

## **CAMEROON**

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**ROBERT C. FOULON**  
**Chargé**  
**Yaoundé (1957-1959)**

*Robert C. Foulon had a very successful career opening posts in Zambia and Cameroon. He played a central role in establishing relations with African officials. He was interviewed by Arthur Tienken in 1988.*

*Q: Alright, I appreciate all of your time and I'm going to take a little advantage if you will of the opportunity of having a chat with you to ask you a little bit about your early days in the Cameroon. I would like you to comment on the fact that you opened the post there and that you were only one of two official Americans. Bob, you were our first Chargé in Yaounde in the then trust territory of the Cameroon.*

FOULON: First Consul and Principal Officer actually. Independence wasn't achieved until about six months after I had left my post.

*Q: That was in the year?*

FOULON: I arrived there in 1957, June of 1957 and we opened the post on July 4, 1957 and the country became independent on the first of January 1960, the first of this wave of 1960.

*Q: Was July fourth coincidental or accidental?*

FOULON: Very purposeful. It was a curious situation as my instructions were to open this post as fast as I could. We actually got it open one month from our arrival. The reason that we broke our necks on this though was at that time in Cameroon, French Cameroon that is, the word independence could not be uttered; it was absolutely forbidden. The Africans were not allowed to print it, the French were not permitted to say it, but everybody knew that it was going to happen.

So I decided that it would be very cute to open the post on the American Independence Day and we put out invitations; talking about the day of independence and so forth, the American independence - in French of course. We invited a nice assortment of French and African leaders. Well the French didn't like it but they had to lump it, having helped American independence and recognizing what a cute stunt we had pulled; they did not object at least openly. The Africans came around and thanked us to the skies for having helped them in their battle for independence by opening our post on the Jour de l'Independence.

*Q: At that time Cameroon was a trust territory?*

FOULON: That is right.

*Q: So we had more than a normal interest?*

FOULON: The Trusteeship Council would send visiting missions from time to time and the previous one had been headed by an American. Just before independence there was another such visit, again headed by another American. We sort of teleguided the results of this through the normal diplomatic methods.

*Q: Can you give us a little insight into some of your early experiences in opening the post and how you conducted American relations with the French basically?*

FOULON: Well, when we arrived there most of the French thought that we had come to sell arms to the rebels who were being supplied actually at the time by the Chinese Communists. They were down in two particular tribal areas near the coast. All of this was somewhat promoted by the fact that one of the main tribal areas was the location for the main active areas for American Presbyterian missionaries who had established the first schools in this area; they ran a teachers school and so forth. They were actually being accused by the French of stirring up the African rebellion which was a real African rebellion and people were being killed all the time.

I can remember one of my first real challenges was when then High Commissioner Pierre Messmer, who eventually became Prime Minister of France and was one of the great pro-consuls of France, called me in, and while very stiffly sitting behind his desk told me that one of our missionaries would have to leave unless the mission was wise enough to transfer him to another post outside of the rebellious area. This was because they thought and they said that they had evidence, that he had actually harbored the leader of the rebellion, a man named Um Nyobe.

Well, I could see that this was a test for me as well as the missionaries. I jumped into the car and went down to their headquarters and remonstrated with them and plead with them. Fortunately, in order to get better acquainted with them I had just spent a week at a missionary retreat, so I knew them all and I knew how they thought, felt, and so forth. Well they were very reluctant to let the French tell them what to do because they were before the French, and even before the Germans. They felt that this was their country as much as anybody's, but fortunately they did relent and this man was transferred and we avoided the incident; and our relations with the French went up continuously after that.

*Q: You mentioned that you had Africans to your opening day ceremony so to speak. Did you also have official, or non-official contact with the Africans at the time?*

FOULON: Oh yes, there was actually an African government at the time under something the French called the "Loi Cadre", or the "Framework Law." This allowed the establishment of self-government, very much under French tutelage, but nevertheless it was the beginning of self-government. There was a Prime Minister and there were Ministers of this and that and so forth on whom I called. I subsequently found out that the French made it quite clear to the African leaders and the Prime Minister that it was alright for me to call on them, but that they were not to return the calls nor to entertain me. This persisted for at least six months until there was a new Prime Minister and I managed to get along well with him socially; and we have been good friends ever since.

*Q: Six months and a new Prime Minister later, were you able to deal sort of officially with some of the Africans? In other words did the French relent?*

FOULON: Once the French realized that we were there to cooperate and not to create problems and would work with them without trying to undermine French influence, there was no problem at all. The main problem then became relations with the leading Africans, especially the later President, who shortly after the time I arrived, became Prime Minister.

The rivalries being as they always are in most of Africa, if you saw too much of his opposition or questionable people, it was assumed then that you were trying to undermine him. So you had to be very, very careful about this. The result was that during a good part of my two years there, I saw very few Africans except the ones that he wanted me to see, or himself. I would once in a while see somebody else if they came in the office, or maybe one of my officers would.

*Q: That African you were talking about who became the first Prime Minister of the Cameroon was named Mbida?*

FOULON: I can't remember his first name, but he was from a tribal group right around the capital. As I recall he was a strong Catholic and bitterly opposed by the Northern groups who were dominated by Muslims. He was very shortly replaced by Ahmadou Ahidjo who was the leader of the Northern group, but had enough European experience and education in the south to be able to bridge the differences between the North and the South. Even after I arrived, and much more beforehand, there was a real fear that the North would try to separate from the South.

*Q: Your mention of kind of walking a tightrope in dealing with the Africans because of various concerns regarding opposition is a fairly common experience in Africa. Sometimes it has to do with tribalism, sometimes with sectionalism, sometimes with just plain politics. You've already introduced a religious element here. What you tell me sounds like a combination of all four and maybe more?*

FOULON: I think that is absolutely right. I can well remember being lectured by Ahidjo on a trip I made to Cameroon -- several trips really -- after independence and after I had left my tour there. He always entertained me very cordially at the Palace and at one point he lectured me. He said, "You Americans, you have to realize that all of these parties that you see here in these African countries with different names that seem to reflect European and American kinds of political divisions, those are just names! They are really reflecting other things: political rivalries, tribal rivalries, and even religious ones. That is the nature of the African condition. We have to deal with it and that is why we find useful, at least in the early stages to have single party systems, Le Parti Unique."

*Q: If I remember correctly, there were two Cameroons at the time really; that administered by the French as a trust territory and a part of Nigeria that was the British Cameroons.*

FOULON: Cameroon actually was broken into two or three different pieces and one of the great accomplishments of French Cameroon in politics was the union of the two Cameroons. The Communist rebellion was based on this as a leading line, I think it was called L'Union des Peuples Camerounaise or du Cameroon, or the Cameroon Union.

To make a long story short, eventually they had a vote and the main part in the Southern area voted to join French Cameroon and not Nigeria. This astounded the French Cameroonians! They never expected it to happen even though they had been pounding drums for it for years. They were literally flabbergasted, I remember Ahidjo telling me "What do we do now?" They created a bilingual state and a bilingual parliament and pretended to be Federal for a while, though I don't think it is anymore.

I can remember taking a trip from French Cameroon to British Cameroon with my French colleague who was head of foreign relations -- or external relations -- for the French High Commission and we got to the border and of course we had to start driving on the left side of the road. I instructed my chauffeur to do this, but he couldn't manage it and so I eventually had to say, "Well I'm sorry, I'll drive." So I drove all the way to Bamenda, the capital of the area on the left side of the road. When we got to Bamenda my French colleague and I went to call on the British District Officer. The Frenchman's wife was left in the car and while she was there she overheard the two chauffeurs talking and one was asking the other whether they were still in Africa because the Europeans were speaking a different language and driving on a different side of the road. That was a lot of fun.

*Q: Well the Cameroon had an interesting history which lead to the establishment of the trust territory, before World War One it was German. Were there vestiges of the German presence still there while you were there?*

FOULON: Oh, a very few. Some of the main residences in Yaounde and Douala had been built by the Germans very skillfully to get a circulation of air through them and so forth. The French High Commissioners palaces in both Yaounde and Douala were German in origin. You would travel around and the old men would still speak a little German, and they would point out this or that hanging tree where the Germans would hang bad boys. It was obvious that the Africans had a great deal of respect for the Germans. They weren't resentful, they just thought that these were real men.

*Q: You were in Yaounde, was that much of a city in those days?*

FOULON: Oh I guess that it was about thirty or thirty-five thousand people, maybe two thousand Europeans; a pleasant place up in the hills - cool at night, just on the verge of the savanna and still in the tropical rain forest, very damp most of the time - but a very pleasant spot.

*Q: Douala was the big city?*

FOULON: Douala was the big city down on the coast, a steamy place, it rained everyday with the highest rainfall I think in the world. People who lived there said they began to like it, but I can't imagine why. I always avoided the place as best as I could.

*Q: But it was an international air terminal so to speak?*

FOULON: Yes.

*Q: It was also the business capital, or was it?*

FOULON: Yes it still is I believe. Now subsequently oil has been found in the area and there is a big aluminum smelter not far inland from Douala.

*Q: Did we open a post there while you were still in the Cameroon?*

FOULON: Not while I was there. There had been a British Consulate in Douala, but it was purely a mundane Consular operation, the British eventually did set up an Embassy in Yaounde.

*Q: You said you opened a post literally in approximately a month, that must have been something of a record in American diplomatic annals?*

FOULON: Yes, I think it was.

*Q: What were your major problems in establishing that post?*

FOULON: My major problem was getting hold of a copy of the regulations. They had been shipped months ago. We had been working on the departmental side to make sure that we had everything loaded in there. The regulations did not appear. I had never run a post before and I didn't quite see how I could run one without the regulations.

So I hopped in a plane and went down to then Leopoldville as the Consulate General there was our backstop by which almost all of this stuff had been shipped. I asked the Administrative Officer there and asked, "Where are my regulations?" He said, "I don't know, they haven't come in." He ran one of the sloppiest offices I have ever seen with stuff stashed all over. I happened to look up on a shelf over his head and I said, "Larry are those my regulations over there?" He reached up and pulled them down and said, "Oh I guess they are!" So I went happily back with my regulations and opened the post.

*Q: Did you have trouble finding a place to open, an office space and that sort of thing?*

FOULON: No, no, that had been selected in advance by an advance team. The advance team had also selected a residence which was totally inappropriate so we went out and found another one. We didn't get any furniture in it for about six months then I guess.

*Q: Who were you dealing with then on the substantive side back in Washington at the time? There was no African bureau at the time.*

FOULON: My Office Director was Vaughan Ferguson and, in all my time out there I never got a single instruction by letter or cable or in any other form, not once. It was a marvelous experience of old-fashioned diplomacy in a situation where you have to make the decisions on the spot. You are Mr. US and nobody is there to tell you anything else. There were a few cases where there were real decisions involved.

*Q: Did you get the impression that anybody in Washington was listening to what you had to say?*

FOULON: Well I think to some extent, particularly with regard to the Trusteeship Council and the date of independence, and how to play the rebellion, and how to deal with the French. They listened to it quite a bit; I assumed that somebody beyond Vaughan Ferguson had some interest in all of this.

Who was the First Assistant Secretary -- Joe Satterthwaite, that's right. He had some interest, but what I wanted to say was in terms of departmental recognition; we did get a post award. I guess it was given the first year we were there and I think that it was the only one given in Africa at the time, not a personal award but for the whole post which I think was quite appropriate. We were very proud of it at the time.

*Q: At that time there were not nearby posts in the Central African Republic, Gabon, Congo; called Congo - Brazzaville?*

FOULON: There was an officer who did open a post in Brazza. That is one of the four posts that I had forgotten. He is a man that looked like Joe DeMaggio and I can't remember his name right now. Since he was so close to then Leopoldville he was a much less independent operation and of course there was a Consulate General in Nigeria, but that was about it. There weren't any others around.

*Q: Were there logistical problems as far as operating the new office in Yaounde, and indeed just in general living?*

FOULON: Indeed there were. I remember not getting a salary check for some three months. I finally sent a wire saying, "I'm going to leave if you don't send me a check!" I eventually did get paid. This was really crucial because we had shipped out a lot of supplies, but for fresh things we had to go to the stores which are French operated, or the African market. My wife found the prices in the French stores absolutely astounding and high, and so I can remember coming home to dinner or lunch a few times with virtually nothing on the table. She said, "Well I just couldn't pay the prices," I said "Well we are going to have to eat!" We had that sort of problem, but nothing really serious. We had, I remember having malaria several times, four times as a matter of fact. The UN had declared Cameroon malaria free, but the missionaries informed me that there were other strains that had not been eliminated and when I started yelling at my secretary, then I should realize that I had better take a pill. So I would take a quinine pill and it would go away, but it was not free of malaria at all! I can remember once my wife trying to cure that, she took too many adenine pills or whatever it was - and went out of her head for half a day. I had to take her down to the missionary hospital to take care of her.

*Q: In those days we did not have the medical network in the Department of State that we have today?*

FOULON: No, no way. We had nothing to do, all we could do really was to rely on the missionaries or the French hospitals, which were very good and there was no problem with it at all.

*Q: Thinking back now in those days in 1957, what is your fondest memory?*

FOULON: My fondest memory is really a very warm relationship with the President Ahmadou Ahidjo, but then Prime Minister, and working with him to achieve a successful outcome in the move toward independence. I can remember that the big question was whether to try to have an election before or after independence, particularly with the rebellion going on and so forth. The



French managed to consult with me outside Yaounde. I happened to be on the trip to Douala and the High Commissioner got himself down there and I was just invited for drinks. Before I knew it we were in the most serious political conversation I had there. They were wondering what to do about the UPC, the Communist Rebellion Party. My reaction which I advanced very forcibly - and here is where the real hip-shooting with no instructions whatsoever occurred -- I said "Just forget them, just go ahead and achieve independence." I did raise the question as to whether or not to have an election beforehand, and they were scratching their heads and I was scratching mine and we didn't quite know how to handle this in light of the fact that it had to pass through the Trusteeship Council.

So I went over and saw the Prime Minister Ahidjo and I outlined the problem and told him about our discussions; he hadn't known about them actually. I said "You are going to have to be the judge here, should we have an election beforehand or afterwards?" He said, "Let me think about it and I will let you know." In about two weeks time he called me back and said, "I think we should just go ahead and then we will have an election afterwards." So we accepted that and we called in the visiting mission and they made their report, and Cameroon became independent without an election. I don't think the election would have made it, it was not a very Democratic decision perhaps, but probably a very wise one.

*Q: Ahidjo then remained as President for many years in the Cameroon. I take it you not only had good relations with him, but you also found him a very sympathetic individual.*

FOULON: I found him very sympathetic, obviously he had to be a bit authoritarian, but I think he was basically a true democrat. He followed American and French political affairs quite in detail, and he ran a very responsible country. He didn't squander a lot of money on himself, or his entourage; he was very modest and tried to achieve development the slow way by fostering agriculture and basic industry. He had no grandiose projects, he cooperated with the European community and the United States, but then kept warm relations with the French even so.

What went wrong later I am not really sure -- only rumors to go on. I understand that he was told by a doctor that he was going to die in a year or so and he decided to retire. Once he retired he found out that he was okay, there is some rumor that he tried to get back, but I really don't know the truth of it.

**WALTER L. CUTLER**  
**Consular Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1957-1959)**

*Walter L. Cutler was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1931. In addition to Cameroon, he served in Algeria, Washington, DC, Iran, Korea, Vietnam, Zaire, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. He was interviewed in 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Your first assignment was to the Cameroon. Was it Cameroon or Cameroons in those days?*

CUTLER: Well, it was the French Cameroons. At least that's the way I think the postage stamp had it. Otherwise, it was Cameroun, the French way.

*Q: You were at the capital of Yaoundé. Could you describe the situation there at the time? How did we see it at the time?*

CUTLER: As I recall, the Department, in 1956, looking ahead at what was happening in Africa and realizing that most, if not all, of these British and French colonies and trust territories were going to become independent fairly rapidly, did some prioritizing and came out with four countries, or countries-to-be, in which it was decided we had better get a foothold, because they were likely to develop into something of importance in Africa. One of them was Cameroun. And I think the decision was well made, because, as you know, over the ensuing 20 or 30 years Cameroun proved to be a quite-stable and relatively prosperous country.

*Q: What was our interest there? What would have attracted us?*

CUTLER: Well, we had no real direct interest. The resources were nothing like Zaire, for example, the old Belgian Congo, where we already had a consulate general. But it was just a matter of figuring that American presence... And I'm sure that it was in a Cold War context, too, that Africa was becoming independent. We didn't have the resources to set up consulates to prepare for independence in every one of those countries, so we picked several of them. Kampala in Uganda, I think, was another that was opened at the same time as Yaoundé. So the decision was made in 1956 to establish a presence, a very minimal presence, in preparation for independence. And that's what I did.

