

Black ambassadors seem to me to be caught in a very interesting position where they, you know, like Ambassador Haynes. He was the one who suggested that Algeria would be the state to be used to free the hostages. He did it. I don't know if Beverly Carter talked to you about it. But Beverly did not believe that ordinary individuals should have the same responsibility as far as Foreign Service people in terms of hostages. So when the Zairoise Marxists wanted to negotiate, Beverly said, right ... But Kissinger's position was, look, you can't do that. He took a different position. I think the book I'm going to publish would not say that some black ambassadors were not ordinary human beings, since they were. But the point is that I'm interested in their structural position and it will be a hell of a long time before an Afro-American can be chosen Ambassador to France or Ambassador to the Court of Saint James. Oh, my God! I don't think we'll ever see that one until we get us to the vice presidency. So, in other words, you must see black ambassadors in structural terms before you can even talk about their effectiveness as ambassadors. But the point is that even those persons ... those states ... that if those states had refused black ambassadors because the black ambassadors don't have the power and prestige in the United States that they would like their ambassadors to have, even those states are saying something about the nature of American society. So when Clinton Knox, I think, was not given the agrément for Honduras, the Hondurans were saying that we will not accept this man. But they were saying something else. They were saying, in your society you don't think enough of this man to give him first-class citizenship. So it's a very interesting dialectic here, and I think many blacks and whites don't see this. This is why they come up with kind of crazy things about Africans not wanting black ambassadors.

*Q: Today is August 9, 1981. Dr. Skinner, yesterday when we discussed your term as Ambassador in Upper Volta, you kindly talked about the events which led to your entry into the diplomatic service. You discussed in great detail your experiences in Upper Volta, some of the better ones and some of your frustrations. One of the things you mentioned early on was the delay in your being able to present your letters, and you said it had something to do with the previous Ambassador's performance there. Do you think that incident clouded your term at all?*

SKINNER: No. I don't think it had anything at all to do with it. I think they were trying to send the Embassy a message, which was that we should watch our relationship with the local population and notify the Government of our activities. And once that message had come across loud and clear and once I respected the modalities of the Government's policy, it went very well. As a matter of fact, my relationship with the Foreign Minister was very cordial. I had known him for a long time. And I remember that I had heard about a ministerial change, that he was going to be replaced, and I told him. As a matter of fact, as soon as I got wind of it, I went to his home one afternoon. I called him up and told him I wanted to come over for a drink and we talked. Of course, he had a lot of people in his house as usual, and I

asked him to step outside. And I told him what I heard and he was very, very pleased to know that he was going to be sent on to Brussels as an ambassador. So it went very well.

In terms of the ... my relationship with the Foreign Minister, I felt that I had to establish a whole set of norms for diplomatic discourse. For example, most of the ambassadors worked directly with the President. They tended not to go through the Foreign Ministers, most of whom were very young individuals. Well, I knew about the difficulty that African ambassadors had in seeing people in the Department. Most ambassadors did see the President when they presented their letters. Almost none saw the Secretary of State on a regular basis, and they were assigned to not even the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. They scarcely ever saw him. And their main contact was the desk officer, a rather junior person. So these individuals had almost no contact.

In contrast, being in a small post, you ... the American Ambassador, the French Ambassador or anybody could see the President. But I felt that I didn't want to be faced with the charge that we had access to their President whereas they had no access to our hierarchy. So I told the Foreign Minister that I would do work with him. I would not deal with the President. I would work with him, unless, of course I had difficulties with him, in which case, of course, I would go to the head. He was surprised and I think he appreciated that. Except one day I went to his office and he said, "You know, the President asked about you." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "Yeah. He hadn't seen you for a whole month." So I said, "Well, there was no reason to see him. I was seeing you." He said, "Well, you know the Mossi. You ought to see him about at least once every two weeks." So I said, "Fine, but what I said still goes. I will not discuss business with him. And I would go to the President and just... I would just tell him, you know, I discussed this, this, this, with your Foreign Minister and that everything is all right and then he would stop talking." So we got into all sorts of things.

The other thing, of course, was our intelligence service was much better than theirs. They didn't have access to information except through Agence France Press, which was the local radio. So sometimes he'll call and ask me if I could come over, and I would have an idea of what he wanted. And I would sometimes take telegrams I received from the Department. Of course, I wouldn't leave the telegrams there; I would just read the important parts so that if, in the event of a coup next door or something like that, I would brief him. I felt it was the task of ... it was my responsibility, I think, to ... have people show respect to African Governments. True, they were small and we were very big, and in many cases they were not respected. But I felt it was my duty to ... to change all of that.

*Q: Was there ever an instance when you did have to go over the Foreign Minister's head in a sense, go directly to the President?*

SKINNER: No. No. I.. No it wasn't, no, we had nothing like that. Again, we had no major problems. No, we ... I never got into difficulties with the Voltaics over anything. So in a way,

it went ... it was very smooth. I understood the culture fairly well, so much so that, one day I was talking to the Foreign Minister -- I was in his office -- and the phone rang. He excused himself and started to speak French and then looked up and saw me and began to speak in More, and then he looked at me again and started to speak French and he said, "You" ... (laughs)" ... you're a dangerous man" (laughs) ... I was amused because, of course, he felt that, that by going to More, it would be secret. Then he realized that, well, I knew More" too. So I thought that was very funny. But by-and-large, there were no problems. No ...

Something like that one had to deal with an element of self-respect. For example, I had made a tour of the country, and I tried to get to the rural areas at least once every six months. I would make a tour of the north, or the west, or the east, and I'd be gone for about a week. And when Ted Roosevelt was around he would go ahead of me and make arrangements, to make sure that everything was all right. And he did a good job in his very aristocratic way, noblesse oblige of the first order. Of course, I didn't forget for one moment that he was really top drawer, and every once in a while he would ask for an appointment to bring in one of the blond "Smithies" or Mt. Holyoke or Vassar kids who would just fly in for the weekend and just come to say hello and so, and so.

But I would go around the country and try to get a feel for what was going on, and I would always brief the President when I got back. I guess he was checking to find out exactly what I found out and I was trying to check him out, too. And in '68, when I got back to Ouagadougou, I told him that I had encountered information that the crops the year before were not good, and that I thought that if he wanted, he could talk to me about getting PL 480 grain. Now, about two months before that there were several articles in the Le Monde dealing with PL 480 and how the State Department was trying to help the Mid-Western farmers by almost dumping grain in Africa and other areas. It was a very nasty article. So when I talked to the President, I said, "Well, look, we need at least a three month period." I had gone there, I had gone to his office around, I think it was November, because the harvest is finished then. And I know that the hungry period in Upper Volta is around March -- March, April. This is the time when last year's harvest is almost finished and the early millet will not be ready until, or, the early maize will not be ready until about June. But it's a very crucial period because you don't have very much food and people have got to expend a great deal of energy planting. But we need about three months lead time in order to get any grain from the States.

So I told him, "Look, the harvest is not very good and if you think you will need our food, let me know." And he said, "No." He said, he looked at me and he said, "Well, the people are lazy," which sort of surprised me. And I started to say, "Well, yeah, you're Samogho, and ... you're talking about Mossi." And with my own ethnicity. He said, "But over and above that, if America keeps on sending grain here, people will lose their will to work and we will be dependent on you for our food. I didn't appreciate that at all, because I thought he was wrong. As it turned out, '69, '70 there was a disaster in the Sahel, and when the Manchester Guardian and The New York Times, Le Monde, and the Der Stern began to publish, they first of all tried

to deny that there was a famine. But they were ashamed of themselves. They were ashamed. I mean, the President thought that I was trying to hook him into a position of dependency on the United States. So that was a bit disturbing to me that he would have thought that. But again, countries do that. He was right. He tried to protect his country from United States domination.

*Q: You spoke of that severe drought in the Sahel. Did you see any signs of that coming before you left?*

SKINNER: Yes. You know the ecological situation is so ... it's so ... so fragile that the people are, very, very conscious of rains. So you will say, you know, "How are things?" and they will say, "Well, two rains, that's all we need; two rains. If we don't have any rains, the two rains or three rains, there'll be disaster." And I knew about that, because as I went through the country, that was the subject of a great deal of discussion. And the people, you know, they were signaling that things were bad, because the year before, apparently, there was a shortfall. So by '68, although they were conscious -- the people as a rule were conscious -- but the Administration, I think, was being very careful; didn't want to get the people hooked into us. So when the drought ... they kept ... things kept on becoming progressively worse. So they really ran into it by '71.

At that point we had here at Columbia, if you remember, a whole series of events trying to get some money, raising some money for the Sahel.

*Q: I recall...*

SKINNER: Yes. So that was the disturbing thing. I think the most difficult problem was getting aid, and the other thing, of course, had to do with their lack of an infrastructure and the complete control of the economy by the French. It was very frustrating to me. You'd go to a minister to talk about something and he would bring in his French counterpart and the French counterpart will take over. At this point in time I didn't feel like saying anything. I felt like saying, okay, if you have to depend upon the Frenchman, well, I'll send my own person. There's no sense in both of us talking, because you don't know exactly what's going on. So that was frustrating, their complete domination of the economy and their political life by the French. That was disturbing to me.

*Q: Would you say that was perhaps one of the most frustrating things about that term?*

SKINNER: No, I think ... no, not that so much, the friendship. I think the problem of aid, just providing aid for that country to begin to move. For example, I wanted to put in a road from Foda, one of the towns, I wanted to put in a road there to lead to Ghana. And they sent out somebody from Washington, a consultant, and his view of trying to assess the need for a road was to spend four hours I think, a half a day, checking the number of trucks that passed (laughs). So when the guy got back to Ouagadougou, I said, "Look, you know something? Unless a truck was hauling gold, it'd be silly to use that road." In other words, the normal thing you do in the States if you want to check the amount of traffic, you'd sit there with a count on how many trucks or cars have passed. But,

you couldn't do that there. The technology was all wrong, because I had gone over that area. That area is very fertile. But the road was so bad that people ... unless you were really sure of making a lot of money, you just can't put a truck in there at all. But the United States, you know, it wanted to go about trying to ascertain or assess the needs of these countries according to its own standard. And the frustrating thing would be a man would go back and say, "Well there's no need for a road. There's no need to improve the road, because the amount of traffic is so small that to expend that amount of money makes no sense."

I said yesterday about the Korry Report and that the Korry Report, written by Ambassador Korry with the assistance of many academics, really ruined in my mind the aid structure in much of Africa. And I think I met with the Assistant Secretary of State in Tangiers -- I think it must have been in 1968 -- and all of us were complaining about the Korry Report because those of us who were in so-called non-concentrate countries felt the lack of aid. And Palmer, Ambassador Palmer, who's Assistant Secretary of State, he said, "Well, this was done with the best of advice from American specialists." It turned out that people like Bill Hance here at Columbia, Wallerstein and Elliot Berg and others like that, they were the ones to give advice.

*Q: Based on what?*

SKINNER: Based on ... apparently, their expertise, and that really ticked me off, because I said, my God, you mean to say that these are my friends from academia who are doing things and they are supposed to be friends of Africa? And in a way I, I never recovered from that view of academia, because I came back very angry with my colleagues.

*Q: Korry's position on that -- first of all, I'm not sure whether you explained how he was commissioned, in a sense, I guess, to prepare that report or not.*

SKINNER: Well...

*Q: Who was Korry?*

SKINNER: Korry was an ambassador to Chile and then he left Chile and went to... was named ambassador to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I think he worked for Life or one of those magazines...

*Q: A Republican?*

SKINNER: No, a Democrat. Now there was a need for a new structure they based on ... the lack of money due to the Vietnam War and I suspect that Korry had that task because he was in Ethiopia, and the Economic Commission for Africa, which is the U.N.'s commission on Africa, was based in Addis. So I think that because they were supposed to have had most of the data in Addis Ababa, that Korry was given that task to write the report. Now when I charged Wallerstein later on with being unconscionable with respect to the African situation, he said that I shouldn't blame the academics; that Korry's

Report was probably written before he came over here to ask ... to ask questions of academics. But I said well, in which case then the academics should have tried to put him right on this but apparently didn't. So the aid situation was the most frustrating one that I had to deal with.

The other thing was, we didn't, the United States, didn't raise protest when the Soviets came into Upper Volta. And I think that the reason why, because under the Yaméogo Government the Soviets were not there. But as a function of Yaméogo's fall the Voltaics decided, well, they needed the Soviets. They expected a great deal from the Soviets, and I think they thought that by bringing the Soviets in they could play the Soviets against the United States.

Well, also, my DCM was based in Moscow and he came to Ouagadougou as a great cold-warrior. But my feeling about the Soviets, I'd seen the Ambassador and that man was a short man and a nice guy. He seemed to be so much out of it that he didn't represent, I didn't feel he was a threat personally. We knew when they moved in. Our CIA came in and identified members of the KGB, so we knew who they were and that sort of thing. And I think there were telegrams dealing with, well, we were being ... we were prepared to offer asylum to any defectors but the ... in terms of protocol, the Soviet Ambassador sat next to me. He came after I did, so we sat next to each other. And we talked; we talked all the time. You know, we visited back and forth. The Soviets were no threat and they were less a threat because they didn't provide aid. Their position was that these governments were capitalists and that these governments had to go through an important period of capitalism before socialism can become a reality and they were about, about to use this aid to, to support capitalists. So they were there. They had a presence but they did not pose a threat to us, the United States. So that gave no issue at all. The cold war did not come to Ouagadougou when I was there.

We did manage to send a few individuals to Saigon, United States Information Service, to get somebody. We wanted these people to know what the war in Vietnam was all about. And one guy came back and visited me, saying to me that he had seen our people in Saigon and they told him that when he got back, he should come and talk to me about his anti-Communism and all that sort of thing. And he did. The next time I saw the President I said, "Who's this guy Bassolet?" Of course, he then smiled and said, "Oh we knew that he came to see you." And I, I just changed the subject. So, again, it's the whole question of how one perceives one's relationships to the local government, how one assesses what they're trying to do. For example, May Day, the fledgling labor unions would be parading and they would pass in front of the residence shouting, you know, and I would (laughs) go up in the balcony and wave to them. (laughs). I guess it was unorthodox but I was interested in what they were doing, and, of course, there was certain joviality. They were not very angry with us, at least not at that point in time. So that as soon as I heard the drumming and all that, I'd come outside and wave, and that's it. And this is the point. I guess that was unorthodox behavior from an American Ambassador, who should be hostile. There was no reason to be. And my DCM, who came to Ouagadougou ready to fight the Soviets as a function of his having a hard time when he was in Moscow, I told him, "Look, Nkomo is not here. Our task is to try to get as much aid as possible. And that was the name of the game in Africa then, not the Soviets or even the Chinese or anybody else. The

question is how would these countries make any progress? And I think that during this period, it went with the politics of aid. And when governments fell, they fell as a function of the frustration of one group of elites against the other group of elites as a function of who was doing what with the scarce resources they had. So the cold war was sort of lost.

The famous radical in town was Joseph Ki-Zerbo, but, again, I knew Joseph before. I knew him when I was there as a researcher. So we used to talk. I would have him over. We talked and he was ... I think he saw me as an American Ambassador, he saw me as possibly the tool of the imperialist, but he was a historian and we talked history. And we talked about Upper Volta in general. But, again, I didn't see, I didn't see him as a threat and so far we've had a coup, but he has been in the opposition now for the last ... he's been in the opposition now for the last fifteen years, and the chances of his taking over are very slim. The military now is in power, so that wasn't the issue.

The question was aid and the inability to get aid, I think, if I look back on it, was the, the greatest sense of frustration. The roads, to get roads. The question of trying to get somebody interested in the manganese, and we were not about to get involved in that. And so Upper Volta, their complaint still is that the United States didn't reward its friends. And it didn't reward its friends. It's only when you become Communist that the United States begins to pay attention to you. If you were just minding your business, the United States ignored you. And that was the major problem.

*Q: Dr. Skinner, given your very meager resources, the financial aid so terribly important to developing countries like this, what did you have to work with, so to speak, what little you had, what would you consider to have been the most, of that work, what part of it do you think was the most important? What part did you find most satisfying or do you feel you made the greatest contribution to the Republic?*

SKINNER: I think it wasn't getting PL 480. Getting food, that was the big thing. Getting food to the people, that was the most important thing I did. And they knew about that. They knew I was working on that issue and I was always ready to ... they knew they could depend upon me to try to help organize conferences or things like that, you know. When they wanted to have the West Africa Economic Community meeting in Dakar, in Ouagadougou, they knew they could come to me and I would be sympathetic to it. But they also understood, I think, that Upper Volta was not an important country to the United States. That was the problem there.

I suspect, providing food. Of course, we had the three-million-dollar ranch, which was the capital, the most important group capital project, but that was done before I got there. It was put in place before I got there. And it was my unhappy experience to have to liquidate it and to try to salvage what was a bum project. So that wasn't the happiest thing, but, again, I did. what I could with that.

*Q: Would you say that project was programmed to fail?*

SKINNER: No. It was that the Near East Foundation was incompetent. I was around when

the project was being thought about. And I saw then the problems of the project and, of course, I wasn't surprised at all when it failed, but I don't think it was programmed to fail. AID did not take into consideration many of the sociological factors involved, such as the inability of the Government to put so much land at the disposal of the AID project. They thought that because you had a few marginal cultivators around, they could fence in so many square miles to put a ranch, but the local people resisted that.

Again, it was just the incompetence of the Near East Foundation, lack of knowledge of the local ecology, the local grasses. For example, they wanted to introduce American cattle and had no notion at all of the behavior of local cattle. One of the first things I said, well, look, get some idea of how local cattle perform. I advised them to buy a little herd and monitor the herds. You hire a young Fulani and monitor the herd over a period of four months, try to understand how the local cattle operate in this environment so that when American cattle are brought in, they would have a baseline from which to understand how American cattle can adapt. No, they thought that this was a new ball game and that once you brought American cattle in, you can almost recreate a king ranch. Well, you don't do that; you couldn't do that. And that was a disaster. It was frustrating in terms of how the United States operated. But that was the situation.

*Q: What are your fondest memories of Upper Volta?*

SKINNER: Well, I think that being a black man representing the United States. That was the big thing. That was the big thing. I saw it primarily in terms of what my ambassadorship meant in terms of the struggle of a race of people for recognition in the world system, that was it. And I felt that it was my task then to aid this process. And I think that's very important. I think that over and above who we are in terms of our economic system, we, we ... this country is a very important country and there're a lot of blacks here, and the blacks here have made a very important contribution to the world of the black man or black people. And I thought that it was important for the race to have this representation in Africa. I think that was very important. For me the symbolic value was important -- attending things and meetings, ceremonies. Of course, whenever we would give anything, whether it's money for a vaccination program or building a local school, or making a gift of medicines, everything, of course, or giving trucks, there were always ceremonies. And I like that. I thought it was good to be involved in things like that. Those are my fondest memories. In a sense this was the culmination of a career pattern. I'd worked in the rural areas; I'd worked in Ouagadougou; and then I moved to the level of the nation states. And I thought that was, that was good. I think it was very, very good.

*Q: And it's rare, I would think, that someone would have that kind of an opportunity.*

SKINNER: Yeah, yeah...

*Q: ...because you knew them first as an anthropologist and then to have the opportunity to see it from that other...*

SKINNER: ...right...

*Q: ...perspective, too, it must have been...*

SKINNER: It was interesting. Again, from a personal standpoint, all I'm talking about is the ability to, to do things. For one example, I worked in the Nobéré area and of the things I did was to build a local clinic. I built it and stocked the medicine. And I opened it. I went down there for the grand opening of it and here was, here was something I did for the people who were kind enough to permit me to live with them for fourteen months in the rural areas. So that was good. I met by the, at the entrance to the district, I was met by the cavaliers with their horses and guns and boom, and boom, and boom, and boom, and that was good. That was good; that was very satisfying that you could do something like that. And it also throws things in perspective. It also means that you can do more things for more people the higher up you go, and I said, you know, if I ever got involved with another project or something like that, if I ever got involved with the State Department again, you can bet your life that I would try to do for Upper Volta what I did for the people of Nobéré. Because the individual does count in terms of decisions. You can make a difference if you are aware where the decisions are made. So it was almost ... it was very, very easy to make sure that the people of the Nobéré region would get enough, would get part of the grain that came in. A delegation came and said, well, we need a clinic. And I was able to just call in my AID man and say, well, look, you know, I would like to have this done, and it was done. Well, that's good. If I ever got involved in the Government again, then I will do the same thing for Upper Volta. I will just tell the people, "Look, in terms of your AID projects, I would like to see so much money going to Upper Volta," and that's it. And if I get a chance, I'll do that. In other words, you can do a lot if you have the power, and I think that's important.

*Q: Thank you. You really just answered in effect the last question I was going to ask you: If you had to do it over again, what if anything would you do differently?*

SKINNER: Well, what I would is, of course, I would want to have a more important country. But more than that, I would want to work on the level of Washington. I think that policy making is very important. You know, within the context of instructions and all that sort of thing, one can do a hell of a lot. The myth is that ambassadors just receive messages and transmit messages. That's nonsense; that's not true.

The State Department always tells you, unless it's counter productive, U.N. structured, or we would like you to do so, and so. Well, depending on what you want to do with that message, the message, as you deliver the message, you will structure your instructions in such a way as to have happen what you want to have happen.

For example, let's take the relationship between Upper Volta and the Ivory Coast with respect with a dialogue with South Africa, okay? Johnson, the Johnson Administration was not yet prepared to lean on South Africa. As a matter of fact, I believe that the State Department felt that one way of dealing with the South Africans was to initiate dialogue between the South Africans and the rest of black Africa. Now, Ambassador Morgan, who was in the Ivory Coast working with Houphouet, felt that Houphouet, being capitalist and all that sort of thing, a good friend of France, and the French were giving arms to the South

Africans, Ambassador Morgan was consciously trying to establish a dialogue between the Ivory Coast and the South Africans. And as usual, all the telegrams he sent to the State Department were copied to me. I was able to follow very closely what he said about Houphouet-Boigny being receptive to Vorster and all that sort of thing. And of course, I was against that; I was against dialogue. I felt that the South Africans were hopeless and that dialogue was not ... not the way they were going about dialogue. I thought that what they wanted to do was to make the black African states dependent upon South Africa so that the Africans would stop criticizing South Africa. And I didn't like what Morgan was doing. But normally you don't, you can't criticize another ambassador; you don't do that, unless and until he says something about your post. And I waited, waited, waited until I saw one telegram in which he said that Houphouet-Boigny believed so and so and that Houphouet said that Lamizana agreed. Well, that gave me the opportunity and I sent him a blistering telegram, because I had saved almost all of the statements made by Lamizana about South Africa.

So what I did was to say, "Look, Lamizana doesn't feel this way. The Voltaics don't feel that dialogue can help Africa and this is why." And I was able to back this with a whole lot of data. So that if you are in a position like that you can send certain signals to the Department of State and you can try to do things. You know, the feeling you get sometimes from talking to people is that the United States does so and so and so and so. You ask, well, who does what? And they will say, well, the Government. Well, the Government is made up of the people, and if you can have a certain input at a certain point, you can condition policy.

Let me give you an example of what probably Frank Williams has probably, would probably have this in his own stuff. It was the Chiefs of Mission meeting at Tangiers and Joe Palmer, Assistant Secretary of State, brought along some people from the Department of Defense to explain to us, the ambassadors who were meeting in Tangiers with him, why an aircraft carrier had to make a stop in Cape Town. Well, we didn't like that and this deputy or assistant secretary or something, tried to make a case for that. Well, our reaction was that that aircraft carrier does not have to go to Cape Town for refueling. We do have oil tenders. It could be fueled at sea, because we were concerned that the last time an aircraft carrier had got into Cape Town and black sailors were discriminated against, and we didn't like that. And I think Frank got together -- he called me, he called Clinton Knox, and he called a number of us together and we talked. And I think it was Frank who sent a telegram to the NAACP, or sent a telegram to Jacob Javits, and in ... and in about ... before we left there that visit was cancelled.

And, again, let's take what may have happened during this reception for Sadat. As of last, as of last Thursday, the South African rugby team was going to play here in New York. Well, Friday you had a very interesting situation. Here was Javits again, there was Koch, there was Sadat, there was Governor Carey, there was Vernon Jordan, and there was Frank, and this dialogue went on. Yesterday we heard that it was cancelled.

Now, I'm not saying that it happened as a function, that meeting at the, at the luncheon for Sadat. I'm suggesting that all of the characters were right there and a policy was made. Of course, the explanation is made that the United States, the city would have to spend four hundred thousand dollars just for cops. Well, they knew that, but something was said, something happened.

So that the important thing for me is, in terms of African policy, is the Washington base where you can say something, you can try. The United States does have many responsibilities and as you look at your own little area, your own country, you must see the country where you are in terms of its relationship to Africa and Africa's relationship to the global system in which the United States is operating. And I think the important thing is to try to get as high up in that system as possible, because the higher up you go, the more clout you have. So I think that if I had to, to do anything again, I think it would be, I would want to operate from the level of Washington. That's what I think.

**ALLEN C. DAVIS**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Ougadougou (1968-1970)**

*Ambassador Allen C. Davis was born in Tennessee in 1927. After receiving his BSFS from Georgetown University in 1956 he served in the US Navy from 1945-1953. His career has included positions in Monrovia, Moscow, Algiers, Ouagadougou, Dakar, Kinshasa, and ambassadorships in Guinea and Uganda. Ambassador Davis was interviewed by Peter Moffat on June 26, 1998.*

*Q: It seems about time for you to return to Africa.*

DAVIS: From Moscow, my assignment was to Upper Volta. At Ouagadougou, we had a very small embassy. The ambassador was a college professor from Columbia University. Elliott Skinner had done graduate studies and I guess his doctoral dissertation had been on the Moray language of Upper Volta. I worked for him as political officer and as his deputy, although we didn't use the title of deputy chief of mission at the small embassies. A delightful assignment in a very, very difficult place. It was very gratifying in personal terms. We had three very small children and it was a safe and comfortable and pleasant place for them. The house was comfortable and the possibility of getting people to help you with the children and all of that on the personal side made it quite gratifying. I loved the assignment. Not very much that I can recall that is significant about what was going on in Upper Volta at the time.

I guess one of the most delightful things that happened and which kind of throws some light on the mentality of the wonderful Voltans: there was only one radio station and no television at the time being run by the government in Upper Volta. And to kind of show you how the newly independent Africans sometimes found humor in really quite official circumstances and events. My ambassador was away. He was traveling in the Southern part of the country and I was in charge of the embassy - I think it was the only time I was in charge of an embassy. In the morning newscast, the radio announcer said that at ten o'clock all members of the diplomatic

corps - I think there were a total of five of us, maybe six - were asked to be at the airport at ten o'clock for a *visit de scale*, a kind of technical stop by Sekou Toure, the president of Guinea. I hadn't really focused that intently on what the day was or what the date was, but I quickly finished shaving. And not being able to wait for the driver to pick me up, I actually drove the official car to the airport to make sure I was there to represent the United States when Sekou Toure got off the airplane.

But as I arrived, there was a little clutch of people out in front of the airport. But there was nowhere near the contingent of police standing at every corner and making a big fuss. The Soviet ambassador, with a really perplexed look, came over to the car and said "What's going on?" With him was the man who was later the foreign minister of Upper Volta after the government changed. He said "You know what day it is?" and I said "No." He said "It's the first of April." So then the Soviet ambassador, with this strange look, said in Russian, "*Schtowet?*" and I said, "Well, I don't think you have this in the Soviet Union, but in the United States we have April's Fool's jokes and the French expression is *Poisson d'Avril* - He said "Well, what does it mean?" And so I said, in a few words, what April's Fool's jokes are. He said in Russian, "In our country, we don't do this kind of thing." I said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador, we know. I've been in your country and it's true, you don't, but it's something that some other people have a lot of fun doing." Later on, I talked with the Minister of Information, and it was obvious that he was the guilty one. He had actually set this up. For me, it was a marvelous commentary on what it was like to work in Africa at the time. The very thought of having such an announcement go out in Washington and having the gridlock and the confusion and all the rest! In Africa this could happen, and it was a little inconvenience, but the inconvenience was immensely outweighed by the fun and lightness that had gone into it, the good humor.

*Q: Who was the strong man in Upper Volta at the time? You spoke of a change of government.*

DAVIS: Yes, Lamizana, the head of the army, had overthrown the first president, Yameogo, and was running the country really rather well. It was rather easy to get along with him and they made every effort to make the United States feel welcome and comfortable there, with one exception. Near the end of my stay, there was one of the recurring famines that required that we provide help to them. We had a struggle with Lamizana about how much control they would allow us to keep over the foodstuffs to prevent them being used for political purposes and worse - to be used for something to sell and then the money to be used for individuals or for the government. So shortly after we got that squared away, I guess we came out of it without too many hard feelings. The new ambassador was named. I happened to be charge at the time the argument occurred. The new ambassador, William Schaufele came out and was able to kind of take over without having to do this under a cloud of bad feeling.

**LAWRENCE LESSER**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Ougadougou (1969-1971)**

*Lawrence Lesser was born in New York in 1940. He received his BA from Cornell*

*University and his MA from the University of Minnesota. He was in the Peace Corps in Enugu, Nigeria in 1964 and 1965. His foreign assignments included New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Brussels, Kigali, and Dhaka. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 12, 2002.*

*Q: Well, then 1969, whither? Where did you go then?*

LESSER: In '69 I was assigned to Ouagadougou in what was then Upper Volta and now Burkina Faso. I went there via 16 weeks of French language training at the Foreign Service Institute (which is where we're sitting now), but it was located in Rosslyn back then. I got to Ouaga in July of '69.

*Q: How long were you there?*

LESSER: I was there for two years.

*Q: Until '71?*

LESSER: Yes. To mid-'71.

*Q: Upper Volta. When you arrived there, what was the situation?*

LESSER: Upper Volta is a poor country, a landlocked country. It doesn't have a large population by world standards, a big change for me after being in India. It had about five and a half million people at that time. All the same, a kind of oddity. It was the most populous ex-French colony in Africa: more people than Senegal, more than the Ivory Coast, more than Mali, more than any place you can name. All of those countries are countries of relatively small populations. Upper Volta is a fairly large country and it is semi-arid and that's actually being generous. It's arid, almost entirely, and it's extremely difficult to produce enough food to feed a population of five and a half million - and the population was growing at that time. It was then and remains now one of the poorest countries in the world, and probably as a result of that or under pressure from that the biggest foreign exchange earner of Upper Volta was remissions from workers in neighboring countries. That was primarily Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Well over 20% of the male working age population lived outside the country, but their families didn't. So, you had villages which were largely composed of elderly people and children and women with occasional visits from the one who's earning the salary on cocoa plantations or working on the docks closer to the coast. It's not a good formula for national development. The country was run at that time by a military government under General Sangoule Lamizana: a very benign military government. It was my first experience of a country under military rule, but it wasn't my last. All three of the countries I served in that were run by military rulers were rather liberal soft military rulers. That's colored some of my views of the pros and cons of military versus civilian government.

I was the economic/commercial officer in a very small embassy in a kind of ramshackle building in - I can't call it the middle of downtown, Ouagadougou, because Ouagadougou didn't really have a downtown. It had a traditional market area and we were about a mile away from that, but it was, did I mention that this was a poor country? There was hardly any development, there

were a few paved streets but no paved roads between cities back then. Ouaga had been, well, not left behind because it wasn't really; you couldn't say what it should have become. It had virtually no resources. One day I was asked to be the reporting officer on General Lamizana's state of the nation address, an annual address. This was my first French speaking post. I had just learned French before getting there, so I wasn't truly fluent, but my comprehension was coming along pretty well. I was listening to the speech and General Lamizana starts out by saying he's giving a report on the state of our country - "This land, cursed by nature." And he went right on. I was shocked to my being. Here was a national leader referring to his country as cursed by nature. I'm an American, can you imagine an American saying anything like that; "America, God shed his grace on thee." Apparently God's grace wasn't extended everywhere. Upper Volta was cursed by nature and that was what they were up against. They may have been the nicest people in the world and they deserved a better country.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

LESSER: My ambassador was William Schaufele. A wonderful man, a great role model for me. I am still friendly with him.

*Q: What was our interest in Upper Volta?*

LESSER: Well, the Kennedy administration had made a policy decision at the time of the independence of all of these former African colonies of mainly Great Britain and France, but also, Belgium and Portugal and Spain. The German ones had been under League of Nations mandate earlier than that. The decision had been that the United States was going to put an embassy in every country. That's why we had an embassy there. We were showing them that we cared. There were if I remember correctly only eight embassies in Ouagadougou at that time. One was the Nationalist Chinese Embassy, which did have diplomatic status. Another was the Soviets, also France obviously, as the ex-colonial power, Israel because they were collecting votes on issues and they had a little aid program in a lot of African countries including Upper Volta. Ghana, where many Voltaiques worked and lived. So, it was an odd collection of countries. If you looked around, the only country that had reasonably friendly - or at least businesslike - relations with all of the other countries represented there was us. There were political disputes between all the others that made it, that; they didn't talk directly to at least one of the others.

*Q: Economically, was it?*

LESSER: We had a little AID program. There was a cattle-raising project in the North. You had to figure out how to develop pasture in order to raise cattle and just as barbed wire won the West, it could have won the Sahel as well, but the costs were very great compared to the amount of benefit that you were going to get. There was education, technical education and some family planning and health, but modest programs. There was some hope that Upper Volta could be more viable by having a closer economic relationship with neighboring countries in the region. There was a five-country group of ex-French colonies called the Entente, led by the Ivory Coast, and that was the best they could do.

*Q: Did you feel the French looked upon you with suspicion?*

LESSER: I don't think they worried about us very much. I found that the French were very friendly to us and I enjoyed my relationship with people in the French Embassy. I suppose they were a little patronizing, but I also suppose I deserved it. I was a beginner in French. The French DCM who was a man of the aristocracy and a wonderful gentleman was very helpful to my wife and me. No, we didn't have a problem in that way.

*Q: Some of those countries during this period were having sort of back down coups and using often French troops to do this.*

LESSER: Upper Volta was not in that situation. If they had needed help, they might have done it that way. They kept very close ties to the French and they were sort of, if you wanted to be a little bit dispirited, you could say they weren't so much independent as they were post-colonial. They didn't have the resources. Let me give you an idea. Here's a country of five and a half million people and one time I was in a conversation with a Voltaique about doctors and he mentioned Dr. Joseph Conombo, who was no longer practicing because he was now the mayor of Ouagadougou. He said something like you know, there aren't very many Voltaique doctors practicing in Upper Volta. They had to go somewhere else to learn medicine, usually France. There are a lot of Upper Volta doctors, but they've stayed in France or elsewhere in Europe. I said, "Oh, that's an interesting question, about how many do you think there are in Upper Volta?" I thought he would answer with a number or say he didn't know. The way he answered was, he said, "Let's see. There's Ouedraogo Maurice and there's Sawadogo Marc and there's..." He named five or six. There were more doctors than that in the country, but they were Europeans or at any rate not from Upper Volta. So, how's a country going to develop? People were born with the same potential as in other places, but they had very few opportunities to develop the way we do.

*Q: Did we have any Peace Corps?*

LESSER: We had Peace Corps. We had a nice little Peace Corps program with 35 or so volunteers and all posted to rural areas.

*Q: How did they find it in this country?*

LESSER: It's a big country so the physical distances were long and as I said earlier there were no paved roads and the roads they had were all washboard surfaces, so getting around was difficult. They were very impressive people. I was an ex-Peace Corps volunteer myself, but I don't think I would have done very well in Upper Volta. They were doing farm and community development projects and water well digging projects. I know of at least one who later joined the Foreign Service and has had a distinguished career. I wasn't close to the Peace Corps program. We had a very, very capable Peace Corps director, Tom Fox, who has also had a very distinguished career subsequent to that. They managed a very good program. I couldn't tell you that it decisively changed the course of development in Upper Volta.

*Q: Did you deal much with the bureaucracy there?*

LESSER: Yes.

*Q: What was your impression?*

LESSER: Again, when I said these are the nicest people in the world I wasn't kidding. I'm not a Pollyanna about that. I've been in countries where I thought it was more difficult dealing with people. The Voltaics are very open, decent people and they have no pretensions about their place in the greater scheme of things. They can see the same thing we can see that they don't have very much to work with. I found it a pleasure to deal with the Upper Volta bureaucracy. They were not afraid to talk to the Americans and they could see that it was to their advantage to be as friendly as they could be and hope that something would come of it.

*Q: How about did you get involved in UN votes and that sort of thing?*

LESSER: Yes. I'll give you one. I don't remember vividly specific examples except for one. We were given a demarche, a worldwide demarche to make to all governments asking for support on matters of industrial pollution and air pollution. The way I remember this conversation literally, the fellow I was talking to from the foreign ministry said, I think you should understand that we would *like* to have industrial pollution and once we do, we'll be quite willing to talk to you about what the next step should be and what to do about it. You can't expect us to get very excited about international rules on industrial pollution when we're a pre-industrial society. You know, there you are.

*Q: How did you find, I mean you were able to begin to exercise your economic muscles here, but I imagine in a rather subdued way.*

LESSER: Yes, rather subdued, but you know, of course I had the economic portfolio all to myself and we had an annual reporting schedule that was in many ways the same for little embassies as it was for large ones. There was no distinction made. It wasn't until the mid-'80s that we got a special embassy program that said that small embassies would not be required to do everything, all the reporting. I had to do an annual budget report and I had to do an annual minerals report for the Bureau of Mines, and different departments, and I did them. The budget of the Upper Voltan government was published and I studied it closely and did an analysis of it. I could see the salary of the president and understood that if things went extremely well for him he might be able to make as much money as I was making as a junior officer in the embassy. He lived in a better house I suppose, although I was living quite well, too. During the time I was writing the budget report I happened to get a fundraising solicitation from my alma mater, Cornell University, and they said they were trying to meet an annual budget which was getting harder to meet, etc. and they hoped alumni would chip in. It occurred to me as I was looking at that that the annual budget for Cornell University was four times as great as the annual budget for the government of Upper Volta. Nobody was writing an annual budget report from the State Department on Cornell so that did give it a little sense of perspective. All the same, there was something worth reporting about the Upper Volta budget; how much were they spending on military equipment for example? They needed everything they could get for building schools and health care facilities. How much were they spending on repayment of debt from international

loans? Those kinds of things were significant, so it was worth doing, but it was a good place to put somebody who was new to economics as well as to the French language. That's all I'm going to say about that, Stu.

*Q: No, I was just thinking, keeping the flag flying there and I guess probably it's paid off in the long run, but all these places, we made the decision very early on and whether you're having these little outposts if nothing else, it's great training for Foreign Service officers.*

LESSER: It was that. Well, as you say in the long run it paid off. I'm sure you weren't applying a strict cost-benefit analysis there.

*Q: No, but I'm just saying, by maintaining relations we went through various patches with these people.*

LESSER: We're an astonishing country and our resources defy belief. The Soviet Union tried to keep up for all that time and they ended up collapsing, and nobody else has challenged to take that spot. Who knows if a united Europe will ever play that kind of a role. We're the wonder of the world and in some ways rightly so, I think. We handled it on the ground, day to day, I think we handled that sort of thing remarkably well without presuming to become the new colonial power. So, I would say it's a close question, but that it was historically the right thing to do.

*Q: What about was Qadhafi messing around there?*

LESSER: I'm trying to think. Qadhafi certainly had close relations in Upper Volta in the Burkina Faso era subsequent to that. I don't think Qadhafi was in power yet.

*Q: Maybe not.*

LESSER: '69 to '71.

*Q: Yes. How about the Soviets, were they up to anything?*

LESSER: They were active there, yes. They gave a little bit of aid and they did a little bit of spying. I don't think the Russian diplomats considered Ouagadougou a prize assignment. We had decent enough relations with their embassy, but they were pretty arm's length. That was sort of high cold war. We didn't carry it around on our shoulders, but you were always a little bit careful. We understood for example that on the rare occasions that we would invite a Soviet diplomat to a function that if you really wanted him to come, you had to invite two. Well, there was one guy who would come alone, but we knew what that meant also. You were a little wary and relations with the Soviets was more the DCM's and ambassador's job. Your humble economic-commercial officer met them when he met them, but I didn't entertain them.

*Q: I take it you didn't have any high level visits while you were there?*

LESSER: We had two high level visits that I can recall. One was Mayor Walter Washington the first elected mayor of Washington, DC. I actually left at the end of my tour on the same plane as

he did. I stayed a couple of extra days in order to help out on the visit and that was very enjoyable. A wonderful man; he and his wife, Bennetta, were very good visitors. In addition, we actually had two congressional delegations come and that was extremely rare. One was led by I'm not going to remember his name – from Texas, but four or five of them came out, and they wanted to look at development projects. One of them said if he'd realized it was so hot and dusty there and that we were going to a dam via an unpaved, washboard road he wouldn't have worn his store-bought suit. He was being funny, but he was also wondering what on earth he was doing in such a remote, god-forsaken place. The other one was Congressman Charles Diggs, who made a point of going to remote African countries. I know he had a mixed reputation for his own ethics, but he I would say he made a good impression on his visit. We didn't have any high level visits from administration figures that I can remember.

*Q: This in Upper Volta was not on any sort of circuit of African Americans who wanted to go back to their roots and that sort of thing?*

LESSER: No, it was too far inland to have been where the roots were and it was a little early for the roots movement also. Maybe in Ghana and Nigeria you would have gotten some of that, but not out in the boondocks of Upper Volta.

*Q: How was the weather behaving while you were there?*

LESSER: The weather was in the early stage of a massive drought which only got worse after I left. We were starting to ship in emergency food while I was there which was '70 to '71, and the drought lasted through '74 and killed tens of thousands of people and decimated the cattle - I don't want to use the word industry because it was far from being an industry, but it left the land even poorer than it had been.

*Q: Well, I've talked to people who've dealt in the area and when you talk about cattle, you know, it sounds like, well, a lot of these cattle and they're like ranchers, but they're really not ranchers, aren't they? I mean these are a sign of wealth, so you, do you sell them all?*

LESSER: Well, the people who had cattle were the Fulani people who in Upper Volta were called Peulh, and they trekked their cattle. They didn't own land, but they did own cattle and so they moved throughout the year and went to better pastureland according to what was available. They did sell cattle piecemeal to keep going, but it wasn't organized in an industrial way like ranches are.

*Q: Well, then by '69 you're ready to go, wait a minute.*

LESSER: '71.

*Q: '71 I mean.*

LESSER: '71 I'm ready to go and it's time to go back to Washington and having served for two years as an economic officer, it was time to learn a little economics. I was enrolled in the six month intensive economic course at FSI and learned what I suppose you could say I should have

known before was included in the economic reporting position, but I don't think the course of history was particularly affected by my ignorance when I was in Ouagadougou.

**WILLIAM E. SCHAUFEELE, JR.**  
**Ambassador**  
**Upper Volta (1969-1971)**

*William E. Schaufele, Jr. was born in Ohio in 1923. He received a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1948 and an M.I.A. from Columbia University in 1950. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. Mr. Schaufele's career with the Foreign Service included positions in Germany, Morocco, Zaire, Burkina Faso, and Poland. He was interviewed by Lillian Mullin on November 19, 1994.*

*Q: When did you learn of your assignment as Ambassador to Ouagadougou? What kind of preparation did you get in the Department for that position?*

SCHAUFEELE: I learned of the probability of this assignment before the elections of 1968, but I was actually nominated by President Nixon in 1969 after he took office. It so happened that Joe Palmer had accompanied then Vice President Nixon to Africa and had a kind of relationship with him. At the same time I was being nominated as Ambassador to Upper Volta, Joe Palmer was exchanging jobs with David Newsom. Joe went to Libya as Ambassador, and Newsom came back to the Department as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. I had been Country Director for the area including Upper Volta, so I didn't need a lot of substantive preparation. I went through my first hearing for my appointment. I had previously had some informal meetings on Congolese policy and that sort of thing.

*Q: How did they handle that? Was this just the first step?*

SCHAUFEELE: The first step is that you get a notification from the White House that the President intends to nominate you as Ambassador to such and such a country.

*Q: What happens before that?*

SCHAUFEELE: Nothing.

*Q: You mean that this comes to you without warning?*

SCHAUFEELE: As soon as an ambassadorial vacancy occurs, the Department -- at least during my period of service -- prepares a paper on the qualities required for an ambassador to this country. The Department then submits a list of two or three names to the White House. Then they wait for feed back from the White House to get some names that will be more acceptable, because they don't want to hurt anybody's career -- if they can avoid it. That's just as far as career officers are concerned. If non-career people are under consideration, sometimes you know about

these in advance, in the sense that the White House wants to appoint a non-career officer. Sometimes you don't know. Sometimes the White House thanks the Department for its suggestions and then says that it is going to appoint somebody else. There was a man who was appointed Ambassador to Cameroon -- a non-career man who happened to be a very good choice. He was a college vice president and later served as president of a couple of colleges. He now runs the philanthropy program at Indiana University as a separate study.

Q: *Where is that?*

SCHAUFELE: It's in Indianapolis. Anyway, he was asked by the State Department to do some consulting for Bill Crockett, then the Under Secretary for Management. Crockett was impressed by him and suggested that he be named Ambassador. So he got the job and turned in a good performance. So appointments can be made in different ways.

Q: *So you received notification...*

SCHAUFELE: That the President intended to nominate me as Ambassador to Upper Volta. The Department then prepares all the papers to be signed. The White House sends the nomination to the Senate. Then the Bureau of Congressional Affairs, or whatever it is called now, in the course of its liaison with Congress, schedules the actual hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Now, certain things are liable to come up. Sometimes you don't know about them, but hopefully somebody will tell you about them. Sometimes you know something about them, which was the case when I went up for confirmation as Ambassador to Greece. I knew that the Greek-American community wanted a Greek American for the job. I expected that question to come up. Then the process is pretty cut and dried. Once the nomination goes forward to the Senate, you really are off on your new job. USIA [United States Information Agency] interviews you and takes pictures, the Bureau of Congressional Affairs advises you on which Senators you should call on before your hearing. If there's somebody not on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but who has a special interest in some aspect of the country to which you are being appointed, you are advised to call on him or her. The management people in the State Department may have some advice to give you.

Then there are all of the personal things you need to do. Whether to sell your house or rent it. Still, I was surprised at how much time I had on my hands. I hope that I used my time well, but nobody expected me to do anything in particular, although I was still technically the Country Director for West and Central African Affairs. Nobody really expected me to do that job, full time. Luckily, there wasn't much business going on at that time.

Q: *This was not a big problem area.*

SCHAUFELE: That's right. There were no big problems. Even before your hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, you go around to the different government departments with an interest in the country to which you are being appointed. This was before we had a Foreign Commercial Service. You certainly go to the Department of Commerce. You nearly

always have to go to the Treasury Department. Then, in my case, I obviously went to AID [Agency for International Development] and USIA [United States Information Agency]. USIA on the business side, not the "glorification of the Ambassador" side. Then you spend some time, in this case, with the Upper Volta Ambassador to the United States. You should meet with the heads of non profit organizations interested in the country to which you are assigned. Upper Volta, for example, has a large missionary presence.

*Q: Did you have contact with the UN?*

SCHAUFLELE: I didn't do the UN bit. However, as I said, I was in touch with missionary groups, the AAI [African-American Institute], and that sort of thing. Then, in this particular case, obviously, I had to visit the Peace Corps contingent in training down in the Virgin Islands. I don't remember at what point in this process I was confirmed by the Senate.

There were a couple of people in the Department who had served in Upper Volta recently. I talked to them.

*Q: Who were they?*

SCHAUFLELE: A political appointee called Skinner, a black anthropologist from Columbia University.

*Q: Had you already met them?*

SCHAUFLELE: I had already seen him in the field several times at post. I was a little bit surprised to learn that Skinner had written a Ph.D. dissertation on the Mossi people, the dominant tribe in Upper Volta. When I got to Ouagadougou, I learned that he didn't really speak More, as their tribal language is known.

*Q: Really?*

SCHAUFLELE: I suppose he worked through French. However, he gave the impression that he spoke More.

Oh, and I also met with representatives of INR [Bureau of Intelligence Research] and CIA. I didn't have a CIA officer assigned to Ouagadougou, but some of their people visited there from time to time -- every few weeks or so. I also didn't have an AID officer.

*Q: Did they have a regional representative?*

SCHAUFLELE: Yes, in the Ivory Coast.

*Q: How many confirmation hearings did you have?*

SCHAUFLELE: Just one. That was routine. They didn't ask any hard questions.

*Q: Did the Senators seem to know anything about you?*

SCHAUFELE: Oh, yes, they had a biographic sketch in front of them. I seem to recall that they did ask me about the situation in the Congo -- just in passing. They weren't making an issue of it. Some of them wanted to make sure -- for the public record -- that they had proved that I had experience in the area. Some of them were sensitive to that. How could they approve this man who had never been within 20 miles of Country X? So they actually proved that they were satisfied or dissatisfied with my background.

*Q: It was a good point to make.*

SCHAUFELE: Yes. So the hearing was really nothing, compared to other hearings. They didn't know anything about Upper Volta and they didn't seem to think that it was very important -- which it isn't. By and large career people get Ambassadorial assignments to countries like that. The Senators can always say that they didn't know anything about it and that they had approved an appointee who knows something about it. You get wined and dined and have a swearing in ceremony at the State Department. The new Ambassador gets to invite whom he wants for the ceremony -- usually, it's all of the people in the whole geographic bureau. A fair number of your colleagues at the same level seem to show up. I can't remember who swore me in. I don't think that it was Secretary of State Rogers. Maybe it was the Deputy Secretary of State under Rogers.

*Q: So when did you leave for your post?*

SCHAUFELE: I guess it was in April, 1969.

*Q: You had been to Ouagadougou before and knew what the town looked like?*

SCHAUFELE: Yes, and I also knew what the Ambassador's residence looked like.

*Q: So you arrived in Ouagadougou in April, 1969. Can you tell us something about your feelings when you arrived at that post?*

SCHAUFELE: Let me just add one more thing which I forgot, because we knew that this assignment was coming up. We sent our eldest son, Steven, off to boarding school.

*Q: Where?*

SCHAUFELE: At Mercersburg Academy. That was the first time we'd been separated as a family.

*Q: How old was he then?*

SCHAUFELE: We went there in 1969, so he was 16. That worked out all right. It wasn't until later that we learned that he didn't like much of it. However, he was a good student.

*Q: And your younger son -- did he go with you?*

SCHAUFELE: Oh, yes, Peter went with us.

Q: *Was there a school there?*

SCHAUFELE: No, he studied under the Calvert system correspondence school, under the supervision of the wife of the representative of Catholic Relief Services. She was teaching her even younger son under the same system.

Q: *What grade was he in?*

SCHAUFELE: Let's see. He was born in 1959. He was 10 when he went to Ouagadougou. So he must have been in fifth or sixth grade. To reach there, we flew in from Paris. Upper Volta is a very dry and hot country -- full of red rocks. The whole Embassy staff, plus the Upper Voltan Chief of Protocol, was there to meet us. The Embassy staff consisted of the DCM, a Political Officer, an Economic Officer, a Consular Officer, two USIS [United States Information Service] officers, an Administrative Officer, and, I think, three communicators. That was about it, I guess.

Q: *Were there any secretaries?*

SCHAUFELE: There was an American secretary who was also my secretary when I was Ambassador to Poland. Brenda Lee, a wonderful black woman. She could always "tell me off." She was a real asset to the Embassy. Of course, my predecessor had been a black. However, Ambassadors always get to choose their secretaries. Brenda circulated well in the community. I should say that I forgot to mention the Peace Corps contingent.

Q: *Today is February 11, 1995. You were just talking about the Peace Corps group in Upper Volta.*

SCHAUFELE: I went down to their training site in the American Virgin Islands. I was told when I arrived that they were the most militantly anti-Vietnam group that they had ever trained. I couldn't really take care of that problem while I was down there, as I was only there for an afternoon and supper. But I met them. They got to Upper Volta about 10 days before we did. They happened to be "out in the bush" when we arrived. They were training in "bush" living. Anyway, we've come back to the Peace Corps. We had a dog with us, a "Sheltie" or miniature collie, with very long hair. He didn't like the climate at all. We drove to the house. We got out of the car, and the Sheltie immediately went into the swimming pool.

The residence was no great shakes. However, we didn't expect to have a great house or anything like that. It was a typical, colonial house. The kitchen was on the ground floor. The living quarters were on the second floor.

Q: *Who built the house originally?*

SCHAUFELE: I think that it was a French house originally. I don't know who built it. There was a living room with a dining room attached. The previous Ambassador's wife had all plush

upholstered furniture put in the livingroom, which I couldn't stand to sit on, because the climate was so hot. We hardly ever used that living room. We had an "L-shaped" bedroom. We made the bottom of the "L" into a family livingroom. We even entertained there. The French Ambassador and his wife were invited to have dinner with us -- in the bedroom!

*Q: I suppose that it was air-conditioned.*

SCHAUFLELE: That's right. The house had a domestic staff of about six people: a cook, a man who took care of and cleaned the inside of the house, a gardener, and I don't know who else. We always joked about it. Our family, and particularly Peter, used to joke and say that Issa made the beds and cleaned our rooms. He would go back and clean our bedroom when we were having breakfast in the regular dining room. He was always barefoot and never walked on the rugs. He would walk on the edge of the rugs.

The house had a swimming pool. I would say that we did about 75 percent of our entertaining around the pool.

*Q: What was the climate like?*

SCHAUFLELE: It gets up to about 110 degrees every day. It's very dry most of the year. The rainy season wasn't too bad. It was in the fall. Ouagadougou is on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. In the far northern part of the country, AID had financed the construction of a ranch up there. We would go up there every once in a while.

*Q: What about water?*

SCHAUFLELE: I'll tell you something interesting about water. There was a city water supply. They had to build a new reservoir in another place. We used to drive by the site as it was being built. All they had to do was to open up the ground, and there was water there. Once I said to an engineer that the reservoir had a very large surface and that there must be a fair amount of evaporation. He said, "Every day during the hot season a three day supply of water evaporates."

*Q: They still didn't have any way to deal with pollution.*

SCHAUFLELE: No, they didn't have any money to finance a sewage plant. The water supply was adequate. It came up from the ground. There was no shortage of water. Everybody drew water from the central water supply. The indigenous people drew their water from spigots. We had a spigot, too. You should have seen the French residence in Ouagadougou. It looked like an Inca temple.

We had a couple of problems. One of my vice consuls was Theodore Roosevelt I V. He had two land tortoises, which weighed about 40 pounds apiece.

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*Q: This is February 25, 1995. We're continuing an interview with Ambassador William Schaufele. When we last talked, you were discussing your posting as Ambassador to Upper Volta, in Ouagadougou, in 1969.*

SCHAUFELE: That's right. Maybe the best way to proceed is to go back over a couple of things that didn't come through so well and talk a little bit about the setting.

Ouagadougou was a sprawling town of very few buildings of any height. Most of the Europeans lived and worked in what used to be called, "the European Section." The "Voltans," as we called them at the time -- now they are called Burkinabe. The country is called "Burkina Faso," instead of "Upper Volta," as it was called during our time there. The Burkinabe lived in what was called the "cite." This was a sprawling collection of huts around the center of the city.

Our Embassy was located in a building which had already been built at the time we opened our office there. It had been expanded and modified for Embassy purposes. The Ambassador's residence was about a three-minute walk from the Embassy.

Ouagadougou was a typical, colonial town set there in Africa. Our residence was a typical, colonial structure, with the living quarters on the second floor. I guess that the reason they built them that way was that you got more air on the second floor than you did on the ground floor. Also, the clothes washing machine and dryer were outside, but protected by having the house over them. It was not a very imposing house. There was a porch the length of the house, where we used to have our breakfast. We practically never used the living room. I remember using it on one occasion for a small reception we had after I presented my credentials and came back to the house with the Chief of Protocol. Everybody from the Embassy and a few other guests were there for a drink. Otherwise, we didn't use the living room.

We entertained mostly outside. The swimming pool had a deck around it. The yard was very comfortable. There was a good growth of grass, which was watered constantly. I think that the first week we were there we entertained 75 people for dinner. That was mostly the Peace Corps contingent and the rest of the "unofficial" American community.

Across the street from the residence the Embassy had rented property and built a swimming pool. We kept a house trailer on this property. It was largely designed for the Peace Corps people when they came in from the "bush" to Ouagadougou for whatever purpose. Our son Peter, who was then 10 years old, preferred the swimming pool across the street to the one next to the residence because the Peace Corps people were there. They were a little younger and were more fun for him. This helped our relationship with the Peace Corps volunteers, because they saw us, not only as the Ambassador and his wife, but also as the parents of Peter who came over to get him for lunch, supper, or whatever. We often sat down near the pool across the street and chatted with the Peace Corps volunteers.

All in all, it was quite a comfortable way to live. We don't have any pretensions to luxurious living accommodations, anyway. As I said before, Peter studied, using the Calvert system. It's a good educational system.

*Q: I used this method for my son Timmy for first and second grade. The only difficulty then was that Timmy finished first grade in six weeks and the second grade in two months! Did you have that difficulty?*

SCHAUFLE: No, as I mentioned before, Peter's teacher was the wife of the Catholic Relief Services representative, who was teaching her own son, who was younger than Peter. She didn't try to rush them along. I knew how long it took for an exchange of papers, texts, and that sort of thing. It might have taken somewhat longer from Ouagadougou than from a more "civilized" place, though Upper Volta was really not "uncivilized." Peter didn't go to school the whole day. He became well-known in the town. He learned More, the local language.

*Q: What is that language related to?*

SCHAUFLE: The "lingua franca" for that part of Mali, Guinea, and Niger is Bambara. That was mostly because the colonial troops, the African troops whom the French organized, used Bambara, which is used mainly in Mali, I believe. So they all spoke the same language. As the soldiers went back home and were discharged, they passed this language on to other people, and it became the "lingua franca" of the area.

We were told an interesting story about this. In Senegal a "tank" became known as a "mossi" because of Voltan soldiers up there at the time. People would point to the tank, and the soldiers would identify themselves with this machine and say that it was a "mossi."

*Q: I think that you arrived in the early fall of 1969. You were confirmed, I recall, on September 17, 1969. Before you arrived in Ouagadougou, wasn't there some kind of scandal involving the former President, who was tried for embezzlement of public funds? What happened to him?*

SCHAUFLE: The first president of an independent Upper Volta was Maurice Yameogo. He was kind of a dictator. He used government funds illegally and was ultimately ousted by the military. He was tried and convicted but not put in prison. He was placed under house arrest in the town where he was born. I can't remember the name of that town right now. He was never a political factor in Upper Volta thereafter. In that part of Africa they usually don't execute people for such things. They just try to isolate them. He was effectively isolated. Also, you have to remember that he was a pre-independence crony of Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, who remained the President of his country until his death two or three years ago. The Voltans didn't want to offend Houphouet-Boigny by executing his pre-independence ally and friend. During the colonial period Upper Volta was administered by the French as a part of French West Africa [Afrique Occidentale Française].

The Voltan military were in control of the government when I got there. The President was a General named Lamizana. At that time the military held the key positions -- but not all of the positions -- in the government. The minister of the interior was a military officer, obviously. The minister of finance was military -- and perhaps the leading personality in the government. He was very outgoing. He had a French wife. There was a fair number of the military who had French wives. The minister of finance had to put the country's finances in order, which he did. So he was important.

Q: *What was his name?*

SCHAUFLE: His name was Garango. He was minister of finance, as I said. President Lami Zanz was a benevolent, soft-spoken, respected person. He was not a big "ego" who dominated the government. There was really nobody who "dominated" the government in the sense of a single personality.

They had a series of -- I'm not sure what you call them -- kind of "fairs" in different places. The Diplomatic Corps, small as it was, was expected to attend those things. We were expected to provide prizes for the best livestock, or something like that. So that took up an unexpected portion of our Embassy budget. It was fun going to these fairs, sitting around and talking to people at the local level -- more than we would have done in some other places. Nearly all of the government ministers would be there, as well as all of the ambassadors -- the few that were there. I think that there were about six or seven ambassadors.

Q: *What countries were represented there at the time?*

SCHAUFLE: France, of course, Germany, the Soviet Union, Nigeria, Communist China, Israel, and, eventually, Egypt -- probably because Israel was there. The single, largest religious group was the Muslims. However, they don't have the concern about the Middle East situation that even the Moroccans have. And the Moroccans don't have so much of that feeling as the people in the Eastern Mediterranean area do.