*Q: You were it?*

CUTLER: I was it. I was it, along with Bob Foulon, I think whom you've already interviewed. But I arrived out there first, before Bob, and set up shop. I proceeded to look around, rent offices, tried to find houses. I hired a staff and so on. Bob came, I can't remember how many weeks later. And the two of us, together with an administrative assistant and a secretary (there were four of us there originally), opened the doors of the first American official presence in Cameroun. This was in 1957.

But it was also the first consulate of any kind, of any country, in Yaoundé, the capital. The British, as I recall, had had a one-man consulate in Douala, the port, maybe for a few years, and they eventually moved up to Yaoundé. But for at least a year we were the only foreign official presence there.

And, of course, Cameroun was a trust territory. The French were administering it, and so there was a French administration. But they were making preparations for a transition to local rule. And we monitored that, working with the French, but we also tried to get to the future Cameroonian leaders. So it was an interesting situation.

*Q: Well, how did you find it? Were the French receptive to the fact that we were making, really at this point, what was an extraordinary effort for this particular area? Was it appreciated or resented?*

CUTLER: I think there were mixed feelings on the part of the French. Obviously, there was some hesitation, some wariness in the private French community, as well as perhaps in the administration. On the other hand, I don't recall an awful lot of hostility, animosity on the part of the French. There weren't that many French there, really. It wasn't like Ivory Coast, where they had a big commercial interest. They had some, but not a great deal, in Cameroun. The only Americans were Presbyterian missionaries, who had been there for some years, and a marvelous character named Phil Carroll, who was known as the American Gorilla Trapper. And there was, also, shortly after we arrived, one Mobil representative.

*Q: Mobil Oil.*

CUTLER: Mobil Oil, yes, that was distributing. And that was it.

*Q: How about with the emerging leaders? How much contact, and how did you develop this and all?*

CUTLER: Yes, it was possible to do that, and the French understood that this was part of our agenda. But we did it, as I recall, somewhat in consultation with the French. We asked them to facilitate, in a way, because it was very difficult.

The first Prime Minister, who was really selected by the French, a man named M'Bida, came from the south, I think he was Catholic, and it didn't work out. He was not a successful political leader, and so he was replaced by a northerner, a Moslem, Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Ahidjo turned out to be a very good choice, and he lasted more than two decades. And we got to know Ahidjo. Bob Foulon, particularly, as the principal officer, became on very good terms with him. I played a supporting role.

We got to know Cameroonians here and there. We got to know the Mayor, Mr. Fouda. But there weren't that many educated Cameroonians there at that time. The country was not yet independent. Many of the Cameroonians were young students still in France. But we made headway, so that when independence came I think we had a pretty good rapport.

*Q: Were you there at the time of independence?*

CUTLER: No, I had left.

*Q: What was the feeling?. The Department made this effort to open a post there, but did you get much feedback from the Department? Because at that time it was the Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs, and obviously the Near East took precedence over Africa.*

CUTLER: Absolutely. As I recall, when I was first assigned to Yaoundé, there was really only an office of African Affairs in that bureau, and a fellow named Don Dumont was the director of it. But it was a very, very thin staff.

There was interest; you could sense it growing at that time - -57, '58--as this wave of independence approached. One had the feeling of considerable isolation in Cameroun, and yet you also had the feeling that there was an increasing interest in what was going.

And there was a particular interest in Cameroun, because, in those days prior to independence, there was a movement called the UPC, Union des Populations Camerounaises, which was believed to be heavily backed by Moscow. This was a radical nationalist group, which was not only fighting to get the French out, but was really jockeying for political power prior to independence vis-à-vis the other groups, which were sanctioned by the French.

This made for some pretty dicey days. We lived with a curfew for quite awhile. And there were some pretty gruesome massacres that occurred right in Yaoundé.

*Q: Who was massacring whom?*

CUTLER: These UPC guerrillas would come out at night and, just trying to create a certain amount of chaos, they would go for the French. They murdered any number of French people while we were there. For example, they got into a movie theater and just started hacking people up.

There was a great deal of tension at the time and uncertainty as to whether or not the French and other Cameroonian elements could handle this, or whether, in fact, the place might be ripped apart by this movement if it really started to gain momentum.

For this reason, Washington tended to follow events in Cameroun perhaps more than otherwise would have been the case.

*Q: Do we see the fine hand of the French Communist party, which was quite subservient to Moscow?*

CUTLER: Yes, I think that's exactly it. Most of these had sort of shifted to the Left, because of French educations and the infiltration into their movement by French Communists, who funded them.

*Q: Well then, shall we move on to your next assignment? You left in '59, is that right?*

CUTLER: Yes, I left in '59. I had spent almost two and a half years in this very remote post, very much of a do-it-yourself kind of operation, but I learned a lot. And then I flipped from one extreme to the other. I went back to the secretariat in Washington, where I started out as what we called a night writer in those days.

**JULIUS S. PRINCE**  
**Public Health Advisor, USAID**  
**Ethiopia (1958-1967)**

*Dr. Julius Prince was born in Crestwood, New York in 1911. He attended Yale University. He joined US AID and was assigned to Ethiopia. He also served in Ghana. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1994.*

*Q: What was the general AID policy on population and family planning at that time? Was it something you agreed with or was it...?*

PRINCE: No, I mean it wasn't AID policy; it was Ravenholt policy. We were constantly at logger heads with one another. For example, the Ambassador to Cameroon in 1971 sent me an urgent cable saying, in effect, please help us, we need a program in health or something like that to help the people of Cameroon because their conditions are very bad; and I know it is not an emphasis country; but you ought to be able to do something about it. You're in charge of the population program aren't you? "See if you can work something, some sort of combined population and health program." I stirred around and found out that they were, indeed, in the process of establishing a health personnel training program, a little like Gondar, where people would be trained in generalized health services. But they wanted the people to be doctors in the end. Jean Pinder went out there and came back with a very positive report saying that they were interested in a really good health cum medical program, training doctors to be good public health physicians as well. The University of Yaounde was interested in being the locus for the thing. In addition the French Government and the Canadian Government were interested in participating. So we began negotiating all around the place with them and with the Government of Cameroon. I went there several times. The upshot was the Centre Universitaire pour les Sciences de la Santé. It was something that we had to fight for tooth and nail, because it was being funded out of Title 10 money 100 percent, at least for the first few years.

*Q: It was being funded out of population money?*

PRINCE: Yes, Title 10.

*Q: For a medical school?*

PRINCE: Yes right. For a center... a university center for health sciences. But you realize what we were really talking about was a form of medical school even though it had a strong public health component to it. But, Ray said, "Where is the 'population' part of the project?" I don't want to fund health programs out of population funds. I said, "Well, how do you ever expect to have a population program in a place like Cameroon without starting with an integrated health program. You know Ray, you've never seen this clearly but you think Africa is the same as Indonesia and Thailand and Malaysia and those places. It is a terribly different world. I've never been in the Far East but I can guarantee that it is as different as it can be. Almost like comparing health/population programs in the United States and Africa. So don't think that all this work in Indonesia is going to work in Cameroon. The things are widely different. You have a large

Muslim population; you know what was said about Muslim attitudes towards family planning... the Population Council's book on the subject. You know perfectly well that all Mullahs don't at all agree, by any means with this idea... some of them do but only with reservations. And you've got a big Muslim population in a place like Cameroon, forget it! You can't do it that way! It won't work. So listen to me and I'll get you your family planning; but you've got to give me a bit of a chance to try it out my way because I know what I am doing." Finally, he agreed so we went ahead we got the money but not to build the whole thing (and I agreed with that too.) The Canadians (CIDA) decided to build the laboratory and public health component and so that the graduates could do good public health work, proper epidemiology diagnosis and so forth. We built the maternal and child health center very appropriately. The French built the rest of the teaching hospital—hospital, and classrooms, etc. WHO also pitched in to help with the teaching staff.

*Q: Did you get family planning included?*

PRINCE: We got a lot of family planning into it. And we got a lot of converts in Cameroon among the medical profession there who were very interested in combining family planning with the health programs around the country. The Center set up a demonstration health center in Bamenda, which was very much like the health centers in Ethiopia, following the same general principles of delivery of decentralized/generalized health services, etc..

*Q: But generally you had the same kind of problem of disagreeing with the agency policy on population?*

PRINCE: Yes, if you consider Ray's policy as the basis for the Agency's. And it certainly was. I had problems with Ray's superiors, too, like Jerry Kieffer, his boss at the Office of Population, who more or less followed his lead; and almost at all times that Ray was there we were on a different wave length, when it came to the ways in which you could really expect to implement any kind of a population program, under conditions like those in Africa and in other truly underdeveloped areas of the world.

**HENRY ALLEN HOLMES**  
**Consular/Economic/Political Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1959-1961)**

*Ambassador Holmes was born in Bucharest, Romania to US Diplomat parents. He served in the Marine Corps and attended Princeton University and entered the Foreign Service in 1957. His first international post was in Cameroon which was followed by Italy, France, Portugal, he also served as an ambassador at large holding posts in Japan and Australia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.*

*Q: Well, now, can you describe Yaoundé and the Cameroons in 1959?*

HOLMES: In 1959, when we arrived, we were the second wave, so to speak. The post had been opened two years before. It was a two-man post, a consul and a vice consul, and so when I arrived I replaced the vice consul, who was Walt Cutler, who later was ambassador in several places and today is the head of the Meridian House.

Q: *Yes, I've interviewed Walt.*

HOLMES: And they'd been there two years, and then we took their place. We were a two-man consulate that grew very quickly into a consulate general. This was basically August, 1959, when I replaced him, and by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, we were an embryonic embassy, because that was the date of Cameroon's independence. It had been a trust territory. French Cameroon had been administered by France as a result of successive decision by the League of Nations and then the United Nations. After World War I, Cameroon and Togo had both been German colonies, and they were established as trust territories, and each territory was divided into a French zone and a British zone. In Cameroon, the French zone was the dominant part of the country.

And so we arrived there. It was an extremely interesting place that was not exactly a colony but had been treated in some respects like other French colonies, but what surprised me was the commitment of resources on the part of France to a country that they knew they could not hope to keep, because after all it had been mandated to them as a trust territory. And when I got there, there were over a thousand Cameroonians in *lycées* and universities in France, for example. There was an enormous aluminum smelter at a place called Edéa that the French had built. There was a hydroelectric plant there as well. They had damned the Wouri River. This wasn't just to produce rural electrification for the Cameroonians, but also this was helping French industry, and they also owned bauxite mines. They were active in Guinea. That was a French colony, and the alumina product was then shipped to Cameroon where it was transformed at this plant into aluminum ingots, which were then exported. So there was a high measure of French commercial self-interest, but at the same time, there was a sense of preparing a country for a future where they would be on their own, and I'm particularly thinking of their education and their government structure. So that was the atmosphere. There were cadres of Cameroonians that worked in all the ministries that were directors of services and *chefs de cabinet* and so forth that were obviously preparing themselves to step forward. And there had been already two series of elections, beginning, I think, in 1956. So there was the beginning of the democratic process, well underway.

Q: *Who was the senior officer when you first arrived?*

HOLMES: A guy named Bolard More was the consul general.

Q: *What was his background? Was he an African hand?*

HOLMES: He had served in Africa. He had served in the American consulate in Lagos - I think it may have been his first post - in the late '30s, just before World War II.

Q: *He was quite a-*

HOLMES: He was a senior man, an eccentric - a decided eccentric.

*Q: How was he eccentric?*

HOLMES: Well, he kept a case of Hershey bars locked up in the consulate safe, and if you wrote a particularly good dispatch, he would reward you with a Hershey bar, accompanied by the explanation that when he'd been a good boy growing up, that his mother would give him a Hershey bar. He also was extraordinarily stubborn and had an almost warped sense of duty. I noticed that he wasn't well, didn't seem to be well. I knew that he was going to make this treacherous drive 125 miles south to a place called Eboloa, where there was a Presbyterian mission station. By the way, the American Presbyterians were the first colonists in Cameroon. They were in there right after the Civil War, long before the Germans came. There were three excellent American doctors there. So he went down basically to have a dental checkup. And I tipped him off. I knew them because I had already been down there, and I sort of said, "Try to persuade the consul general to have a physical while he's there. He's very stubborn, but I'm concerned about him." And so they did that, and they found an enormous tumor on the side of his rib cage, which he could easily touch while showering, and they phoned me to say that he had to be evacuated immediately to the United States. And he was in quite a bit of pain. So I just went out to the local aero-club and I hired a little airplane, with no authority of course, and had it flown down to pick him up, because the road - the potholed road - it took about nine hours to drive 125 miles, the road was so bad. And I was concerned about his condition, so I sent this plane down to bring him back. He was furious with me for having done something irregular without any authority from Washington. And he had with him, though, the very stern recommendation of the American doctors in Eboloa that he should be evacuated, and he was determined that he would send this by sea pouch. And I made a nuisance of myself, and said that if he didn't do it, I would send it by telegram, and I did, and he was evacuated. He left about four days later, and he got back here, and he actually went to Walter Reed. It was never quite clear to me why, but they did remove the cancer, and they basically saved his life, and he lived for quite a few years thereafter.

*Q: This was maybe a little later, but at one time, did you feel the heavy hand of Dakar on you, because many of the French posts, early consulates and all, were being run out of Dakar? Was that still going on when you were there?*

HOLMES: No, that wasn't going on. Dakar was, however, the communications relay point for our com system. Our communications went to Dakar and from there to Paris and then to Washington.

*Q: But where did you report, from the Cameroons, before you became an embassy? Straight up to Paris?*

HOLMES: No, no. We reported to the fledgling African bureau. We reported to the Department.

*Q: So you were basically a-*



HOLMES: Because actually my father - I think I recounted that in an earlier session - had spent three months traveling through Africa at John Foster Dulles's behest, and his trip around Africa was over by the end of 1957, and he'd made recommendations for an independent American foreign policy apparatus in Africa, instead of going through the old colonial offices of the European powers, that we would deal directly with these new countries. And so by then there was - and I believe it was Joseph Satterthwaite who was the first assistant secretary for African affairs.

*Q: That sounds about right. Even though there were just the two of you, were you being treated really as an embassy even when you were a consular post?*

HOLMES: No, we only really started functioning as an embassy after the independence celebrations, which were on the first of January, and which were quite an extraordinary event, because it was really the first country to become independent in Africa other than Ghana, which became independent in 1956, and Kwame Nkrumah and so forth. We had an extraordinary delegation that came out. There were five ambassadors, and the senior ambassador was Henry Cabot Lodge, wearing - I kid thee not - a white linen suit.

*Q: He was wearing it later on in Saigon.*

HOLMES: We also had another ambassador that I remember very well because he was a fascinating figure, General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., who was an African American Air Force general, and his father had been the first African American ever to get flight rank in the Army, shortly after the end of World War II.

*Q: And to graduate from the military academy, too.*

HOLMES: Anyway, B. O. Davis was an amazing man, and we enjoyed having him there. We were really stretched in this tiny little embassy we had. We didn't have an ambassador at that point. We had a chargé, who replaced Bolard More, Bowie More, and myself, an administrative officer, whose spouse was the secretary, and we had a CIA representative, and he had a secretary. And that was the entire embassy, so everybody pitched in. My wife was the escort officer for General Davis. The facilities were fairly minimal in a place like Yaoundé, and so there was a lot of scrambling about, but it was a quite fascinating event, crowned, I remember, in the gardens of the governor general's palace, which looked like a huge marshmallow sitting in the middle of Yaoundé, a Miss Indépendance election, and there was a jury made up of representatives of the various countries that were there, and the chairman of the jury was Golda Meir, representing Israel.

*Q: All these sultry beauties came out?*

HOLMES: That's right. There was one from every province of Cameroon.

*Q: Well, in the first place, were we sort of under instructions to let the French have their way? In other words, were we trying to keep a relatively low profile at that point, or not? How were we treating this?*

HOLMES: Well, we were trying to do it in a cooperative way, very definitely, moving, I would say, deliberately but gradually, not to displace the French certainly... I found myself, frankly, in the embassy, I was a kind of committee of one. I didn't see the French presence in the same malevolent way that some of my colleagues did because I saw the enormous investment by France, and I thought that was a benefit for the Cameroonians. So we moved, basically, to establish an American presence, including an American cultural presence, and eventually we had a very fine USIS officer who came, who was an African American, and then he started an English language program, which was needed. It was the beginning of establishing our cultural presence. That was resented to some degree - I don't want to exaggerate - by the French embassy. But another African American came in, and he started a series of courses that were available to Cameroonians. I as a young vice consul, third secretary, had a ball. I did everything in the place. I was the political officer, the consular officer, the economic officer, the AID officer. Until USIA arrived, I was USIA. The first AID mission came. The Cameroonians were interested, as most new countries are, in having a monument to their independence, and so their idea was to extend the railroad that went from Douala, the seaport, to Yaoundé, the capital, to a place called Ingandaré, up north. And they wanted to take it all the way up to the top of the country. And so an AID official came, and he was an expert in railroads, and he and I went out on one of these little inspection cars and went up and down the length of the railroad. It took us several days to travel up and down, and we made an interesting discovery, that at a certain point we stopped because he noticed something about the rails. We got down on our hands and knees and examined these rails, and they were all German. And what the French had done to save money, since there was a certain amount of erosion on one side, when the French took over, they reversed them, and they were still serviceable.