About 20 percent of the people were Muslim. During Ramadan [the fasting month] they used to congregate in a very large plaza, which was empty of buildings. They would gather on Muslim feast days, pray, and that sort of thing. You would usually see 3,000 to 4,000 people out there. The Catholic Church was there. The Catholic Archbishop was an African, Cardinal Zoungana. There were also Protestants, though not very many. However, for the most part the people were animists.

Q: *I think that Cardinal Zoungana was very influential.*

SCHAUFLE: Yes, he was important. You always have to remember that the effects of the colonial period did not wear off easily. The Catholic Church, of course, had had European priests and, I think, a bishop before independence. There was a Catholic Cathedral, which was one of the most imposing buildings in Ouagadougou. Cardinal Zoungana was the second African cardinal to be appointed. He was not very talkative and was not a great conversationalist. However, he was listened to. We gave a reception on July 4. Cardinal Zoungana always came and sat next to the President. He was an important figure. I always got a kick out of him, since he was not a great talker. I asked him once about the breakdown of religious membership in Upper Volta. He went through the litany: about 20 percent Muslim, five percent Catholic, two percent Protestant. And I said, "And the rest are animists?" He said, "Oh, no, the rest are potential Catholics!"

*Q: The country had been independent for a few years when you got there. What was the nature of the government and how did they set it up?*

SCHAUFLE: When the military formed the government, I have the feeling -- though I can't prove it -- that they realized that a fully military government would probably be counterproductive. However, they had to have enough military people in the government to be able to control it. They also appointed non military people. The Foreign Minister was not a military man. The Development Minister was a man named Pierre Damiba, who was a very able man in his field. They also had to have effective representation of groups or tribes. I don't know whether there were any Catholics in the government or not. I never thought about that. I know that the president was a non practicing Muslim. I suspect that Gerango, the Finance Minister, may have been a Catholic. I don't know whether he was a practicing Catholic. So you had a fairly large government, by our standards, in such a small country. However, that's the way you keep a balance of relative moderation and peace. Everybody who really matters was represented in it.

Even the Moro Naba, the head of the Mossi, the biggest tribe, who no longer has political power, still had his court. You could go down there on a Friday and see his pages and all that sort of thing. He was a Muslim. Although he had no political power, he could cause trouble if his "Mossis" were not adequately represented. The President was not a "Mossi." He came from the northwest corner of the country. The Minister of Finance who, as I said, was probably the strongest minister in the government was a "Bissa." He was not a "Mossi."

*Q: Were the Mossis in the majority?*

SCHAUFLE: No. They were the single, largest tribe but not a majority. Upper Volta was known as a Mossi country. They were centered around Ouagadougou anyway. As I said, the Moro Naba was a Mossi. If you can think of the map, there is a railway that goes between Abidjan [Ivory Coast] and Ouagadougou. You leave Ouagadougou and head West, then South, and you get into a really tropical part of Upper Volta. Before you get into the Ivory Coast itself, there are many different tribes down there. But they all seemed to be adequately represented. I'm not going into the political developments in Ouagadougou and whatever came up between the military and the President. The upshot was that the President was ousted. He was not accused of a crime or anything like that. He just went back to his home place and lived there. Young activists -- I guess that you would put them politically to the Left of Center, but not too far to the Left -- took over the country. The first man who took over has been ousted since then. There still is that kind of instability. However, there's never been a real blood-letting in Burkina-Faso.

*Q: When you were there, the country's name was "Upper Volta."*

SCHAUFLE: That's right.

*Q: For the entire time you were there. The change didn't happen until later.*

SCHAUFLE: Yes. The change in name didn't occur until some time in the 1980's, I think.

*Q: Was the influence of the French colonial governments apparent in the setup of the Voltan government?*

SCHAUFLELE: Most of the major ministries still had French advisers. That was true in nearly all of the former French colonies. Those countries kept their French advisers for quite a while because they didn't have people available to replace them. For instance, Garango, the Finance Minister, was the most important member of the cabinet when we got there. He had an influence on economic development, obviously. His commission in the French Army was in the Quartermaster Corps. He had management skills but he didn't really have a background in public finance. He had to learn that and so he needed somebody. He was obviously well advised. He did a very good job, straightening out the finances of the country. The trouble is that the country is so poor that economic development comes very slowly.

*Q: What is its principal source of income, if any?*

SCHAUFLELE: It really doesn't have much income, except for agricultural products, such as cattle. They grow many crops in the South, in the tropical area. They kept talking to me about deposits of manganese North of Ouagadougou. That's true. There is a deposit of manganese, but there is no way to get to it. They would have to extend the railroad, which would have been very expensive. The reserves of manganese aren't large enough to justify the expense, either of the railroad or the excavation of the manganese. So this remains a forlorn hope. In our development efforts we tried to talk about cattle raising, maybe on a commercial basis. As I mentioned before, we started up a ranch in the North, on the edge of the Sahara Desert. That was working pretty well, but it was hard to find the resources really to get into cattle raising and then to make arrangements for slaughter houses and the export of beef.

*Q: How would you describe the availability of food?*

SCHAUFLELE: There was no particular problem with food there. They had enough cattle, pigs, and that sort of thing for local consumption. A lot of imported goods still came in from France. We had a commissary for the Embassy which didn't carry meat, vegetables, or other perishables. It stocked canned goods and some frozen items.

*Q: How did the food for the Commissary come in?*

SCHAUFLELE: It came in by rail from Abidjan to Ouagadougou. I don't recall how we purchased it -- maybe from Denmark, I don't know. Abidjan had a fairly large Embassy. Maybe we just became a sub unit of the Commissary in Abidjan.

While we talk about economics, we might mention the export of labor. The Voltans are good workers. Heather has a theory which, I think, is correct. The people in the north have to work to live, but it is a hard life. The people down in the tropics in the south have an easy living. They pick the food from the trees. The port of Abidjan is the major, West African port. When you come down the coast, you have Dakar [Senegal] and then Abidjan [Ivory Coast]. Those ports were staffed by migrants, foreign workers, because they were more productive than the Ivoirians.

*Q: Could the Voltans also go to Ghana?*

SCHAUFLE: Some did. It was interesting. The people who lived just north of the Ghanaian border very often spoke English, because of the traffic back and forth. Some of them worked in Ghana, though not usually down on the coast. There was a fair number of Voltans who worked on the big dam project in Ghana which had been built some years before.

*Q: What was the Embassy's main interest in Upper Volta and how would you describe your daily job at that time, in 1969 and 1970?*

SCHAUFLE: The Embassy's main interest, in a sense, was development. I should say that the decision was made, around 1965 or 1966, right after the wave of countries acceding to independence, that the Embassy in Abidjan would be responsible for the so-called "Entente" powers. The Entente powers included the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, Togo, and Benin. Under the French system they had put this grouping of countries together as kind of an economic unit. So we didn't have just the Ambassador to the Ivory Coast. We made a decision that we would have an Embassy in each country. However, the economy of Upper Volta didn't warrant having an AID mission. We did have some AID projects. The cattle ranch in the northern part of the country was one. The others, by and large, were agricultural projects.

Other than development, our main interest was political, in the sense that we wanted to see stability in the area. We knew that this was a French "fiefdom" and we weren't going to challenge the French, although they always thought that we were challenging them. Given our other responsibilities, we couldn't get the resources to match what the French had -- which were essentially based on maintaining their economic and commercial position. Actually, the French Ambassador and I got along pretty well. I think that he kind of lost his instinctive distrust of what the Americans were up to, especially as they knew very well that we didn't have a CIA representative in the Embassy.

Our interest really was to continue what we called the "Entente" idea because this grouping of five countries helped to maintain a certain degree of stability. You might have some instability in one country or another. There was complete stability in the Ivory Coast. Houphouet-Boigny lived out his life there as President. There was some instability in Upper Volta, but it didn't affect things very much. It was more important when the military took over Togo, and General Eyadema became increasingly authoritarian and dictatorial. That didn't work very well. Then the people living in Benin, which used to be called Dahomey, were always very interesting and active. In some ways, they were very brainy, but were always unstable, although never dangerously so.

*Q: In terms of daily reporting, what was the State Department asking for?*

SCHAUFLE: The Department obviously wanted whatever kind of reporting we could send in which would throw light on political, economic, and financial developments. However, because I'd been the Country Director for this area of Africa, I tended to look at the situation in a larger context, because this was what I had done as Country Director. The reporting system was quite good, I thought. I talked to the cabinet ministers and the President, while the younger officers

were talking to lower level people in the same ministries and also struck up friendships in other areas. This might not have anything to do with anything we were interested in, but nevertheless it taught them a lot about the society and how it operated. I've always considered that very important.

If you don't know how the society operates, you can get into trouble. For example, while we were there, as had been done in Malawi, the Voltan government ruled that no women could wear mini skirts in public. So, as Embassy people arrived, we would brief the women on this matter. They could wrap a cloth called a "panga" around the waist, which would then drop to the ground, in case anyone was wearing mini skirts. The young women in the Peace Corps had a little problem with that, although they finally accepted this. At first this rule didn't apply to non Muslims. A Frenchwoman we knew wore really short skirts. I think that this woman's skirts were what caused the Voltan government to apply this prohibition to everybody. My secretary always had a "panga" in the office. When she went out on the streets, she wore it.

One of my friends -- I guess that he was an Ivorian -- was an African economic and financial expert. He often came up to visit Upper Volta. We were having lunch one day at the house. I said, "Now, tell me, does this mean, in effect, that in your society female thighs are seen as more provocative than breasts?" There were bare breasted women -- not so much in Ouagadougou but out in the countryside. He said, "Oh, yes. African men are much more interested in thighs than breasts." [Laughter]

*Q: A local dress requirement. I think that you mentioned the Peace Corps in Upper Volta.*

SCHAUFLE: Yes. There was a contingent of about 30 Peace Corps volunteers -- both men and women. I mentioned that I had visited them in training in the American Virgin Islands before we went to Upper Volta. I mentioned that this was the most militantly anti-Vietnam group that had ever gone through training there. Well, we were only in the Virgin Islands over night. I talked to some of the volunteers, but none of this had really come up.

They had arrived before we did and had gone out in the "bush" to experience "bush" style living. When we arrived in Upper Volta, not all of them were out in the field yet. So one of the early things that I did was to go over to the Peace Corps headquarters. I sat down and spent a couple of hours, talking with them. A lot of this anti-Vietnam and anti-U. S. Government attitudes came out. I couldn't satisfy them under the circumstances.

Luckily, somebody asked a question. Sometimes a single question can help. They asked me about recognition of Communist China. I said, "Well, as you know, the United States does not recognize Communist China." I said that I didn't happen to agree with that policy and that I thought that we should recognize them. I developed this theme a little bit. That surprised them -- that I would say that I was opposed to a government position. They obviously had a learning process to go through.

Most of them had been trained as well diggers. They went out to help the villagers dig wells. Then they found that, obviously, the villagers already knew how to dig wells. The interesting thing was the lining of the wells. The Peace Corps volunteers taught the villagers to line these

wells with concrete and to have a raised step at the edge so that dirt and animal droppings don't get kicked into the well. It's a very simple thing but it makes a difference.

*Q: The villagers didn't have that kind of idea?*

SCHAUFLE: No. They just dug a hole in the ground. Sometimes enough soil or animal droppings would get kicked in so that it would plug up the well. Most of the volunteers helped to dig wells. There were some of them who did other things as well. Our son Peter used to go out with two or three of them, whom he visited occasionally. Heather would send what she called a "Care" package along, including things that they couldn't get to eat in the "bush." So Peter became fairly well known among the Peace Corps volunteers.

It was interesting to watch the evolution of the Peace Corps. At first they used to dress the way the young people used to dress in the 1960's: fairly sloppy, in shorts or that sort of thing. They found out themselves that the Voltans didn't respect Europeans who dressed worse than the Voltans. At least the Voltans were largely neat. A man would wear pants and a shirt. If he had a little more money, he might eventually get up to a jacket and a tie. The women always wore their "pangas," and they were always neat. A lot of the Peace Corps volunteers discovered that they got more respect and were listened to more frequently if they dressed more neatly.

As one volunteer who had just come in from the field said to me, "Now I've found out about this cultural imperialism." I saw him in Ouagadougou just after he had gotten a haircut. I joked with him about it. He said, "I have enough trouble doing my job without making it more difficult for myself with the way I look and dress." That was a rather interesting development as time went on.

*Q: So the Peace Corps volunteers were a very important part of our presence in Upper Volta.*

SCHAUFLE: They were the single, largest American group there. They were much larger than the Embassy. In addition to the 30 Peace Corps volunteers there were three Peace Corps staff members, administering the contingent, and a doctor, which was unusual for a post that size. He treated us in the Embassy, too, but he was the Peace Corps doctor. When you look at the situation from an historical, including colonial, perspective, the French probably had some Residents or Deputy Residents -- whatever titles they gave them -- living in the country, outside the capital. However, the French didn't have anyone at the village level, except people occasionally passing through. They certainly didn't have anybody at the local level who was more comfortable speaking More than French, because the French "civilizing mission" didn't include learning the local language.

So the Peace Corps was a presence scattered throughout the country. The only contact that a lot of Voltans ever had with Americans was a Peace Corps volunteer, who probably did a lot more than dig a well. Americans tend to be able to "do things" to make life easier. They would get a hut and then improve it, and that sort of thing. The locals could see that things could be done to make their lives a little easier, a little more convenient, or something like that.

So what has been left behind by the Peace Corps? Somebody should probably write this up some day. I don't know if this will be done or not. I don't know if there is still a Peace Corps in what is now Burkina Faso [Upper Volta]. Practically the only other Americans in the country outside the Embassy were Catholic Relief Services representatives and some Protestant missionaries -- not many, but some.

At the time of the Moratorium against our Vietnam policies in Washington [1970] the Peace Corps volunteers sent a delegation to meet with me. They asked first if they could wear black armbands on that day. I said, "Sure, fine, if you want to wear black armbands." They asked me if I would forward a petition to the President about the Vietnam War. I said, "Yes." They asked me a couple of other, little things. I didn't turn them down on anything, so one of them finally said, "Well, what wouldn't you accept?" I was very frank with them. I said that I wouldn't accept anything that would embarrass the Voltan Government, because American policies on Vietnam are an internal, American issue. The Voltans shouldn't have to put up with incidents, demonstrations, or anything like that which would give them problems, because we are a foreign presence. It also might give some Voltans ideas about one thing or other. I said, "You have to remember that this is a military government. The President and several of his cabinet ministers served in Vietnam with the French Army. In fact, the President was at Dien Bien Phu. So, in effect, you're taking them to task. We don't need that." The end result was that they didn't do any of the things. I don't know what they did among themselves -- whether they had meetings or something like that. They didn't do anything in the way of presenting demands in public. They didn't send me a petition.

*Q: They understood the fact of being a guest in another country.*

SCHAUFLE: That's right.

*Q: That's quite amazing.*

SCHAUFLE: It was. And it so happened that a friend of mine was the Ambassador to Ghana. He had the same experience with Peace Corps volunteers assigned there and he turned them down on everything that they asked for. He had a hell of a mess on his hands afterwards, in the form of constant hostility displayed by the Peace Corps volunteers. Well, he was that type. It didn't surprise me that he turned them down. He was a pretty stiff, "traditionalist" diplomat. However, just as an Ambassador should learn the foreign culture in which he has to operate, he has to know something about his own culture, and the Peace Corps was part of that culture.

We had a Peace Corps volunteer who was hurt twice. We used to say that he was "accident prone." One time he fell down a well and broke his heel. The next time he was out running in Ouagadougou and broke his cheek bone. He had to be medically evacuated both times. He came back both times and finished out his contract. That was pretty impressive to the people who knew about it.

*Q: Would you say that the Peace Corps had a good reputation with the Voltans? What did they think about this group of young people, coming over there?*

SCHAUFELE: I think that they were puzzled by them. The villagers in many places had really not had personal contact with Europeans, to speak of. And, for this purpose, we were considered Europeans. Secondly, if they had had some contact, it was usually in a commercial or a development context -- because the French had aid projects, too. Then, the Peace Corps volunteers lived as these people did but brought additional talents. They had something to offer, including their own labor. I think that this was quite impressive to them. If these villagers had had experience with Europeans, they didn't expect this. If they hadn't had such experience, this contact with Peace Corps volunteers was entirely new to them.

I'm sure that people who compile a history of the Peace Corps will find that the volunteers did well in some places and badly in other places. Perhaps the projects weren't properly picked out, and that sort of thing. I suspect that the balance, over the years, will be positive.

*Q: So there was no immediate reaction to the Peace Corps volunteers in Upper Volta?*

SCHAUFELE: No.

*Q: So they were living right out in the village areas?*

SCHAUFELE: Oh, yes.

*Q: In groups of, what, three or four?*

SCHAUFELE: No, individually.

*Q: Truly? Good heavens!*

SCHAUFELE: There were some projects where there were two or three volunteers involved, but the well diggers, the biggest, single group, lived alone in the villages.

*Q: These were men and women?*

SCHAUFELE: Yes.

*Q: And the women would go out singly, as well?*

SCHAUFELE: They didn't do well digging. They worked with women's groups.

*Q: So they had specific tasks.*

SCHAUFELE: Yes. These were jobs that they were taught to do. This was what their training was about. They had to learn to eat, by and large, with the local population. That didn't seem to cause any negative problems.

*Q: What did the people eat out in the country?*

SCHAUFELE: They essentially have a grain and meat diet. I've eaten like this. It's not very "thrilling," but it's perfectly good, basic food, as long as you also eat vegetables. And the people did eat vegetables.

*Q: These were available in the countryside?*

SCHAUFELE: The people in the villages grew the vegetables themselves, by and large. You would find watered plots, and they cultivated vegetables there. There was a distribution system for basic essentials. If some items weren't available from local production, there was a distribution system in the larger, provincial capitals.

*Q: They went down to Abidjan, to the Embassy Commissary?*

SCHAUFELE: Or the basic essentials came from the southern part of Upper Volta, which was less arid. Bobo Dioulasso was the second largest town in Upper Volta and was on the railroad line which ran from Abidjan to Ouagadougou. The railroad line used to end at Bobo. That's where the tropical part of Upper Volta starts.

I took the train once from Abidjan back to Ouagadougou. People thought that I was crazy. Imagine, a European who took the train! They have showers on it, as I already knew. I asked the conductor about a shower, because it's an overnight trip from Abidjan to Ouagadougou. He said, "Yes. Probably, tomorrow you can take a shower." I said, "Why can't I take one now?" So he took me down to the shower stall at the end of the car. It was full of bananas, which he had bought to sell when he got to the end of the line.

*Q: He filled up the shower stall!*

SCHAUFELE: After he sold all of the bananas, I could take a shower. There was recently a story about that railroad line in the "New York Times." There's a lot of fever going on down there. The service has degenerated.

*Q: That's too bad. Did the French build that railway line?*

SCHAUFELE: Yes.

*Q: Were the cars and the equipment also French?*

SCHAUFELE: Yes.

*Q: Were there sleeper cars?*

SCHAUFELE: Yes. Luckily, they weren't built exactly to European standards because it's so hot there. The cars were much more open, so you could sleep. It could get very hot there during the day. However, at least when you were moving, there was some breeze coming in through the open window. But they didn't have any food. When I took the train from Abidjan to Ouagadougou, I brought some food with me to eat. When we stopped at Bobo Dioulasso, I went

out into the town, for one reason or another. We stopped long enough for me to go to the local hotel and have lunch. Like in the United States, the first hotels in a lot of towns were built by the railroads.

I'm sorry that the service has degenerated, but I'm afraid that that's the history of parts of Africa and other parts of the world. There are things that the colonialists built which don't fit the culture or situation of the people, in some cases. Anyway, when the French were there, public order was always pretty good. When the French left, public order and security tended to deteriorate. The worst case I saw was in the Belgian Congo, where public order really deteriorated.

*Q: Things haven't improved, I understand.*

SCHAUFELE: Yes, it's just the same -- if not worse.

*Q: The French built these things, but there was probably no training in how to maintain them.*

SCHAUFELE: There was some training. I don't "knock" the African ability to figure out ways to maintain lots of things, as long as they're not too complicated. They could do it. They couldn't do major repairs on a locomotive. Perhaps that was done in Abidjan, for the most part. And Bobo Dioulasso. Bobo had a more substantial facility for maintaining trains than Ouagadougou did, because Ouagadougou was the end of the line.

I enjoyed the country, but there wasn't enough for me to do. I think that we had a fairly successful presence. We were looked up to. The Voltans, by and large, were very friendly, so that you could have good chats and talks with them. I was given a horse.

*Q: A horse!*

SCHAUFELE: Yes. A village would come to us and say that they needed a one-room school. They would provide the labor if we would provide the funds for the materials. They needed a school or some other kind of building. We put up a lot of buildings like that. When this community project was finished, of course, I always had to go to dedicate it. On one occasion I went to a Fulani village. The Fulanis are nomads. They're not as nomadic as they used to be, but traditionally they are nomads. You call them "Hausas" in Nigeria and "Fulanis" in Upper Volta. Heather always went with me on these trips.

We'd gone through the dedication ceremony and so forth. All of a sudden, up comes a man, leading a horse. The village chief said that this was their gift to me. So immediately I had to put off the leave taking, and we sat down and had a typical, African "palaver" [discussion]. We had to negotiate this. I had to explain to him that I couldn't accept the gift. So finally it was agreed that the present would be given to the Embassy. I left. They walked the horse to Ouagadougou -- took 10 days.

*Q: How far was that?*

SCHAUFLE: I can't remember exactly where it was in relation to Ouagadougou. It was probably 100 miles. They brought the horse down to Ouagadougou. Of course, they told everybody that it was for the Ambassador. We weren't there when it arrived. We came back a couple of hours later, and there was the horse in our compound, grazing on the grass, which he didn't have up where he came from.

We couldn't leave the horse there. However, there was a French riding club, where we were able to stable the horse. Our son Peter learned to ride there. It was very interesting. Nearly all of the French officers -- because the French had a military mission there -- were trained cavalymen. However, the horses from that part of the world are too small for most adult, European males. So they agreed to teach the women and children how to ride. Peter told the story that there was one rather bad-tempered horse. They put someone on it who really couldn't control it. The horse was running around the corral. He turned his head, grabbed the rider's shirt, and pulled him out of the saddle! He wasn't hurt, but...

Q: *I've never seen that!*

SCHAUFLE: It was a white horse.

Q: *Did the Voltans ride horses?*

SCHAUFLE: Yes, they ride. They ride bare back or with something like camel saddles which they manufacture locally. They are primitive saddles.

Q: *Was that a traditional way of riding?*

SCHAUFLE: I doubt it. It must have been introduced. It may have come from Nigeria, where they have horses. The Hausas had horses. In Upper Volta we had -- what are they called? We called them the "blue people" in Morocco.

Q: *I can only think of Berbers.*

SCHAUFLE: They're not Hausas. They're called Tuaregs. They speak a language called Tomachek, and they're all over the Sahara Desert region. We went up, with a group, and spent a couple of days with them. There we found out that the clothing of these proud people, who were called "blue people" because of what they wore, was colored with aniline dyes. In the desert area in particular they wore a part of their clothing wrapped around their faces. So this gave a blue tinge to their skin.

Q: *The dye came off?*

SCHAUFLE: Yes. We went up there. They had their camels and their "yurts," or big tents. They tend to be very tall people. I asked finally about a group of short people who seemed to be doing all of the serving. I asked one man, "Who are those people?" I was told, "Those are 'Bellas.' They're not Tuaregs. I said, "What is the Bella relationship to the Tuaregs?" He answered without thinking, because they had gotten used to me. He said, "That's our slave tribe."

I said, "Do you still have slaves here?" He said, "No. Technically, we can't have slaves any more." He said that after independence, "We told the Bellas that they weren't slaves any more." But, he said, "They didn't know how to do anything else, so they stayed with us, anyway." I didn't say, "So you still treat them as slaves." But they did. However, that practice is declining, and the Tuaregs themselves are dying out, because the area in which they can wander is getting smaller and less hospitable to them all the time, now.

There was a recent story about Tuaregs. I don't know where I saw that. Perhaps it was in the "National Geographic." It wasn't really about Tuaregs, but the article mentioned the Tuaregs because the author went to Timbuktu [Mali].

*Q: I don't recall if I asked you about other amenities. Did the French install electricity? If there was such service, how far did it extend? How available was electricity in Ouagadougou?*

SCHAUFLE: We certainly had electricity in Ouagadougou. All of the major towns had electricity. In the villages you would find generators which would only be turned on at night. It didn't mean that each hut had electricity, but whatever administrative buildings there were would have electricity. We never had any particular problems with electricity that I can recall. I was always rather surprised at how much electricity there was.

*Q: How was it generated?*

SCHAUFLE: There was a coal-fired plant in Ouagadougou.

*Q: Did it burn locally produced coal?*

SCHAUFLE: No. The coal was brought in. I don't know where it was brought from. There is coal produced in Africa -- but not very high quality. I know that those pre-independence electricity generating installations required almost constant maintenance.

*Q: You mentioned that you had done quite a bit of traveling, both in Upper Volta and in the area. Could you tell us something about that?*

SCHAUFLE: Well, we traveled a lot in Upper Volta -- either by myself or with Heather. We were always greeted hospitably and learned something from it. I remember once when we went up to the AID ranch, one of our development projects up in northern Upper Volta, on the edge of the Sahara Desert. The AID mission had established a cattle ranch -- called Markoy. We had a resident American up there. He was the only resident AID person, that is, hired by AID, to run the ranch. The temperature got up to about 130 degrees during the day there. The ranch was a little way out of a local town. People came out from the town and serenaded us for an hour or so.

I got at least some feeling on how it is to raise cattle under such desert or semi-desert conditions. The cattle did pretty well. A cow would be taken out to a person in the area who was expected to arrange to breed her. That would spread the breed, or the cross-breed, for that area. The program had mixed success. In some places this worked out and sometimes it didn't. In some areas if the local man was assiduous in making sure that he had the right feed for the animal, it worked out.

There was a veterinarian available. A careful, local man would call the veterinarian at the right time, when the calf was expected. If he didn't take care of the animal, it would be used for meat. However, it was a worthwhile project. I don't know what's happened to it since then.

*Q: Did the Voltans traditionally have cattle?*

SCHAUFLELE: Oh, yes, the Tuaregs travel with cattle.

*Q: They've had them for a long time.*

SCHAUFLELE: Yes. However, they are African breeds and are not very meaty.

*Q: Do they use the cattle for milk?*

SCHAUFLELE: Oh, yes, although they also drink camel's milk, because they have camels for transport. They pack up their tents and put them on camels -- and then ride the camels themselves. It's quite an engineering feat.

*Q: This was an American AID project at this ranch?*

SCHAUFLELE: Yes.

*Q: What was the project supposed to do?*

SCHAUFLELE: The idea was to modernize and formalize cattle raising. Instead of having one cow for an extended family or two cows for a village, you might have a larger number of cows. And these cows raised at the AID ranch were worth a lot more. Raising cattle could become a real "profession," so to speak -- just keeping the cows for milk.

*Q: But how would they get the milk to market? Where were the markets?*

SCHAUFLELE: Well, they could drive the cattle to market. That's what they were doing when we were there. But they didn't have a large number of cattle, and they weren't driving them very far. If the project were to be really successful, in the long run, they would probably have to have cattle trucks. I think that I mentioned earlier that there would have to be a slaughterhouse somewhere -- not just slaughter the cow in typical, local style.

*Q: In that kind of heat the meat wouldn't last very long.*

SCHAUFLELE: That's right. But if you build a slaughterhouse, you can also build a cold storage place. That would have been feasible if there had been enough cattle. However, the project hadn't reached that point when I was there. In fact, the ranch had almost closed at one point. I can't remember what happened. It was before my time. It had been reinvigorated and really restarted at the level which they had hoped to achieve some time earlier.

We took one, relatively long trip. We went down to Ghana, Togo, and Dahomey, which is now called Benin. We didn't go to Nigeria. We did the whole trip in our own car -- no driver. Heather and Peter went along, and we took the Sheltie dog along with us.

Q: *What kind of car did you have?*

SCHAUFELE: We had a Peugeot station wagon.

Q: *What were the roads like?*

SCHAUFELE: They were mostly dirt roads. The Peugeot was very good under those circumstances. Other cars would work out very well, except for that little Renault, which was the most widely used car in that part of the world. French cars held up very well in that situation. We didn't have any trouble. I can still remember it. We missed the ferry across a big reservoir in Ghana, which had been built as part of a large AID project. We had come down from Upper Volta in the North and had to cross that lake to go on down to Accra. We missed the ferry, so we got out of the car and walked around a bit. Along the shore of the reservoir we ran into a village chief, who was greatly entranced by our dog, especially because he had such a heavy coat. The chief really wanted that dog. He would have offered me anything to have it. I'm sure he would have eaten it, but he didn't get it.

You couldn't travel in a Peugeot in those circumstances without air conditioning.

Q: *What about gasoline?*

SCHAUFELE: There was no problem. As long as there was a road, there was gasoline somewhere.

Q: *Did you know where the gas was?*

SCHAUFELE: No.

Q: *How much gas did you carry with you?*

SCHAUFELE: I think that we only carried one five-gallon can. My Peugeot 404 got fairly good mileage. You could certainly find a gas station after going 100 miles or so.

Q: *Really?*

SCHAUFELE: Oh, yes. That is, as long as you were on the road. When you really got off the road, where there isn't much traffic, you could have a problem.

Q: *How much traffic was there?*

SCHAUFELE: There was some. Sometimes you were alone. Sometimes you would see a group of cars. It varied, depending on where you were. The road to the South, from Upper Volta into

Ghana, was pretty well traveled. The last town in Upper Volta before you reach the Ghanaian border is called Po. It's a fairly good-sized town. I didn't find traveling that difficult. When you drive along the coast, as we did this time, the road was paved. The North-South roads tended to be unpaved. This was an interesting trip for all of us, and we enjoyed it. It was about the only vacation trip of that nature which we took.

While I was in Ouagadougou, we had a visit from the Under Secretary for Management, Bill Macomber. This was in 1971. He had gone to Yale. He had a U. S. Air Force plane for the trip. We gave a big reception for him and his wife, who accompanied him. They seemed to enjoy it. I don't know if you ever met his wife, whose name was Phyllis Bernau. She used to work in the Secretary's office. Bill was a staff aide to Secretaries of State Dulles and Herter. He was a political appointee. So they got to know each other and were married later on.

Macomber could be very irascible. She really tempered his bad habits. The culmination of his trip was to be in Abidjan, where we were to have a Chiefs of Mission conference. We flew down on the plane with him to Abidjan. I had talked with him previously. I said that I thought that it was about time for me to leave Upper Volta. I had enjoyed it, but I needed something more active to occupy my time. He agreed. I remember that when I was in Abidjan, I learned that my father had died. I couldn't get a plane for three days.

*Q: It was too late?*

SCHAUFLE: Too late, yes. It probably took two days to get word to me, somehow or other, because we were moving around.

*Q: Where did your father live at this time?*

SCHAUFLE: Near Cleveland, in Lakewood, OH. So I missed that unhappy event. I did talk to my sister. I didn't even know that he was seriously ill. I knew that he was ill, but not that seriously. I finally asked her what he died of. She said his aorta burst. It was incredible. I'd never heard of such a thing before. He was probably weakened by the cancer.

*Q: He had an aneurysm?*

SCHAUFLE: Yes. Well, the transfer from Ouagadougou didn't take long. Heather went home for Steven's graduation from prep school. Steven had written to say that it was a tradition at the school to do something on graduation day that you normally weren't allowed to do. There were some girls at the school. Steven said that most of the guys were going to smoke on the front lawn of the campus. He didn't smoke, but he said that that didn't mean anything to him. He said, "If you'll give me a bottle of wine..."

Well, that brings up one thing, I'm sorry to say, that we have missed. I'd forgotten about that. In 1970 we had an R&R [Rest and Recuperation] leave. We had R&R leave once a year. Steven was spending the summer at Grenoble [France], attending a course there and increasing his appreciation of French food and wine. We flew up to Grenoble with Peter and did some traveling in France and into Germany, where we saw some old friends. It was nothing unusual but it was

very pleasant. It was a relief from the hot, sunny days in Upper Volta. It's always good to see old friends. Anyway, Heather went back for Steven's graduation in 1971. I received a telegram from Washington, asking me if I would be interested in replacing the person who was then called the Senior Adviser to the Permanent Representative to the UN. I sent a message to Heather to arrange to talk with Charlie Yost who had previously been the Permanent Representative, though he didn't then hold that position. He had retired.

*Q: He was our Ambassador in Morocco.*

SCHAUFELE: That's right. He was the first career officer to be Permanent Representative to the UN -- maybe the only one. I don't know whether there's been any career officer assigned there since that time.

*Q: I can't remember any.*

SCHAUFELE: At that time the Permanent Representative was an ex officio member of the President's cabinet. That was interesting -- not that they listened to him much, I believe. Anyway, in my telegram to Heather, I said, "Please talk to Charlie Yost and see what he thinks of it as a job per se and as a job for me and then call me from Bill Macomber's office. They'll arrange it for you." So that's what she did. Charlie Yost thought it was a worthwhile job, so I agreed to accept the offer. Heather flew back to Ouagadougou for the packing of our effects and the leavetaking.

We left Ouagadougou, satisfied that we had done a reasonably good job and quite happy that we had been there. However, I think that we had had enough of it. After all, it was my first assignment as Ambassador -- both literally and as an Ambassador. I learned a lot of things from this experience that I could apply elsewhere, under different circumstances and at different levels of responsibility. I never served at such a small place again. This is not surprising, of course. So the Ouagadougou episode was a worthwhile experience. I was promoted to FSO-1 while I was there. U. Alexis Johnson [then Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs] felt better that we no longer had an FSO-2 as Ambassador.

*Q: FSO-1 is the equivalent to FSO Minister Counselor today, as I recall.*

SCHAUFELE: I guess so. I never kept track of those things.

*Q: There was something about the way they changed those ranks.*

SCHAUFELE: They changed them all.

*Q: But that was about it. That was the top.*

SCHAUFELE: Yes, but you see they didn't change the ranks then. I was later promoted to FSO Career Minister, which was the highest rank in the Foreign Service. They had appointed some FSO Career Ambassadors and then they stopped doing that. Then they reinstated that rank after I retired. What do they call Career Minister in the new system?

Q: *That's an extra step above the other grades.*

SCHAUFELE: I see. Well, I didn't follow that change.

Q: *How did you feel about the support you received from the State Department while you were in Ouagadougou? Did anybody else visit you beside Under Secretary Macomber, for example?*

SCHAUFELE: Yes, the Country Director did -- the guy who replaced me.

Q: *Who was that?*

SCHAUFELE: I think that it was John McKesson. The desk officer for Upper Volta did, obviously. We had a good desk officer.

Q: *Who was that?*

SCHAUFELE: Chuck Twining. He was very good. He followed up on everything. I couldn't have asked for a better desk officer. Somebody came out from USIA [United States Information Agency], but I can't remember his name. There was no AID visit. We had the AID Director from Abidjan who came up, but I can't remember anybody from Washington coming for a visit. We didn't get any military visits, which was fine with me. Let the French have their military presence in Upper Volta.

Q: *Yes, they probably wouldn't be happy about American military visits. Flying into and out of Ouagadougou wasn't all of that difficult at that time.*

SCHAUFELE: No. I think that there were three flights a week from Paris and two flights a week from Abidjan.

Q: *What kind of planes?*

SCHAUFELE: They were usually DC-7's, I think. They were flown by Air France or Air Afrique, both of which were subsidized by the French government. There were charter flights. I'm sure that the French had some charter planes at the airport in Ouagadougou. I can't remember them specifically, although I was out at the airport often enough. There were a lot of small planes there, but I don't know whose they were. Some of them could well have been French. Obviously, there were some Voltan Air Force planes. They weren't fighter planes. They were small aircraft.

Q: *So you felt fairly isolated in Upper Volta?*

SCHAUFELE: No, we didn't feel that isolated. Sometimes you might not get a message, as was the case when my father died. You might have to wait two days for a flight reservation. You're never happy about that sort of thing.

**DONALD B. EASUM**  
**Ambassador**  
**Upper Volta (1971-1974)**

*Donald B. Easum left Madison, Wisconsin for Washington, DC to enter the Foreign Service in March, 1953. He served as ambassador to Upper Volta and became Assistant Secretary for African Affairs in 1974. A year later he was appointed ambassador to Nigeria. He was interviewed by Arthur Day on January 17th and March 12, 1990.*

*Q: From then on you served in a number of posts in Latin America, and in Africa, but I think we could jump ahead, if you agree, to your tour as Ambassador in Upper Volta at which point, in a sense, commenced your association with Henry Kissinger and that leads us into the most interesting part of the story of your career. Why don't you begin with that, how Kissinger picked you up, and what happened to you at that point.*

EASUM: This takes us to 1971, '72 and '73. I was appointed in early '71 as Ambassador to Ouagadougou, then it was Upper Volta and now it's Burkina Faso, a small and insignificant country in so many ways, in the Sahelian zone subject to incredible drought, incredible poverty, and all of the attendant difficulties. But we found it a very interesting post, partly because the personality of the Voltaic was gentle and friendly and interested. Partly also because we had a tremendous Peace Corps establishment there, 90 volunteers. And in those days we had no AID program at all. AID was regional, as opposed to bilateral, or country-specific, and we had virtually no AID program to play with. So the Peace Corps was really our presence, and in effect, I felt sometimes I was more the director of the Peace Corps than I was the Ambassador because that was really our lifestyle. I got to know virtually every volunteer; the alleged separation between the Peace Corps on the one hand, and the State Department on the other, meant absolutely nothing out there. And my relationships with the Peace Corps director was splendid.

In the second year, it was '72, the drought hit all of the Sahelian zone of Africa--Sahelian meaning, border of the desert, just to the south of the desert. So that drought struck from Senegal on the west all the way across to Ethiopia--Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, on the east, and there was incredible starvation and hardship all through the area. The United States had the extreme good fortune of having available tremendous amounts of a very serviceable grain, sorghum. The sorghum which is fed in the US to livestock is extremely nutritious and not unlike the millet and sorghum that is commonly grown across the Sahelian zone of Africa. So some wise heads decided to see whether massive shipments of American sorghum might not serve to alleviate hardship, hold off starvation. And these deliveries began--50 kilo bags packed in plastic--began arriving at the various ports of West Africa and we all got to work figuring out how to get them from the ports into the interior where we were. Some of them came up from Ghana, many of them did by truck, others came in in other ways. Some came in by air, and we soon were in a position to put together a reasonable drought relief effort in those emergency circumstances.

One day when we were busy getting another shipment of this sorghum coming in, and trying to figure out how to assist the government to deliver it because roads had been broken by early

rains, and the starving populations could no longer receive these shipments by road and truck--I got a message from somebody saying, "The American airplanes have arrived at the airport. You must go out." I went out to the airport, which was about five minutes from downtown Ouagadougou, and here were two C-130s Hercules airplanes flown by--I thought Americans as I saw these fellows coming walking toward me in their green fatigues--it turned out they were Belgian pilots. The Belgian Minister of Economic Development, I guess it was, had just sort of sent these guys south, and said to them, "Go to Upper Volta. They'll need you there, and contact the Belgium ambassador." Well, the Belgian ambassador lived in Abidjan, which was about 1500 miles away--the Ivory Coast, on the sea--and I was the next best. So they said, "What can we do? We're here." I said, "Well, we can do something, I'm sure. We've got all this sorghum and we're trying to figure out how to deliver it. What can we figure out? Meanwhile I'm glad to let you use my cable facilities. We'll talk to your ambassador in Abidjan. We'll tell him you are here, and if he has any other instructions for you, fine. But there is a lot to be done here if we can figure out what to do."

And I had been through one of these unique circumstances where a training program that is provided for you really pays off. I'd been in the so-called Senior Seminar, and we'd gone to Fort Bragg and we had seen C-130s flying low, dropping...called the LAPES technique, Low Altitude Parachute Ejection System. We'd seen stuff being slid out the back end of these C-130s as they would fly low over an airfield, and a parachute would pull the stuff out and it would land these pellets, skid along, and you'd have a delivery.

It happened that these planes had in them paratroopers, a paratroop brigade, not to jump, but to do other kinds of things, and these fellows said, "We're not trained in that, but that's an idea. We think maybe we could fly one of these planes back to Belgium and pick up a lot of extra parachutes that are outdated, and maybe we can figure out a way to tie those on pallets, if we can get pallets. We can put your bags of sorghum on the pallets, we can take them up, and drop them down and they will float down to the populations that need them." We had no pallets. We figured out how to find some--I can't even remember now how we found the pallets--and we commenced loading these things with these brigades of paratroopers doing most of the work. And that worked quite well, until we ran out of parachutes and they couldn't get any more. They went back several times to get more [from Brussels].

So then we decided, why not try the LAPES system. Without parachutes maybe we can just fly over a field and drop the stuff out. We tried that right on the airfield in Ouagadougou, and I was then made, by the local government, the coordinator for all drought relief. So we had other governments involved, and we had, of course, some Voltaic who were working with us. And we found that pushing this stuff out, it would burst. We put it in jute sacks, and it still burst. And we kept experimenting with it until we found that if we wrapped it in three jute sacks, it would not burst. We could just push it out the back end of the plane. How rapid? Well, the GSO of the embassy devised a scheme for building a kind of a chute. We built five or six chutes, we got a lot of Peace Corps volunteers, and local Red Cross youngsters together. The government gave us a hangar. We went one Sunday morning and we just pushed out all the airplanes that were in the hangar, most of them belonging to French private citizens. I had the Minister of Interior with me, so I thought we could do this. So the Peace Corps volunteers were pushing these airplanes out in the sunshine, and the heat and the dust. We took over the hangar, and then our problem was jute

bags because we'd sent an emissary down to the local market where I'd seen the tailors making these things. And the tailor, in fact, was the one who first came out and made the samples for us but, of course, we didn't have enough quantity. So we found that in Kumasi, in Ghana, which was about 400 miles away, there was a jute bag factory. We sent some trucks off to get big quantities. And first of all, we were tying these bags, using the volunteers, both Peace Corps and Red Cross, and wrapping wire around them and that became obviously onerous. And our assembly line just wasn't moving very fast, so the Belgium pilot said, "Oh, well, we'll just fly back to Brussels. We'll be back tomorrow, and we'll bring some little hand sewing machines that just go burr." And so they did.

And that worked really well. We found we could drop a lot of sorghum. I've forgotten what our figure was. It was something like, I think, 20,000 tons. That seems like a lot but one pallet, with ten of these bags, I think was a ton. At any rate, we dropped a lot and saved a lot of lives. And by that time in Chad, and in Mali, our system was being copied. One day we were out at the airport loading, and I'm out there trying to keep vigorous and young, and I'm pushing a pallet with a bunch of others onto a fork lift, which in turn then takes it into the belly of the C-130, and here comes David Ottaway, the correspondent of the Washington Post, who had arrived by highway. I didn't know he was coming, no problem, but he was just a surprise. He was somebody I'd known, and he walks out on the strip and says, "Hey Don, since when did you join the Peace Corps?" And he had a camera and took my picture, and he wrote a big story that appeared on the front page of the second section of the Washington Post, with a big picture, and the headlines saying, "You're seeing our shirtsleeve American Ambassador pushing sorghum," something like that. That story was the beginning of my demise, in a sense, and it was the beginning of my life with Henry because we're now mid-'73, the fall of '73. He is still the National Security Adviser for President Nixon at the White House, but he is about to be named Secretary of State. And it was, I think, in October of that year, '73, that he officially moved his office and came over to the State Department. He told me later, and we'll get to that, that he was looking for, he said, young, innovative, unorthodox, Foreign Service Officers. He felt the Foreign Service was filled with a bunch of effete intellectual non-hard hitting, non-pragmatic, idealistic, missionary zealots, for whatever causes, and he just had no patience with the Foreign Service, and he wanted to just run it himself with new type thinking. That was what was in his mind. He later told me that.

So in December of that year suddenly I got a message from the Secretary of State saying, "I want to see you in New York in my apartment at the Pierre Hotel, day after tomorrow." And that's where the other story begins. We can catch our breath here. You wanted to know about Ouagadougou. I've told you a little bit about Ouagadougou, and I didn't tell you about the softball games, and the fact that I was successful in keeping both the Marine Corps and the CIA out of Ouagadougou. I said I didn't need either one of them. I didn't need the Marines because the best thing they do is play softball and we had such good Peace Corps volunteers, and also some of the embassy, that we didn't need them.

*Q: These were Marines as the standard security detail for the embassy?*

EASUM: That's right. And I think I was right. Of course, we can't translate that to today. Today's security problem is indeed greater, and I've had good experience with Marine Guards, and did later in Nigeria where I was ambassador and we had mobs in the street and I was comforted by

the fact that the Marines were there although I had to tell them not to throw the tear gas, and if they had, we'd been in deep trouble. So they were controllable, but they are a mixed blessing, and in Ouagadougou they would have gone crazy, especially when they would have found that they couldn't dominate the softball team. So we managed to have that little success, in addition to drought relief. And as far as a CIA presence was concerned, I didn't think they were necessary either and I succeeded in keeping them away, and every time we came back to Washington I did not get pressure on the Marines but I got a lot of pressure on the CIA. I'd be invited across the river to Langley, and they would give me a pleasant lunch, and I would be gently remonstrated for not appreciating the importance of CIA persons even in such a strange, out-of-the-way environment as Ouagadougou. They would tell me tall stories about how you can track a Soviet diplomat, who is lonely in a place like Ouagadougou, who has nothing to do except play volley ball, who has had to send his wife home because none of the Soviet wives can hack it in a place like that, and that's just the place where you can find, where our people can find--this is CIA talking to me--where our people can find weaknesses, bad habits, we can build a profile of some of these people who don't speak French, and certainly don't speak Djerma or any of the indigenous Voltaic languages. " And later on, Mr. Ambassador, you should realize that they are useful to all of us. You may say you don't need them, but we as a country find that tracking our Soviet colleagues is very useful to us in the long run. And who knows, somebody we could identify in Ouagadougou may someday become a key adviser in the Soviet military establishment, and can tell us things that we really need to know." At any rate, that's Ouagadougou, and that represents the beginning of my life with Henry when I went back to the Pierre Hotel and then had my first conversation with him.

*Q: Why don't we break there while I change the tape, and you can start with a fresh tape on the other side.*

*So, we have you coming back from Ouagadougou to begin your association with Henry Kissinger, and your first talk, I guess, at the Pierre Hotel in New York.*

EASUM: That's the first stop, and I was nervous. I wasn't nervous when I had that SY interview that I told you about 21 years earlier. But I was surely nervous this time. His suite was up on--I don't know which floor--and I went up there, and he received me in a very obviously elite setting, and I think he offered me a drink, or coffee, or something. And I sat down in a soft chair, and he was seated in another one, and before we really got started in comes this little black Pekinese, scrambling all over and jumping up and down on me and on him, and I couldn't concentrate on what was happening. Then I think it was his mother who came in, who was charming, and he introduced her and that was pleasant, and she left, and we were just about ready to start when his wife came in from a shopping tour, and there was conversation about that. And eventually he had me unencumbered, so to speak, and he asked me a little bit about what I was doing in Ouagadougou, but all in a sort of typically Kissingerian way, as if to say what are you doing out there (machine noise) for the United States, but not hostile, just making sure he was in charge of the interview.

And then he said, "You know I want to do some new things. Some innovative things, and I'm beginning to get my team in order--by the way, how old are you?" And I said, "I'm your age, Mr. Secretary," which was then 50 for both of us. And he asked a little bit about Africa, but relatively

little. And then he said, "Well, look, I have several jobs to fill. I'm looking for an Executive Secretary to run the Executive Secretariat. I'm looking for a new head of INR, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. I'm looking for an Assistant Secretary for Latin America, and an Assistant Secretary for Africa." What else did he need? There were 4 or 5, maybe 6 or 7, I've forgotten the others. And he said, "You've mentioned to me someone who might be qualified for one of these posts, and I'd like you to give me your views." Well, that was all pretty sudden. I realized that only one of those assignments filled my experience, and that would be the Executive Secretary assignment. You and I, Pete, have both been in that routine-- you, I think, at a higher level of eminence than I. But no matter where you are in the Secretariat, I think that you learn it well, do it well, and have a feeling of respect for what that job entails. I had always liked that work once I got to the point where I understood what I was doing, and I had then moved across to be the Executive Secretary of AID, Deputy first for a year, and then the Executive Secretary of AID. First under Fowler Hamilton, and then under David Bell. So I'd had some experience that was relevant. But I said, "Mr. Secretary, I don't want to do that. I think maybe I could do a passable job, but I don't want to do it. It just doesn't suit my thinking about what I want to do in the Foreign Service, and I think you'll find other people who will be able to do it just as well, and probably a lot better. The Latin American job, I'm flattered that you would think of me for that, but I wouldn't do that well enough. I've had only one tour in Latin America, I did a Ph.D. in Buenos Aires, and I was Staff Director of the Inter-Departmental Group for Latin American Affairs, but [the Assistant Secretary position needs] somebody who knows a lot more about Latin America than I do. So I would say 'no' to that. The Intelligence and Research job-- I'm not, I think, cut out for that. The only job I think that I might like to do, that I would be willing maybe to take a stab at, if you really want me, would be the African Assistant Secretary position." And he said, "What's your experience in Africa?" And I explained to him that it was limited to West Africa--first it was Senegal which also took me to Gambia, and to Portuguese Guinea--what was then called Portuguese Guinea. For me it was a fascinating assignment, it was an assignment to three different colonial areas, three different European language areas of Africa, but it was limited in so many ways. Then I'd had two years as Deputy Chief of Mission in Niamey, Niger, which is the Sahel again. And then two years as Ambassador in Ouagadougou. That's a pretty limited experience for somebody whose being asked to be an Assistant Secretary of State. And I said this to him. I said, "I know nothing about North Africa. I've no Arabic. I don't know anything about The Horn of Africa, East and southern Africa I, of course, know what's going on as any Ambassador should wherever he is in Africa, but I can't tell you you'd be getting anybody with any particular expertise in those areas." He said, "All right. Go on back to whatever that place is--Ouagadougou--and I'll call you if I need you."

So I hustled out of there, and felt, "Wow, I got through that without any disasters and clearly he's not going to ask me to do anything, so I'm home safe." And I went back to Ouagadougou. In about three weeks, maybe later, I got another message saying, "I want to see you in my office day after tomorrow." And now he was in the State Department. He was in his own office, the new office. And I went back to Washington on time and then I sat around cooling my heels in the African Bureau for four or five days until Larry Eagleburger called me. Larry was...what was he? Special Assistant, wasn't he? Senior Executive Assistant to the Secretary, I think. And Larry said, "Don, the Secretary wants you to go see Brent Scowcroft at the White House." Scowcroft has always been close to Kissinger, was close then, the two of them had worked very closely together in the White House. So I guess I made the appointment myself, and I went over there to

the Executive Office Building, and I saw Scowcroft, and I liked him, and we had a good talk about Africa, other things. I was candid again about what I didn't know about the continent. But Scowcroft apparently got an upbeat view of me, and reported back to Kissinger. At any rate I got a call from Larry telling me the Secretary wanted me for the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. I didn't see Kissinger. I said, "All right, I'll do my best. When should I report back for duty?" I don't remember quite what Larry said, but in effect I think he said, "Well, you go on back to post, clear the post as well as you can, and as soon as you can, and come on back and we'll start the new job."

I often thought afterwards that I made a really big error in not somehow insisting that I see Kissinger then, and ask him what he thought of our policy toward Africa. How did he want to approach the continent? What were his ideas on apartheid, and decolonialization, the continuation of Portuguese rule, the problems of economic development, the problems of national unity? What is the US national interest in Africa? The role of the Soviets? All those kinds of things that later, of course, I was dealing with all the time. I never knew anything about what he felt about Africa. I'd been, in a sense, too frightened and too put off by the bizarre interview at the Pierre Hotel to ask him any decent questions. And he didn't ask me anything very serious there. That was a just a kind of get acquainted session, I figured. And the second time, I should have probably pushed Scowcroft because I know he'd have spoken to me wisely, and intelligently. We could have had a serious conversation. I didn't do that, I guess, because I felt probably I'd be invited and have a meeting with Kissinger. And when I wasn't invited, maybe I should have insisted. At any rate, I didn't.

I went back to Ouagadougou, cleared the post in a sensible way, and I came back--it must have been February or March of 1974--started work right away, although I was not yet confirmed. So in a sense I was not there, I was a non-person, but I was reading, and I was talking with all the members of the Bureau. I think it was Tony Ross--Claude Ross--who was Acting prior to my taking over officially, and he had taken over from David Newsom who, I think, was being sent out to be Ambassador in Indonesia. So there was an inter-regnum there during a certain time when we had the deputies in place from David's bureau, and Tony, the senior of them, was the Acting Assistant Secretary. And he was going to the staff meetings, and I was not because I wasn't yet confirmed. Eventually, when I was confirmed, I think it was Eagleburger who said, "The Secretary is sure glad to get Tony Ross out of his hair. He doesn't want to see Tony Ross come up here anymore." Now Tony Ross, with whom I just spoke today, is a wonderful Foreign Service Officer. And typical of the way Kissinger approaches the people relationships with which he has to deal--for some reason, he just didn't like this man. He thought Tony was the quintessential, careful, clipped speech, stripe pants, Foreign Service Officer. I think he felt Tony wasn't decisive enough-- that when he asked Tony a question, Tony would try to explain the pros and the cons, and the various options, and for whatever reason, Kissinger didn't want that. He was impatient. He wanted to have an answer and not a series of comments. And I never told Tony that. If he listens to this tape, he'll hear it for the first time. I've never told him what Kissinger apparently thought of him, although maybe Tony knows it directly, for all I know.

**THOMAS D. BOYATT**

**Ambassador  
Upper Volta (1978-1980)**

*Ambassador Thomas D. Boyatt was born in Ohio. He joined the Foreign Service in 1959. In addition to serving in Chile, Ambassador Boyatt served in Luxembourg, Cyprus, and was ambassador to Upper Volta and Colombia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

Q: *So from this hot house you went to Upper Volta as ambassador.*

BOYATT: Yes, do you think that was an exile, Stuart, or what?

Q: *Well, I don't know, '78 to '80. Being an ambassador is something, but at the same time Upper Volta doesn't rate very high on the radar in foreign policy.*

BOYATT: Well, beggars can't be choosers, old boy.

Q: *Well, this is the entree for many Foreign Service officers by getting a post in Africa.*

BOYATT: Well, exactly, and I was young, I was 45, and I considered it a great honor. I went off to Ouagadougou with flags flying.

Q: *Do you have any idea how the appointment came about? Was there any problem with you?*

BOYATT: No, I think it came about...it had nothing to do with politics with the big P, it came about because a lot of senior people in AF, Dick Moose, the Assistant Secretary, and Bill Harrop, the Deputy, and Lannon Walker, the deputy, they were all people I had known earlier in my career who respected me, I guess, and saw me as a hard charger. Ouaga is not a place you send a 60 year old who wants a retirement post. I mean, it's tough out there, and I was young and dumb, who's more perfect than that?

Q: *What was the situation? We're talking about the '78-80 period in Upper Volta.*

BOYATT: That was the era of the great Sahelian drought. Not unlike the drought on the east coast of Africa now, except that we had no civil war to match it, or series of civil wars. The focus of everything was A.I.D., so essentially while there was a Foreign Minister, and I did see him, and I saw the president, and we tried to get them to vote our way, and to open up their own political process. Essentially, it was a management job, and I spent most of my time on A.I.D. I discovered, this will amuse you, we distributed food aid, direct aid, everything, all in maybe 18 million dollars a year, and I once sat down and calculated the cost of having the A.I.D. mission there, plus the A.I.D. contractors, and that came to another 18 million. So it cost us a dollar to distribute a dollar's worth of development, and I said, this is ridiculous. You can't get there from here, you can't do that. So I went on this great campaign to reduce the A.I.D. mission which, of course, you know how A.I.D. is, they fought it, and I won some battles. I used to get cables from Dick Moose which would say, "Well, the thundering herd from A.I.D. came into my office again this morning. What have you done now?" That sort of stuff, very amusing. But he knew in his

heart that I was right. Our method of delivering development is the most inefficient in the world. I think I sent one cable once that said we'd be better off if we just bought West African francs and baled them up, put them in a C-47, flew around the country and kicked 18 million dollars out of the window. We'd probably have a better impact on the economy. And we probably would have.

*Q: I suspect we would have.*

BOYATT: I wish I had known then, what I know now about the private sector, about business in general, and how things really happen. Never, never, never give money to a government. At best governments are inefficient, particularly Third World governments, and at worse, they are corrupt beyond imagining. And in Upper Volta, as in most of the rest of the Third World, it was both. We'd put X amount of money into a project that we would do through the Agriculture Ministry, and by the time their inefficiencies, and their corruption was finished, we were getting 30 percent on the dollar. And then they weren't the right kinds of projects because we always depended on some government ministry to keep them implemented. If you have to give somebody money, give it to a private entrepreneur who has some reason to keep doing whatever it is you want him to do.

*Q: Did you find yourself going out and looking at A.I.D. projects which had gotten a lot of attention, and then the attention was switched somewhere else?*

BOYATT: Absolutely. abso-bloody-lutely. I remember one, and I wish I could remember the name of this project, they even did an article on it in the National Geographic once. We went off to some place up in the boonies, and we built this huge God damned fence around about a county, around about 40-50,000 acres. And this was supposed to be a model agricultural station, and we poured in a lot of money to improve the grasses, and we had sheds to keep animals in, and a veterinary shop, and a laboratory, and plows, the whole thing. And this was supposed to have a profound impact on the herder economy in the northern part of the country. And I went there about four or five years after the project. It was the most incredible thing you can imagine. The one thing that was true was, that inside the fence it was green, and outside the fence it was a mess, it was brown. But the fence was broken in several places, the herds were scattered, and the little test tubes and beakers in all the laboratories were broken, and dust encrusted. Nobody that was supposed to be there was there, it was the most incredible God damned thing you've ever seen. I can't imagine that A.I.D. took me up there to show that to me because all it did was to confirm all of my worst suspicions about A.I.D., and the process of delivering development. Incredible!

*Q: Tom, you've had business experience, you're not a professional A.I.D. person, what was your analysis at that time? What was the problem with A.I.D. as far as in Upper Volta of trying to deliver?*

BOYATT: The problem with A.I.D. is that it is a huge bureaucracy that does nothing but design projects, and justify those projects, both to its own bureaucracy and to the Congress. A.I.D. itself never delivers a nickel's worth of development. That's all done by contractors. So you have this huge bureaucratic overhead, then they go out and hire as many contractors as there are A.I.D.

people to actually go out and dig the wells, and make the plows, or whatever, so you have double the bureaucracy, and it channels all of its money through governments. It does everything absolutely the wrong way. It should all be done the other way. It should be done through the private sector.

*Q: Are there any countries that do it through the private sector? Did you observe any?*

BOYATT: Oh yes. A lot of today's World Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank, lending is done through private institutions now. If I had my druthers, I'd wipe A.I.D. out, and I'd reconstitute development offices as adjuncts of the State Department, and make developments especially within the State Department/Foreign Service institution. Something I understand was recently recommended by a Presidential commission. A.I.D. is totally bankrupt now. Nobody believes in it. A.I.D. never restructured an economy in its life, and it simply went in there and did things through government bureaucracies, and more often than not they made things worse.

How? Let me tell you how. What do you do, Stuart, if you go into a country that can barely feed itself, and has no money to import food, and if you go in there and you institute child health systems that double the population in three years. Is that good for development? It isn't, it just isn't. We never concentrated on the right end of development. What we should have been working for all along was increased agriculture production, and population control. Those two things, and nothing else. But we spent our time, and our money, on medical, educational, everything you can think of. Women in development, every trendy thing that came along in Washington that had a constituency in Washington, had a project overseas. I just think we've done it all wrong.

And the people who have done it right, the Koreans, the Taiwanese, the Chileans, they've all done it through the private sector--the Japanese, the Germans. We have to reorient the whole thing.

*Q: What was your impression? I mean you'd been outside this, and this is your first time in the African Bureau, of the so-called Africanists, and the African Bureau, as a support staff?*

BOYATT: Like everybody else, there were a certain number of people that were in the AF Bureau for romantic reasons. I've no big impressions along those lines.

*Q: In other words, there wasn't any great difference between the ARA Bureau, and the African Bureau?*

BOYATT: ...and the NEA Bureau. I would say that the NEA Bureau was the best of those three bureaus, but that's a private, prejudice analysis. By and large people did a good job under difficult circumstances. The real problems were much bigger than that, Stuart, they were strategic.