Have I already recounted the night we had a crisis?

Q: *In Yaoundé?*

HOLMES: Yes.

Q: *No, we haven't. Whatever. I certainly don't have it on tape.*

HOLMES: Well, that's an interesting story, again, an experience for a young Foreign Service officer. A couple of months after independence, Richard Moose, who was later undersecretary for management and in the Carter Administration was assistant secretary for African affairs, Dick Moose came out - he was a Foreign Service officer, and he'd had a tour of duty in Mexico City - as the administrative officer, and we became fast friends. In fact, he lived with us for the first several months at post until his wife came. Dick was new to Africa and the French language, but he was the senior guy, so at a certain point he was chargé and I was the number two. And one day I got a call from the diplomatic advisor to the president saying that the president wanted to see me immediately. So Dick and I went over there, and there were the prime minister and the foreign minister, the three of them. They seemed quite agitated because they had reports of a Czech freighter offloading weapons in burlap bags onto African pirogues, which were then being paddled into the beaches, and people had reported that they were weapons and they had been distributed to tribal elements down somewhere near Douala. And they were concerned that a

dissident movement called the Union of the Cameroonian Peoples (the UPC), which had opposed the French presence and then independence under the terms that had occurred, led by a fellow named Félix Moumié. They had carried out quite a few assassinations while we were there. In fact, the week after we arrived, they killed a number of French people right downtown with machetes. But the Cameroonian President Ahmadou Ahidjo was at pains to point out that this group, with the help of the Warsaw Pact, was obviously trying to unseat his new government. And they wanted the United States to help. So we got as much information as we could on this. The CIA representative back at the embassy had no information about it. So Dick Moose and I sat down and wrote the dispatch of our lives. This was going to make our careers. You know, this is a crisis. So we wrote a dispatch, and to give you an idea of the kind of communications we had in those days, after writing the dispatch, we then went and opened the vault, got out the "one-time pad" and transliterated the message into code, carefully choosing the right letters, typed it up ourselves, and then, since it was nine o'clock at night, I then went down to the PTT, the post office, which set up by the French was now run by the Cameroonians, and it was after hours, so there was only one person on duty. And I couldn't get him to answer the door, so I went around to the back and looked through the window, and I could see that he was sort of snoozing, slumped at a table, and there was a half-empty bottle of palm wine there. So I finally got him to answer the door, I made him some coffee, sobered him up, and finally, I think about two hours later, he sent the message. Well, of course, it was relayed to Dakar, to Paris, to Washington. By the time it got to Washington, it was totally garbled, and it was a "night action" cable, you know, secret night action. So they then sent a service message saying "We couldn't read your message. Please repeat." But by the time we went through the whole process a second time the whole crisis had passed. It turned out to be a very inaccurate report that the new Cameroonian government received. So there was a lesson in that for me.

*Q: How did you find the new Cameroonian government. People I've talked to who've dealt with the early ones usually have a... Europeans who want to do business would call up a ministry and say, "Let me speak to the white." In other words, there was a certain bypassing of the native-*

HOLMES: There was some of that for a while - I would say probably in the first six to eight months. In every ministry there was a director of services, whereas under the old French trust setup there had been French ministers with Africans. The best educated ones were director of services and *chefs de cabinet* and so forth. The situation reversed after independence. And so, yes, there was very often a French civil servant who was in the back room and who was helping make things run, and obviously if it involved contracts and obviously funneling as many as he could to French companies, which was not surprising. But that didn't last for a very long time. I noticed there were some remarkable Cameroonians that came out of university and that rose up and quickly established themselves. I remember in particular the second foreign minister. The first one was a man named Charles Okala, who spoke remarkable French and was extraordinarily well educated. I remember he made a dramatic speech to the UN where he talked about the Solomonic judgment of the League of Nations in having divided Cameroon into two babies, one for the French and one for the British. And he was extremely cultivated and very smart, shrewd. But he was eventually replaced by another extremely cultivated and shrewd Cameroonian named Jean Faustus Bétayéné. And there were people that emerged that had been prepared, basically, by French schooling. That's what kept coming home to me. Remarkable people who very quickly

assumed responsibility of their offices and were sailing on their own and frequently turning aside the advice - often uninvited - of their French counselors.

*Q: How was the amalgamation of the British and the French sides into this one country? How did it work?*

HOLMES: That happened really after I left. I was there for two years. But it happened in stages. The British sliver of Cameroon, which nestled between the large French Cameroon and Nigeria, was divided into two sections. The northern section was largely inhabited by Hausas, which was a very large Nigerian tribe, and so there as a great deal of agitation to join Nigeria. If memory serves correctly - this was happening just as I was leaving - they had a referendum, and I believe that they joined Nigeria. And it was subsequent to that, perhaps a year or two later, that the larger part of British Cameroon then joined French Cameroon into one large state.

*Q: Were you finding that you were naturally attracted toward the British side? I mean our embassy?*

HOLMES: No. We had extraordinarily little contact with the British side. One reason for that is that while we were there we only had this very small embassy in Yaoundé. We didn't have a consulate in Douala. That came later. Douala was the seaport and the commercial center and was much bigger and more active.

*Q: Was that on the British side, Douala?*

HOLMES: No, that was on the French side. That was actually the major seaport of Cameroon, and it was on the French side. I would go down there periodically, every two months or so, just to talk to people, find out what was going on, and sometimes do some consular services. I took our new ambassador, Leland Barrows, down there to meet the mayor and the municipal council, and that was a very interesting encounter. It was rather stiff. We had lunch, and the mayor, Mayor Touketo, was trying to break the ice. He was working harder at that than Ambassador Barrows was, so finally he said, "You know, Mr. Ambassador, I come from a very..."

So Mayor Touketo, trying to impress the ambassador with his authority, said, "We've been around for a long time. In fact, we sold a number of slaves from the hinterland to the United States and made a lot of money." And there was a kind of a silence around the table, and then Barrows, rising to the occasion, said, "Well, I'm sure that Mr. Holmes's great-great grandfather bought a lot of them." And laughter broke out around the table, and all the Cameroonians just thought that was a hoot. And that really did it. After that we got along famously.

*Q: Was Barrows African American?*

HOLMES: No, he wasn't. He was from Kansas.

*Q: What was his background?*

HOLMES: Well, he basically was an AID officer, and in World War II, something I found out - I had a hard time dealing with this - he was senior official in the War Relocation Authority, basically that authority which interned Japanese Americans. How anybody could possibly have agreed to serve in that capacity still troubles me.

*Q: How did he relate. He doesn't sound like a very promising-*

HOLMES: He spoke French.

*Q: Oh, he spoke French.*

HOLMES: Oh, yes. He spoke French quite well. He knew a lot about development economics, which was extraordinarily helpful, but he did have an ingrained prejudice against the French. He saw the French as the enemy, and that they were only interested in exploiting the Cameroon, and that resulted in many long discussions between the two of us.

*Q: I would think that this was something that took, really, almost a generation of Foreign Service officers to work out in Africa, in a way. I mean, this idea of we were the "independence country," and our anti-colonial attitude and coming into this, and the French, from our point of view being beastly on things, which continues to today. I would think it would be very easy to find this idea even though we weren't trying to have the takeover from the French as the official policy as being the dominant power at the same time be very hard to restrain our people.*

HOLMES: Well, I would describe it in a different way. By the time we were in Africa and for several years after, there was already a process underway of various countries acceding to independence, but under French tutelage. In other words, the French were not trying to prevent this. If you remember, by that time, Charles De Gaulle had come back in 1958, the Fifth Republic had been established, and one of the things that De Gaulle established was a new French equivalence of the commonwealth, basically a French community. I can't remember exactly what it was called, but it was a French community of nations in Africa, and he invited representation in the French Senate from African countries, and there were benefits, obviously, for African countries to become associate members of this new French community. The one country that opposed this invitation staunchly was Sekou Touré in Guinea, and De Gaulle was furious that they hadn't accepted his grand offer, and so when the French left they took everything. I mean they took the phones out of the offices. It was extraordinary.

*Q: And the faucets.*

HOLMES: It was a real severing of the umbilical cord. But the rest - French West Africa and then the southern part, the sort of Brazzaville sector - these countries were moving towards independence, and the French were not opposing it. In fact, they were helping the process, but with a view to maintaining their influence - in fact, wherever possible their control, not only of the foreign policy of those countries but also of their economies. And of course the CFA franc was still pegged to the French franc, so the French treasury had a lot of influence on the situation. But they weren't opposing independence; they were just carving out an area of influence, which of course has remained, in increasingly diminishing ways, to this day.

*Q: I would have thought that one of the most sensitive things would be to set up English classes and things of this nature, because France and the French language and all, and all of a sudden to throw English into this pot would have been very annoying.*

HOLMES: Yes, they were annoyed. There's no doubt about it. But first of all, it wasn't very widespread. I mean, our English language classes were pretty small. It was a very small program, and I daresay the program was also small in other parts of West Africa, and they really kind of blanketed their countries with French. You see the French - as opposed to the British - they had a very different approach to instruction. They basically sent successive generations of Frenchmen and French women to teach in African schools, whereas the British, after an initial generation, the Nigerians, for example, next door, then became the teachers. So the British began to bow out of the actual primary and secondary schooling that the French maintained. And so by doing that, they maintained a certain measure of influence. In fact, I remember there was a song that was played, and everybody used to laugh about it. It was a cha-cha-cha, and it was called "*Nos ancêtres, les gaulois* [French: *Our ancestors, the Gauls*]." The humor in it was that the French had been so successful with their civilizing mission, that many young Africans thought that their ancestors were the Gauls.

*Q: Were we concerned at that point about the "Communist menace," the Soviet menace? Did we see Cameroons as any kind of a battlefield?*

HOLMES: Not at the time that I was there, although there was the story I told you about the Czech weapons. Whether this was true or whether this was a rather shrewd attempt on the part of the new Cameroonian leadership to open up what they would hope would be a floodgate of AID, recognizing that even if they weren't, they might be a battlefield in the Cold War. But there were influences. I mean, this fellow Félix Moumié of the UPC, who was living in Geneva, and we knew that at one time the Soviets had him on the payroll. But he was eventually assassinated by an organization called the Red Hand. No one ever quite knew who they were or who sponsored them, but he was assassinated in Geneva.

*Q: Were you getting any feel for what American policy was? I mean, was it just to keep the flag flying, or were we-*

HOLMES: No, we were establishing our presence and our influence, and as I say, there was some initial skirmishing with the old colonial offices, with the British and the French, but by and large I think there was a sense that we were embarked along similar strategic lines to further the development of these countries for joining the family of nations and also, down the road, to ensure that they did not become prey to Soviet-style coups and areas of influence - which happened in Guinea, of course. Sekou Touré was pretty smart about keeping control of his own country's destiny, but willingly worked with the Soviets and milked them for whatever he could get in the way of assistance.

*Q: I realize that you were at one level, and the Cameroons were probably one exception in the whole African place, but was there at that time a firm conviction in the thought process that no*

*matter what happened we didn't want to see Africa start splitting up along tribal lines? I mean in other words, keep the borders.*

HOLMES: Now that's a hard one for me to give much of a perspective on for the simple reason that Cameroon was the racial crossroads of Africa, because it was every kind... I mean, we had the Nigero-Sudanese group, we had the Bantu group, we had Pygmies, we had the sort of Hamitic and even Semitic influence in the north of Cameroon, the Fulani tribesmen, who were Muslim. And there was a reasonably clear line of demarcation between the Islamic north and the animist/Christian south, and it was basically where the jungle started, because that's where the tsetse fly decimated the Fulani cavalry when they came 150 years before out of the north and moved into that part of Africa. They only went as far as the tsetse fly permitted them to. There was a place, I remember, in the area close to British Cameroon and Nigeria, a river called the Noon River, and to the north of the river was a tribe called Bamoun. This was all in French Cameroon. The Bamoun tribe was Muslim, and on the other side of the River were the Bamiléké. The Bamiléké were animist/Christian, and they were the sort of entrepreneurs of Cameroon - very, very smart, very shrewd business people. And they fought periodically. They would raid each others' villages, and the central government in Yaoundé would have to go take care of it. But it's kind of an example of a kind of natural line of division that vegetation and wildlife produced in the settlement of that part of Africa, but it was really quite an extraordinary grouping of different peoples in Cameroon. It really was the sort of racial crossroads of Africa.

*Q: Did you have any thought at that point - this was sort of the high point of enthusiasm and all that - of becoming an Africanist? Was this where you were pointing yourself at that point?*

HOLMES: No, not particularly. I was fascinated by it. I had an extraordinary two years and enjoyed every minute of it, learned a lot. I might have gone in the direction of becoming an Africanist except that my wife was very, very ill and nearly died. I nearly lost her in Cameroon during the last two months that we were there. She had an unexplained pain. The one doctor that was there, the one surgeon, was up-country looking after some chieftain's wife, and so we were just waiting for him to come back anxiously, and she had three days of terrible pain, and when he came back he decided to have exploratory surgery and found that she had an amoebic abscess on her colon, which quickly developed into peritonitis, and this little bush hospital in Yaoundé had six French sisters, a nursing order, and one of the sisters was the anesthesiologist, and so she stayed with Marilyn all night to nurse her, care for her during the critical postoperative period. Then for about five or six days it was really pretty dicey. But she got through it. By that time we had our first child, and so the DCM/chargé, Leo Cyr, and his wonderful wife, took over the baby and took care of her. And I just stationed myself as a full-time monitor/nurse by Marilyn's bed, because the French sisters couldn't stay there the whole time and I didn't have confidence in some of the other orderlies. And we got through that, and then we requested... We were about three or four weeks short of our two-year mandatory assignment there, and we requested permission from Washington to leave early because she was in such terrible condition and the doctors strongly recommended that she be evacuated, basically, that we leave early. And her parents were stationed by that time in Morocco, in Tangier, and there was an American naval hospital in what had been called Port Lyautey - it was then called Kenitra - so that seemed advisable, to go there and recuperate. Well, in those days, the State Department's medical division was pretty primitive in the way it operated, and they refused permission. They said we

could not be evacuated because I hadn't completed the two years. There was provision in the law for emergency evacuation, but not for emergency recuperation, and so they refused permission to evacuate her. So I basically, with the ambassador's permission, borrowed money from my father, bought my own tickets, and left early - took Marilyn to Rabat. I said Tangier, but I meant Rabat, and that was a very good thing that we did. We left about three and a half weeks before the end of our tour. She did finally recover from that and we were reassigned to Washington, but her case and an officer named McKinnon who died, I think it was in Ouagadougou during the same period and was very ill... because the Department's procedures for taking care of people were so inflexible, that the French ambassador personally interceded in this - I think it was Ouagadougou - and was able to get McKinnon - his name was Bob McKinnon; he was chargé, the number two - get him evacuated to Paris on an Air France plane, but he either died on the way or shortly after getting to Paris. So these two cases, Marilyn's and McKinnon's, were used by the Department to go and get special authority and special funding from the Congress to establish a crash medical program for all these new posts in Africa. And that eventually was done, and the regulations were revised. But Marilyn's was one of the two test cases.

I was pretty upset, as you can imagine, but it meant, of course, that the idea of having a career in Africa was out, because she had subsequent problems as a result of this. The early experience that she'd had with amoeba and various other tropical diseases in Cambodia, where she had been evacuated a number of times to Hong Kong for treatment, plus the African experience, together meant that she was kind of damaged. So wisely we were not able to get clearance to go to places that did not have good medical facilities and a reasonably salubrious atmosphere.

Q: *Well, you came back in '61 and-*

HOLMES: -and I was assigned to the Operations Center as a reports officer. We had three eight-hour shifts, and we changed every two days, which was madness. We should have been on it a week at a time so that you could get adjusted, but despite the fact that I was an honors graduate in English from Princeton, I learned more about the English language and good writing from a guy who was the chief reports officer named Sam Gammon in the six months that spent in the Operations Center having my nightly summary critiqued the following day by Sam, things that we would write for the Secretary out of all the avalanche of cables that came in overnight. That was a great experience, and I did that for about six months.

**LEO G. CYR**  
**Chargé d'Affaires**  
**Yaoundé (1990-1961)**

*Ambassador Leo G. Cyr was born in Limestone, Maine on July 28, 1909. He received a bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College in 1930, a master's degree in Foreign Service from Georgetown University in 1933, and a law degree from Georgetown University in 1939. Ambassador Cyr's career included positions in Morocco, Cameroon, Tunisia, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Rwanda. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 4, 1988.*



*Q: Your next assignment was then to . . . ?*

CYR: I recall that one day I got a telegram in Tangier from the Department, "Front and center to Yaounde, Cameroon. The Chargé d'Affaires being evacuated for medical reasons. You are to replace him until further notice." And within a few days I was in Yaounde. And the morning after I arrived there I had an appointment, pre-arranged by the staff with an ex-prime minister of Cameroon, a bit wacky I learned later, who had many demands to make on the United States. What I do recall principally is his saying, "I could just snap my fingers and this embassy would be blown up." So I just blandly reported this to the Department, saying, "Will keep you advised."