*Q: You went back to ARA, to Colombia...*

BOYATT: You haven't asked me, Stuart, about baseball.

*Q: No, let me ask you about baseball.*

BOYATT: They had this wonderful institution in West Africa. It may have come up in some of your other interviews, called West African International Softball Tournament, WAIST. And the first time I ever heard about it, I was reading an international Herald Tribune in Chile, where we also had a good softball team, a good league. And there was a guy out in left field making a catch under a baobab tree, and it was a little article in the international Herald Tribune about the league. I said, "God, I wish I could play in that league," and somebody up there must have been listening, because within a year I was playing in that league. And what it was, each embassy had a team. Most of the embassies had Little Leagues, and they'd pick an all-star team from the league, from all their teams. And every long weekend there would be a tournament, like over George Washington's birthday, Labor Day and July Fourth, at one of the embassies, and the host embassy would invite all the others in, and there would be three days, we'd play two games a day, for six days, and there would be a party every night, and everyone would go home. But it was great for morale because it got people out. Even if you went from Ouaga to Bamako, it was a big deal. If you went from Ouaga to Dakar it was a really big deal because the weather is nice there, it's more civilized. So we had a lot of fun, and the teams all had humorous names: Ouagadougou's team was called Sahel's Angels, and the guys from Nouakchott were called The Camelot, and Bamako was named after their local beer, where they called themselves the So-So Malleau. Niger was Whales, Tails, something or other, Drinking Society. But anyway, it was a huge morale pleaser.

The first time I ever had to leave the country to go to one of these softball teams--you know ambassadors have to request a permission of the Assistant Secretary--so I sent Moose a cable that said, "Ouagadougou's Sahel's Angels" are playing in Dakar next weekend. I'm the first baseman on our team, and I'd like to leave the country to participate in the tournament." And Moose sent me back a cable that said, "I'm surprised that you can make it to first base, much less play the position. By all means go." It was the single, biggest, morale maker in the whole region. People loved it.

**ROBERT S. ZIGLER**  
**Program Officer, USAID**  
**Ougadougou (1982)**

*Robert S. Zigler was born in Illinois in 1920. He received his bachelor's degree from Manchester College in 1942. During his career with US AID he served in Laos, Vietnam, Philippines, Washington D.C., Ghana, and Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). Mr. Zigler was interviewed by W. Haven North in November 1998.*

*Q: What year?*

ZIGLER: Well, Upper Volta comes on in 1982. I had several projects there. In the country itself, there were 17 different ethnic groups, and as you might believe, they couldn't talk to each other

in African languages. French was the common language. Anytime anyone wants to criticize colonialism should note some positive results, one of which was commonalty and communication. The project I had involved wells and public health. Public health education and well construction, they had a common relationship. The interesting thing there was a considerable period of time between when I got there and when the previous American left, the project manager. There was a Burkinabe, and he was doing a good job. It was an interesting human presence problem, so I let him continue with reasonable independence.

*Q: What about the wells program and the health program; was that effective?*

ZIGLER: That was done by a contractor. They lived on site. They were Americans, but they could speak French, of course, with their local team members.

*Q: Were they well received in the villages?*

ZIGLER: You have a problem with wells and pumps. These were hand pump wells. I can remember seeing 15-20 people lined up to pump, pump, pump. I don't think by the time I left there, there had been any type of pump that survived very long in a village because of constant use. One of the things that really needs to be done, and they tried to do it, was to have spare parts and somebody responsible for well maintenance. That was an issue, you know, how to keep those pumps working.

*Q: Were there problems about the locations of these wells?*

ZIGLER: I never heard of any. The people that put them in, put them in at appropriate locations. They all seemed to work. I never heard of any dry wells. Now you talk about dry wells. Here we go back to Laos again. There was an American man who ran a well drilling team. He used a hand powered drill which meant he could go down about 30 feet. That was about as far as he could go. In southern Laos, there was an important political man who wanted to have a big soiree, a big party. It had to do with his daughter's marriage, so that meant a lot of visitors. This well driller was down there trying to find water. I think he went down something like 40 times. It was all hard pan rock and he couldn't get through. Forty times unsuccessful. Now you talk about a public relations problem or a public relations success. If he would have hit water; it would have been glorious, but he didn't.

*Q: What about the public health part? Was it related to water use?*

ZIGLER: The project goal was to teach good hygiene, so the two elements combined significantly. Another project I was involved in had to do with village artisans. This was an interesting project in which a program was taught by local people to local people. They taught courses in carpentry, blacksmithing, plumbing, electricity, and small motor maintenance, that had an application in the local village. They'd come in and learn it and go back and use it. Now one of the problems is, if you train a man, hopefully, he'll go back home. This is an AID participant training problem and we had the same problem there: to get them to go home. Nevertheless, it was an all Burkina Faso project done by competent people.

One of the interesting human problems again for this one was AID supplied some funds every month for the operation of the program. That was one of my responsibilities of course. I had a counterpart in the government of Upper Volta then. I noticed two or three times I'd make a suggestion, he was kind of cool. This was surprising. I couldn't understand why this somewhat lack of cooperation exists until I was over at the accounting office and one of the people said to me, "You know, you have a check down here for the rural training program." I said, "How long has it been there?" He said, "Oh, about three weeks." Nobody ever came after it. It is right there in the pile. So, I called up and he sent a guy over. Now, here you have an interesting phenomenon where his attitude toward me was such that he thought I was trying to use economic pressure to agree to what I wanted to do, and he resisted because he wasn't going to be pressured. I didn't know why he resisted. Of course neither one of us knew the check was on file ready to be picked up. Of course once that was done we were ready...

*Q: He thought you were holding back.*

ZIGLER: Sure.

*Q: What is your feel for the counterpart as far as doing business?*

ZIGLER: Well, number on it is an aspect of training, no question about that. One of the things I always used to believe is that whenever you trained somebody you should send two people not just one. If you send just one, the guy can go home and forget it. If you send two, then you have sort of a check and balance and (inaudible) which makes it more likely that what is taught will be used.

*Q: In terms of the day to day working, did you find that training worked?*

ZIGLER: I would say so but once again there are limitations. What are the forces that impinge? That's an unknown, it is as simple as that.

Another project we did is still in existence today. Because AID had a number of participants going in the United States, there was a problem of English language instruction. Of course, I had my history of Vietnam behind me. Then an AID participant, just returned to Ouagadougou, who had a Ph.D. in linguistics. We put together an endeavor which resulted in an English language training school which is going right today. As you know USIA has been cutting back and AID has cut back on English language. But the school is still going on right now. According to a man who is a curator at the Museum of African Art, who went to that school, it has become a very important school in that region of Africa. Other countries are sending their people to be trained there.

*Q: Is it still being supported by AID or is it on its own?*

ZIGLER: It gets some USIA money but it is almost self-sufficient now. That was good. Particularly on the basis that it has become self-run, self-managed.

Another problem was the Ph.D. equivalency and the French doctorate. It is a strategy the French

use if they want to impose superiority for tactical or strategic reasons on the American Ph.D.

*Q: What did you find were the differences?*

ZIGLER: Well, actually, the French program runs a little bit longer. I don't know whether or not it is better or more practical, but from the point of view of length of time, the French holds up.

*Q: But in terms of the competence of the people who have been through the two programs?*

ZIGLER: I can't really speak to that now, in 1999. I have a hunch that the American universities are more useful and more practical.

Now then, there are a couple of other activities that happened out that relates to the reality of life. The State Department had a program which I will call the "triage exercise." This was started after some bombings at US buildings. It was run by the embassy nurse. We learned how to take care of the kinds of injuries (a broken arm, a scalp wound, whatever) that come from a bomb explosion. Then the final test was a trainee team would go into a room, and here were eight or 10 people with different kinds of costume effects like a person with a red arm like it was bleeding or a victim with a plastic fitting in over his eye with a pencil stuck in it as if he had a pencil stuck through his eyeball, or a hysterical person. One was identified as the Ambassador's mother-in-law. Then we had to treat all these people and work up a departure list on the basis of injuries and which included the Ambassador's mother-in-law!

*Q: This was training in emergency...*

ZIGLER: From a practical point of view, there was good reason to do that.

Then there is another thing that should be said about Upper Volta, and in my summation it might pop up again too. It has to do with the loss of trained, educated personnel through political or military activities. One night there was a coup d'état. I lived in a house that was near some houses of government officials. It was dark at night and you could hear the guns going off. The smart guy turns off his lights and gets down on the floor and I did! I could hear soldiers in my backyard and front yard. Fortunately, they kept on running and didn't stop. This again is one of those factors which can affect the attitudes of a person and performance on the next day.

Another problem is health. If you are not healthy, you are not functioning. It is like a football player who has a broken arm, He's unhealthy. Well, I got hepatitis. Why did I get hepatitis? It doesn't make any difference. I did. I was out of commission for about three months.

I can remember years ago when I went to Afghanistan for the first time. There was a facility run by Morrison Knudsen. They were working on the Helmond Valley dam project. They had a hotel, a garden, a restaurant. I asked why they were doing all this. They said, "We believe we should have everything ready for our technicians when they come on the scene. All they have to do is put their suitcase down, change their clothes and go to work." That's realistic. Sometimes with AID we didn't do it that way. We'd go out there and search to find a house. How long did that take? People spent too much time trying to get settled.

*Q: Right, they are not working.*

ZIGLER: Well, anyway I am ready to move on to a summation, according to the plan you gave me if you are ready to move to that now. I retired in 1985.

**JULIUS W. WALKER, JR.**  
**Ambassador**  
**Upper Volta (1983-1984)**

*Julius Walker was born in Texas in 1927 and educated at VMI, Texas University and Baylor Law School. He served in the Marine Corps and entered the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included posts in Valletta, Bujumbura, N'Djamena, London and Monrovia and he was ambassador to Upper Volta/Burkina Faso. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.*

*Q: Today is October 14, 1992 and here we go again with another interview with Ambassador Julius Walker. Julius how did you get your next assignment after you left Liberia?*

WALKER: I had been in the blocks to go to Ouagadougou, Upper Volta as it was then, in the last days of the Carter administration. I had filled in all the papers.

*Q: This was as Ambassador?*

WALKER: Yes. I had filled in all the ambassadorial papers, and I can tell you there is a sheaf of them. Then along about June I got a call from somebody at State saying, "Julius, relax on the appointment for a while because Mr. Carter is not making any new appointments until he is reelected." I said that was good and relaxed totally, because even in Liberia it didn't appear likely Mr. Carter was going to be reelected.

Frankly the idea had gone out of my mind so that along in February or early March, after the Reagan administration had come in, I had quit thinking about Upper Volta. I was at home, for once, and both my wife and our son, who was with us, were sitting with me in the living room watching a video tape. Savannah and I were also doing needlepoint. The phone rang and a Liberian voice said, "Mr. Walker?" "Yes." "The White House is calling." Well, I thought the Liberians just didn't know the difference between the White House and the State Department. Then another voice came on, an American voice, saying, "Is this Julius Walker?" And I said, "Yes, it is." "Just a moment, this is White House communications, the President wants to speak to you." At that point, I did not know that President Reagan was personally calling prospective ambassadors and I came within an ace of making a nasty comment to this guy about being at home relaxing and not in need of this kind of a joke, but I didn't. The next voice I heard was indeed that of Ronald Reagan asking if I would be his ambassador to Upper Volta. Well, I was so taken back I could barely get out the word, "yes" but I did. I asked about his health and we chatted for a few seconds. I was obviously so excited that when I hung up Savannah said, "Well

what is it Julius, the Court of St. James?" I said, "No, it is Ouagadougou." She said, "You sounded like it was the Court of St. James." But I was flattered and pleased to get the call. Later I learned of the new calling policy. It was a very, very nice thing.

*Q: It certainly is.*

WALKER: It didn't take a lot of his time, but it made a lot of difference for those of us who got the call. It was a tremendous thrill to get that call way out in Monrovia. He was personable and friendly on the phone. He did another good thing which I think President Bush has carried on and I hope other Presidents will as well. He invited the ambassador and the family come to the White House for photographs before they go to post. It is helpful to have a photograph of yourself with the head of state on the wall of your office or home. Not that I deluded myself that I was at his elbow, but others were impressed. It gave weight to the Ambassador. A small thing, but very clever.

Before I left Liberia, I had some unusual pain in my chest. The doctor came to see me. We had an American doctor at the Embassy. He checked and said, "I think you have just had bad indigestion, but you should get some heart tests when you are in Washington." A month later I was home and took a treadmill test and then an angiogram. Both indicated severe heart disease. When I got through with the angiogram, the cardiologist told me I should stay in the hospital and have coronary bypass surgery the next day. He said I could die getting out of bed or walking to the car. More than 90 percent of the flow of blood to my heart was blocked. I said I had invited 250 people to a swearing-in and couldn't explain to them I was sick and couldn't come. Also, if I were to die, I thought the tombstone would look better with "ambassador" than "mister." The ceremony was only a week away. So I went ahead with the swearing-in on Friday and Sunday went back into the hospital.

They gave me a quintuple coronary bypass on Monday and About 10 weeks later I left for post. Joan Clark was Director General. I went to Joan as soon as I discovered I had the disease and told her it might be several months before I could get to post and it had been a long time since we had an Ambassador in Upper Volta. Indeed, my predecessor had been gone about 15 months then. I told her if she wanted to put someone else there I would fully understand. Bless her heart, Joan said, "Julius, we wouldn't even consider it. You get yourself well and get out to Ouagadougou. That is where we want you and that is where you should be." That did more for me than anything else.

*Q: You keep talking about Upper Volta and Burkina Faso. What was it at that time?*

WALKER: At that time it was Upper Volta and had that name the entire time I was there. A month after I left it became Burkina Faso. So if you want a real piece of trivia, the last American Ambassador to Upper Volta was Julius Walker. There will never be another one.

*Q: Before you went out...obviously you are an old African hand and have been around, what did you see were American interests there and did the Department give you instructions?*

WALKER: Instructions come from the Department, of course, but the ambassador has an important role in writing his instructions. The Department has the final say. If there are difficulties between the Department and the ambassador they are settled in the Department's favor. American interests in Upper Volta were and remain minimal. Our interest is for stability and development there. It is the theory of the US government that stability and growth in countries is in our own best interest because it can open markets, it can make room for investment. Also, stability keeps people from governmental overthrows and the like.

So those were our basic interests in Upper Volta. We had an AID mission there at the time which was fairly heavily engaged. The Upper Volta people are intelligent and hard working. They worked very well with AID projects. Burkina is a delightful place to work, not only in assistance, but from all points of view, because the people are open and friendly. They don't have hangups. They approach strangers as equals and work with them readily.

Before I went out a good deal of my time was spent getting over the effects of the operation. Then, when I was able to get to the Department of State, I did what everyone does, I read as many of recent files as possible. And I had the opportunity of attending discussions between the then Foreign Minister of Upper Volta and the US government.

The Foreign Minister made a visit to the United States during that time. He was a colonel in the government of SY Sego and interested in developmental issues. One of his major appointments was with the Director of AID, Peter McPherson. The Minister spoke French so the conversation had to be translated into English because McPherson didn't speak French. Very quickly the question of population control arose. McPherson was a strong advocate of governments controlling growth, particularly in Africa, of populations. The point being that countries could not develop fast enough to keep up with their population. No matter how fast they developed, there were more and more people. Therefore, the countries were actually moving backwards. This engendered a strong argument. The Foreign Minister taking the position that no government in Africa could do anything about population growth, it was a political no-no. If they even talked about it they would be thrown out. The conversation became strong and heated. Fortunately, the phone rang - the Secretary of State wanted to see McPherson. I was delighted because they were certainly at an impasse.

One point that went into my mind from the conversation was that I would say nothing about population control in Upper Volta.

When I got there, the AID doctor in charge of health programs, a black American from Texas, with strong ties to the Caribbean, came to me...I had been there only a few months...and said the midwives association wanted assistance in establishing family planning clinics. I said that was something we had to be very carefully about. Had he talked to anyone in the government, and if so, what was the reaction? He said, "So long as we call them family planning clinics there will be no reaction. The government will be supportive and let us do it." Family planning was needed very much. I approved the work.

We started a clinic in Ouagadougou and before long one was wanted in Bobo Dioulasso, the nation's second largest city. Then they wanted more in Ouagadougou and in other cities. Before

long there were family planning clinics throughout the country and more wanted. The government was happy about them. I spoke informally with the Minister of Health. He knew what was going on, he welcomed it and thanked me personally. I was surprised but pleased.

Then there were two coup d'etats. I figured the new government would not be happy with the clinics. But no, Thomas Sankara, the new head of state, called our AID doctor and said, "We want you to work with our Minister of Health to formulate a population control/family planning statement for this government."

So we went 180 degrees on that subject through the brilliance of a doctor, who in a very low key manner, was able to get clinics started. The people saw their value. The women wanted children but they wanted births spaced more widely. They wanted the time necessary between children to get each one raised and taken care of properly. Sankara saw this and was willing to go with it. So they ended up with a statement for population control.

*Q: These phrases that we are using now may at some point have different connotations. In the context when you were there what did the family planning clinics do?*

WALKER: They did a number of things: regular things like helping mothers with their babies, well-baby clinics; post-partum problems; things having to do with birth and rearing of infants. They also distributed condoms freely and openly in large quantities.

*Q: Who paid for this?*

WALKER: US AID. We imported large numbers of condoms. They were welcome in the country although the country has a large Muslim and Catholic population.

*Q: Were abortions part of the program?*

WALKER: Abortions were not part of this. Abortions were performed in the country, but not in those clinics. That was not part of the clinic plan.

*Q: Was AIDs a problem at that time?*

WALKER: No, AIDs was something we began to find out about towards the end of this time. This was 1981-84. AIDs only came on the scene then. It was talked about as kin to the Green monkey disease, another disease similar to AIDs, but I think whatever similarities there were they are not the same problem.

*Q: You arrived when?*

WALKER: I arrived there in November 1981. I should have gotten there in late August or early September, but I had to take about two months to recuperate.

*Q: What was the embassy like?*

WALKER: It was a delight. The chancery was in a house that had been procured in the Loy Henderson mission to Africa in 1959.

*Q: When he made a celebrated tour...*

WALKER: When he made a trip to get properties for the United States set up to be represented in Africa. As I understand it he had rented this house. I think it was still being rented when I was there. We were trying to buy it but the purchase was complicated because the owner was in prison and we had trouble contacting with him. I don't know what the situation is now.

But the house looked very much like a house. The ambassador's office was in the master bedroom. It was a nice size room, but it was a master bedroom. It was most inconvenient. We did a lot of changing of the space while I was there. There was lumber someone had purchased for some reason. The inspectors, who had left just before I got there, said the embassy should get rid of it. So we did. We worked up a design and we put additions on the house at the rear and made it into much more convenient office space. We didn't help the external appearance much, however. But we did make the working space a great deal better. This was one of the problems in Africa everywhere I went. Office space was not good and we had to make do with what we had or could find. We are still in the same property in Burkina Faso. I wanted to get a new chancery and/or a new residence while I was there, but was unable to do either one.

The residence was rather strange. It was built so that all of the living space was on the first floor. The ground floor was given over to storage area, to the kitchen and to a guest suite, which was accessible only from the outside of the house. It was not the most comfortable place in which to live. But we lived in it and we enjoyed it. It had a nice garden which we used for large receptions. A small dining area. I guess the most we ever had to a seated dinner was twelve. We have had buffet dinners there for a much larger numbers. The best thing about both the residence and the chancery was that they were across the street from one another. So I could literally walk to work. I went home at noon for lunch...we had a two hour lunch period. I found that very good because we went to work so early. The long lunch period let me eat, work a crossword puzzle and get a 20 minute nap before returning.

*Q: What sort of staff did you have there?*

WALKER: There was a deputy chief of mission; a political/econ officer; a chief of station, who was also consular officer; two American secretaries; a consular secretary who was American, but with the station chief. We had two communicators, an admin counselor and three GSOs. The Aid mission had about 30 people in it. This was a combined administrative operation so our admin section was quite large. We had an embassy nurse, a Peace Corps nurse and a nurse to deal with the Foreign Service National Employees who couldn't speak English or French. There were a number of those. We had a Peace Corps detachment and a USIS operation, which, while small, was effective and busy.

*Q: What did the Peace Corps do?*

WALKER: The Peace Corps had several different projects. A number of health projects tied in with well drilling projects. Potable water is a real problem in that part of the world. We put in about 300 wells during the time I was there. Every place a well was put in a Peace Corps health team would come out and talk to the people in the village about the uses of clean water, personal hygiene, keeping themselves and their food clean, etc. PC also had school teachers teaching English and other subjects. There were fish pond people who oversaw construction and stocking of fish tanks. The tanks were harvested on a regular basis. We had forestry people who helped with the control of what wooded space remained in the country. They also helped put new areas into forestation. It was an active program and we had superb people working in it. Not only the Peace Corps volunteers who are always top flight people, but also the Peace Corps staff. Very, very good people.

*Q: What was your impression of say, the well operation? I have seen criticism of many of our well operations in Africa in that they tended to...there had been a nomadic flow back and forth to watering places and by creating wells, particularly places with large stocks of cattle, it meant that they got permanently in a place which meant they denuded the countryside around the wells. Was this a problem where you were?*

WALKER: This was not a problem with this project. These were hand operated wells and were not made in association with stock tanks at all. They were there simply to save the labor of village women who frequently had to walk five to seven miles to get water which they would pull out of open wells in leather sacks and pour into large urns which they would then carry back on their heads. This meant a 10-15 mile walk each day simply for the water they used. We tried to put the wells nearer and the water that came from the PC wells was clean. The water the women got from the other wells looked a little bit like watered down coffee that had milk in it...a very weak, milky coffee. A most unappetizing beverage. And it certainly had other things in it than water.

No, we had no stock problems with this project. There was a migration of cattle through Upper Volta. Cattle is an important agricultural enterprise there. One didn't interfere with the movement of the stock. The wells did nothing in that respect.

*Q: How about USIS? What sort of work were they doing?*

WALKER: USIS had a large library which, while I was in Upper Volta, moved from the downtown area to a location next to the university. It was good to make the library more accessible to the University students. We also sent a number of people to the United States on USIS education and travel grants. We did the same thing with Aid grants. Also USIS showed a lot of films and did the other things that a USIS office normally does. It was an active and productive operation. The one sad thing was that after the library was moved to the new location the first coup took place. In both coups the President made his office in an area quite near the university and declared most of the area around the office off limits to everyone. The library was on the edge of this off-limits area. So while we thought we were doing such a wise thing in getting near the university, it became quite difficult for people to get to the library. I hear they have since moved the library.

*Q: Where were the students going that we were giving them exchanges for?*

WALKER: They would come to some of the schools in the United States for study. I can't recall which ones they were off hand. There weren't too many from USIS that were doing that. More of the USIS travel was, I guess, leader grants. But there were some who came on educational grants through USIS. Many more came on AID grants. They would go to Michigan State, to California and to the best schools in the United States. They did darn well here too. There were only one or two who came here and didn't do well. This is unusual because their world language was French and they had to learn English on top of it. So it was a double dose of world language in order to even receive our training.

*Q: How would you characterize the people? Could you give a feel of what Upper Volta was like? Was it divided into a series of tribes or fairly homogeneous?*

WALKER: It is not homogeneous. Upper Volta is about the size of Colorado and it has sixty different language groups. They do official business in a 61st, French. There are major tribes. The largest is the Mossi who speak Moré and the Peuhl are also quite large, but there are sixty different ethnic groups.

The country, itself, ranges from subtropical in the southern part, near the Ivory Coast. That area is wet enough for sugar cane to be a major crop. The northern part of the country is in the Sahara Desert and extremely dry and arid. There is a belt of green stones that goes diagonally across the country in which there are touches of gold and other minerals, some of which are precious or semiprecious, others just valuable, but they haven't found anything in large enough quantity in that belt to make it worthwhile to undertake mining. But some gold is produced in the area. In the north on the Mali border there is magnesium. Mali and Burkina have been arguing about that area since independence. From time to time shootings and killings break out there.

The major part of the country is flat, it is the basin for the Volta River. There are three tributaries of the Volta...the Black, Red and White. They all rise in the territory of Upper Volta and that is where it got its name - a geological designation given by the French. The name meant nothing to the Burkinabe so they adopted the name of Burkina Faso which means the land of the upright men, the upstanding men, the honorable men. The country is hot and is basically pretty arid except for the extreme south.

The people in Burkina Faso are, as I said earlier, hard working, There is a driven nature about most of the Burkinabe. If they aren't busy doing something they are nervous. It is almost a "Christian work ethic" there. However, I don't believe it has to do with Christianity or religion. Life on the edge of the desert is so difficult, so hard, so demanding that if they aren't working every minute they're awake, the elements will get them. They know they must work to live.

*Q: It is not just reaching up and picking a banana off a tree.*

WALKER: It certainly is not. They have to work like hell just to stay alive. And for that reason the Burkinabe are well known throughout Africa as highly industrious, it's easy for them to get jobs abroad. The Ivory Coast, for instance, has almost as large a population of Burkinabe citizens

as does Burkina Faso. They do the work the Ivorians don't want to do. They are found in other countries up and down the coast working very hard. They are highly respected and well liked. They are personable, outgoing people. I can't say enough good about them.

*Q: Tell me, before we get to the political developments there, what about the role of the French and how did you deal with it?*

WALKER: The French are by far the most important foreign element in Burkina Faso. France provides most of the assistance that goes into the country. Thus the French Ambassador calls a lot of the shots. The French Ambassador arrived the same time I did. Actually, three of us presented credentials the same day. The French Ambassador, the Soviet Ambassador and I. We all arrived at the same time and we were all pretty much of the same generation.

The French Ambassador was a wonderful gentleman named Gaston Boyer. Gaston was from the Marseille region. He always had a pipe in his mouth and he talked in that marvelous rapid slurring Marseillaise fashion. Every other sentence he uttered to me I had to ask him to repeat. I have never had such difficulty understanding one man in my life. And to his eternal credit he never got upset with me for asking him to repeat. I think he knew he had a difficult accent and the pipe didn't help it.

We were good friends, got along well. The U.S. wasn't there to supplant the French, far from it. We wanted Burkina to get all the assistance it could and we knew very well we couldn't pick up the assistance the French gave.

The Soviet Ambassador was an interesting type. He and I were both veterans of World War II. He was a little older than I was and had lost a leg at Stalingrad. He walked on a prosthetic device. He had only a slight limp. You could barely tell he had any problems whatsoever. But it was exceedingly difficult for him to stand for long periods of time. Unfortunately many of the official functions in Burkina required long periods of standing, frequently in the hot sun. The poor man just couldn't do it. I felt sorry for him. He was a good colleague. We worked together well. Although we didn't see each other very much, from time to time we would call on one another. I respected him and I think he respected me. We, obviously, had different goals and ideas, but we were never at one another's throat.

*Q: Was this the time when there was a feeling that the Soviets were trying to extend their influence in Upper Volta or was this a concern?*

WALKER: No, there wasn't much concern by that point about extension of Soviet influence in Upper Volta. The Soviets had a number of scholarships which they gave each year to students. It was sad that when the scholarships were offered the students would show up almost en masse the next day at USIS office to see if they couldn't get a scholarship to the United States. They did not want to go to the Soviet Union. I don't think we took any of those, but the Soviet scholarships were not sought after. I guess the people felt they were better than nothing.

The Soviets didn't have many contacts. They were pretty racist in many of their remarks. That was one thing that upset me about the Soviet Ambassador. He would frequently mutter things

under his breath to me or to others who were standing next to him. And I stood next to him because we presented our credentials on the same day and were therefore next to each other at all of those line-up functions. He would talk about "these blacks" and "these Africans" and it was uncomfortable to listen to him because there was very little that I could say back. I usually tried to ignore his remarks.

But, no, we weren't worried about inroads the Soviets might be making there. Or, for that matter, any inroads the Chinese might be making. They had some active assistance programs. Some medical programs that were quite good. But neither country seemed to be making an awful lot of political progress because of their programs. The Burkinabe appreciated the assistance, but they didn't want to be like them. They wanted to emulate the West.

*Q: Well, what about dealing with the French? In Africa it has always been a very tricky thing because the French have always been sensitive, and with reason about the role of the United States in territory over which they once had colonial rule. How did you deal with the French Ambassador about aid programs, USIS programs, etc.?*

WALKER: I answered any questions he had. I answered them fully and as completely as I could and kept him informed of our assistance programs. I established a group of aid donors that met regularly. We shared information on our assistance programs. We got great participation by all the donors except the French. Finally, the French got to where they shared more information with us. All I was trying to do in the meetings was to make certain we weren't all getting into the same assistance boat. The need was so great for developmental assistance throughout the country that there was no reason for any duplication of effort in any field. We could all work very, very well and have plenty of room for others. Sometimes development people from different nations would begin similar projects. They would quickly overload the capability in that area and leave gaps in other areas. Elimination of such double efforts was what we were aiming at with our discussion group. The French finally understood what we were doing and cooperated, to a degree. Although they were taking more information than they gave, it was helpful as they could steer clear of what others were planning and go ahead their own projects.

*Q: Did we have any military assistance program or was this pretty much left to the French?*

WALKER: We did a small amount of military assistance. Late in my tour we got money for a language laboratory which would teach military officers enough English so they could come to the United States for a six-month training tour at the Command and General Staff College or elsewhere. We sent a few officers to the US for training and they appreciated it. I think the military organization there was delighted they were going. They felt our training was good.

*Q: How did you deal with the governments?*

WALKER: Well, I dealt with the government really on two levels. Of course, on the official level I followed the standard protocol of calling on all the government agency heads as soon as I got there. Then I invited them for lunch or dinner or something else at the house whenever I could.

I found with one government that we had a Foreign Minister and a Minister of Commerce who had lived in the United States for many years...one at the UN and the other as a student and then a resident of the US. They both had become attracted to American football. One an avid fan of the Dallas Cowboys and the other of the Washington Redskins. Traditional rivals. Frequently I got tapes of their games and would invite these guys over, with others from the government who understood American football. Frequently there would be a half dozen ministers and sub-ministerial level people in the living room with the Aid director and the Peace Corps director, the DCM, etc. Savannah would cook popcorn and we would have beer, cokes, and sit there and yell and scream at the game just as though it was going on. These guys didn't know the score so it was just as much fun for them as though it was actually being broadcast live. They were as avid fans as you would find anywhere. We really had a great time. It was a lot of fun.