*Q: What was the political situation in Cameroon? You went there, this was in ...?*

CYR: This was in '60.

*Q: Yes, 1960 to 1961. What was the situation? First the post. Was there an ambassador while you were there?*

CYR: No. Bolard More had been the Consul General when it became independent, and so he became Chargé d'Affaires. He'd been there just a few months thereafter when he became sick. So I went down as Chargé d'Affaires. And in the meantime, while I was holding the fort, it became known that Leland Barrows would become the first ambassador.

At that particular time a Consular Conference was scheduled for Tangier in the spring of '61. I attended the conference as the representative of the embassy in Cameroon. Leland Barrows was at the conference, and I met him there. I later returned to Yaounde as DCM under him.

*Q: Well, the period you were there, what was the political situation in Cameroon.*

CYR: The political situation . . .

*Q: Quite confused?*

CYR: Yes, confused. The Bamileke tribe was in an uproar. They were opposing Ahidjo's government. And a good part of that time there were night curfews in Yaounde and when traveling at night you were supposed to leave your car lights on. This always left me in a dilemma, because if you didn't turn your lights on they might shoot into the car. And if you had your lights on, they could get better aim.

*Q: Yes. I know the feeling.*

CYR: The actual fighting was primarily in the Western part of Cameroon.

*Q: Cameroon, we're talking about this period what had been the French Cameroon.*

CYR: Yes, that's right. And after I left the Federation took place.

*Q: Including part of what was the old German Cameroon . . .*

CYR: Yes, but the British had since been trustees under a UN trusteeship.

*Q: The British?*

CYR: Right.

*Q: Part of it went to Nigeria, and part, was that right?*

CYR: I may be wrong. My impression is that the British Cameroon was federated with the new republic, and it became the Federated Republic of Cameroon.

*Q: You were there at the time of the Federation?*

CYR: That took place after I left.

*Q: Well now, did you deal with the government? Was there a government of the Cameroons?*

CYR: Yes.

*Q: Was it French, were they still there?*

CYR: No. Ahidjo was President.

*Q: How was he to deal with?*

CYR: Very good. He's a very reserved person, not talkative, not outgoing at all, a dour Moslem from the north. But capable, fair, shrewd, friendly enough.

*Q: Did we have much interest in Cameroons other than wish them well in those days?*

CYR: There was a railroad that we had an interest in. No, I don't know that we were very interested in Cameroon. I recall that G. Mennen Williams, the first Assistant Secretary of the new Bureau of African Affairs, visited us in Yaounde. Africa finally had its own bureau, and he was familiarizing himself with his parish.

*Q: No great issues.*

CYR: No.

**SCOTT BEHOTEGUY  
US AID Mission Director  
Yaoundé (1961-1963)**

*Scott Behoteguy worked in the Office of Foreign Liquidation Commission in France, worked on the Marshall Plan, and coordinated the ICA staff training program. He also served as US AID Mission Director to the Cameroon, and as the director of the India-Ceylon-Nepal division in NESa. He was also deputy director of the US AID mission in Tunisia and was assigned Mission Director to Haiti shortly after.*

BEHOTEGUY: I was named mission director to the Federal Republic of Cameroon, located right in the crotch of Africa, so to speak. I went out there and was very happy to discover that the Ambassador there was an old acquaintance, Lee Barrows, whom I had known in the Marshall Plan in Paris. From there he had gone to Greece, a long tour in Saigon, after which he was named ambassador jointly to Cameroon and Togo. We renewed acquaintances in Cameroon. I was there from 1961 to 1963. It was a small AID mission and one where we did some work for the first time, cooperative work, with the European Economic Community. The European Community was doing economic development in Africa and had a project with us in building a railroad from Yaounde up to Ngaoundere in northern Cameroon. It was a loan project called the Trans-Cameroon Railway. I spent much of my time in monitoring this project, walking the track frequently, visiting EEC backstoppers in Brussels, and ICA backstoppers in Washington.

*Q: Can you remember any of the other projects that you had?*

BEHOTEGUY: We did a little bit, not too much in coffee. We did a little bit in agriculture, a little bit in transport. We did a little work with the roads. Actually, like I say, the project that I liked the best was building the Trans-Cameroon railroad. That was essentially a loan project rather than a grant project working with another organization. We did something in cocoa, a little bit. But actually it was perfectly clear to me from the first that the role of the United States in the Cameroon, and I imagine that would be true of most of the other former French colonies, was really to be second fiddle to the French. So, I think I was never anxious to develop a big program there because the French had always been there. They were really in control behind the scenes of the operation. They were doing a fairly good job. I think our very presence increased the size of their program because they were afraid the Americans were going to come and take it over, which was never the case. It was on the whole a satisfactory assignment.

*Q: What is the Capital?*

BEHOTEGUY: Yaounde, which is happily up in the hills about 1000 meters above sea level. It is not the Turkish bath that the seaport of Douala is. It was a nice capital and an interesting place. There were lots of Embassies there and we also had the United Nations. We didn't have a UN Resident Representative there, but we did have a representative of FAO, as I recall, and another one of the specialized agencies. The Canadians, Israelis, Germans, as well as the British were there. They all had modest little aid programs of one sort or another; also the Taiwan Chinese, then called the Republic of China. But after two years, in 1963 when my normal tour was over, the authorities in Washington decided we would reduce the post from a full AID mission, USAID, to an AID Representative on the ambassador's staff. So, for the next two or three years it was just an AID representative post. AID, I'm using that word now because just as I left for the

Cameroon post in the summer of 1961, President Kennedy was on board, we'd already gone through the ECA, the MSA, the FOA, and the ICA. Kennedy was the one I recall who decided that we would now call the foreign aid program the Agency for International Development. It was such a wonderful acronym, AID, that it has maintained its life ever since.

A final thought before moving on in this narrative: I remember that when I first went to Yaounde in 1961, the Mission Directors all signed telegrams over their own name rather than that of the Ambassador, so it must have been about that time that the country team concept came into full force and effect. I suspected that something like that had taken place because my colleagues in other missions were sending their messages out over their respective Ambassador's signature. I was sending them out of Yaounde over my signature and not the Ambassador's. So, I searched for and finally got Washington to send me the New Directive, but until I did, Ambassador Barrows was not willing to take over that responsibility. Oh, I must say that he never bothered me or worried about me sending things out over his signature once the change was made. It was just a bureaucratic slow up, that's all.

I have also been a little staccato in describing my work in Cameroon. One reason was, I think, because the French side was so very well developed. In addition to building a railroad, we didn't do an awful lot, a few things. The major effort on my part was in so-called West Cameroon, which had been a mandate under the League of Nations and a trust territory under the United Nations. This was Cameroon itself, and a plebiscite took place. Excuse me, one more thing, the Southern Cameroon trusteeship was administered by Nigeria, and the other one was administered by the French. The UN decided to have a plebiscite to decide whether West Cameroon (Southern Cameroon) would join Cameroon or join Nigeria where it was contiguous and had been administered for years. The plebiscite resulted in West Cameroonians deciding that they wanted to join the Federal Republic of Cameroon, rather than Nigeria. We then had one of the early bi-lingual states, official languages of the federal republic were English and French. They devised a constitutional system in which the President would be French and the Vice President would be English speaking. A lot of the time while I was there, efforts were being made so they could start communicating with each other. They could do very well in a tribal language, but when it came to a European or world language, they were a little handicapped because West Cameroonians did not know French and the East Cameroonians did not know English. Anyway, I spent considerable time back and forth.

Most of our program was oriented toward West Cameroon which was much less developed than East Cameroon. We had projects in technical education in roads and agriculture. And happily, the Peace Corps had come to Cameroon as one of the first places in Africa. The Peace Corps program was exclusively operated in West Cameroon. I worked very well with the Peace Corps Director over the head of Sargent Shriver who had devised the theory that the Peace Corps was something quite separate from the United States Government. Peace Corps representatives should not be seen in or near an embassy if at all possible. This was a people to people program quite independent of the United States Government in Shriver's view - an illogical conclusion which we just quietly overlooked. I actually had the Peace Corps Director living in my house for a short period of time, and we did things very quietly and very cooperatively between AID and the Peace Corps which were beneficial to both organizations. Then I established a sub office in the capital of West Cameroon, Buea, up in the mountains, which was a very attractive altitude

situation in contrast to the sweaty seacoast of the Atlantic, where there was a very fine mountain hotel used by many of the British colonial civil servants in the past. We established a small office near the hotel with a small program. Most of our work over there had to do with public works, road maintenance and road development, some work in coffee, and some work in education. That was the story in West Cameroon.

Q: *You left Yaounde, Cameroon in 1963?*

BEHOTEGUY: 1963.

Q: *Where did you go?*

**RICHARD C. MATHERON**  
**Political Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1961-1963)**

*Richard C. Matheron was born in California in 1927. He received his bachelor's degree at University of California in Berkley during 1948. His career has included positions in Cameroon, Zaire, Ethiopia, and and ambassadorship to Swaziland. Ambassador Matheron was interviewed by Lee Cottman in Mark 1989.*

Q: *And nervously sat there outside.*

MATHERON: Sat outside for about half an hour or 45 minutes. I'd been asked one question to which the chairman of the board had said I was dead wrong in my answer, and I was quite convinced I was right. I had said that the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in 1882. Chairman Durbrow insisted it was much later. I didn't know whether he was testing me for my knowledge or whether he was testing my willingness to stand up and defend a position, but I defended it. I was very happy there was an Encyclopaedia Britannica in the ambassador's outer office, and so while these gentlemen were deliberating, I looked up my question and knew I was right. I was practically holding it in my hand, ready to defend my position again if he'd come out and said I hadn't passed the exam. But when he came out and shook my hand and congratulated me on passing it, I didn't press the issue any further.

I then left what was not yet AID, I think it was called MSA in those days or United States Operations Mission, and became a full-fledged Foreign Service officer in May of 1957, when I went to the A-100 course. My first assignment as an FSO was in Rome as commercial officer.

In 1959, I returned to Washington and was assigned to INR in the old days when INR was still responsible for working on the National Intelligence Surveys for the intelligence community, and I spent the better part of a year studying the Korean bicycle industry and the Japanese sewing machine industry, and was not very happy in that assignment. One day my boss came in and said, "Well, I told Personnel you wouldn't be interested, but then I thought maybe I should check with

you anyway. I know how dedicated you are to the Far East and really are only interested in the Far East."

I said, "Well, what did Personnel propose?"

He said, "Well, they wanted to know whether you'd be interested in going for a year of African studies. You're not interested in Africa."

I said, "Well, wait a minute. Tell them, yes, I'd be glad to spend a year."

So the Department sent me for a year of graduate studies in African affairs at the African Study Center in UCLA. From there I first went to Nigeria, where I was in the political section for a couple of months. But because of an opening in Yaoundé, I was transferred there. I remember at the time being quite disappointed because I thought Nigeria was a much bigger, more important country than Cameroon. But it turned out that the first assignment in Cameroon, I think, really made it for me in the Foreign Service.

It was the time when there had just been a plebiscite in British Southern Cameroon on whether they wanted to join Nigeria or the Republic of Cameroun, which had been under French mandate since World War I and was predominantly French. Much to the surprise of many people, the old British Southern Cameroons voted to join French-speaking Republic of Cameroun. I was there at the time of Reunification. In fact, we went over to British Southern Cameroon just before "reunification," and I'm very proud of the political analysis of the situation there. I predicted that the reunification would work.

You remember at the time there was actually a full-scale rebellion going on in ex-French Cameroun, led by the UPC, Union des Populations Camerounaises. It was a very leftist rebellion, which had a lot of other origins, ethnic and sociological, but it was considered by many in the two Cameroons and in the West as a communist revolution.

On the other side, on the English-speaking side, there was fear that once the two countries were united, the rebellion would spread over there. I and my British colleague, with whom I remained friends for a long time, traveled together. We were both junior officers and we came up with individual reports, of course, to our respective governments, saying, "This thing is not going to fall apart." We're now 28 years later. Cameroon is both an English-speaking and French-speaking country, and the system has worked. It's one of the relatively few success stories in the African continent in the intervening period.

**WINGATE LLOYD**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1962-1963)**

*Wingate Lloyd was born and raised in Philadelphia. He attended Princeton, Johns Hopkins (SAIS), and the University of Rangoon. He entered the Foreign*

*Service in 1957 and served in France, Cameroon, Morocco, and Portugal. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: Well then, you left there in what? Sixty-*

LLOYD: I left there in early '62 for home leave and transferred to Douala. When the telegram arrived, I looked on the map and couldn't find it because there was no post there, and I realized I'd been sent to open a post in Cameroon. I went there in April, of '62 after home leave. Douala, I'll point it out to you.

Cameroon had been a German colony until World War I. There was a strip of Cameroon along the Nigeria-Cameroon border where the northern part went to Nigeria (as one looks at the map you can see it; there's sort of a notch there), and the southern part went to Cameroon. It was a bilingual country in terms of European languages. The people in the western part of the country spoke only English and no French, and the ones in the eastern part spoke only French and no English. The post in Douala was to facilitate movement of Americans. We had just opened embassies in most of West Africa and Central Africa at that time. One of the major airports in the area was Douala.

*Q: Now Douala was not the capital.*

LLOYD: It was not the capital. The capital was Yaoundé. Our Embassy there was opened a couple of years earlier. The Consulate at Douala was a small post. At the beginning there were three Americans: a USIA (United States Information Agency) Branch PAO, one American secretary, and myself. It gave me a sense of what it takes to open and post and really do all of the things involved: the administrative work, the budget and fiscal work, the consular work, the political reporting, the economic reporting, and so on. I had seen some of that in Marseille, but I was doing it all there. I was in charge of the post for the first four or five months.

*Q: What were American interests in Cameroon at the time?*

LLOYD: I think now the overwhelming American interest in Cameroon was the issue of race relations in America. Efforts by USIA to portray movement toward racial equality were probably the reason for much of our activity in Africa at that time. We had minimal trade interests. France was overwhelmingly in control of the area. French companies had offices throughout what had been French Africa, and they more or less ran the show. We eventually had two American officers in the consulate; the French consulate general probably had ten. They considered it very much an extension of the French colonial times.

*Q: Did you find that you had to walk carefully there vis-à-vis the French?*

LLOYD: I was very comfortable with them. I was comfortable in the language by that time; I spoke it well. I was able to joke with them about their continuing colonial views there. They shrugged and took that for what it was worth. American exports into Cameroon, as I look back on it now with more knowledge of trade policy, were probably being stymied at every turn by France. I'm sure that a French assistant was sitting behind the minister of economics when they

looked at tariff schedules to ensure that French products got priority. While there were some American automobiles, it was very difficult to get any American products in there at all.

*Q: Still, why Douala, because we-*

LLOYD: It was a transportation hub for the newly opened posts in what's now called N'djamena in Chad ( then called Fort-Lamy), Yaoundé, Bangui in Central African Republic, Libreville in Gabon, and Lagos, which was then the capital of Nigeria. It was a transportation hub for all of those posts. Everything that came to any of those five posts came through Douala. The overnight flights from France - 707s - would arrive at noon, go south to Brazzaville, and then stop in Douala late in the afternoon before returning to France. There were no non-French air carriers or steamship lines.

*Q: Was Douala a port?*

LLOYD: A port? Yes, located about 20 miles up a shallow river, the Wouri.

*Q: Were we concerned about Soviet ships and that sort of thing?*

LLOYD: Not really. Some American ships came in. I had a captain come into my office once. We had just opened the consulate, and I had a galvanized pipe that was my flagpole. He looked at me and said, "Young man, I've been traveling for 30 years around the world, and this is the worst American consulate I've ever seen in my entire life." But there was no particular Cold War interests in terms of Chinese or Soviet involvement in the area. There was a Soviet embassy and Eastern European embassies in Yaoundé. They were not really an issue for me.

One event happened that I should mention during the time I was in Cameroon. In the spring of 1963 a plane from Douala heading for Lagos on a cloudless day decided to take a turn around Mount Cameroon, which is a 13,000-foot mountain just to the northwest of Douala about 30 or 40 miles, I guess. It flew into the mountain. Clouds covered over the mountain at the last minute. There was a State Department courier on board with pouches, an American secretary from the embassy in Yaoundé, and about 50 other people, mainly French. I had climbed the mountain earlier in the year with a group of French, Americans, and others, just for the experience, so I went up the mountain again. The plane crashed in an area that had no roads, in heavy jungle. We had to cut a way up there. It crashed one afternoon at about four or five in the afternoon. We heard about it that evening. The local army station in that area had sent some people out to try to get to the site for survivors. They brought our courier down, who was still alive. It took 16 men eight hours to bring him down because they had to take turns carrying a litter and it was very difficult terrain. He later died. There was a lot of concern, as you can imagine, for the pouches. My job was to go up and get the pouches. I spent almost a week on that mountain, the first five days with the 50 bodies-which were in greatly deteriorated shape in the sun-with a group of other people. There was one Peace Corps volunteer. It took a fairly young, energetic group to do that because we were living just out of what we could carry up there. But the Peace Corps pulled the Peace Corps volunteer out because they didn't want him associated with any official U.S. government activities in the area. We never found any pouches. We found melted metal clasps with attached pieces of cloth that had been our pouches, and melted glass containers. The aircraft



had been fully loaded with jet fuel, and it exploded as it hit the mountain. We searched up and down, and security people came from the embassy to take a look for it. People much older than I came up, were exhausted, drank a liter of our water which we'd had to haul up there, and then went back down again. I found that a threat, and went out and buried water so that we wouldn't run out ourselves. Anyway that was an exciting event, but unsuccessful in terms of finding the pouches. For a young officer it was an exciting adventure.

*Q: How did you find dealing with the Cameroonian government?*

LLOYD: They were pleasant and warm toward us. They were very oriented toward France. At least in the eastern part of the country, their training had been entirely by French administrators. I got to know the president of the chamber of commerce reasonably well. They spoke really quite good French. They had no particular differences. We didn't have a lot of business.

I guess the main political issue was the integration of eastern and western Cameroon, these two areas that had come together just about six months before I opened the post. The leader of the eastern part spoke no English, and the leader of the western part spoke no French. They were president and vice president of the country. To their consternation they could only do business through an interpreter, and Englishman. I think that was irritating to have a vestige of colonialism sitting there making it work.

But they had totally different systems. In fact, the calls from Douala to Lagos had to go through both Paris and London. You couldn't call directly. You could hear the operator in London speaking broken French to get a call through.

*Q: Who was our ambassador?*

LLOYD: A man named Leland Barrows, who had been a long-term AID officer, knew and liked Cameroon a lot, was very sympathetic and was known to be sympathetic toward the Cameroonians. I don't know what his background was, but he'd served in Africa. He did a very good job as ambassador. I didn't see a great deal of him. When he came through Douala I did see him, and I came up to the embassy a few times.

The climate in Douala was very different from Yaoundé. Yaoundé was at about 800 meters or about 2,500 feet, and was relatively temperate. In Douala we were right at sea level, very wet, three or four meters of water fell a year. So it rained constantly. The area was impoverished because the rainfall had leached the nutrients out of the soil for the most part. It was a very poor area. They later discovered oil off Cameroon. I think that's the source of whatever wealth Cameroon has now.

But in terms of politics and the cold war, I don't think this was the front line.

*Q: Peace Corps, what were they doing?*

LLOYD: We had one of the first groups of Peace Corps volunteers. They were working in community development. There was a great effort made to keep them separate from the

consulate and the embassy. I mentioned the Peace Corps volunteer withdrawn from the group that I took up the mountain. They had a doctor, and their doctor was not supposed to treat people in the embassy or the consulate, although on a couple of occasions - once when the wife of our USIS office was sick with hepatitis - we were able to press the doctor to help us. That was the style in the first couple of years of the Peace Corps. "We're not going to let that State Department co-opt us." I worked later with the Peace Corps in Morocco, and they were less concerned about that issue. But it seemed to me that they lived quite a comfortable life. They were, I think, solely in western Cameroon, in the English-speaking portion of it. There were probably 20 volunteers or so.

*Q: Yes. What was social life like for you and your wife?*

LLOYD: It was largely French. We knew some Cameroonians, but really not a lot. We saw largely the French business group that was installed in Douala. Typical was the CFAO (Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale), the French company for West Africa, which had offices in the former French colonies, mirrored by similar British companies that had offices in the former British colonies. If there's a thread through these posts that I've had, it was the colonialism and the post colonialism effects of that period, of these extraordinary events of the century before.

*Q: I can't remember when it happened, but I think Senegal suffered when de Gaulle sort of made the offer of being part of the French and its own Guinea...*

LLOYD: It was Guinea/Conakry. When they voted not to join the French Community, the French left, pulling out the light fixtures, the toilets, the plumbing, everything, yes.

*Q: Had that happened during-*

LLOYD: Cameroon had a much more benign transition. A common situation would be to have a French assistant to a Cameroonian administrator, who in fact had been in charge prior to independence. The roles simply reversed. He French assistant would defer ostentatiously to his Cameroonian boss because the roles had been reversed. The Cameroonians insisted on the full rights that the French had had and the same pay and even home leave in France. So they got an annual trip to France, which was very nice.

I think we went out of our way. We went out of our way to make it clear who we thought was in charge. Things weren't run terribly well. The French consulate general in Douala was still very powerful. There were four; it was the British, the French, the Americans, and maybe one more consulate there. I came to know the British quite well. The German honorary consul was a German woman married to a Frenchman who had lived there for some time. Early on in my stay when I was learning the ropes (I was alone, living in a hotel room trying to open a consulate with a manual typewriter on my knees), I got an invitation to attend the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "glorious death of King Douala Bell." The party was given by his grandson. So I went to the party and I stood with the consuls over in a corner. I turned to the German consul (who was then, I guess, in her late 40s or thereabouts, and I was 28) and said, "What were the circumstances of the glorious death of King Douala Bell?"

She looked around and then whispered to him, “We hanged him.” Apparently he had called in the British fleet when Germany owned Kamerun (with a K) in 1916. He got caught and was hanged by the Germans. But nonetheless, every year there had been a party for the glorious death to honor the anniversary. The grandson, a physician, was the doctor used by the German consul.

*Q: [Laughter] Well, I think this is a good place to stop.*

LLOYD: Yes, why don't we stop there?

*Q: I put at the end of the tape so we know where to start. We'll pick this up. You left Cameroon in-*

LLOYD: I left Cameroon in December of 1963 and arrived in Morocco in January of 1964.

**MICHAEL PISTOR**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Douala (1962-1964)**

*Mr. Pistor was born in Oregon and raised in Arizona. After graduating from the University of Arizona and serving with the US Army, in 1959 he joined the United States Information Agency. He served as Public Affairs Officer in Teheran, Kampala, Douala, London and New Delhi. He also held senior positions at USIA headquarters in Washington before being appointed Ambassador to Malawi in 1991. Ambassador Pistor was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: You were in the Cameroons from when to when?*

PISTOR: In Cameroon from 1962 to '64, and we were there at the time when East Cameroon, which had been under French tutelage from World War I on, joined with West Cameroon, which had been the Southern Cameroons under British tutelage. We watched these two former separate countries come together. It was remarkable, because their attitudes were so different, the attitudes both of the politicians and the people you talked to. On home leave in Arizona I ran across a young man whose father was a distinguished politician in Cameroon of the English persuasion, and this young man was at the university in Tucson. We had a meal together, and he said, “Well, you'll find that East Cameroonians refer to us in West Cameroon as ‘according to's,’ because when we're approached by a policeman or a gendarme, we say, ‘According to such and such law, you can't do this, and according to that such and such regulation.’.. On the east side they just go ‘Pow’ and hit you on the head.” So there were enormous differences in attitude between the two, inherited from their colonial masters.

My boss, the Country PAO in Yaounde, assigned me the southern region of East Cameroon and the whole of West Cameroon to look after, so for two years after setting up the post, I traveled back and forth to West Cameroon. You could see traces there of the earlier German colony-- there was a fountain with a bas-relief of Bismarck in the port city now called Victoria. The solid,

thick-walled administrative buildings which had been built by the Germans at the end of the nineteenth century had been used by both the British and their Cameroonian successors. The government house in the little hill station of Buea was still called the Schloss because that's what the Germans had called it. There was even a huge Bechstein grand piano in the Schloss that must have been head-loaded from the Coast. You could see the bones of two different colonial eras and the beginnings of independence, all in one place.

JFK was assassinated when we were in Douala, and I remember going to the newspaper and alerting them. The paper had already gone to bed. I sat with the French editor of the single daily newspaper in Cameroon and I had the Voice of America on my portable radio. I translated in my execrable French what the Voice was telling me in English as the story was breaking, and then he wrote it up and was able to get into the paper in the morning. Then a couple of days later my wife and I were in our house listening to the radio, tuning into the radio, while we were getting dressed to go somewhere when Jack Ruby shot Oswald. Now, the French and the Cameroonians that we had known immediately jumped to larger conspiracy, and I tried to explain we've got a lot of crazy people but we don't have a lot of big plots, or successful ones. But the minute Oswald was shot, I wasn't able to talk to anybody at all ever about saying this is not a conspiracy; you're paid to say this.

*Q: Did you feel part of a developing core of Africanists by that time?*

PISTOR: I did and I didn't. You know, I yearned for Europe too, just like everybody else did. What I was doing was fascinating, it was absolutely fascinating work, but by the time we got to Douala -- and Douala was much less pleasant than Kampala-- we began to see the outlines of the post-independent troubles ahead. In the southern part of Cameroon where we were, there had already been a couple of panga (machete) attacks on movie theaters and some guerilla activity in the countryside. After being freed from colonialism Africa was entering a tortuous period of transition from which it hasn't emerged yet.

USIA's African Area director had come to see us in Kampala, and he sat on our front porch and said, "You know, we're really pleased to have you here and we think you're doing a terrific job. We try to send people down from Europe, from France and Germany. They come down here and they whine and they complain and they just hate it. Now we're developing a whole bunch of people who don't know any better, who don't know anything else." I kind of thought, well, that means that I'm here for the duration. Douala was so damp, so wet, so miserable in climate-- it was in a mangrove swamp-- and I thought I can't get out of Africa, but maybe we can go north where the desert is, maybe Morocco or somewhere, at least to get some sea and some dryness. So that's what I put on my wish list when the time came. I sent it off and waited, and what came back was that not only was I not going to Morocco, but my family and I were going to London. I was to be Student Affairs Officer at the London embassy. I thought, that might be damp but I'll take it.

**ANDREW F. ANTIPPAS**  
**Consular Officer**

## **Douala (1963)**

*Andrew F. Antippas was born in Massachusetts in 1931. He received a bachelor's degree from Tufts University and entered the Foreign Service in 1960. His career included positions in Africa, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Korea, Canada, and Washington DC. Mr. Antippas was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 19, 1994.*

*Q: The capital of Cameroon was Douala, wasn't it?*

ANTIPPAS: Yaounde was the capital. We had opened a Consulate in Douala in 1962. I was the third officer to be assigned there. There wasn't even a Post Report. I had to go to the library and find something in the "National Geographic" to find out what Cameroon was all about.

*Q: I have to ask. Did the three years in Washington get you a wife or not?*

ANTIPPAS: No. I came close. I had relationships with a couple of young women, one of them a CIA analyst who had graduated from Fletcher [Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University]. But she was from Kentucky and was certainly not interested in going to go to Africa. No, I think that she felt that she had her own career and was not really interested in doing the Foreign Service spouse thing.

So I went to deepest, darkest Africa, without a wife.

*Q: You went out to Douala in 1963. This was the height of the "romance" with Africa [in the Department of State]. It was thought that the corps of specialists on Africa was going to be the leading edge of the Department and that Africa was going to be the bright light of the world. It was just a feeling. I am not denigrating anyone.*

ANTIPPAS: You're right. That feeling was very much there.

*Q: Did you think this way?*

ANTIPPAS: Well, I didn't particularly want to go to "Black Africa" [Africa South of the Sahara]. In fact, I had asked to be a "Mediterranean Basin Specialist." This field of specialization didn't exist, of course, but it sounded all right to me. Algeria was one of the most interesting places in the world at that time. It was really the "hot issue." France and the French language were also my interest. I figured that there were lots of places where the French language was used. It would be interesting to serve in some of those places. I said that I really would like to serve in Algiers, if I could, for my first posting abroad. I was taking an early morning French class with the Personnel Officer in the Department for Africa. I kept telling him, "Don't forget, when my name comes up, that I want to go to Tunis or Algiers or some place like that."

Anyway, he called me up in IO one day with laughter in his voice and said, "Guess where you're going?" He said, "You're going to Douala." I said, "What? What is Douala?" I remember reaching for the Department phone book on my desk, because there used to be a map in the back

with all of the Foreign Service posts on it. I wondered, "Where in the hell is Douala?" Douala wasn't even on the map. I said, "You can't do this to me." He really got a great laugh out of that. I thought that my career had ended, before it started. I was somewhat depressed by the prospect.

I went to Cameroon by ship, via Europe, where I bought a Volkswagen "beetle". I drove it to Marseille, loaded it on the SS "General Mangin", and took a 17-day trip down the West coast of Africa.

*Q: Before you went, did you get any briefing from the African Bureau? Did it stick in your mind at all?*

ANTIPPAS: Yes, I did. But it didn't stick with me very much. Cameroon is an interesting place, though, because an insurgency was going on at that time, sponsored by the Chinese Communists, the Guineans, and Ghana. The insurgency was led by what was called the UPC [Cameroonian People's Union]. This insurrection had been going on since 1955. Cameroon (ex German Imperial colony of "Kamerun") had been a League of Nations then a UN Trust territory, with the French and British as the administering powers. The reason that we had opened a Consulate in Douala was that Cameroon was supposed to be an independent country. It really wasn't independent. We thought that there might be commercial opportunities there. The Consulate was supposed to handle consular affairs as well, but the French had the country "sewed up" economically as tight as a drum. They weren't about to let the Americans get in.

The insurgency in Cameroon had been violent. It was kind of like what had gone on in East Africa, with the "Mau Mau" movement. There were 17,000 casualties over seven years. But the interesting thing was that few ever knew anything about it, because the French kept the press out of there. They knew how to keep a "lock" on things. And, of course, most of the attention at the time was in Algeria. The guerrillas attacked the international airport at Douala and hacked a bunch of French to death with machetes. This doesn't shock anybody nowadays, but in 1963 it caught your attention.

*Q: What were they after?*

ANTIPPAS: It was a communist-Marxist led movement. Everything was in a state of flux. West Cameroon, which had been under British control, had split in 1960 with half of the territory deciding, along tribal lines, to go with French Cameroon, and the other half--the northern part of Cameroon--went with Nigeria. Many of the tribes that were involved in this rebellion were along the West Cameroon border. Great Britain assigned a regular army infantry battalion to keep an eye on things. We had about a hundred Peace Corps volunteers in West Cameroon in 1963 and a much smaller number in French Cameroon.

So it was an interesting place. Ahmadou Adhijo, who was the President of Cameroon, was a fairly stable individual. He was smart and competent. He ruled for over 20 years--and quite sagely. It kind of went to pieces after he died. He had not been as dictatorial or as nutty as Kwame Nkrumah or some of the other African rulers of the period.

*Q: What were you doing there in Douala?*

ANTIPPAS: I was a vice-consul, the number two man at the Consulate. There were four Americans at the post. There was a secretary and an administrative assistant--both female. The Principal Officer was the Consul, and I was the vice-consul. I replaced the man who actually opened the post.

I didn't hit it off with the Principal Officer. The first year that I was there was not a very rewarding experience. He was the kind of person who kept all of the interesting work for himself. If a Peace Corps volunteer turned a jeep over out in the bush, or had some other kind of accident, the Consul would hop in his vehicle and go out to rescue him. I couldn't even write a letter to a missionary, saying, "Your passport is about to expire," without the Consul's correcting it. So I ended up by counting the paper clips in the warehouse and meeting the couriers, that sort of thing. I think that the Consul didn't have a high opinion of my French language capability. He was himself married to a French woman. I had come out of French language class and still felt a little uncertain about using it. Although I thought that he had given me a fairly decent efficiency report, my first abroad, it was only after I returned to the Department and read the CONFIDENTIAL part of it, as they used to do, that I realized that he had literally "cut my throat." The DCM, who wrote the Reviewing statement tried to soften it because he liked me. However, the Consul came down with hepatitis, four months before he was due to be transferred and had to be medically evacuated.

Cameroon was being inspected at that time [by Foreign Service Inspectors]. The chief inspector was a very highly regarded, senior Foreign Service Officer named Randolph Kidder. His previous position had been that of Political Counselor in the Embassy in Paris. He took a liking to me, and with the Department and the Embassy wondering who was going to replace the Principal Officer in Douala until the Consul's replacement arrived from Genoa. Inspector Kidder said, "Let Antippas do the job. He's going to sink or swim. He'll either do it or not."

So the Embassy and the Department agreed to leave me in charge of the post and I served as acting Principal Officer for four months. I think that I did well. As I was on my own, I kind of "took off." Of course, I worked very hard. I wrote an analysis of the political parties of the West Cameroon, the first ever. But because there was no secretary I had a Peace Corps girl I was dating type the airgram for me. I also spent a hectic month helping search for an aircraft that disappeared near Mount Cameroon in the process of being ferried to the former Belgian Congo by the brother of the then Duke of Hamilton. The Duke was related to the then British Prime Minister Douglas Home.