But I dealt with the ministers and the government as I needed to. I didn't take their valuable time for any long series of calls, but I did make the initial calls on them. I visited them when necessary. I tried to keep the visits to as small a number as possible. Some of the ministers I had to call on much more frequently than others.

Sometimes I was in to see the Foreign Minister two or three times a week...maybe more often. Sometimes I saw the Minister of Economy frequently. I often signed agreements with him for developmental projects. And I frequently called on the heads of state, of which we had three while I was there. These calls on the head of state would be calls that I would be directed to make or calls that I felt necessary because of events that had transpired.

I found the government always open, easy to contact and normally very easy to get appointments with. Sometimes the press of events made it difficult to meet with them. But usually I met with them readily, quickly and easily. Although we frequently had different points of view, they were respectful and listened. The only time I ever had any difficulty with the government was just before I left. I had made appointments for departure calls and the Sankara government had just captured three former governmental officials, charged them with treason for attempting to overthrow the government, and executed them.

I didn't think anything about it but I got a call from the Minister of Defense about three or four nights before I was to leave the country. He asked me to come see him that evening. I walked into the Defense Ministry and noticed a television camera. That was unusual. I wondered what was up. He called me into his office and began a long story, the gist of which was that the three men who had been executed had confessed they were going to overthrow the government. Their first activity would be to blowup the radio station. Once they had established a government they were going to install a radio station on the grounds of the American embassy. He wanted to know what I knew about this.

At first I was dumbfounded, but not for long. The story made me terribly angry and I let my anger show. I told the Minister it was utterly stupid to believe a confession concocted under torture. If the confession had served their purpose of convicting the men that was one thing. However, they should not believe it. I said, "You could look at the grounds of the American embassy and see we don't have enough space to erect a tower." Which indeed we didn't. It was small. Both the AID mission and the chancery were on the same grounds and there was also a

large building for the joint administrative operations section. There was no place another antenna could be erected that would come anywhere near serving the area of Burkina Faso. I said, "It is utterly absurd to think the United States would be involved in anything like that. I want to know what I have done that would cause you to put any credence in this." Well, I was angry enough that the man backed down and I left his office.

The next morning I had my scheduled farewell call with President Sankara. I went in to see him and darned if he didn't start on the same tack. And I got just as angry with him and said things to him that were very strong. I said, "This is idiotic. This is stupid. I expected better of you. I can't believe you would even think this." After about 20 minutes I left his office. We were both angry.

The next day the phone rang, it was Sankara. He had put the call in himself. He said, "I simply cannot let you leave this country with the memory of the things we said yesterday still in my mind. Won't you come back this afternoon?" I said, "Any time Mr. President."

I went over and he apologized for what he had said. He said, "We are sorry for any concern we have caused you and we retract any statement or accusation we may have made." What made me feel he really meant it, was about six months later he came to the United States to address the UN. He asked to see only one American - me. I went to New York and met him at the Burkina mission and he fell on my shoulders as though we were long lost brothers. We sat together for an hour and chatted about old friends and old times, etc. I think it was all forgotten. I think he was embarrassed about the accusation.

We were speaking of dealing with the government. One thing always difficult is what does one do after a coup. Our instructions were to deal with the government on a normal basis. Then U.S. policy was that we recognized nations and not governments. So we had the coup d'etat that put in Jean Batista Ouedraogo. Jean Batista was a medical officer but really a cats paw for Sankara who had engineered the coup and became his Prime Minister. That was our first coup. We did as instructed and went ahead with scheduled governmental meetings and continued business as usual.

*Q: From your perspective, how did this coup play out?*

WALKER: The people accepted it. There was a lot of shooting and some people were killed...about a dozen. One was a Frenchman who was simply driving down the road when the coup took place and either did not hear or refused an order to halt. They shot at the car and killed him. But the coup was accepted by the population quickly. It took place in the early evening with lots of shooting. There was a shootout at the police barracks between the police and the military and about a half a dozen people were killed. But Ouedraogo was installed and functioning smoothly within 24 or 36 hours. It was quick, easy and accepted.

Ouedraogo was in power for six to eight months. After about four or five months he fell out with Sankara and decided to get rid of him. I was the first non-Burkinabe to know that was underway because I took early morning walks. Part of my treatment for my heart condition is to exercise and I do that by walking fairly rapidly for 30 minutes to an hour a day. I would get up early in the morning, about 5:00, and walk around Ouagadougou. The Marines walked with me for a

while then they got tired. Sometimes others would walk with me then there were many times when I was alone. I was out for one of my very early walks, alone, and I happened to walk into that part of town where Sankara lived. I suddenly saw a half dozen armored cars. They were small tanks with canon and machines guns. They were placed around his house about a block away with the guns aimed at his house. I rounded the corner and there I was, face-to-face with the crew of one of these things. They looked at me...I was well-known there, they knew who I was. They saw me coming along. At first I thought perhaps I should turn around and go back, but nothing was happening so I decided to continue to get a better idea of what was happening. I walked right passed them and they all stood, saluted, and smiled as I walked by. I waved at them. I walked back and went straight to the office and wrote a short cable to inform that we were having a change of prime ministers.

Later, Sankara called that a half coup, and in a way I guess it was. So I had two and a half coups in Upper Volta. He was locked up for a while and then taken to a village in the desert area and kept under house arrest there. While he was under house arrest, one of his frequent visitors was a Peace Corps volunteer. When Sankara was younger, he taught Peuhl to Peace Corps volunteers and he liked the Peace Corps. This volunteer would visit him and they chatted a good bit.

While Sankara was in the village under house arrest, Blaise Compaore, was one of Sankara's lieutenants who had been instrumental in the Ouedraogo coup, organized a coup to throw out Ouedraogo and install Sankara. That was the second of the two and a half coups.

Both times we went ahead doing business with the government. Not on a large scale but on as small a scale as possible until we were convinced the government was firmly in control. In neither case was it long before it was clear the government was indeed in control. The population might not have been happy about all of this, but each coup was a fait accompli and accepted. We accepted it as well.

*Q: I can think of a major issue that might have existed because you were still in the orbit of the problem of Libya. During this period we took a very strong line against Muammar Qadhafi, the ruler of Libya, which was not always appreciated in other parts of Africa. How about Libyan influence and what we were doing?*

WALKER: Libya had a great deal of influence with Sankara - less with Ouedraogo. Qadhafi came to Burkina while I was there. This was before we had been told to avoid showing up at any of these things, so when I was asked to go to the airport, I went. I stood in the receiving line and shook hands with the guy as he came by. He was funny looking. He had his cap pulled down so that it almost touched his nose and when he met anyone as tall as me, he had to hold his head back to look them in the face.

He had a group of young people on the plane who carried machine guns - his "security" force. They were young men and women and all were very attractive. When the plane landed, the young people got off and started leading cheers. We stood and waited about ten minutes until the great man came off the plane to more cheers.

He gave military assistance to both coups. He also brought in a plane load of food at one point, which got a lot of publicity. This upset me and I used the occasion to call on Sankara. This was during Sankara's administration. I said, "This airplane has brought in 14 tons of food and in a time of drought your country needs it. I would point out to you, Mr. President, that the United States is bringing in 280 thousand tons of food yet the Libyans have received more publicity than we have. We aren't looking for thanks, but we do expect equal treatment. We don't appreciate being taken for granted."

It was surprising. There were a number of news stories after that expressing appreciation for the American food. That call paid off in the way I had hoped it would.

Our relations in U.V. were difficult because the U.S. frequently publicly denigrated Libya. Each time this happened I was called to the Foreign Ministry and given a dressing down. I would listen then explain the U.S. action and add that once Libya indicates it wants to get along with us we will get along with it. I tried to make clear that the U.S. would not be harmed or insulted by Qadhafi or anyone else. It was this routine each time something happened. It did not make my job any easier, but it wasn't much harder, because after the messages were passed, we went on doing business the same way we had in the past.

*Q: Were there any other events during this period that we should cover?*

WALKER: There is one that was amusing. We had a number of private volunteer organizations in Burkina. Among them was Save the Children. There are two Save the Children funds, an American and a British. One day the American Save the Children rep told me his British counterpart needed some assistance. They were both working in Burkina and had offices side-by-side. I said, "What is it? What can I do?" He said, "Princess Anne, daughter of the Queen of England, is going to visit here and an advance team will come in a few days. They need transportation but we only have enough for ourselves. Could you loan them some cars? She will visit a project in the desert and they need transportation for the advance work." I said I would help.

Well, there were four on the advance team and we let them have cars. When they had finished the Colonel in charge (I later learned he was Princess Anne's personal secretary) came to express his appreciation. As there was no British embassy there he had been forced to rely on us. The only Commonwealth embassies were Nigeria, Ghana and Canada, and none of them had much equipment.

*Q: Why weren't the British there?*

WALKER: The British were represented by their Ambassador resident in the Ivory Coast. He came up from time to time and made calls. Such a system is not very effective but is probably better than nothing at all.

I told the colonel, we were glad to have been of assistance and if there were anything else we could do for the visit, to let us know. The Colonel said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, there is one thing that would be of considerable assistance to us." I said, "What is it?" He said, "An invitation

from the American Ambassador for Her Royal Highness to stay in his residence would be most gratefully accepted." I said, "Well, I will have to consult with a higher authority on that." I went to the phone and rang my wife. She said she would be delighted. So I said, "Sure, we would be delighted." She was to spend two nights with us. I said, "There are two conditions I would like to add if I may. One is for her to meet the American embassy community; not just the Americans but all of those in the embassy who work with us." "She would be happy to do that." I said, "I would also like to have a dinner party for her. It would be small because we can't seat more than about a dozen." "Fine, I know she will accept."

The next thing I knew, Embassy London sent a telegram asking for biographic information on both Savannah and me for the Palace. Before Princess Anne could accept Buckingham Palace had to know who we were. The Palace promised to send bio data about Princess Anne. So we exchanged biographic information.

The great day came and she arrived. The British Ambassador and his wife had arrived. We had a great time. She was a lovely, charming house guest. There were four official members of the party that also had to be housed. We had enough space for the Princess, for the woman who looked after her clothes, and for the Scotland Yard man who was her personal bodyguard. Her private secretary and her lady-in-waiting stayed one block down the street in the residence of the political officer.

The British wanted her to stay with us because if she was a guest of the Burkina Faso government the British would be obligated to do something of like order for a high Burkinabe and they didn't want to do it because this was not a visit to Burkina, it was a visit to see the Save the Children projects. Princess Anne is the honorary president of the British Save the Children Fund.

They asked for a Marine to stay outside the apartment, which is on the ground floor. I asked if any Marines would volunteer for this duty and they said that they would be happy to. their condition was a photograph taken with Her Royal Highness. We lined that up. She was pleased to oblige. Our photographer took the photograph the morning I took the Princess to the chancery to see everyone. The Marines were in the building all spiffy in their dress blues, very stiff and crisp. The first shot showed everyone very somber. Then the Princess, watching the photographer preparing for a second shot "You know, to make people smile in photographs we used to say 'cheese' but there is a much better word"...and she timed this perfectly so that just before the second shot was snapped, she said, "and the word is 'bitch.'" In the second photograph the Marines are breaking up.

I took her outside about 8:00 in the morning and she was to leave at 8:45. She had said that she would not make a speech to the group, but would go around and speak with small groups, which is the way royalty usually does at such things. She had on a beautiful blue linen dress with a broad rimmed hat and gloves that came to her elbows and the weather was hot as the hinges of hell. But she went around and talked to everyone. If they spoke French she spoke in French. There was a group there from the American School and the kids were saying, "Hi Princess" and such. They didn't have a clue about protocol but it didn't bother her.

She chatted with them and was still talking to people at 9:10 and the secretary came to me and said, "Mr. Ambassador we have to get Her Royal Highness out of here." In a moment I touched her arm and said, "Ma'am, I am sorry to bother you, but the time has come, you have to leave." She said, "Thank you very much," and kept right on talking. She talked for another fifteen minutes until she had talked to everyone there who wanted to talk to her, and I think she spoke to everyone. She was charming and gracious.

And I have to say that visit was the turning point for Anne in her press relations. Up to then the press had talked about how nasty and mean she was. From then on she got quite good press coverage.

The final thing...she came back to the house and her private secretary said there are three couples that Her Royal Highness wanted to see before she left: the British Ambassador and his wife, the Director of the Save the Children Fund and his wife and Ambassador and Mrs. Walker. We had pictures made in front of the residence before she went in. Then the Save the Children couple went in and left. Then the British Ambassador and his wife went in. There was about ten minutes for each visit. Then finally we were called. We were walking into the apartment area with Savannah in the lead. The secretary stood in the door from the little office area that led into the reception area. He looked inside and said, "Madam, the American Ambassador and Mrs. Walker." Savannah stepped quickly to one side, I took the lead and we went in. And here in our own home the Princess gave a very formal speech of gratitude, of appreciation and all of this and a hand shake. Then I felt a reply speech was in order.

It was strange, having these highly formal activities in our own home. It struck both Savannah and me as a bit absurd. Anyway, she gave us an autographed photograph, which was the best likeness of her I've ever seen. And also a little letter opener with her crest and initial on it. I checked with Protocol about it and they said I could keep the gifts so we have them today.

That was one of the more unusual things that happened. I suppose there are a lot of others if I sat around and cogitated a while. People have asked me if I put a pea under the mattress on the Princess' bed. I have to say that the thought occurred to me, but I didn't do it.

*Q: Well, Julius, you left there and came back to Washington. Did you find that there was much interest in what was happening there?*

WALKER: Well, there was a some interest. Those of us who dealt with Africa over the years had come to realize the interest in the countries where we served is restricted to those few who deal with them regularly. Yes, there was interest and there continued to be interest. But it wasn't overwhelming. There was a certain amount.

**JOYCE E. LEADER**  
**Political/Economic Officer**  
**Ouagadougou (1983-1985)**

*Ambassador Leader was born in Pennsylvania and raised in Ohio. He was educated at Dennison University, the University of Chicago, and the Columbia University School of Journalism. After work in the private sector and with the US Department of Education, he joined the Peace Corps, serving in Kinshasa and at headquarters in Washington. Joining the State Department in 1982 he began his career in which he was to deal primarily with African concerns, both in Washington and abroad. His foreign postings include Kinshasa, Ouagadougou, Lagos and Marseilles. In 1999 he was appointed Ambassador to Guinea, where he served until 2000. Ambassador Leader was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.*

*Q: You went to Ouagadougou, the capital of Upper Volta. You were there from when to when?*

LEADER: From 1983 to 1985.

*Q: What was Upper Volta like in those days?*

LEADER: The capital, Ouagadougou, was like an overgrown village. It did not have any kind of high buildings or anything. It didn't even have a big marketplace. It just sort of sprawled and it was little communities sort of all tacked together. That was partly a function of the fact that the French had actually had their capital in a town quite a bit to the southwest called Bobo-Dioulasso. That was a proper town in my view, but the capital, Ouagadougou, was very much of an overgrown village. When I visited it 10 years later, there had been some growth and it looked a little bit more like a town by that time. There were some paved roads, but not all that many. They had a nice train that went from Ouagadougou all the way down to Abidjan and Cote d'Ivoire on the coast. The French had done that much. There was another road that went through Togo down to Lome and those were the access points from the coast into Burkina Faso. At that time, the road between Ouagadougou and the capital of neighboring Niger was not paved and it was a good day's drive. I think now it's down to three to four hours between those two capitals. When I was there, it was quite a bit longer than that.

*Q: What was your job?*

LEADER: I was political/economic officer. I did some reporting. I called it the "etc. officer." Pol/econ, etc. I did all of the IMET programs. In that capacity, I was the embassy's link to the defense ministry. The ambassador, Julius Walker, seemed to be quite content to let me maintain the relationship with the defense minister, so I saw him pretty regularly. I maintained this liaison with the military in between visits of the defense attaché, who would come up from time to time from Abidjan and then I'd be his control officer and we'd go around and see all the contacts. Of course, the military was very important. I forgot to say that I got there a few weeks after the coup that brought Thomas San Kara to power. He was a very populist leader who got rid of all the big Mercedes for the government officials and made them drive little black Renault 5s. They set up these Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. The person who was at the head of that was one of my good contacts. I also had to do all the contacts with the foreign ministry and developed very good friends in that area. Burkina Faso rotated onto the UN Security Council while I was there and that was a lot of fun because we worked with them a lot on the issues that

were of concern to us at the Security Council.

*Q: What was the role of the French there?*

LEADER: The French were everywhere. They were very involved in Ouagadougou. They had people in the defense ministry. They were advisors to the military. They had a very big role to play.

*Q: Did you find yourself often at odds with the French?*

LEADER: Throughout West Africa, particularly at that time, there was a bit of suspicion on their part that we were trying to somehow take over their role. But I think that we were small enough there that we could fairly well convince them that we weren't trying to displace them either economically or politically or militarily for that matter. We had a modest IMET program which gave us our entrée to the military but we didn't have any big military stakes at that time in that country.

*Q: What about a military program? The French could have done the whole thing. Why leave us a bit of the action?*

LEADER: That's kind of a mute question regarding the period that I was there because San Cara having just taken over wasn't sending anybody out. So, it was more of a program.

*Q: Usually IMET means bringing people to the United States for training.*

LEADER: That's correct. My job was to keep talking to them about it and to keep planning and finding out when they were going to restart and so forth. But they did not restart while I was there. But it was an interesting time. There were four people who had made this coup who were all in positions of leadership. The person who was the current president was very rarely in Ouagadougou. He was much more of a military man and tended to stay at a base in the southern part of the country where he was the commander. He wasn't very evident.

My job was a little bit of everything. We only had the ambassador, the DCM, myself, and a consular officer. That was it. I had two FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) working for me. One handled the self help program. We had one of the biggest self help programs in Africa, \$200,000 a year, and he ran the program beautifully.

*Q: This is where you give \$500 or \$1,000 to somebody to set up a little store or something like that.*

LEADER: It was usually more than that. We built three classroom blocks. We would help out with digging wells. We would provide funding and they would provide the manpower. The way the program was managed, we never gave cash. We paid the vendors. People would buy their supplies for whatever project they were doing in Ouagadougou and then the bills would be sent to us and we'd pay the vendors. That was basically the place where people got their supplies, so it worked out well. Our FSN knew all of the suppliers and was on very good terms. He could

always tell if the bill that came in was too much because he had worked with the projects for such a long time. That was very good. Interestingly enough, that person retired and then they brought him back out of retirement. Last May, he and his wife came to visit. They stayed at my house for two weeks while they were going around seeing other people and other places. Twenty years later, we were reconnected. The other FSN was doing economic reports for me because I wasn't much of an economist. He later left and went to UNICEF. I lost track of him.

*Q: How about Burkina Faso? Was it split into tribal groups? What was the predominant religion?*

LEADER: It did have tribal groups. It also had some traditional rulers who still had some standing in the community, the Mossi. There wasn't a lot of cross-fertilization between the ethnic groups. Our Foreign Service national who worked with our self help program came from the south from outside of Ouagadougou and he could not speak the language. To this day, he does not speak the language of Ouagadougou. When we would go out to the self help projects, which was one of the great activities that I just loved doing, he was as dependent on a translator as I was. He did not know the other local languages. They needed the French as their lingua franca. Of course, a lot of people didn't speak French because the educational system was so poor and the number of illiterate people was so great. So there were these tribal differences. But I never got the sense that they were really in competition. Burkina Faso has virtually no resources. But I didn't get the sense that they were really competing, cutthroat for what few resources there were. So there wasn't an intense ethnic competition from my perspective. Maybe it was there, but I didn't see it at the time. As far as religion is concerned, of course, Islam was the major religion. There was some Christianity, but it was predominantly Islam. But again, it wasn't an Islam that was trying to dominate the political, economic, religious scene. It coexisted quite easily with the Christianity that was there and with the local religions that also existed.

*Q: How did you find working in this area as a woman?*

LEADER: I never found it a problem in Burkina Faso. I never had problems with the people that I worked with or the contacts that I made.

*Q: Were we watching for the hand of Qadhafi from Libya in the area?*

LEADER: Yes, we were watching for it. I have always maintained that the person with the strongest links of the four leaders was this military man who stayed in the south and now has become the president. I think there was some training going on. I could never verify it. But we know that later the space that he had was possibly used to train dissidents from other countries in the area and we know that he had a role in supporting Charles Taylor of Liberia eventually, who had his Qadhafi connections. So, I think that there has always been a Qadhafi connection. We may have closed our eyes to it more than we should have in some instances. I wasn't following the policy closely.

*Q: The two years you were there, the same government was in power and there weren't many changes, is that right?*

LEADER: That's correct.

Speaking of Libya, Qadhafi came to Burkina Faso during my stay there. He always travels with an entourage of female security guards. They all surrounded the plane and do their little dances and he comes down. It was quite an event.

*Q: What did we do, stay out of the way?*

LEADER: Yes. We were observers. We didn't have a lot we could do.

*Q: We didn't have relations with the country, so you didn't go to the receptions.*

LEADER: No. But we would see the Libyans around. The Libyans were evident in Ouagadougou.

*Q: How about a Soviet presence?*

LEADER: There was a Soviet presence. We had fairly good contacts at the Soviet embassy. I don't know what they were doing.

*Q: The Chinese?*

LEADER: They were there.

**LEONARDO NEHER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Burkina Faso (1984-1987)**

*Ambassador Leonardo Neher was born on December 5, 1922 in Akron, Ohio. He attended Akron University for a year before serving in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946. After his time in the Army, he received his BA from Bowling Green State University in 1948 and his MA from the University of Chicago in 1952. Throughout his career he has held positions in countries including Morocco, Vietnam, Syria, Zaire, Chad, the Dominican Republic, and Burkina Faso. Ambassador Neher was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 18, 1989.*

*Q: Well, now you were appointed as Ambassador to--you better pronounce it...*

NEHER: Burkina Faso, very easy.

*Q: ... which is old Upper Volta, and you served there from 1984 to '87. What was our interest in the area to begin with, American interests.*

NEHER: At the time that I went, our interest was heavily slanted toward knowing what to do about this very radical, very troublesome country in West Africa. There'd been a coup there in 1983 that brought in some young military officers who had a Marxist vocabulary, and they were good friends of Qadhafi's, and they were up on the stage everywhere in the world denouncing the U.S. and imperialism and siding with Cuba, the Soviets and with Nicaragua. The government had refused to vote to condemn the shooting down of the KAL airline. It refused to vote against...

*Q: The Soviets had shot down a civilian airline flying over the Kamchatka peninsula.*

NEHER: Right, and they had not voted to condemn the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. They had boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics in the summer of '84, ostensibly because a British team participating had made a tour of South Africa. But, in fact, as far as we were concerned, it was part of the alignment with the Soviet Bloc. The only other countries in Africa to boycott were Angola, Mozambique and Madagascar, all of them closely aligned with the USSR.

I helped to draft my own instructions, detailed instructions, and converted those eventually into objectives that I would try to attain there. They concentrated heavily on that problem of how radical is this country, what can be done about it, is there any meaningful dialogue we can have with a country like this? It's your job to go out and report back to us and tell us what to do, and to do something yourself. That was the main purpose for being there, and that was the charter I had.

*Q: Do we have economic interests in the area?*

NEHER: None.

*Q: Was it a menace to any of the other countries around, destabilizing, or do we feel that they were exporting their revolution either by example or by actual use of force?*

NEHER: Yes. There was always the tendency that it would move in that way, and it did move to a certain point. It erupted in a small border war with Mali in Christmas 1985 because of statements that the president, Captain Thomas Sankara, had made.

*Q: He's the president of...*

NEHER: He was the president. He was overthrown in '87. Although he contended always in public speeches that this revolution was for Burkina Faso, and could not be exported, he began to hear the applause of young people all over Africa when he showed up. Once, he went to a conference and there was more applause for him than there was for the head of state. It happened in Nigeria. When he went to places in Africa, almost anyplace he was going to be a speaker, he was the one who got the audience. He got the adulation of the crowd. So it began to go to his head a little bit, and there was a danger that he would try to export it. And there were his comments on Mali, and his invitation to the Malian people to get rid of that corrupt government in Mali. That really led to the war, and that sobered him up.

*Q: What happened in the war?*

NEHER: The moment the guns went off there, there was a skirmish, a series of skirmishes, so Burkina Faso did very well by itself. But the Malians were pretty inept, and they lost some tanks and some armored cars, but they did bomb one of the towns and killed some people in northern Burkina Faso. Immediately when Thomas Sankara looked around for allies, he found out that there was not one country in the world to back him; if he had trouble with Mali, he would have no allies whatsoever. Nobody, the French, the Libyans, the Ghanaians, nobody would be on his side. And so that gave him a jolt, and he drew back. But it was still a problem.

Of course, we did establish a good relationship, we had a good dialogue going, it was open, it was friendly. The newspapers stopped criticizing us. They were friendly, very supportive. When we had visitors to present we had big turnouts of people, government people participated in seminars and discussion groups, we had great access. When they wanted to denounce apartheid in South Africa they stopped putting the name of the United States on every sentence. They modified their hostility considerably.

*Q: How did this come about? How did you operate? I take it at the time it was a very unfriendly situation.*

NEHER: Terribly.

*Q: How did you do it?*

NEHER: Strategy and tactics. There were a lot of discussions here in Washington before I went there. What can I solve? What do I have to bring back? What do I take there? How much do I really have to confront this guy? I wanted to make sure that I didn't have to go out there and in the first meeting end the whole thing. I had a set of instructions that I helped to draft but AF made them too confrontational. The first set, which I needed to lobby against and tried to get changed, said, "When you go there, when you first call on Sankara, you will tell him the following: because of this, and this, and this, we're cutting your aid program." I said if I do that, there's no point in my going there. I said, "What I want you to do is convert these into a set of guidelines. Give me some running room on this and I'll get the message across." And they agreed, "Fine, okay. You go out and do this." So on my first call on the president I took my DCM along as note taker--Bob Pringle, who is now in Mali. I wanted to make sure that we didn't compromise our message, so I told Pringle, I said, "When we go in there, if when we come out, no matter how long we're in there, he is smiling, and he is talking about future relations with us, we will have failed. He's got to be angry when we leave." I set that as a guideline. I said, "When we go there, this guy has got to be hot when we leave. Because we have to go back to Washington in this cable, there's where my credibility lies." And this is what we did, and at one point the president got up from his desk and said, "I don't have to be talked to like this. I don't have to listen to you. You can go." I said, "Maybe you misunderstood or something." We went back and we talked about it some more but we had such a hot exchange, some of his military aides came to the door of his office and stood outside. And that turned the thing around. He knew he wasn't dealing with...it wasn't a country that was going to roll over every time he yelled. It wasn't going to come through with aid programs for him on the basis of his need. He was going to have to perform somehow. Even though he got that message, relations went down and down

through...I got there in October and this went down--no, I got there in August--this was in October we had the big session with him. He had been out of town before that. Relations went down through that December and then finally in January...we cut in November one of his favorite aid programs. And we cut it with enough--not publicity-- enough openness to show that it was deliberately being cut because of their conduct. It was a good program. It was a forestry reeducation program, and cut off all salaries. They wanted extensions, they wanted time to phase out, and we just said, "No, absolutely not. As of November 30 everything stops. No more funding. No completion of buildings. No aid. That's when the project ends." When that thing really hit home they realized that, by God, we weren't the French. We weren't going to be there all the time.

One important event that helped to get things on a better basis was a visit of one of the Burkinabe leaders to Washington on behalf of president Sankara. He had orders to see the Secretary of State or even the President of the U.S., in the exaggerated notion of that country's importance. I sent a message to Washington saying that he should be received only at a very low level. I wanted Sankara to have to deal with me, not with Washington. And he was received by a Deputy Assistant Secretary who chastised him for the treatment the American Ambassador was getting in Ouagadougou. "That Ambassador wanted to go to Burkina Faso, he requested it because he was interested in the country and what was happening there. He sympathized with some of the goals of the regime," or words to that effect as related to me later. So when he, Zongo, came back and reported to Sankara that I had actually requested the assignment to Burkina Faso, it made an impression on the president.

And in January then the president called me up and asked me to come to lunch. I took along the AID director as my note taker, and for two and a half hours he said, "We can't understand you. What do you want from us." He spent two and half hours saying, "What do we have to do to have good relations with the United States?" And boy, that was the turning point, exactly what we all wanted. I went over the whole list of actions by his government that bothered us. I told him about the press, the press handling of relations. Well, one of the attacks in the press was so bad that State sent me a back channel cable saying, "Does that mean that they're suggesting that you be assassinated?" Because the final line in one of their front page reports in the press said, "It's time to finish with this new guy as soon as we can," something of that order. They said, "Hey, what does that mean?" I said, "No. They'd just like me to go somewhere else." But at that session, it was a good frank one, and it was animated, but it was direct and I gave him a list of all these things that had to be done and I'll tell you, it turned around from then on, and at public sessions he'd call me over and talk with me, even showing a certain affection. The phone would ring at my house on a Sunday night and he'd say, "I just want to talk," and we'd chat for a while. One time he called me over to his office and sort of asked me how things were going in his country. How do I see them? The way he's governing. I talked to him very candidly about that. One time I was going on a trip and I was leaving on a Monday morning, and the phone rang on Sunday night and it was President Sankara on the phone saying, "I just want to wish you a bon voyage, have a nice trip."

One of the most fascinating and challenging aspects of the job was keeping Washington informed but bringing them around to see Burkina Faso as much less dangerous to U.S. interests than they thought. FBIS would carry remarks of the president or the leaders, full of marxist

jargon and hot with attacks on the United States and its policies, and Washington would not understand what they really were, would take them at face value. Well, they sometimes meant just the opposite. Here was Thomas Sankara, self-taught mostly from marxist sources and with a marxist vocabulary. But he was a populist who was facing a serious threat, the only one, from a truly marxist left, people subsidized by one or another of the Eastern European regimes, or by China or North Korea. But because he contended that his "revolution" was the final socialist revolution, only those on the right could attack it. Nothing could exist on the left of a marxist regime. So he would denounce these real communists as bourgeois lackeys in the service of imperialism. And Washington would read that as a true communist attacking the moderate center. Try explaining that to a conservative Reagan government when you have Jeane Kirkpatrick at the UN and some right wing ideologues at the NSC and AID. But I was blessed with two of the ablest DCM's anyone could have, both good writers, and we put out the stuff that cooled some of the ardor in Washington and allowed us to go ahead and develop a dialogue with this regime.