Not the least of the Consulate's chores related to the fact that Douala was a transit point for the U.S. diplomatic courier system in West Africa. The post with the departure of the Consul was reduced to two American, Principal Officer and Administrative Assistant. We had 13 couriers a week come to Douala--only one during normal duty hours. So every other day I had to go to the airport in the middle of the night, pick up the courier, and take him down, with all of his "X-2" [large size diplomatic pouch] bags.

The Congo was the hot area at the time--this was now 1964. I swear that Washington must have been shipping ammunition to the Congo because those X-2 bags were very heavy. It also went

very hard for you if you missed a courier run. One day G. Mennen Williams, or "Soapy" Williams [then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs], came to Douala, flying out of the Congo. He was just transiting Cameroon. A French friend who was UTA [Air Transport Union, a French airline] manager...

*Q: By UTA, you mean the other...*

ANTIPPAS: The other French airline beside Air France. He called me up and said, "There's a guy sitting out here, sleeping on a bench in the waiting room at the airport. The manifest says that he's an Assistant Secretary of State named Williams." So I quickly called the Embassy, got the Ambassador on the phone, and told him that Assistant Secretary Williams was in the waiting room at the airport. The Ambassador said, "Go out there and tell him to hold on. I'm coming down to see him." I rushed out the door of the Consulate. When I got to the airport, I saw Assistant Secretary Williams walking out to his plane, which had just been called for departure. I introduced myself, said I was the Vice-Consul, and said that the Ambassador would really like to talk to him. He smiled, was very nice, but waved me away. That was 1964. Four years later, in 1968, when I was in Saigon, "Soapy" was the Ambassador to the Philippines. He came to Vietnam for a visit. This was three days before the bombing halt of early November, 1968, by which President Lyndon Johnson was trying to ensure that Hubert Humphrey [the Democratic presidential candidate] would be elected.

As the Saigon Embassy escort officer I took "Soapy" Williams all over Vietnam, including a visit to "Yankee Station" [an area off the coast of South Vietnam where U. S. Navy carriers conducting the air war against North Vietnam were normally located]. He wanted to talk to the people who were bombing North Vietnam. I reminded him of his visit to Douala and what a day he made for me when I found out that he was sleeping on a bench and how the Ambassador was unhappy that I hadn't been able to persuade him stay. "Soapy" was amused by the story.

In any event it was really delightful to be a Principal Officer and I thought the best job in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Was there a Cameroonian Government, a French Government, or what?*

ANTIPPAS: There was a Cameroonian Government. The French were still dominant, for the most part. There were only three career Consulates in Douala: the French, who, under the Cameroonian constitution, were automatically deans of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, no matter how long the incumbent French diplomats had been there; the Swiss; and ourselves. There was a gaggle of honorary consulates. The French were influential because they were paying a good part of the international aid bill. They had a lot of technical people there. They also had a lot of "Peace Corps type" volunteers, who were doing their military service as teachers. The French exercised an omnipresent influence with their aid and technical advisors. The French Consul in Douala had been a local "Prefect" before independence. But there was a Cameroonian Government.

*Q: Did you have much to do with the Cameroonians?*



ANTIPPAS: Not all of that much. Mostly with the Provincial Governor in the French Cameroons side. I spent more time over in West Cameroon than anything else because there were more Americans over there. There were missionaries and...

*Q: West Cameroon was part of Cameroon--is that right?*

ANTIPPAS: Yes. West Cameroon was a long strip of British administered territory that stretched from the Bight of Biafra to Lake Chad in the North. In 1960 it was split into northern and southern parts. The northern part went to Nigeria. The southern part elected to be federated with French Cameroon. The split went along tribal lines. The Vice President of Cameroon at the time was a West Cameroonian named John Ngu Foncha. He spoke no French but was the Vice President of the Federated Republic of Cameroon. Given the fact that the insurrection was taking place in that part of the country and that we had all of these Peace Corps volunteers and a little bit of commercial activity, I spent a fair amount of time in West Cameroon.

*Q: How did you find the Cameroonian Government officials that you dealt with at the provincial level?*

ANTIPPAS: There were no particular problems. They were quite accommodating. There was no particular difficulty. The one contact that comes to mind is when the AID mission in Yaounde asked me to represent them in the presentation of some chemicals to fight cocoa plant blight.

It became quite clear that, first, there were very few commercial Americans in the area. Oil exploration was just beginning at that time offshore in the Bight of Biafra, where major strikes were made afterwards. I can remember that, apart from the Peace Corps volunteers and a couple of guys from Texas or Louisiana who were doing seismic soundings in preparation for oil prospecting, there was very little American commercial activity. I left the post when the new Principal Officer came, because the Department decided to reduce the size of the post to two Americans, rather than four Americans, as had been the case previously. I was transferred to the Embassy in Bangui [Central African Republic].

*Q: What about the Peace Corps volunteers? What were they doing?*

ANTIPPAS: They were mostly teaching English.

*Q: How did this go? Here was a...*

ANTIPPAS: It was really the first generation of Peace Corps volunteers.

*Q: Here were Peace Corps volunteers teaching English in what had been virtually a private hunting ground of the French. I'm surprised that there was any call for English.*

ANTIPPAS: There was interest in English. There was a much smaller number of Peace Corps volunteers, as I recall it, in the former French Cameroon than there was in what had been British controlled West Cameroon. West Cameroon was somewhat backward in comparison to the

French Cameroons. The British hadn't done much for it, and the French didn't do anything for it, either. I remember that when the West Cameroons affiliated itself with the French side they lost Commonwealth preferences for banana exports which really hurt. In any event, I think that the Peace Corps volunteers were accepted all right. They didn't do too badly. In the West Cameroons they were mostly involved in village development projects; digging wells and the like.

My basic impression of the Peace Corps volunteers was that a lot of them "went native" very quickly. This was kind of the beginning of the "flower children" generation anyway. This was the early generation of the 1960's. My eyes went very wide at some of the things these people did. The Peace Corps had its own administration. They had an in-country Director with whom we worked very closely and had very cordial relations. They had to watch out for the volunteers. But nevertheless, if something happened, the consular officers had a certain responsibility toward them.

*Q: When you say, "going native," I think it's interesting...*

ANTIPPAS: I meant that some were living with native women. Some volunteers, I recall, lived in local huts--not, exactly, Peace Corps issue housing. They really got into the culture, if you could call it that. These were fairly primitive living quarters. Some of the locations were pretty limited. I dated a Peace Corps volunteer, who lived 80 miles away in what was a French aluminum foundry town at Edea. There were several rubber plantations in the area as well some that belonged to the Terres Rouges Company. There was a waterfall there at Edea, so the French had built a power plant and a smelter. They brought bauxite from Guinea to Cameroon. They trucked the bauxite 80 miles into the interior, smelted it, and sent the ingots to Louisiana in the United States. It's interesting in terms of mercantilist theory.

I used to have to drive through this rain forest, 80 miles one way, for a date in Edea. It made it very interesting. What you do when you're young and single!

*Q: Then you went to the Central African Republic [CAR], where you served from 1964 to...*

ANTIPPAS: 1965. I spent a year at each post [Douala and Bangui]. The CAR was much smaller in scope than the Cameroons even though it had a land area the size of Europe. The city of Bangui had a population of only 45,000 people at that time, out of a total population in the whole country of about one million.

*Q: Before we get to that, what was the political situation there?*

ANTIPPAS: The President of the country was a civilian named David Dacko. He was later thrown out by the Army chief, Colonel Bokassa, who proclaimed himself Emperor and spent the country's entire GNP for a year on his "coronation". The Central African Republic is situated just North of the then Republic of the Congo [now Zaire], which, at that time, dominated everything that was going on in the region. French power was very much "present." The French had a military force stationed on the tri-border area of Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. They had a military post there at which what was called an "intervention force" was stationed. It was smaller than a division--probably a regiment or brigade of paratroopers. I think

that they actually intervened in Gabon, when a coup d'etat was attempted there. They were very evidently going to intervene wherever French interests dictated and to secure those countries whose administrations were basically friendly to France.

There were several insurrections going on. The Katanga area [Eastern Congo, now Eastern Zaire] was of the greatest interest.

*Q: This was the southern Congo province of Katanga, which split away from the central Congolese Government. There were a lot of mercenaries there.*

ANTIPPAS: There were considerable mineral resources there.

*Q: The major company was the Union Miniere du Haut Katanga [Mining Union of Upper Katanga].*

ANTIPPAS: The union leader there, I think, subsequently became the president of the Congo. What was his name? I can picture him but I can't remember his name. [Moise Tshombe]

Anyhow, there were some other, "half-baked" insurrections going on. One of them was called the "Simba Rebellion." They were a real bunch of "crazies" up in the northern part of the Congo. They captured Stanleyville and held our Consul.

*Q: Michael Hoyt.*

ANTIPPAS: At least one American missionary was killed during the Belgian-American rescue operation [of Stanleyville].

*Q: The operation was called "Dragon Rouge" [Red Dragon].*

ANTIPPAS: Exactly. There was a little chore I had to do from time to time in this connection. Our PAO [Public Affairs Officer] had his own airplane in Bangui. So we used to fly around the country. We went up to a crossing point 300-400 miles into the interior on the river that forms the border between the CAR and the Congo. This was apparently a traditional crossing point of the main North-South road from the Sudan. All of the canoes had been brought over to the CAR side and chained up there to keep the "Simbas" from crossing over and doing any more marauding. I went up there to try to pick up intelligence--to see if any "line crossers" could tell us anything about what the Simbas were doing to our people, who were still under house arrest.

One of the other chores I had in Bangui was to go down to the river [Ubangi River] every day and look for American bodies in the river. Bodies were floating down the river. Some of them would wash up in the shallows in downtown Bangui. The situation was kind of like Rwanda today, though not as bad. I have pictures at home of bodies floating in the river. One of the things which one learns is that the skin pigmentation of black people, after being immersed in water for a time, turns white. So the bodies all looked like Caucasians, floating in the river, until you realized that, in fact, they weren't. Anyway, this was a pretty grisly job.

I had originally been assigned to shift to Embassy Nouakchott, Niger from Douala. But this was changed to Bangui as Third Secretary and Vice-Consul, because the incumbent Administrative Officer had to have a hernia operation. He went up to Wheelus Air Force Base in Libya, where there was an Air Force hospital. So I was assigned to Bangui as Administrative Officer, Consul and Economic/Commercial Officer. I had at least three "hats" to wear. Claude "Tony" Ross was Ambassador. He was at age 43, the youngest career Foreign Service Officer to become Ambassador. Ed Brennan was DCM. Charlie Bray, who was then Political Officer, subsequently became spokesman for the Department and Ambassador to Senegal. In addition to a Public Affairs Officer (PAO) who was a USIS officer, The Military Attaché, as I recall, was also actually resident in Chad, at Fort Lamy [now called N'Djamena]. There was no Peace Corps contingent but we did have a couple of "SeaBees" doing some kind of construction work in the Western part of the country. We would stop with them if we drove the 800 miles to Cameroon. It was a very small, fairly close knit Embassy and diplomatic community. I was in Bangui when De Gaulle recognized Red China. The CAR was very close to De Gaulle. The Ubangi Shari, as the territory was called before independence, had been one of the first French African territories to declare for the Free French in 1940. So it had a place very close to De Gaulle's heart. He never forgot those African countries that had supported him at that time--particularly the CAR and Cameroon.

Consequently, De Gaulle gave them an extra dollop of aid every year. When France [under De Gaulle] recognized Red China in 1964, the CAR, and all of the other former French territories also recognized the PRC. The CAR kicked out the Ambassador of the Republic of China, who, of course, was fairly close to us. Then the Red Chinese and the Russians came in, which sort of changed the local atmosphere.

*Q: We'll stop this at this point and will pick up with more details about what our interests in the CAR were, more about the "Simba" business and how that worked out, and how the Embassy in Bangui was run and how it dealt with the CAR.*

**JOHN PROPST BLANE**  
**Political Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1963-1966)**

*Ambassador Blane was born and raised in Alabama and was educated at the University of Tennessee and at the University of Vienna, Austria as a Fulbright Scholar. Following a tour of duty with the US Army during the Korean War, he entered the Foreign Service in 1956. A specialist in African Affairs, Ambassador Blane held several positions at the State Department in Washington and served in a number of African countries including Somalia, Ethiopia (Asmara), Cameroon and Kenya. From 1982 to 1985 he served as United States Ambassador to Rwanda and from 1985 to 1988 as Ambassador to Chad. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Your first assignment on going back was to Yaoundé, Cameroon. How did that assignment come about and what was the situation there?*

BLANE: Well, it came about as all assignments still in those days came about: I got an operations memorandum (no telegram) from the Department of State informing me that I had been assigned to Yaoundé as political officer.

*Q: It was an independent country at that time.*

BLANE: That's correct.

*Q: What did our embassy consist of?*

BLANE: Ambassador, DCM, two political officers, an economic officer, and a general junior-officer dogsbody who did everything.

*Q: Our ambassador, Leland Barrows, had almost made a career out of Cameroon, hadn't he? He was there six years.*

BLANE: He was there about six and a half years, and if they had just gone off and left him alone, he would have been there the next ten, too. He liked Cameroon, the Cameroonians liked him, and I think he did an exceptionally good job there. But he hung on as long as he could.

*Q: This was your first embassy. What was his style of operation?*

BLANE: How shall I say, he watched over things and didn't get in the way of his officers very much. I thought he had a very good operational style. I would discuss things with him. Saw him of course every day in a small embassy. But my reporting was mine; he didn't hector me much on that at all. He was very supportive.

*Q: What was the political situation in Cameroon? At one time it had been really two colonial people...*

BLANE: That's right. There was the larger, former French territory and a much smaller, former British territory. But through a vote in the British territory, they had melded themselves into one country.

It was a bilingual country--something that none of us, by the way, ever thought would work but which, strangely enough, has worked. We thought that West Cameroon (that's the ex-British part) was, just as sure as the world, a future Francophone country, that pretty soon English would vanish, because they were so much smaller, and that it would be a lot easier for them to learn French than for the French-speakers to learn English. As it turns out, there is an awful lot of bilingualism in the country. A lot of the French-speakers did learn English. Never thought it would happen, but it's worked.

*Q: What type of government did it have?*

BLANE: Presidential. Well, a president and a parliament. There was at the time an illegal opposition, Communist-dominated, called the Union of Cameroon Peoples, which had some rather inept guerilla fighters out in the bush. They didn't do very much--shoot up a car every now and again, and they were of marginal importance at that. Cameroon then was under the then-president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. A very stable country. A country with which the United States had very good relations. The working climate was superb.

*Q: When you say "the working climate," here you are a political officer, what did you do? Because, you see, these interviews are designed for people who are not overly familiar, often, with the work of the Foreign Service, and so I emphasize.*

BLANE: I did what I suppose all political officers do, I tried to inform myself as to what was going on in Cameroon and tell Washington about it, so that our government could be informed in its policymaking process. A political officer, as I saw it and as I practiced the trade, is pretty much a journalist. You go out and find out what's going on, you meet people, you travel around, you write articles--to a very limited audience.

*Q: What were American interests in Cameroon?*

BLANE: Basically, stability. Nigeria was just getting ready to have its civil war, and we needed a sort of an island of stability in what was a shaky part of the world. The Congo, that is, the former French Congo, had undergone some quite severe political turmoil and was being ruled by a very, very left-leaning government which was hostile to us, leading us (how good is my memory?) to break relations with the Congo in 1965, and we didn't resume relations for nine years. It was a very unsettled time in the area.

*Q: How did we feel about the Soviet, or Communist, threat, and were they the same?*

BLANE: I think those of us who worked in Africa pretty much discounted any Soviet threat. We just didn't see it. I know that you would see references made to it. Some of the right-wing columnists in the United States would from time to time write about the Soviet designs on Black Africa and all of this. But on the ground it was very hard to see any Soviet designs. They didn't do much of anything, and I don't think they ever had serious designs. Obviously they would have been happy to take whatever influence they could, without spending a lot of time and effort on it, or money, but they certainly made no concerted effort, in any place that I've been, to create a power base for themselves.

*Q: Did you see any fertile ground for this type of thing?*

BLANE: Not in Cameroon, no. The Cameroonians are a relatively conservative society. The northern Cameroonians are all Muslim, and Muslims tend not to lend themselves terribly well to that sort of proselytizing. There was no strong radical sentiment at all in the country.

*Q: How about the role of the French there? I mean, they had been the colonial power. At the time, did you feel that we were saying, "Ok, if there's going to be any outside influence, it's going to be mainly the French."?*

BLANE: Certainly, because the French had the money, and still have the money, in Black Africa. We had neither the personnel nor the money to try to compete with the French. We were perfectly happy to let them be the principal European interlocutor with the Africans.