Things eventually turned around and we had good dialogue, good access, until about six months before I left. But with the air attack on Tripoli and Benghazi, that really just cut off conversations all over Africa but in my case it cut off my conversation with the president. And he was becoming more isolated. It led to his assassination in October. I left in August of '87 and he was assassinated in...

*Q: Just to put it in context, we're talking about the air attack. There had been some, apparently a Libyan sponsored, terrorists attacks against American troops in Europe, and we bombed Libya from bases in England on this. This was when?*

NEHER: This was '87.

*Q: Which had an effect of slowing down at least Libyan activity, but it was not looked upon kindly elsewhere, particularly in Africa.*

NEHER: At any rate, he began to be more isolated even from his own people, from his close advisers, supporters, and that's what brought about his downfall in October of '87.

*Q: You were there at the time?*

NEHER: No, I left in August--finished my tour in August, and it was in October that he was overthrown.

*Q: Did you have the feeling...you'd made this turn around, but were there angry young Marxist type officers, or just radical officers who were sort of glowering and unhappy about this? If so, were there any sort of manifestations of this?*

NEHER: The little political groupings that are still in existence there, all have names like The Union of Burkinabe Communists, The Union of Communist Struggle, and the Group of Communist Officers, etc., and they see themselves as radical Marxists. They see the United States as being the big imperialistic country. At the airport when you fly in there you look across

the face of the airport, there's "Shame on Imperialism". So you have that throughout the society. But at any rate, that was the end of my mission. I was asked to choose a date for leaving there, and I chose July 31st because of the date... (interruption) So it was exactly three years from the time I arrived.

*Q: Before we leave that, was the government as such that if you got along with the president, you got along with everyone. I mean, there must have been all sorts of other problems dealing down at different levels?*

NEHER: Yes. There were people who did not like the United States, and who did not want better relations with the United States, and you always had to deal with them. The head of the youth organization, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, went out of his way to try to harm relations with the United States, sometimes in very uncomfortable circumstances. Calling the Diplomatic Corps and sitting down at the table in the Foreign Ministry and just lambasting the United States and accusing it of all kinds of things, and here we are, the whole Diplomatic Corps. Just on and on and on, a major speech, impromptu but...so you're sitting there as the American Ambassador and you wait until it's your turn to speak, and saying, "Thank you very much for your kind words, but I don't really feel this is the forum in which I care to discuss policy, to make statements about the policy."

*Q: What about the role of the French there, having been a former French colony? Do the French still have a pretty major oar in that pond, or not?*

NEHER: Yes, they're the big economic supporters, of course, Project Assistance. And they're the only ones doing budget support. They pay, in one form or another, for a lot of the services, the teachers and other welfare activities, social activities, and a number of subsidiaries. And they're also very big on project aid. They put in something like \$150 million a year, but their involvement is not the same as ours. They don't require these people to say nice things about them, they don't care what they say in the United Nations. They don't react the way we do. We have to, you know, we get our list out there. I mean every year the report cards on their performance in the UN, and we've got to go in and protest what they said about this, or they used this word, can they retract this word. It's silly, but we have to do it. The French don't care much about that. They want stability in the area, they want to make sure that this guy doesn't become troublesome for neighbors, or they want to keep things rocking along. They've got their monetary union, they don't want extravagancies there, they don't want chaos. They've got a few French commercial and business interests. A lot of French prestige in international forums is based on their ties with Africa, and they want to keep that. They don't really care much about these kinds of things. The Ambassador gets insulted, and the country gets insulted and there's no reaction at all.

*Q: Looking back on this then, is there anything else we should talk about do you think about this that I might have left out, or didn't ask?*

NEHER: I don't think so. I think we've covered it. These were the high points and in Burkina Faso, as you see we're concentrating on that one problem with stability, and how you get them to behave in a way that allows us to have dialogue with them, and allows us to continue our

programs, very modest but we are there. We think that they're good people, and programs tend to succeed there better than they do in most other countries of Africa.

*Q: More enterprising, more follow through.*

NEHER: They're hard working people, there is less corruption in the place. There is real austerity, that is, no extravagance on the part of the leaders. They still run around in little Renault 5s, or Volkswagen Jettas the Germans gave them. There are no great palaces, no luxury travel. Unfortunately there is a slight change in that policy. About four weeks ago there was a so-called attempted coup. I'm not sure there really was, but in which the two remaining survivors of the four, who took over in 1983, were killed--they were said to be executed. So now you have one. There's not going to be the brake on him on extravagancies, and so forth, that they had before. When Sankara was killed they had three, now they have one. It doesn't bode well for the country.

**CHARLES H. TWINING**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Ouagadougou (1985-1988)**

*Ambassador Charles H. Twining was born in Maryland in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Virginia in 1962 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1964. After entering the Foreign Service in 1964 his assignments included Tananarive, Dalat, Abidjan, Bangkok, Cotonou, Douala, Ouagadougou, and Honolulu with ambassadorships to Cambodia and Cameroon. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador Twining in 2004.*

*Q: This would have been when?*

TWINING: 1985. I had been looking to go to Swaziland. I had always wanted to see the green hills of Swaziland and I thought it would be a lovely place for a family. But, he said, "Charlie, we need you in Ouagadougou." I said, "Well, I know Ouagadougou, I've gone there with Crossroads Africa in 1962 as a student. I was a desk officer from 1970 to 1972. I know it well, and like it very much, but I really want to go to Swaziland." He said, "No, the need for you is in Ouagadougou. They are undergoing a revolution right now. We need someone who knows the lay of the land, and knows how to deal with people in a revolution. So, maybe you can go to Swaziland some other time, but right now, I would really appeal to you to go to Ouagadougou and be deputy chief of mission." Therefore, in 1985 we went to Ouagadougou for three years.

*Q: Ouagadougou is the capital of?*

TWINING: They had just changed the name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso.

*Q: You were there from when to when? What were your responsibilities? Tell me about the Embassy.*

TWINING: I was in Ouagadougou from 1985 to 1988 as Deputy Chief of Mission. I had taken the DCM course at FSI in 1982, prior to departing for Cotonou as the permanent Chargé d'Affaires, training which stood me in good stead for this new job. With one exception, that of Ambassador Elliot Skinner, the prominent anthropology professor who had led my Operations Crossroads Africa group in 1962, all our Ambassadors to Upper Volta / Burkina Faso have been career people. Leonardo Neher was Ambassador when I arrived. He left in 1987, and I was Chargé d'Affaires for several months until the arrival of a colleague, David Shinn, as the new Ambassador. The Embassy was a medium-sized post, with a large AID mission running one of our most important programs of assistance in Africa, as well as a Cultural Center and an especially successful Peace Corps program. An Ambassador and a DCM work out a division of labor, the Ambassador being more the outside man and the DCM the internal manager and alter ego. That was certainly the case in Ouagadougou. Both Ambassadors gave me lots of opportunities to do internal travel, and we all took part in overseeing a large and vigorous self-help program.

*Q: What was the situation there?*

TWINING: The revolution had begun in 1983 when a group of four young officers headed by Captain Thomas Sankara took over the government. They decided that capitalism had left the country behind, and it was time to follow some other direction. They, too, linked up with Libya and the Soviets. They thought the Soviets could show them how to do it. The Libyans could help them financially. Libya, in particular, had strong influence in Burkina Faso while I was there. Also, John Jerry Rawlings of Ghana had preceded them in trying the radical way of development. Sankara thought he would follow his "big brother", John Jerry Rawlings' example. He would develop Burkina along socialist lines.

*Q: How was it working?*

TWINING: There was a considerable element of self-reliance in their approach. On Saturdays, Sankara would go out with the entire government and work with the population. People would be there pounding sticks in the ground to build a railroad. The rails would go in all directions. They planted trees everywhere in the country in the face of the advance of the Sahara. Trees had their merits, but nobody thought to ensure that, after planting, the trees would continue to be watered. The trees often died. People went to so much effort, with the best of intentions. The government nationalized private companies, just like Benin had done. The companies were all going down the drain.

The region formed something called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. Members were 15-year-old kids with Kalashnikovs, who would stand out on the highway and stop you. They were young thugs. They didn't care if you were a diplomat or if you were an ordinary Burkinabe, as the people came to be called. It was a tough time. Like Benin's, this regime also loved the communist theme song, the "Internationals." It also converted these revolutionary songs for people to learn. Sadly, Burkina had always had a traditional and modern elite, the latter not very large, but the country needed those educated people. This revolution drove them out or underground. Those who stayed there were under suspicion and

they were watched. At the height of the revolution, this easy going country became a very somber place.

*Q: Without the real nastiness, it almost sounds like Cambodia.*

TWINING: It was, except there weren't the killing fields. The people in the Sahel are gentle, very human people, very warm people. They don't go in much for that kind of killing. Yet, under that regime some occurred, particularly thanks to one of Sankara's henchmen. The country has had coups before and after. But before the coup that brought these four officers into power, no one was killed. There was some killing with this new crowd, however. That was sad, because you felt the country lost its innocence after 1983. I began my assignment at the height of the revolution, then watched it run out of steam.

*Q: Who was in charge of the Embassy when you were there?*

TWINING: A fine gentleman named Julius Walker was Ambassador at the time of the change of regime and encountered very tough problems, leading again to questions in Washington as to whether the U.S. should keep an Embassy open. Once again, the decision was taken to stay and a wise experienced officer named Leonardo Neher was carefully chosen as the new U.S. Ambassador in 1984, it being thought that his calm, friendly and fatherly manner could appeal to these young Turks running Burkina and help put them on the right track. When I arrived a year later and would accompany him on calls on them, I found they were usually at ease listening to him, receiving his counsel. His approach was one of a friend, not of a harsh, know-it-all critic. It must have required great patience and restraint on Ambassador Neher's part. The mercurial President Sankara, in particular, seemed to appreciate both his approach and the overall relationship. Neher appeared to have a beneficial calming effect on him.

Sometimes Sankara and the other three young leaders would act on the Ambassador's advice, other times not. For example, Neher would say, "Look, it's not normal to have these 15 year old kids stopping and bothering people for no apparent purpose." They would sometimes reply, "You're right, we have to bring that under control." Or he might point to some of the radical things they were trying to do and say, "It just doesn't make sense for a poor country like yours to follow this route that is not going to get you where you are trying to go. Perhaps here is another approach." It was a constant effort that Ambassador Neher made, in any case, and one I tried to emulate in my own contacts with as wide a variety of the younger revolutionaries as possible. He was the right Ambassador to have in Burkina at that time.

*Q: What was your own personal situation?*

TWINING: Despite the tense times, particularly at first, it was a very good posting for the family. The Burkinabe are among the world's friendliest people, in my view, and very nice toward children. There was a small, but fine, international school my sons Dan and Steve attended. It was easy to travel around the country. The revolution wasn't as harsh outside the capital city region, and villagers welcomed you. The game parks were great. Until Sankara for reasons still unexplained decided one day that Peace Corps had to go (probably either to

please one of his donor countries like Libya or due to paranoia into which one of his allies probably fed suggesting that Peace Corps Volunteers were nothing but spies), our PCVs around Burkina were happy and motivated, and fun to visit. The U.S. was trying its best to reach out and work with the new authorities, with an extensive AID program aimed at helping address the basic human needs of that impoverished country and with an active United States Information Service outreach. American NGOs were active, particularly Catholic Relief Services. We enjoyed interacting with all the activity going on. In those days, for morale reasons, State was spending money to make sure that Embassy personnel – regardless of level – in the African Sahel had swimming pools, a modest expenditure worth every penny. I had a nice, modest home with a pool over near the University on the eastern edge of town in what the government called the outer security perimeter. On the other side of my back wall was the inner security perimeter which enclosed villas for the five members of the Council of the Entente. During the Sankara period it became the off-limits location for the coup leaders to work secretly.

In order to get to my house one had to drive past a machine gun post, which was always manned. One evening I came home and found my sons riding on the machine gun, next to grinning soldiers. It provided me an insight that there was hope in the revolution when neighborhood children were allowed to go ride on the machine gun, that hopefully this revolution could be brought more under control.

In 1987 President Sankara was killed about 200 meters from my house.

*Q: Oh, boy. How did that come about?*

TWINING: Even today, the story isn't very clear. I was Chargé d'Affaires by that time. Ambassador Neher had left, and then several months passed before Ambassador Shinn arrived. I was 400 kilometers away. It was a school holiday, and I had taken my family out of town, to the city of Bobo-Dioulasso. My sons, to this day, haven't forgiven me because they missed the coup. I returned to Ouagadougou the next morning. There were spent cartridges all around my house. The new President, Blaise Compaore, one of the original Young Turks, called in the French Ambassador, and then me in, to say, "Sadly, someone killed our president yesterday, and I have to take over." I said to him, "Well, where were you at that time?" He said, "I had terrible malaria and was at home. All I could hear were the gunshots." Maybe that was the case, and maybe it wasn't. But, in any case, several military personnel killed President Sankara, then the next day, several of his henchmen. You realized this was a situation where the regime was eating itself up. It was after I left in 1988 that the two other military officers, who had taken power with Sankara and Compaore, were tried for treason and sentenced to death. It went from four to one. That was the story of Burkina Faso's revolution. Most of the radicalism stopped then.

*Q: What was the role of the French there?*

TWINING: The 1983 revolution was very much a reaction against the French. Burkina is such a poor country, like Mali and Niger. It was relying on French aid, more than anything else. These young military officers felt they could find another economic philosophy of

development. They could find others to give them aid. They would no longer be beholden to the French, as their elders had been, but would be truly non-aligned. During the revolutionary period in Burkina, the French were always under suspicion; the leaders felt the French would try to overthrow them, that they would find some nefarious way to do it. The French were more suspect than the U.S. In any case, the French were watching the situation as we were, without knowing exactly what was going to happen and trying to remain patient.

*Q: Were the Libyans and the Soviets sort of top dog?*

TWINING: The Libyans were top dog, and I guess the Soviets were number two. I remember when Qadhafi came to Ouagadougou, as he also had come to Cotonou during my time there. Sankara and the others would go up to Tripoli. That tie was very important.

*Q: How do you feel the Libyans stood? The Soviets were all over Africa, but they never really developed their ties. They didn't really like it. The Americans, for the most part, liked Africa, and liked Africans. Well, how about the Libyans? They had been the slave traders.*

TWINING: You would remind Burkinabe from time to time the facts about the Libyans. Personally, I found the Libyans had a very superior attitude toward the Africans. I found it in Benin. I found it in Ouagadougou. They had nice Mercedes and BMWs and they loved going around in them. They gave a BMW to Sankara to keep him happy. That was all good, and yet were they great fellow Africans? They often would drink together, if that indicates anything.

*Q: Drink together?*

TWINING: Oh, yes.

*Q: I'm just wondering, because these are good solid Muslims.*

TWINING: Oh, well, there are limits. They would party together. They were great friends, and yet how well they personally connected, I always had my doubts about it. Certainly, they connected better than the Soviets did. But, with that connection, also went assistance agreements, often to form joint enterprises.

*Q: Any lessons learned from the Burkinabe experience?*

TWINING: Once again I am convinced of the wisdom of preserving through a less than easy situation, believing that we can give guidance like a friend instead of taking umbrage at incidents that, in hindsight, are unimportant. For example, Sankara received Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega and treated him equal to, and probably superior to, French President Mitterrand when he visited. On the occasion of the Ortega visit, and I was Chargé, Sankara used the press to mock me for having had to act diplomatic at a dinner. Most Burkinabe thought it was a ridiculous slam of a diplomat, but I found it easier to laugh along with them than to take offense. We were particularly upset by his expulsion of the Peace Corps, but even then sought not to burn any bridges in the hope that Peace Corps could return, and it has returned, in force. It was important to seek access to the revolutionary elements in charge,

and we did it, having long discussions with its members at various levels and finding, for the most part, that these were people sincerely dedicated to improving their country and not quite sure how to do it. In sum, it was a situation with which you could work. We were happy to extend our tour of duty there from two to three years.

**DAVID HAMILTON SHINN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Burkina Faso (1987-1990)**

*Ambassador David Hamilton Shinn was born in Washington in 1940. He received three degrees from George Washington University. During his career he had positions in Kenya, Washington D.C., Tanzania, Mauritania, Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and ambassadorships to Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. Ambassador Shinn was interviewed in July 2002 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: After the senior seminar, what was next?*

SHINN: I was nominated and approved by the Senate as ambassador to Burkina Faso. That was a three year tour from 1987 to 1990. Burkina Faso was not a country of major interest to the U.S. It is relatively small and relatively unimportant. On the other hand, it had just passed through serious internal problems. President Thomas Sankara had just been assassinated and one of his close aides, Blaise Compaore, took power. He remains in power today.

My three years in Ouagadougou were routine, the best term I can come up with to describe my ambassadorial tour. I did whatever was expected to represent the U.S.: delivering demarches, making public affairs appearances, visiting every corner of the country. We did have a few ups and downs in our relationship with the Compaore regime, which was not overly friendly toward the U.S. There was a wariness about our intentions in this part of Africa.

Our mission was relatively small. We had USAID, USIA and a station. There were no Peace Corps or Defense Attaché. About mid-way through my tour, Compaore began to cozy up to Libya and Charles Taylor in Liberia. He began to take a less friendly attitude toward the U.S. At one point, I was recalled by Washington as an indication of our displeasure with Burkina Faso's attitude. I stayed in Washington for about two weeks before going back. For the rest of my tour, the relationship was correct and normal. France was the key player in Burkina Faso. Perhaps the Dutch, Germans and the Soviets were as influential as we were. We just played the game like a lot of other countries. We reported as well as we could about what was going in the country, but I never felt that Washington was particularly anxious to hear from us.

*Q: What was Burkina Faso like?*

SHINN: It is a nice little country. It is homogeneous and predominantly Muslim, but there are significant Christian elements in the country. It is ethnically divided, but there are a couple of ethnic groups like the Mossi that have dominated the political landscape. It is easy to travel

around Burkina; it is compact and the roads are fairly good. There isn't very much to see there.

It is a poor country with a basic economy. It manages to feed its people and life goes on in a traditional manner. Burkina Faso does not have any diamond mines or oil fields, resources that have led some of its neighbors to disastrous consequences. The country has essentially no resources except for its people which it exports in large numbers. There were about three million of them in the Ivory Coast contributing, according to some, to the problems in that country. Burkinabe are hard workers; they tend to do the kind of work that other West Africans are reluctant to undertake. Labor is the major export.

*Q: Did UN issues arise very often?*

SHINN: No more often than in other African countries. We were not very successful in getting Burkina Faso to vote with us. If it did, it was sheer coincidence. They tended to vote with the majority of "left leaning" African states. They would be on the same side with Guinea or Ghana.

*Q: What attracted Burkina Faso to Charles Taylor?*

SHINN: It was a curious phenomenon. I saw no reason why Compaore would find it useful to have close relations with Charles Taylor. I didn't see that there was anything in it for Burkina Faso. Allegedly, Charles Taylor was living in Burkina Faso during my tour. He later migrated to Liberia and took power. There may have been a personal connection between the two men or Libya may have been behind this strange relationship. It may have offered Burkina Faso financial assistance in return for support of Charles Taylor, whom Libya supported. Burkina Faso may have been a Libyan proxy. Otherwise, I see no reason why Compaore would have a close relationship with Taylor.

*Q: How were your relations with the French?*

SHINN: They were good. I dealt with two different French ambassadors in my three years. They were cordial, but they made it clear that of all the ambassadors in Ouagadougou they were "top banana." I never tried to challenge that view.

*Q: Was the Sahel food supply a major issue while you were in Burkina Faso?*

SHINN: I came well after the serious Sahel famine of the 1970s. There were periodic food shortages in the Sahel from 1987-90, but nothing like the magnitude of the earlier famine.

I had enough time in Ouagadougou to devote time to the West African softball league. We had very active teams in Ouagadougou and in neighboring countries and we took seriously the tournaments in places like Bamako, Niamey, Lome and Ouagadougou. I pitched. As ambassador I had my choice of positions to play. We did okay.

*Q: Did you have any problems in getting staff?*

SHINN: We did not have a long list of people who were bidding for an assignment to Burkina

Faso, but we filled all the positions. The staff in general was good; there were a few problem cases. We had an inspection which turned out poorly, in part due to staffing problems. Some of these problems came to a head right before the inspection. The timing was unfortunate and it caused me a lot of anguish. The buck does stop with the ambassador.

One of the problems concerned marijuana usage among the Marine guards. Another concerned physical harassment of an embassy spouse. There were also a couple of charges of sexual harassment which turned out to be essentially misunderstandings. This was a period when there was enormous sensitivity about treatment of women. Some of our older staff had not learned that times had changed and that acceptable language in their youth was no longer so. This kind of problem is particularly troublesome in a small mission. We fixed the problems, but it took 6-9 months and we had to shift some people around. This episode was the low point in my Foreign Service career. After fixing the problems, I requested a second inspection and we passed with flying colors.

**ROBERT BEECROFT**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Ouagadougou (1988-1991)**

*While Ambassador Beecroft served as Political Officer at a number of posts in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, his primary focus was on Political/Military Affairs, both in Washington and abroad. Later in his career he served as Special Envoy to the Bosnia Federation and subsequently as Ambassador to the Office of Security & Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) operating in Bosnia & Herzegovina. A native of New Jersey, Ambassador Beecroft served in the US Army and studied at the University of Pennsylvania and the Sorbonne in Paris before joining the Foreign Service in 1967. Ambassador Beecroft was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: '88.*

BEECROFT: Yes?

*Q: Whither?*

BEECROFT: Off to Ouagadougou.

*Q: I always use Ouagadougou as the sort of the never never land. It's a great name to use, but anyway Ouagadougou as what?*

BEECROFT: Ouagadougou. Well. When I finished my year at the National War College in June '88, first of all I wanted to go overseas again, and second, I wanted to be a DCM. I'd never been a DCM. We've all heard the clichés about a 50% failure rate for DCMs. I wanted to test myself - let's see if I can do this. So, I called a friend from Egypt days, Frances Cook. She was the

personnel and assignments DAS in AF. I had already looked at the open assignments list of DCMships, and frankly there was very little that fit with my background. So I figured okay, let's shoot for something really different. And there on the list was Ouagadougou.

*Q: Ouagadougou being the capital of what?*

BEECROFT: Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta. Burkina Faso means "land of the upright men," renamed by president, Thomas Sankara, who had been assassinated by his successor, Blaise Compaoré. I called Frances and I said I'm interested in going to Ouagadougou as DCM. After she stopped laughing she said, I'll get back to you. Lo and behold, I got it. It was a total shot in the dark.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

BEECROFT: There were two during my time there. The first was David Shinn. He had been there for a year by the time I got there. Later he became Ambassador to Ethiopia. He and his wife Judy were from Yakima, Washington -- old Africa hands. My second Ambassador there, during my third year there, was Ed Brynn, a wonderful man. We're still very good friends. He's now retired from State and teaching at UNC Charlotte.

*Q: Yes, I've interviewed Ed.*

BEECROFT: A great guy, brilliant. In any case, before we went out to post, my wife Mette and I talked with the previous Ambassador, Leonard "Nard" Neher and his wife. They gave us valuable insights into what made the place tick, what my priorities might be, and so forth. For us, Ouaga was a total change. It was also francophone. I wanted to go to a place where I knew the language. We flew via Paris, and transferred to UTA French African airlines, and lo and behold, there we were in Ouagadougou. I remember to this day what Mrs. Neher said: "When you go to Ouagadougou you cry twice, once when you arrive and once when you leave, but for different reasons." And she was right. When you arrive, you see this gaggle of modest buildings and mud huts on a low, flat plain, with a couple of artificial lakes in the distance and the horizon stretching away across the Sahel to the Sahara, and you say, my God, what is there to do here for three years? And before very long, you realize that you don't want to leave. We had a great time.

*Q: You were there from '88 to '91?*

BEECROFT: '91. Yes.

*Q: What had you been told or what were as you went out, what were our interests in Ouagadougou?*

BEECROFT: Our major interest in Burkina Faso had to do with Muammar Qadhafi and his designs on West Africa. There was a Charles Taylor angle to that too -- Taylor had spent time in Libya, and had also lived a lot of his life in the United States, had been jailed in Massachusetts, had operated an office in South Orange, New Jersey, and had fingers in all kinds of pies.

*Q: You might explain who Charles Taylor is.*

BEECROFT: Charles Taylor is a vile human being who became president of Liberia and proceeded to get involved in the diamond trade in Sierra Leone. He supported the rebels in Sierra Leone, the ones who chopped children's hands off. He is one of the world's great crooks, a man who drained what little resource base the country of Liberia had and made its peoples' lives worse than it had been to start with. For a lot of that time we turned a blind eye. When I arrived in Ouaga, Charles Taylor was spending a lot of time in Ghana with -- what was his name? Samuel Doe?

*Q: No, Doe was.*

BEECROFT: Was it a sergeant?

*Q: He was the air force officer.*

BEECROFT: Got it. Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings.

Anyway, Taylor was commuting between Accra and Ouagadougou. This was in '89-'90. Blaise Compaoré, the president of Burkina Faso, then and now, used to put him up in a government guest house. Of course we kept a close eye on this, sometimes with the help of the French Embassy. I had a good relationship with the French Embassy, which helped a lot. Our residence was right under the glide path to Ouagadougou International Airport. Every Friday this big white Ilyushin transport plane from Libya would come right over our house and touch down at Ouagadougou Airport. It was the only airstrip in the country big enough to handle such planes. I would send one of our people from the Embassy out to check it out. He had a Great Dane. It turned out that Africans are very skittish about large dogs. I would simply call him up and say "Go walk the dog," and he would. They would always offload a lot of crates marked "medicine." My colleague would come back and say, "Well, the medicine this week consists of 50 crates of Kalashnikovs, 25 mortars, ten cartons of hand grenades..." and all of this stuff would transit Burkina Faso and Northern Côte d'Ivoire, and then onward into Liberia. And this was all Charles Taylor's doing, with Qadhafi's support. This was a case where the War College really helped. If you look at a map of Africa, and draw a line southwest from Libya across the Sahara to the coast at Sierra Leone, it goes right through Burkina Faso to northern Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. And you say to yourself, Qadhafi has a strategy here. He is trying to divide West Africa. That's exactly what he was trying to do -- draw a diagonal line down to the coast and, eventually, simply convert the whole area with his Little Green Book. It was his strategy so that was interesting. We got nothing but pious denials from Compaoré -- a Catholic, by the way -- that he was helping in any way.

I'd been there two or three weeks, I can't remember exactly, and it was the second anniversary of the bombing of Qadhafi's tent. Of course the rhetoric out of Tripoli was horrendous, but the only country in the world that had worse things to say about the United States was Burkina Faso. It was a Friday, and once the Burkinabè statement hit Washington, I got a phone call. State had decided to recall the Ambassador Shinn. I called the ambassador and said, "David, they want you to leave right away." The following day, Saturday, he and Judy left. Nothing happened over the

weekend; nothing ever happens in Burkina over the weekend. Monday morning, the phone rings, summoning the Ambassador to the Foreign Ministry. Obviously, they've decided to keep the anti-American drum beat going. Qadhafi must have been giving them a lot of goodies. I said, very innocently, "Oh, he's not here." "Where is he?" "Oh, he's left." "Well, then you come." So the newly minted Chargé d'Affaires goes down to the Foreign Ministry – a matter of a few blocks-- with no instructions. It was still the middle of the night in Washington. If I recall correctly, I saw the Deputy Foreign Minister. He launches into his prepared tirade about America's aggression in Libya in 1986. After a couple of minutes, I put up my hand and said "Excuse me, I'd like to make a brief statement, and then I will leave. Ambassador Shinn has left Burkina Faso. It's entirely up to you if you want an American ambassador or not; it doesn't matter to us one way or the other. Please do not think that he has gone because you matter to us. The opposite is the case. We will be watching what you say in the coming days, and we'll draw our own conclusions. Au revoir, monsieur." And I left. All this was without instructions, except for my impressions of Washington's anger over the phone.

*Q: What happened?*

BEECROFT: I figured, well, looks like my tour here will be very short. The next day in the local state-run press: conciliatory language. "We must get past the events of 1986 and look to a better relationship between Libya and the United States" -- as if anyone cared what Burkina Faso thought about the bilateral relationship between Washington and Tripoli -- and that was the end of it. Two weeks later the Ambassador returned. That was a baptism of fire I'll never forget.

*Q: Did we have intelligence people looking at what Qadhafi was doing there or did we take care of it on our own or how did we do it?*

BEECROFT: We had a presence. You'll understand that I don't want to go into detail. We that kept an eye on Qadhafi, and on the connections he was trying to develop. At that time, he was still a true believer in his own cause and trying to play strategic games in his immediate neighborhood. Burkina Faso was a useful target of opportunity. Blaise Compaoré saw himself as a young revolutionary and something of a soul brother even though he's Catholic, so yes, we watched it.

*Q: Where did this stand, I mean, when were the Kyoto wars going on in Chad and all that?*

BEECROFT: Chad was awfully far away from Burkina Faso. One of the real learning experiences for me, who had never been south of the Sahara, was how bloody big Africa is. Chad is a long way off. West Africa basically took care of West Africa. West Africa stops where Cameroon starts. We had an old Peugeot 505, and we visited by road every country surrounding Burkina Faso -- Niger, Mali, Bénin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana. It's a big and very beautiful area when you get the feel for it. We loved going out to villages. We got to know one chief in particular, the leader of a group of villages, some 9,000 people, north of Ouaga. This guy had actually been a deputy in the French national assembly before independence. The village didn't even have electricity. He had his own gas lamps, and he had a wonderful library. You could go out to his village for a weekend – there were no lights at night except the ones in his house. The stars were so close you could touch them. Here was this very erudite man, who spoke perfect

French and had lived through the end of the colonial era. Now he was a very big fish in a quite small pond. It was great.