The French didn't always believe this about this time, by the way. The French kept showing very definite signs of paranoia, fearing that we were somehow going to try to supplant them. And nothing could have been further from Washington's mind, believe me! Nobody in this town wanted to supplant the French.

*Q: This was, I would imagine, one of your and the whole embassy's major tasks, to keep the French mollified.*

BLANE: Well, we tried not to frighten them. Don't disturb them, don't disturb them. But basically on the ground, certainly in Cameroon, I don't think the French harbored any illusions about our ambitions. Their bosses in Paris from time to time did. I think we went out of our way, certainly in Africa, and I suspect in Paris and Washington as well, to try to disabuse the French of any notion that we really wanted to get out in front of them anywhere in Africa.

*Q: I think the French, at least in my experiences, tend to see grand designs, as opposed to our seeing practicalities. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. That type of cultural thing is our attitude.*

BLANE: And as far as just managing involvement--in education, in economic development assistance, this sort of thing--to do it, you have to have French-speakers. And we don't have all that many French-speakers. It's very difficult for us to find French-speaking range management specialists and things like that. So, for that reason alone, we were certainly not challenging the French.

*Q: While you were there, were there any real problems that the embassy or you had to deal with?*

BLANE: None at all. None at all. It was a very, very smooth, very smooth time.

*Q: It sounds like a very good posting.*

BLANE: It was a good posting. It was very good. As I say, the government at that time was very accessible. You could get in to see a minister in fifteen minutes. There was just no great protocol or any other difficulties put in our way.

*Q: Your were in Cameroon from 1963 to '66. Did that pretty well confirm you in saying, "Gee, I'm glad I'm an African specialist and want to stay in."?*

BLANE: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was not looking to go anywhere else.

*Q: You came back again, in sort of the traditional upward and onward assignment, as basically a desk officer in AF (AF being the African Bureau). What were you doing there?*

BLANE: I had four and a half little countries. I had Chad, Gabon, Togo, Dahomey, and, for part of the time, Equatorial Guinea. I simply managed the Washington end of the telegraph line between here and there. Looking after the care and feeding of my ambassadors. Making sure that their concerns were brought to the attention of those back here in Washington. That was not always easy. It is very hard to get somebody's attention on Dahomey and that sort of thing. Those were good years. Again, no serious problems.

Well, some serious problems. At least serious at the time. For example, Dahomey had done something (and I don't remember what) to irritate the French. Dahomey is now, by the way, called Benin. It is a very poor country, and they were operating basically on French subventions to run their government. And the French became irritated and cut off the money for about four or five months.

The poor Dahomian Embassy were just in a terrible fix. They didn't have a nickel to operate on, so they went over to Riggs Bank and started borrowing. And for the last couple of months during this fiscal drought, the Riggs people would call me up to ask what I thought the chances were that the French would turn the money back on. I explained to them I couldn't give them any guarantees, but since Dahomey had always been in the French reserve, I was convinced in my heart of hearts that the money line would be reestablished, I couldn't tell them when. Well, ultimately it was, and Riggs got their money.

I also did a lot of care and feeding of African ambassadors at that time, too, because some of them weren't at all experienced in diplomacy or in living outside of Africa.

This was particularly true of the Gabonese ambassador, who was forever getting himself into one scrape or another because he simply didn't know how to cope with life in Washington. At one point I was called by the police, who asked if I would render them assistance in the matter of the Gabonese ambassador and his garbage. And I said yes.

It turned out that the ambassador was simply throwing his garbage out his back door. He lived in a very, very, very nice neighborhood in Washington, and his neighbors were beginning to take some exception to this. Because this garbage mound grew, and it smelled, and it attracted flies and all this sort of thing. The police said that they had sent the health folks over, and they had gone over, but the ambassador didn't speak any English and they had had no luck in getting their message across, would I undertake the job?

So I trotted over to see the ambassador, and I said, "Well, I'm told that you're throwing your garbage out the back door."

"Yeah, yeah, sure, that's what one does with garbage, you throw it out the back door."

I said, "Well, maybe you do in Gabon, but here we have a service, and you put your garbage in a can and twice a week they'll come and carry it away."



"Ah!" A revelation. An absolute revelation.

We got that taken care of, but we had a number of little problems like that.

*Q: Joseph Palmer was the assistant secretary at that time. How did he run the African Bureau, would you say?*

BLANE: Well, how shall I say, in a very collegial fashion. We had staff meetings every day at that time. We would get together and inform him of what was going on in our various countries; he would tell us what was going on in the upper reaches of the State Department; we'd get our marching orders for the day and we'd go off about our business. At these staff meetings, we'd discuss any policy questions that came up. This was a time of lots of visits. We would talk about presidential visits over here, African presidents visiting the United States. But Joe ran a very open shop, he was very informal. He kept quite close touch with everything that was going on.

*Q: How did you feel Africa weighed-in within the State Department at that time?*

BLANE: Those years were the heyday of Africa. Those were the years Lyndon Johnson was president. Now most American presidents have been extremely loath to spend much time on African affairs or African leaders. Mr. Johnson, however, had a very open door. He would receive anybody anytime. During my two and a half years on the desk, I managed five state visits. And my colleagues were doing the same. So President Johnson was an extremely accessible president for our client states. That never existed before; has not existed since.

**LUCIAN HEICHLER**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1965-1968)**

*Lucian Heichler was born in Vienna, Austria in 1925. He emigrated to the United States with his parents in 1940 where he later attended NYU and was naturalized as a US citizen in 1944. He served in the US Army during World War II. He entered the Foreign Service and held positions in Germany, Cameroon, Zaire, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Turkey. Lucian Heichler was interviewed by Susan Klingman in 2000.*

*Q: So after that course, you did go to a Third-World country?*

HEICHLER: Yes, I was sent to Cameroon (see endnote 6).

*Q: And what was your job there?*

HEICHLER: Economic/commercial officer.

*Q: And you said that obviously not too many records were being kept. How big was the embassy, then, because Cameroon could not have been independent for all that long?*

HEICHLER: No, Cameroon got its independence in 1960. The embassy was quite small. There was one economic officer, one political officer, a small AID mission of four or five people, one CIA man, a military attaché assisted by one enlisted man.

*Q: What was he doing? I mean, why CIA in Yaoundé?*

HEICHLER: Watching the Russians.

*Q: Watching the Russians, and were they doing anything?*

HEICHLER: They were watching us.

*Q: They were watching us - okay. And this was at the time, I guess... Well, this would have been following in the wake of Kennedy's wanting an American flag to fly over every country in Africa, so we had an embassy in-*

HEICHLER: Everywhere.

*Q: Everywhere, including Yaoundé. So what did you do for - how many years was that?*

HEICHLER: Two years. As the commercial officer, I tried hard to attract American business and investment, which was next to impossible to do, because the French had it sewn up, completely. Nominal political independence notwithstanding, Cameroon and its francophone neighbors in UDEAC (Union douanière et économique africaine (African customs and economic union), consisting of the former French colonies of Cameroun, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the Central African Republic and Gabon.) formed an integral part of the French economic empire, and behind a mile-high tariff wall it was almost impossible to sell any American product at less than 150 percent of its French price. By and large the only thing the Cameroonians bought from us was Caterpillar earth-moving equipment because they liked it and were willing to pay the tariff-inflated price.

*Q: And what was it like to deal with the Cameroonians?*

HEICHLER: They were rather pleasant. The people I dealt with were de facto black Frenchmen. They had been taken off to France as young men and returned as senior civil servants, more chauvinistically French than the French. It was characteristic of them to bring French wives back with them to Cameroon. Since they'd already had African wives when they were taken from their villages and sent to France, this created problems, especially for the French wives who were obviously not welcome back in the tribal community, nor fully accepted in the "European" community of the capital.

Yaoundé had a diplomatic corps of 13 missions- (end of tape)

*Q: So it sounds like Yaoundé was something of an incestuous place to live, in the sense that the French had the economic interests pretty much tied up, and it was a small mission, but yet was there a U.S. policy as such toward the Cameroon? Were we trying to achieve anything, or we were just flying the flag, essentially?*

HEICHLER: We were just flying the flag.

*Q: Flying the flag. Okay, did you have any opportunity to travel in the country?*

HEICHLER: Yes, fortunately. Our enterprising young political ambassador loved to travel and loved to take staff people with him. We would load up two Land Rovers and off we went for 10 days at a time, trekking through the bush. And that was the most fun we had, because the town was a nothing, and the African bush I rather liked.

*Q: What was interesting about it?*

HEICHLER: The people.

*Q: Did they speak French?*

HEICHLER: No, for the most part they spoke only African languages, but somehow we managed to communicate. From the day that I arrived in Africa, I felt that the cities -- and the bigger the worse -- were the places where the European and African cultures clashed and brought out the absolute worst in each other. My next assignment, Kinshasa, certainly proved that beyond any additional proof, and from what I read, it does so now more than ever. Lagos was equally terrible, as I gathered from a couple of visits to that former Nigerian capital.

*Q: And yet in the countryside you were able more to come in contact with the African culture?*

HEICHLER: Yes, I found the Africans in their natural environment to be nice, generous, hospitable people. It seemed to me that there was no crime; there was no racial hatred; there was none of all the danger, crime, and general unpleasantness you ran into in the cities.

*Q: So you were in Yaoundé until -*

HEICHLER: '68.

**JAMES K. BISHOP JR.**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1968-1970)**

*Ambassador James K. Bishop, Jr. was born in New York in 1938. He received his bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College in 1960. His career has included positions in Auckland, Beirut, Yaounde, and ambassadorships to Nigeria, Liberia,*

*and Somalia. Ambassador Bishop was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1995.*

*Q: That brings us into 1968. You then went from Lebanon to the Cameroon where you remained until 1970.*

BISHOP: Right. I was still trying to get to North Africa, but PER said that at least it could assign me to Africa. I went willingly even though it was not on my list of preferences. My wife hurt herself on our way out; so I left her in a hospital in Paris. I arrived in the Cameroon with three little kids, after going through Lagos which at the time was in the middle of a civil war--the Biafran war. At the Lagos airport, we were all shepherded into an unairconditioned Quonset hut; they closed the doors and started to serve beer in the largest bottles I had ever seen. I bought one. The African women had their hair dressed in a manner which made my little girls look up and say: "That woman has a spider on her head!" I explained to them that it was only a hair-do.

When we arrived in Yaounde, we were warmly received by my colleagues-to-be. I found myself working for an absolutely delightful guy--Ambassador Bob Payton, who had been the Chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis. He just happened to be in the city of Washington working as the public member of an inspection team when someone thought up the idea that one way President Johnson could appease universities' criticisms of his Vietnam policies would be to appoint some members of that community to ambassadorships. So Payton was asked whether he would like to meet the President. On his way to the White House, he was asked whether he would like to go to Africa or Latin America. He chose Africa because he had never been there. After he had passed Presidential scrutiny and was told not to breathe a word of their meeting--which he didn't--he found himself as the President's envoy to the Cameroon. He was a renaissance person with great love for sports, music, literature, languages, travel, photography, etc. I had the good fortune in that small Embassy to be the economic officer first; we soon lost our political officer, so that I took over that portfolio as well. Payton and I traveled all over the country together, stepping sometimes back into the pages of medieval history as we would spend the night with a local chief who would describe the respective roles of his four wives. In one case, with the Sultan of Bamoum, I remember him describing his most recent raid on the Bamileke tribe to the south. He had put 5,000 of his warriors on trucks to carry them south to wipe out every man, woman and child in two villages where some of his border policemen had been killed earlier. When we asked why he had not consulted with the authorities in Yaounde before his raid, he pointed out that the rival tribe had not referred its complaint to Yaounde before killing his border policemen. He thought under the circumstances, it was a matter that he should take care of and did. It was all in cold blood.

This was during a period in which Americans were treated with some suspicion in Africa, in part understandable because of our own racist society and the experiences that some Africans had had in the US. Our image was therefore somewhat suspect and in many respects a negative one. The Peace Corps was active in Cameroon, helping to break down the stereotype image through their person-to-person contacts--a process which continued throughout the period that I served in Africa. Over the course of decades, these efforts resulted in Africans having an image of the US based on their contacts with Peace Corps volunteers who might have taught in their school or who might have worked in a neighboring village. These volunteers became known as decent,

caring human beings; they brought a remarkable change to the African view of the US. At the same time, the French remained suspicious of American intentions in Francophone Africa, particularly in the commercial and academic areas. They made life difficult for American businessmen. For Cameroonians who chose to go to the US for education--they would return to their home country only to be told that an American degree was not the equivalent of a French degree, which, in some cases, may have been true, but certainly not in many others. The young Cameroonians fought to have their American degrees recognized.

Cameroon was a country divided between those who spoke English and those who spoke French as their first foreign language. It was also divided religiously among Christians, Muslims and Animists. It is a country that stretched from rain forests to the Sahara, encompassing all of the cultures of those geographic stratifications. It was absolutely fascinating. There as the physical challenge of living in a difficult climate. Later the Cameroonians became known to Americans as difficult to approach; while we were there, that was not the case. There were very few Americans--we didn't have the huge aid mission that came later; the growth of the American community tended to foster a withdrawal of that community into itself. We were out in the Cameroonian community, fortunate to have tumbled in amongst a number of Cameroonian friends whom we had no difficulty in seeing. We used to kid about having to "beat them off with a broom-stick." We needed to get some rest at night while they wanted to us to join them going to night clubs to party away until 1 a.m. They didn't have to go to work at 7 a.m. as we did! The Cameroonians and the French just wanted to party.

We had different kinds of parties. One of our friends--whose nephew Yanich Noah became quite famous as a world class tennis player--had a mother who made goat's stew--well renowned in Cameroon. Sometime the President of Cameroon would send his driver to pick up some of her stew. So we would go to her house--a cinder block home--and eat there by candlelight because there wasn't any electricity. The stew was accompanied by champagne. Sometimes we would go out there in tuxedos. We would dance after having eaten the goat's stew. On Sundays there would often be lunch parties hosted by a French or a Cameroonian family. We had one fellow--Jean Batayue, a deputy Foreign Minister and then President of the National Investment Society--who was married to a French woman; he was quite wealthy as indicated by the fact that he had his own hunters who would go into the bush to kill some antelopes, porcupines and other game animals. Batayue would host Sunday lunches served at tables set up under trees; we would eat and drink wine and spend the afternoon talking and enjoying the company.

Various sections of the small Embassy had different briefs. The Biafran war was going on and our intelligence people were trying to keep an eye on that--a somewhat difficult task from the Cameroon, particularly from Douala. The Biafran war was not much of a factor for me. The Station Chief, who later became the CIA's Director of Operations, was spending a lot of time in Douala trying to find out what the French were up to--we now know that the French were supporting the Biafran insurgency. Our policy was one of strict neutrality. We did fly relief supplies into Biafra from Fernando Po; that was an effort spearheaded by American non-governmental organizations. The US government did finance some of the relief supplies, but we were not engaged any more actively than that, at least from Cameroon.

We were pushing American business; we had an American Chamber of Commerce in Douala, which was the commercial center of the country. I would often travel from Yaounde to Douala. We had humanitarian interests, which we expressed through the Peace Corps--as I said, the US aid program had not yet begun. We did participate with some assistance to the construction of a railroad system which was financed multilaterally. That eventually transformed the country in many ways. We also protected American missionaries who were working in the Cameroon. One of my tasks was to periodically visit them--they were located in all quadrants--, which gave me an excuse to travel around the country which I did very extensively. We provided some moral support to those Cameroonians who had been educated in the US and who might have been struggling at the local university. Through our cultural programs, we brought American culture to those who were not acquainted with it or those who had been given a slanted or even hostile description of it--usually fashioned by the French who were trying to maintain a neo-colonial relationship with the Cameroonians especially in the eastern part of the country. The British had long before given up that effort in the western part, which was therefore much more receptive to American culture and influence.

As I said, our commercial efforts were targeted on Douala and the eastern part of Cameroon--that was about three-quarters of the country. Americans focused on the petroleum sector--exploration and marketing--, the banking sector and the fishing industry. We had a fishing company from Gloucester which had set up a shrimp fishing operation in Douala. We also had PanAm flying into Douala which needed some periodic attention. We had some American representatives coming through trying to sell agri-business and mining equipment.

Ahmadou Ahidjo had risen to political prominence in the last days of French colonial rule. He was a Muslim from northern Cameroon--from Garoua. He had come to power in a country which was going through a civil war, following independence, with considerable violence centering on the Bamileke tribe in the highlands that straddled the dividing line between East and West Cameroon. The French helped repress that rebellion with napalm and by cutting off the heads of the insurgents, placing them on poles outside of villages and on roads and paths going through the Bamileke territory. That created an environment which lent itself to the establishment of an authoritarian government led by Ahidjo. The political parties had coalesced. Ahidjo had formed an alliance with non-Bamileke elements in western Cameroon, appealing to them in the grounds that they would be better off as a minority group in the Cameroon rather than being subjected to Ibo domination if they had become part of Nigeria. Because Cameroon had been a UN Trusteeship, the independence process included some plebiscites in western Cameroon; they had the choice of joining Cameroon or Nigeria. Ahidjo had made an alliance with the majority of the people--Christian and Animists--in western Cameroon; they chose the Cameroon, although a part of northern Cameroon joined Nigeria.