*Q: What else would the embassy be doing? I mean, you know.*

BEECROFT: Two things -- AID and support for human rights. We no longer had a Peace Corps mission in Ouaga. It had been pulled out in response to President Compaoré's murder of his predecessor, Thomas Sankara, who was something of a charismatic figure. Sankara used to drive around town in his own Toyota. The AID mission stayed on. It was a small account. It focused on peoples' lives, not building roads or hotels in Ouaga or anything like that. They did some very interesting things. Burkina Faso is mostly flatland and very low volcanic hills, red laterite -- ungrateful, rocky terrain. What rain there was would tend to run down the hills and down the creeks without ever being absorbed into the ground, because the ground wasn't very porous. So, one of our AID people had come up with a very simple system using lengths of garden hose. You fill them with water and you up a hill and you'd actually make a series of necklaces down the hill. When the water level was the same at both ends of the hose, you knew that you had the fall line of the hill. You know where the rainwater is going to go when it comes down the hill. What the French and others had tried to do was build basins, but this didn't work very well because they didn't always know where the water was going to go. We didn't bother with the basins. The locals thought this was wonderful because you didn't need the basins. All you did was put the hoses on the hillside and leave them there. Then when the rains came, the hoses would slow it down so that it would have a chance to be absorbed into the ground and it would raise the water table, and it worked. This was replicated all over the region. AID was doing simple, practical things that would improve crops. They also were very much into eradicating river blindness.

*Q: There's this, I guess there's a cycle in the Sahel about when you have terrible drought and all that and we got very much involved in relief efforts and all that.*

BEECROFT: Correct.

*Q: Where was the cycle?*

BEECROFT: In West Africa the rainy season starts at the end of May and ends in early September. If it doesn't rain then, it won't rain at all until the following year. In the three years that I was there, the rains were good. It's funny -- even after all these years, I still check the rainy cycle in West Africa. You can do it online now. If the reservoirs are low by say mid-Spring or gone, you know you've got a problem, but again that's why this hose system was so practical. We worked a lot with NGOs on river blindness - bilharzia. Catholic Relief Services was there, Save the Children was there. It's caused by a kind of a worm or a parasite that thrives in the few low-lying river valleys.

*Q: Is it like \_\_\_\_\_?*

BEECROFT: Yes, that's right. Basically river blindness was on the way to being eradicated, largely through the efforts of USAID, and that was good news.

*Q: What would say a political officer do there?*

BEECROFT: We had one political officer, Stuart Jones. He actually was here last year on the War College faculty. He and I both did political work. As DCM, I did the labor reporting because the labor unions were actually quite active on the French model, CGT. You follow human rights, domestic political affairs, relations with neighboring West African states, relations with the various religious groups, to some extent ethnic relations, although in Burkina, which was largely Mossi, that was less of a problem than it would be in, say, Côte d'Ivoire. There was enough to keep a political officer busy.

*Q: What were we doing on the human rights line?*

BEECROFT: Well, you remember that human rights was something that Jimmy Carter had started as a major U.S. foreign policy priority. He created the Bureau of Human Rights. Everybody thought that when Reagan came in that, that would be the end of that, but Reagan had seen the value of human rights as another stick to beat the Soviets with, so he expanded our human rights activities. I was in Ouaga during the late Reagan/early Bush '41 era, and we got instructions from the Department to renew our focus on human rights. This was at a time, at the end of the Cold War, when there were a few brave souls out there in Burkina Faso, local people, who founded a human rights NGO. It was called the Mouvement Burkinabè pour les Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples. It was headed by a judge. His name was Alidou Ouédraogo. In Burkina, Ouédraogo is like Smith. Jones and I got to know him very well. This was one very smart man. I think he had political ambitions. Politically, he was quite close to being a communist, but he truly believed in human rights, that human rights were not dependent on poverty levels, and that human rights were in fact a basis for developing prosperity and democracy. Of course he was hounded and harassed by government authorities. So we got him a leader grant, an IVP trip, and sent him to the U.S. That did wonders. It was in effect a message from the United States, don't put this guy in jail, don't touch him, give him some space. This was also a time when there was real movement in South Africa. Mandela was gaining influence and power. These things served as a warning signal to the local powers to allow for a bit of latitude. Like almost everybody in Burkina Faso, Alidou Ouédraogo had systemic malaria. Once in a while he would get a fever and just ride it out. Well, this happened to him in Portland, Oregon, while he was on his IVP tour. He immediately became a local celebrity, because no one at the local hospital had ever seen a case of malaria! So he explained I have malaria, I need the following medicines. It was on the television news programs – "visiting African dignitary has malaria." As soon as people were reassured that it wasn't contagious, it added to his charm. When he returned to Ouaga, we funded an office for his human rights movement, with typewriters and tables and stuff. It cost a pittance, but it gave him a place to hang his sign. I got a phone call one day from my French Embassy counterpart, with whom I generally got along well. We went out and had lunch. He said, "I'm speaking to you as a friend, but this is also French policy. We wish you wouldn't spend so much time on human rights." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, and these were his very words, "This is our deep South. We don't want any trouble down here." I said, "Well, thank you very much." We didn't throttle back.

*Q: Sounds familiar.*

BEECROFT: Yes. It was something like out of a Graham Greene novel. There we were in the Hôtel Central dining room -- the owner of which was from Monte Carlo and he was on the run, I think it was a murder charge. The French had the most amazing collection of local colonial residents. This guy actually ran one of the better restaurants in town. We're sitting there having, of all things, spaghetti flambé. Can you imagine? Now, the best restaurant in town was called the l'Eau Vive, the living water. It was owned and operated by the local Catholic Diocese. You ate outside in this lovely garden, and there was a spotlight statue of the Virgin Mary with water gushing from beneath her feet. It was good French cuisine. The waitresses were reformed prostitutes, many from Vietnam. At 9:30 pm, all eating and serving stopped and they would distribute prayer sheets and you'd sing hymns for 10 minutes. This was nothing like Bonn or Cairo.

*Q: Tell me a bit about the government there.*

BEECROFT: Interesting group. I mentioned it was headed by Blaise Compaoré, the former Minister of Justice, who had killed his best friend Thomas Sankara and taken his chair in October 1987 -- nine months before I got there. When I say "taken his chair," this is a tradition in the Mossi culture that the person who has the stool of authority is in charge, no matter how he gets it. Compaoré, by the way, still has the stool. Compaoré had been a military officer, a commando, and became Minister of Justice under Sankara. He surrounded himself with an interesting mix of military types and French-trained technocrats. He was no fool, is no fool. That's why he's still in power. He was careful to maintain good relations with the various tribal groups. As I noted, the Mossi people predominate, so it wasn't a big problem as it is in so many African states, but there is another group called the Bobo, down in the southwest corner of Burkina, who were quite strong and sometimes quite headstrong. Compaoré made sure they were well represented and, on a modest scale, stayed on good terms with France, which mattered a lot. The French influence could not be overstated. France was still the magnet; it was what you measured your success against.

Every other year, now as then, they have a festival called FESPACO, which is the West African film festival. It's a big deal. Burkina Faso makes good movies. They made one called Yaaba which was widely praised. I still have it on tape. Yaaba means grandmother. It was about life in a village. In Burkina Faso, nobody was starving. Between subsistence agriculture, remittances and international aid, people got by. This was before AIDS had worked its way up to Burkina Faso. It had reached the coast, but not the interior. There were a lot of Burkinabè working down on the coast, especially in Côte d'Ivoire. Remittances were very important to family viability. The political, social and economic collapse of Côte d'Ivoire has created huge problems for Burkina Faso. But no one starves in Burkina Faso. They may not be living luxurious lives, but people got by.

*Q: Human rights. What were the problems when you were there?*

BEECROFT: Human rights. Well, the basic problem was the absence of the rule of the law. The rule of law was what the government said it was. There were, as I mentioned, judges who had been trained according to the French model. But the courts were very hit or miss, and

undoubtedly took guidance from the government. There was a parliament, but it was not serious – typical rubber-stamp approach. Students had to be very careful about what they said or did or they would find that their scholarships had been revoked. People could be put in jail with no charges levied and simply disappear.

*Q: The French. I mean they were obviously pretty well calling the shots, but how were the relations with the French? The French have always been at least maybe not at a certain point they were terribly suspicious of what we were up to. Are we going to supplant them which would place us far from being our policy, but still.*

BEECROFT: Just by our weight.

*Q: Yes. What was the French American relationship?*

BEECROFT: It was excellent. Again, since I spoke French and knew the Ambassador and the DCM, I got invited to a lot of events at the French Embassy. But the French have this thing about “Anglo-Saxons.” What the French thought they saw, amazingly enough, was that the Americans, or maybe the British with American support, had a strategic plan to supplant the French in West Africa politically and economically and make English the dominant language in the region. The French just aren’t happy unless see a plot at work. They saw a strategic plan to minimize the French influence in West Africa, whereas the reality was we were perfectly happy to have them be the top dog in West Africa. We had enough fish to fry then, and God knows we do now.

*Q: Yes.*

BEECROFT: But they just love this stuff.

*Q: What about social life with the people there?*

BEECROFT: The U.S. Embassy, including USAID, had a staff of about 30 people. As DCM, you spend a lot of your time cheerleading. Morale can be a problem. We once had a staff meeting whose only theme was “Why are we here?” and that was good. We talked about the various reasons why the United States actually puts people on the ground in places like Burkina Faso, unlike some other countries that have roving, regional ambassadors. The Finns for example: their ambassador was stationed in Helsinki and once a year he would do the rounds. Even the Brits had a couple of roving ambassadors. We do not, or at least didn’t then, I don’t know if we do now. The Embassy had a nice small club with clay tennis courts and a pool. There were tennis tournaments. The DCM’s residence was very nice house, with a pool and a garden and a big patio, and we held square dances for the community every week. Pulled the loudspeakers out on the patio, people would come and square dance. Most of the year, the evening is the best time for outdoor events. The nights are beautiful and mild. It’s actually chilly in the winter. We also had good relations with other embassies, including the Soviet Union, which at that point was in the process of collapsing. The Soviet Embassy had been huge. They had had over 100 people in Burkina Faso, and in the spring of 1991 most of them left. This really hit the “socialist” Burkinabè government hard. The Chinese were well represented too. I knew

the Iranians at a time when we were hardly talking to them. Even the Libyans. You couldn't help but know everybody.

We had a small Marine Security Guard that was subsequently removed -- no real need for an MSG. As I said, the living quarters were nice. The AID director had a house that was easily as nice as the Ambassador's residence.

*Q: Which is often the case.*

BEECROFT: Indeed. Our house had been the AID director's house, and then it was converted to the DCM's residence. It very nice. Of course, we had a generator, a big one. When the electric power failed and the generator kicked in, it sounded like the Hindenburg taking off.

*Q: Well, then you left there in?*

BEECROFT: '91.

**EDWARD BRYNN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Burkina Faso (1990-1993)**

*Ambassador Edward Brynn was born in Pennsylvania in 1942. He graduated from Georgetown University and received an M.S. and a PhD from Stanford University. He also attended Trinity College in Ireland and served as a captain overseas in the U.S. Air Force from 1968-1972. His postings abroad have included Sri Lanka, Mali and Cameroon, with ambassadorships to Burkina Faso and Ghana. Ambassador Brynn was interviewed in 2000 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: In 1990 you went where?*

BRYNN: Went to Ouagadougou.

*Q: I always use Ouagadougou as sort of like that back of beyond. Talk about Burkina Faso.*

BRYNN: I didn't arrive there until November 17, because, among other vicissitudes on the way, I was one of Senator Jesse Helms' hostages in his campaign to get USIS integrated into State. I had a fair amount of free time and in the fall I volunteered to do some speaking engagements around the United States. In fact, Jane and I just hopped into our car and we drove as far as Colorado, Utah and Arizona. We were in Phoenix when I finally got the call saying, "All is forgiven. Come on home." So we came back and went off to Ouagadougou. I had never expected to be there, but I knew the country a bit because I had gone to Ouagadougou several times to play softball over the course of some years. When I arrived there, the shadow of Thomas Sankara lurked on the edges of political life. He had been killed two years before. He was still a cult hero.

*Q: He had been...*

BRYNN: He had been President. He had been involved in what was the sixth coup, and Blaise Compaoré, who overthrew him in late '87 or early '88, was the seventh coup. There was still a lot of tension in the streets, a lot of feeling that Compaoré's days were numbered. Ironically, he has turned out to be an extraordinary survivor. The Burkinabé are extremely hard working. I must say I think the work ethic among the peasants in Burkina Faso is just the highest I've ever seen in any of my posts. The social structure is based upon the Mossi hierarchy. Interestingly, the upper class in Ouagadougou all went to Catholic prep schools together and are Catholic in a region which, of course, is very largely Muslim. So you had at the top a fairly sophisticated, very focused ruling aristocracy, and then you had a plunge way down to an extraordinarily impoverished by hard-working peasantry at the bottom. There was not much in between, not much in the way of a middle class at all.

*Q: What was the history of Burkina Faso? Under whom had it been during colonial times?*

BRYNN: It had been a semi-independent Mossi kingdom very much in the same line as the Ashanti had been to the south. It came under French influence right at the cusp of the 20th century, really in January of 1901, I think. The upper class in Ouagadougou was quickly converted to Catholicism. It had always resisted Islam. The French established themselves very lightly in Ouagadougou but very, very forcefully in Bobo-Dioulasso, which is the major commercial city, located in the southwestern part of the country. It is the area where you get enough rainfall for settled agriculture.

*Q: Looking at the map you see it borders on both French and English. You've got Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, Niger and Nigeria. What were the influences?*

BRYNN: First of all, the overarching influence has been Cote d'Ivoire, because, although until World War I Upper Volta, as it was called - Burkina Faso was Upper Volta - had been an independent French fiefdom, it was fused with Cote d'Ivoire, Ivory Coast, in 1920, I believe, and remained so, remained a province or a stepchild of Cote d'Ivoire until after World War II. At that point the Mossi were able to convince the French that they needed their own identity back, and so in 1947 that Upper Volta regained its autonomy. But there was no doubt about it that Cote d'Ivoire remained a very, very powerful influence. Not only were some of the leading families in Burkina Faso very closely connected with families in Cote d'Ivoire parish but trade was absolutely governed by the trading houses in Abidjan. Every year Burkinabé men, partly because they had a reputation for being strong and good workers, filled the seasonal plantation jobs on the southern Cote d'Ivoire plantations: cocoa, bananas, pineapples, the lot. So Burkina Faso remained a surrogate in an economic relationship to Cote d'Ivoire. The other relationship was, of course, to Ghana directly to the south. This was a very testy relationship. From the time that J. J. Rawlings came to power in 1979 and then for good in 1981, tension levels between successive regimes in Ouagadougou and Rawlings were always very high. It was a very difficult border area. There were many small skirmishes along the frontier. There was a contest over riparian rights because the three branches of the Volta River came out of Burkina Faso and coalesced in Ghana. There was very little evidence of Anglophone commercial ties between Burkina Faso and

Ghana. It was for the average Burkinabé as if there was no country at all to the south; so this was different from their relationship to Cote d'Ivoire.

*Q: You get to Cote d'Ivoire, which under Houphouët-Boigny sort of went on almost forever, and you had seven coups up in Burkina Faso. Were the neighbors messing around, or were your people in Burkina Faso sort of coup prone?*

BRYNN: No, I think the neighbors were messing around, and there was quite often an Ivorian finger in there, maybe acting as surrogate for the French, who I think tired of certain of the reformers, especially Lamizana. Lamizana really did effect some significant structural reforms in Burkina Faso, and I think this alienated some of the French trading houses up there. This was a field of play for the outsiders.

*Q: Were you sniffing around and picking up the same French sort of corruptive influence that you'd seen in the Cameroons?*

BRYNN: No, I don't think that we had the same level of corruption, probably because there was less to be corrupt about there. Interestingly, Henri Deschamps, who was the ambassador in the Comoros Islands when I was there, was ambassador in Ouagadougou during my tenure; we were something of a tandem couple. We started seeing each other quite regularly both at his place and mine. One day in a moment of great Gallic candor he said, "Ed, the French community in Burkina Faso is the lowest class French community that I have seen in Africa. The French who are here are so dysfunctional that they can't go back to France."

*Q: Were they Corsican, by any chance?*

BRYNN: I think there were some Corsicans, yes. They lived a pretty mean life, I think, and they were indeed a slice of French surete who couldn't go back and make it back home. He said - in fact, it was in the context of coming up for Bastille Day - 'It's a moment of extraordinary dread. We have to invite all of them, and they just sort of trash the place.'

*Q: What were our interests there? What were you up to?*

BRYNN: Well, Blaise had established - in fact, this is the post where, I suppose, the interests were most sensitive - Blaise had established a symbiotic relationship with Qadhafi and with Charles Taylor, and Ouagadougou was being used as a midpoint in arms shipments from the north to Charles Taylor. Taylor also kept a house in...

*Q: You'd better mention...*

BRYNN: The leader of the insurgency in Liberia had relied on Burkina Faso for structural support and arms that were channeled through Burkina Faso from Libya. Compaoré was paid in diamonds for his work and probably is still getting paid now with Taylor installed as president in Liberia. Taylor came to power just at the point of my arrival in Ouagadougou, and I would see Taylor from time to time because he would come up to Burkina Faso. I would get instructions from Washington to read the riot act about his role in the arms trafficking from Qadhafi. The

most memorable point I had after reading a particularly nasty letter to him from Hank Cohen, who was then the Assistant Secretary in the African Bureau. I said to Taylor, "Do you have anything you'd like me to report back to Washington?" and he said, "Ambassador, no, nothing at all." So I turned and walked to the door. I always felt sort of like I was going to be shot from behind - the atmosphere surrounding this Taylor was really pretty awful. I got the door, I put my hand on the doorknob and he said, "Ambassador." I turned around and he said, "I do have something I want you to tell Mr. Cohen. I want you to tell him that I resent the tone of the language that he uses in his communications with me. I want..." Then he stopped and he said, "Well, Ambassador, forget about it. If you had any influence in Washington, you would not be ambassador to a silly (shitty is the word he used) little country like Burkina Faso."

*Q: Peculiar place.*

BRYNN: That's right. We were really concerned obviously about the relationship between Compaoré and Libya, because we knew that Ouaga was being used as a trans-shipment point for guns and other bits of armament from Qadhafi to elsewhere, not just into Liberia but into Sierra Leone and into Niger and Chad and points south. There was always something on the agenda about the relationship between Compaoré and Qadhafi, and I had a number of talks with Compaoré about it. To his credit Compaoré never said, "We won't do it anymore." He just listened, and he had that extraordinary demeanor where you couldn't see behind the mask. You would just register the points and he would say, "Thank you very much."

*Q: Dealing in this part of the world, this was after Qadhafi had seemed to pull in his horns a bit after we had bombed him, and all of sudden there seemed to be something change, at least certain operations. What was your feeling and the analysis that you were getting from your colleagues? What the hell was Qadhafi up to in all this stuff?*

BRYNN: I think, Stu, you're right. By the time I got to Ouagadougou I think we were looking at a relationship between Qadhafi and Compaoré that had built up a certain momentum over the years but had lost a lot of its purpose. There was still a need to supply arms to Charles Taylor because there was a traditional relationship there, but even there Taylor was moving to victory and his need to rely on Qadhafi was diminishing. But we were still into the period where there remained some obligation on Qadhafi's part to meddle in African affairs.

*Q: Did you have a feeling that Qadhafi was no longer quite the force that he had been? It's very interesting. As we speak today Qadhafi has been very quiet while we're in Afghanistan and for some time. Really we're talking about somebody who in a way one night a bombing and all of a sudden he started to reverse himself very slowly.*

BRYNN: Well, in fact, there's a perverse chapter to all of this. We watched Qadhafi supply financial assistance for schools in rural areas in the north in the profoundly Muslim areas, and the schools that Qadhafi was supporting went head to head with the fundamentalist schools that were receiving support from other parts of the Arab world, including from Saudi Arabia. The Saudis, I don't think, had the slightest idea how radical some of these schools were that they were so generously supporting. Qadhafi's schools were secular, vocational, and not abetting

fundamentalist tendencies, something that was sort of in our favor.

*Q: As we speak today in 2002, we're looking much more closely at many of these extreme fundamentalist schools because we're concerned about anti-Americanism, terrorism, creating of schools where they're sort of training martyrs to go out and blow themselves up and that sort of thing. Did you feel under any particular threat while you were in Burkina Faso?*

BRYNN: No, I didn't. Maybe I'm just sort of insensitive to this, but I took all the normal precautions and went different ways to work. I could walk to work, and usually did. I traveled a lot in the country, and I never felt any threat in that area. I was recalled at one point by Cohen when his exasperation level with Compaoré's indulgence of Libyan arms trafficking was at a high point. Of course, it's easy to recall an ambassador, but it's very hard then to get him back if things don't change. I learned a lesson there. I think I sort of resisted going back, but I should have put more opposition because it was hard to get back into Burkina Faso afterwards.

*Q: To me, it's always struck me as being one of the most nonsensical situations: when things get difficult, you pull your top man out. It may send a signal, but, hell, you can devise a special flag you can raise. There are other ways of doing this. This goes way back into antiquity, but it's stupid.*

BRYNN: I think so. It's not a good option.

*Q: How did you find society there?*

BRYNN: First of all, we had a staff with extraordinarily high morale. It was splendid in that respect. My own personal circumstance was different because Jane, after having worked in contracts with the State Department and Peace Corps and all these things, actually entered the Foreign Service in early 1990. The Department thought it was doing a good thing and assigned her to Conakry because we'd be so close. Well, nothing is farther than Ouagadougou and Conakry, trying to get there to each other. So I was very much a bachelor on Ouaga, but maybe because of that I was very much a center of the social community. Every Saturday I had a community event at the house, and I was able to meet an awful lot of Burkinabé because I would on rather short notice go off to various projects and got involved in saving the elephants and all that stuff. I found the Burkinabé extremely open, and I had very solid personal relationships across the spectrum of the aristocracy. It really was; they were very emphatically self-defined upper class.

*Q: Was Burkina Faso sort of divided? It seems like every central African country in that area has the north that's sort of desertish and in the south it's agriculture, and between Muslim and animist or black and Moorish or what have you.*

BRYNN: The northern three-fifths of Burkina Faso was scrubland, pastoral, dominated by Fulanis, who are very enterprising, Fulanis on one hand and Tuaregs especially up in the northeastern part, who came down and whose presence was a source of considerable distress for the Mossi. The Tuaregs were coming into Ouagadougou and they tended to crowd into the vacant areas of the parks and they were perceived to be trashing various neighborhoods. The southern

two-fifths were a combination of animist and Muslim except for an area, a circle of about 15 miles around Ouagadougou and around Bobo-Dioulasso that was largely Christians, largely Catholic actually. The percentage of the population that was Christian/Catholic was probably only 20 percent but it absolutely dominated the country.

*Q: Were we doing much aid?*

BRYNN: We had a small, an appropriately small, direct AID program which was largely focused on agricultural development down around Bobo-Dioulasso, which was fine, but we had one of the largest self-help programs in Africa, maybe the largest. Because the Burkinabé were extremely dependable in terms of use of self-help funds, we ran a self-help program that I think was in the neighborhood of \$400,000 a year. This constituted probably a fairly high-profile AID program. We were also very active in health measures, worked very carefully with the Carter Center on the guinea worm project- (end of tape)

We worked very, very closely with NGOs, TDOs, CARE, Africare, Catholic Relief, so our formal aid program was small, but our relationships with other organizations were very, very active, very strong.

*Q: You mentioned family planning. This would be the Bush administration at that time, being Republican, and abortion was always an issue. Was this an issue?*

BRYNN: We didn't really get into the abortion thing very much, probably because we were working with a country with a Catholic ruling class. There was a fair level of sync between the Bush/Reagan feeling on this and the leading Catholic community. But there was unexpected liberalism when it came to contraceptives and being forthright in talking about HIV AIDS and in other aspects of family planning.

*Q: What about AIDS? By this time this was recognized as a full-blown pandemic, I guess, wasn't it?*

BRYNN: It was. The first Peace Corps volunteer to be positively identified as an AIDS victim was a Peace Corps volunteer in Mauritania who had gone down to spend a month or so with friends in the Congo Basin. He came back, became very thin, was sent home, and died. He died in 1984 or '85. Then AIDS in terms of my experience didn't come up high again on the radar screen until I was back in Burkina Faso. It was not much of a feature in the Comoros Islands, and I don't recall it being at the top of the chart in Cameroon, although probably it should have been. But in Burkina Faso we had a situation where a large percentage of the male population would sign on for seasonal work down along the coast, and of course down there the men established anomalous sexual relationships. They would come back home after the harvest and we began to see in the late '80s, that there was developing high concentrations of HIV infections in certain areas along the truck routes and in the villages where large numbers of men were recruited to go south. We put into place in the embassy in the beginning of 1991 what was, I believe, the first comprehensive testing program for embassy employees in Sub-Saharan Africa. I know that that is still going on in Ouagadougou today. It's one of the sad chapters in Africa that the number of people that are candidates for employment on local hire, nationals, in the embassy has gone up

very sharply over the years from one or two percent up to 15 or 20 or 25 percent.

*Q: I would think this would cause a real problem for people assigned in the Foreign Service and other things to parts of Africa where AIDS is high, because it's not just sexual relations but it's blood mixing with blood. You think about automobile accidents and things like this, emergency hospital treatment or what have you. I think this would make people very nervous.*

BRYNN: It did, and that began to come up on the radar screen in Ouagadougou. We had a superb small clinic and we had a couple of nurses who came through on assignment from Med who were really superb. We had a permanent second nurse. Pauline Julia, who in fact just got Employee of the Year Award from the State Department last year. She, I think, provided a level of professionalism and reassurance that really contributed enormously to the high morale that we had at that post. I contrast that experience with what happened in Ghana a bit later when the AIDS thing was even higher on the radar screen and where we had many more families there with kids. Ouaga was a post where we had very few kids. Tom and Sarah Genton had kids and a couple others. We ran a fantastic school, but in the population of the school - I think we had about 65 students in the school - I'll bet only seven of them were from members of the official American community. We had very few other Americans with children in the country. Our community at the school was largely Dutch and German.

*Q: Did you get many delegations or visits there?*

BRYNN: No, it really was quite amazing that for my entire career in the Foreign Service prior to getting the Ghana I was never at post when we had a CODEL.

*Q: Here you are ambassador. One of the things that ambassadors get is to go running off to the foreign ministry and saying, "Will you vote so-and-so in the United Nations?" How did you find this with the government there?*

BRYNN: It worked pretty well. In fact, I think that Compaoré and his crew found that that was one area that they could be fairly forthcoming to the United States. In fact, Burkina Faso track record in supporting us in UN and other fora was really quite good.

*Q: It was a throw-away.*

BRYNN: It was a throw-away for them, and it was a way that, if they had any guilt pangs about Libyan arms, they could be assuaged by saying, "Well, we voted for the U.S. on this and that." Oddly enough, although we had very few high-profile visits of the normal type, we had a number of visits by people who had a high profile in another area. Jimmy Carter came two or three times, partly because of the guinea worm project and partly because...

*Q: The guinea worm being...?*

BRYNN: ...being the worm, a long worm, I guess up to six feet long, that comes in through untreated water and develops inside the person. It does not kill you, but eventually it erupts through the skin and literally has to be pulled out. It's extraordinarily painful. But the cycle can

be broken if you put a piece of a special type of nylon cloth, which Dupont has been providing free for years, over the aperture from the water supply. You can break the cycle, and once it's broken, unless you re-contaminate, then that village is free. The guinea worm must have human body as a vector. So we had Jimmy Carter and Rosalyn there. We had people from the Center for Disease Control because we were running projects on malaria testing and similar initiatives. We were host to anthropologists, geologists, and waters people that found Burkina Faso sort of an exotic and interesting place to visit, but we had almost no one from the regular government side of things.

*Q: Was there oil?*

BRYNN: No oil at all. There is some gold. Gold mining in Burkina Faso is done by individual miners digging holes in relatively soft sand which has a gold content, bringing the stuff up in little sacks, and then subjecting it to cleansing and melting and making it into gold bars. Some of the most horrific conditions that I ever saw anywhere were in the gold mine in the northern part of Burkina Faso near the Malian frontier. An area screened off or barb-wired off would enclose maybe a dozen young men. They had to be slim because they burrow down through narrow holes. They would work in this confined area for a week. Families would supply food. They would work naked under extremely hot conditions in the day and then they would wrap themselves in blankets at night. When they left the compound at the end of the week, they were paid a percentage, obviously a modest percentage, of the gold that had been made from their gleanings. They would have a week off and then they'd go back in. It was an occupation that attracted lots of strong young men because, relatively speaking, it paid well.

*Q: You mentioned talking to the president and all. How did you deal with the government? How did you find dealing with the government?*

BRYNN: It was an easier experience, I think than almost anywhere else in Africa, because the Burkinabé followed French forms very religiously. Appointments were kept. The minister with whom you met had an agenda, or if you would ask for a meeting on a particular subject, I found that the ministers had informed themselves to a certain degree about the topic. I found that, unlike in the Comoros Islands, papers that you needed for signing ceremonies were properly drafted. Indeed, Burkina Faso's bureaucracy worked a cut above what I found in other parts of Francophone Africa.

*Q: You left there when?*

BRYNN: All of a sudden I left there. I got a call from George Moose, who had been recently installed - this was in March of 1993 - he had just been installed as the new Assistant Secretary...

*Q: Taking Hank Cohen's place.*

BRYNN: ...taking Hank Cohen's place. I got a call from him in Ouagadougou asking if I would come back to see him. No other information was given. I went back and I arrived on a Friday afternoon. I had an appointment to see him on Monday, but because I got into Washington early enough on Friday afternoon that business was still open, I went to the African Bureau and asked

his secretary, Claire Mueller, whom I knew a bit, if she could give me any idea what the meeting was about. She said, "Well, I do know what the meeting is about, but I'm surprised that you don't and maybe I'm not supposed to say anything." So she went into George's office and she came back out and said, "Why don't you go in and have your chat with him now." So I went in, and George talked about Africa and what he was trying to do and how he wanted to reorganize the Bureau. At the end he said, "Are you interested?" I said, "Sir, I don't know what I'm supposed to be interested in." He said, "I'd like you to be the PDAS."

*Q: That's the Principal Deputy...*

BRYNN: ...Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, and I said, "Yes." I caught a plane the same evening. I was back in Burkina Faso on Sunday afternoon. I had asked to be able to stay two weeks. He wanted me to start right away, but I stayed two weeks so that I could be there for the softball tournament in Accra, and then I got on the plane and was back in Washington by the beginning of April 1993. I found out, oddly enough, that, for reasons that again had escaped me, my name had gone forward very far to be ambassador to Zaire. I actually was at the point where I was going to receive a call from President Clinton. That was not what my wife wanted; she thought we needed to come back. So as it turned out this PDAS interrupted that, so I ended up back in Washington.

*End of reader*