Ahidjo ran an authoritarian government as president. He selected as Vice President a man named Salumun Musa from the western part of the country. The key positions in the security apparatus were held by northerners or, as in the case of the police, by a Frenchman who had been seconded to assist the Cameroonian authorities. The northerners were Fulanis rather than Hausa--the dominant ethnic group in neighboring northern Nigeria. The Ambassador undertook to learn Fulani--never became very proficient--although he worked on it quite diligently--, but spoke it well enough to flatter Ahidjo, who was impressed by the Ambassador's knowledge of their

common language. One time he called on Ahidjo--the Ambassador was then trying to learn Ewondo (the language of the tribe around Yaounde). So he greeted Ahidjo in Ewondo--which the President spoke to some extent-- that brought a suggestion from Ahidjo that the Ambassador was doing well enough in Falani and should stick to that!

The French had not yet pulled out Cameroon when I was there. In fact, the French influence was as great, if not greater than it had ever been in the colonial period. Their presence was first of all in the commercial area; secondly at the University; then there were some technical advisors at the Foreign Ministry--strictly technical; there were French military officers assigned throughout the Cameroonian Army and the Gendarmerie--they were a significant force; there were French in the security forces. As a matter of fact, the most important person in the security forces was Focheve--a Frenchman running the secret police. The judicial police's lock-up was about 100 feet away from the Chancery. If one worked late at night, one could at times hear people screaming. But in those days we were not as concerned with human rights as we became later. The police methods used by the Cameroonian police while I was there and for years subsequently were quite brutal.

The government tried to keep us away from their military because it didn't want diplomats having anything to do with military matters. They were concerned more about the Soviets than us. The Soviets had a good size Embassy in Yaounde. But we had an ingenious Defense Attaché--Colonel Grout. He told the Cameroonian gendarmes that if he wasn't welcomed at their bases, he was a pilot and would join the flying club in Yaounde. He volunteered to fly any gendarme who might be wounded or seriously hurt; all the gendarmes commandants had to do was to call him. Over time, this ploy worked very well and he built up a good relationship with the Cameroonian gendarmerie and the military in general. He would be called by officers who needed a lift to some remote area--traveling overland in Cameroon was very difficult and they didn't have any planes. By using Grout's offer, they could save days if not weeks of travel time.

At the University, we met French resistance at our efforts at cultural penetration. The Foreign Ministry tended to be very formal--a Cameroonian cultural characteristic that still governs today stemming from an interplay of French and local influences. The Cameroonians were very French because it had been a trusteeship and before that a League of Nation's mandate. The eyes of the world had been on the quality of government; that induced the French and the British to go to considerable extent to show that they were doing a good job. The Germans, who had been there before, had been barely attentive to education; the French and the British tried to reverse that to the extent that in post-war France, the student organizations were in fact dominated by Cameroonian students. At the senior and mid-management levels of the bureaucracy, almost all of the officials had been French educated. A few had had British education, but for the most, the officials had been educated in France. So three piece suits were the dress code. The method of interacting with us was quite formal, often ranging from touchy to resentful of our cultural approach to getting business done as quickly as possible with as little formality as possible. But this general tendency was often muted by personal relationships. The Chief of Protocol--Jean Claude Hapi-Tina--could be an absolute s.o.b. when we were trying to deal with him on an official level, but he would spend his evening hours dancing and partying with us. Then we had an opportunity to convince him to do something that he had refused to do in his office or that he would refuse to do if he were presented with the proposition in a formal manner.

The US government was a major party to an effort to eradicate small-pox--an effort that eventually proved to be successful in Africa. It was called the "measles-small pox" program because measles in fact killed more children than small pox. We distributed vaccines--and trucks to get them around the country--to the Cameroonians; we had some people from the Center for Communicable Diseases assigned to Cameroon to supervise the effort.

Payton's successor, Lou Hoffacker--a career Foreign Service officer who was also a great guy--one of the Americans involved in the distribution of the vaccines, and I drove three trucks from Yaounde through the rain forest to Equatorial Guinea--we may have been the first American diplomats in some parts of Rio Muni. We were there at a fascinating time. The Spanish, who had ruled Equatorial Guinea with an iron hand, disengaged precipitously, when following independence, there was a fracas in Fernando Po which led to a couple of Spaniards being killed. Then the entire Spanish community left six weeks before we entered from Cameroon into Rio Muni--a town called Ebebiyin. The discipline of Franco Spain had left such an imprint that none of the houses had been vandalized--the doors were still closed. The Guineans had not entered them. As we drove all across Rio Muni to Bata, we noticed that all the African huts were set back an equal distance from the road, the bare land in front of them was swept clean, etc. It was remarkable how well the Spanish discipline had been absorbed. From Bata we flew to Fernando Po and spent some time there, where the Ambassador dealt with the ministries. Our Ambassador in Cameroon was formally accredited to Equatorial Guinea, but I wasn't. I did however make one other trip to Equatorial Guinea besides the one I have just mentioned; then I discussed commercial matters with our Embassy in Fernando Po.

In Cameroon there were a few--very few--women in mid level positions in the government. The government was Muslim dominated; there weren't that many well educated women even in the non-Muslim sectors of society. There were some lady journalists with whom we had good relations. There may have been a jurist or two, but in general women did not play a significant role in the public sector. They were very active in commerce at the market level; some of them became quite successful. They were also well represented in the health and education sectors. The one political party had a women's auxiliary, which didn't have much influence. There was a national women's organization, but it also lacked clout.

The Cameroon's position in the UN was not much of a factor in the 1960s, in part because the General Assembly did not become obstreperous until later. The Security Council had not been enlarged, so that representation from non-permanent members was still very small. So we did not have many conversations with Cameroon on UN issues.

I mentioned that the Soviets had a large mission in Yaounde. They kept an eye on us. They tried to infiltrate Cameroonian society--pretty ineffectively. I became pretty well acquainted with a couple of Soviet diplomats. I arrived just after the invasion of Czechoslovakia; so we were under restraint in our contacts with the Soviets. "Restraint" meant that I was the senior American official who went to the Soviet Embassy for social affairs. The Soviets diplomats were assigned to Cameroon for long tours. One of my Soviet acquaintances told me that he would go the banks of the Sanaga River; there he would take off his shirt in the hopes that he would be bitten by a fly that carried a parasite that might make him sick enough to warrant a medical evacuation home--



just to escape Cameroon. When I returned to Cameroon several years later, I found that the same Soviet Ambassador was there. As he said to me that he was still there; his facial expression suggested that he would much prefer to be anywhere else. The Soviets targeted the trade union movement, journalists, students, but I don't think their efforts had enough successes to warrant the large expenditures of resources they were devoting to Cameroon. The government viewed the Soviets with extreme suspicion. The insurgency that had accompanied its independence had Marxists intellectual origins; it had received some assistance from Nkrumah and other Soviet surrogates in Africa. The Cameroonians had accepted a Soviet helicopter that flew every once in a while, but I think in general the government was doing its best to keep the Soviets at arm's length.

In general, my tour in Cameroon was pretty uneventful. We were visited by Secretary of State Rogers; that was our major challenge during my two years there. He was on a general mission to Africa and Cameroon fell in his flight path. He came up to Yaounde to talk to the Cameroonians, mostly about trade. It was not of great significance.

*Q: In 1970, you left Cameroon and returned to the US. What was your assignment?*

BISHOP: As you said, I came back to the US. I got divorced; I had three kids to raise on the weekend--that is I spent as much with them as possible. I accepted a job offer to be a desk officer on the Office of Central African Affairs, where my responsibilities were Chad, Gabon, Mauritius and Madagascar--a cluster united by French language and little else. The diversity was a delight to me; it gave me an opportunity to learn something about countries whose history and culture were quite different. It gave me an opportunity to begin to understand more about the State Department and the Washington bureaucracy. I actually stayed in Washington for the next nine years. The Department was quite tolerant in allowing me to remain in Washington for that much time. It allowed me to raise my kids well into their adolescent years; I felt more comfortable serving overseas at that period of their lives.

The work on the desk allowed me to travel extensively to Africa. I later became the desk officer for Ghana and Togo; then I was promoted to the job of Deputy Director of the Office of West Africa. That was followed by a year in the Senior Seminar which was followed by an assignment as Director of the Office of North African Affairs. In 1979, I left Washington to be our Ambassador to Niger.

Let me talk a little about the first assignment, which lasted for two years until 1972. In that period, we had to deal with an insurgency in Chad with which I became much more familiar later on. I had visited Chad twice while in Cameroon; I spent a month traveling in the North of Cameroon in each of two successive years.

In Gabon, our principal interest was market penetration. Gabon was one of West Africa's richer countries. The President, Omar Bongo, had an ambivalent attitude toward the French. He was heavily dependent on them and at the same time embarrassed by that dependence. He wanted greater American presence as a partial off-set.

In Madagascar, we had a political appointee as Ambassador, Tony Marshall. He tried to mount a commercial assault on the local French establishment. He was framed for alleged participation in a coup attempt. He and much of the Embassy were declared *persona non grata*. So I wound up spending three weeks relieving the Charge', who was believed to be showing signs of stress. In fact, he was so stressed that he wouldn't leave and relinquish his post. That enabled me to travel around the country--much more than I could have under normal circumstances.

In Mauritius, we were in the process of establishing our military facilities in Diego Garcia. We had some unresolved issues of sovereignty and territoriality with the Mauritians, who claimed jurisdiction over an area that included Diego Garcia. We also had some commercial interests. Mauritius exported sugar to the US under preferential terms; they therefore had a great interest in maintaining and possibly extending their quota. They were also beginning to develop a textile industry, which was exporting some of its production to the US. But in this case, Mauritius, as every other producer, faced quota limitations and they were busy fighting to keep what they had.

So for countries I covered, we had a pretty broad spectrum of US interests at a time when the US administration was not particularly concerned about Africa. In addition to other issues that Nixon and Kissinger had to face--Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union, disarmament--they both had also had very disparaging views of Africa. Nixon told one of our ambassadors--with whom I was working when he made his farewell call on the President at the White House--that Africans were a bunch of children and should be treated as such. Those were the ambassador's marching orders. Kissinger went to Africa once during my period in Washington--when I was the Deputy Office Director for West Africa. Bill Schauffele was the Assistant Secretary at the time; he looked over the manifest for Kissinger's plane and realized that he was the only African expert aboard. He asked whether he could bring an assistant along to help him. I was marched up to Kissinger's office and inspected--as a slave might have been inspected 200 years earlier on a block in Annapolis. He looked at me as if I were a piece of rancid meat. During the inspection, Kissinger went out of the room to take a telephone call from the President. Winston Lord, who remained with Schauffele and I, was kind enough to tell me not to be offended because Kissinger treated all of his staff the same way. The bottom line was that I didn't go on the plane; Schauffele went by himself.

When I reported to the Bureau for African Affairs, I found a very good *esprit de corps*. David Newsom was the Assistant Secretary. When I was stationed in Africa he came to visit us. As Assistant Secretary, he was accessible to even low ranking desk officers. He took a serious interest in us as fellow professionals and as human beings. There was a camaraderie among officers who served in Africa--including those older ones that had pioneered service in Africa--and we younger officers who had enjoyed our African tours. We had volunteered for assignments to the Bureau; none of us had been conscripted. That made for a very nice ambience. There was a feeling, as the Nixon era moved along, that Africa was getting short shrift in terms of our assistance, particularly when American disillusion followed the Congo crisis. Both we and the Soviets had pulled back from our earlier competitive postures. Our assistance was limited to ten "concentration" countries on the continent. As we moved into the 1970s, the great Sahel drought hit and we came to recognize that our humanitarian interests were ill served by such a modest AID presence. We then expanded our humanitarian interests and activities throughout most the African countries. Newsom was succeeded by Don Easum; Kissinger used to call him a

"missionary" in an unflattering manner because Easum insisted on bringing to Kissinger humanitarian issues which were of little interest to the Secretary. Easum had a short tour as Assistant Secretary; he was sent to Nigeria as our ambassador.

Don was followed by Nat Davis; he had profound differences with Kissinger over Angola policy. Nat was gone before he had served even a year. Kissinger worked with Ed Mulcahy, who was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary; Ed was prepared to do Kissinger's bidding on Angola which meant providing support to one of the parties involved in a very bloody civil conflict. Davis was succeeded by Bill Schaefe.

**LEWIS HOFFACKER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cameroon (1969-1972)**

*Ambassador Lewis Hoffacker was born in Pennsylvania in 1923. He received his bachelor's degree from George Washington University in 1948 and then his master's degree from Fletcher's School of Law and Diplomacy in 1949. He then served in the US Army from 1943-1946. His career has included positions in Teheran, Istanbul, Paris, Algiers, and Leopoldville and ambassadorships to both Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Ambassador Hoffacker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 17, 1998.*

Q: *Then you got this assignment in '69.*

HOFFACKER: From '69 to '72, in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, jointly.

Q: *Did you have any problem getting confirmed on this?*

HOFFACKER: No.

Q: *Nobody was interested, eh?*

HOFFACKER: You had to show them where it was on the map. No, it was a breeze.

Q: *Normally we have this policy of recognizing every state and having a separate ambassador. How come you have two posts, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.*

HOFFACKER: Equatorial Guinea accepted that. Some countries wouldn't like it. And we weren't the only one which had one ambassador serving two or three countries down there. Resident Western ambassadors at the time I was in Equatorial Guinea were French and Spanish, who had important roles to play, and then the commies, who had big Soviet, Chinese, East German, and North Korean embassies there, and they had big resident staffs and mischief.

Q: *What did they do?*

HOFFACKER: Intrigue.

Q: *What?*

HOFFACKER: *Intrigue*--you know, intrigue.

Q: *I would think they'd be intriguing against each other almost.*

HOFFACKER: They wanted to defame us, of course, give false information about us. That takes a certain amount of time. They had little programs. They'd put in a road or two or fishing boats. But their goals were primarily political. They wanted to get a foothold there. I had a problem with Washington. Washington was always wanting to close down the embassy. But I said, no, there are too many commies over here. They've got to be watched. And we had no CIA. Normally the CIA would watch them, but no, they were scared of the place. As it turned out, our embassy was closed because of this Erdos case. When Chargé Erdos murdered his assistant, Donald Leahy, I went over and did my business and so I didn't have anybody on the ground. My successor did the same. But then the next ambassador, Herbert Spiro, came over there and he was declared *persona non grata* for no reason. And so we suspended relations with them. We didn't have any relations.

Q: *Good.*

HOFFACKER: Where do you want to start? They're two different kettles of fish.

Q: *Why don't we talk about the Cameroon first?*

HOFFACKER: That's a pleasure.

Q: *Could you give me a little background about it? What's the situation from '69 to '72?*

HOFFACKER: We had good relations with Cameroon from the time of independence, until recently - not at the present time, but until recently. We supported the idea of independence as the British and French were withdrawing from their trusteeships. We were generous with aid programs and so forth. The president, Ahidjo, with whom I had very good relations, said to me, when the French used to complain to him about the American activities there, "But I want *diversification*," which meant that he wanted something besides the French, who regarded Algeria as their *chasse gardée*. They thought it was their territory. But he said, no, we want you also in these various areas, including oil. So we did increasingly well economically. When I became consultant with Shell Oil Company, we as a company did move in there, worked with a French company, found oil, and produced oil, and that was fine. The Cameroonese are good people, and their government liked us as a government, and so it was just fine. We did a lot of good things. We had a modest AID program.

Q: *Peace Corps?*

HOFFACKER: We had an excellent Peace Corps. We had a good USIA. We had a consulate in Douala, which was useful. We had the AID headquarters for the whole of Central Africa there. It was a good place to work, and relations were easy.

Q: *No great crises in the government?*

HOFFACKER: After I left, not while I was there. Later on things happened, but we don't have to go into them.

Q: *No, we might as well just stick to -*

HOFFACKER: —stick to that period. It was sweetness and light.

Q: *Did you travel around?*

HOFFACKER: All the time, anywhere, anytime, and I could talk to anybody. I had great pleasure there.

Q: *How did you get along with the French?*

HOFFACKER: The way I always did. I wanted to be friendly. Most of them wished we hadn't been there. But we weren't there for the French; we were there responding to the Cameroonians, who were pleased to have us there. That's the way we played it. I got on with the French if I had to. I refer once again to that Shell Oil collaboration with Elf, the French oil company, that brought in the first oil. There is something to be said for that: if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Q: *The ruler was who now?*

HOFFACKER: Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Q: *He was there for how long?*

HOFFACKER: From the beginning - whenever that was, the time of independence, and after I left - let's see, how many years later, I'm trying to think? - he was induced to leave by the prime minister in the belief that he was not well. So he left, and then he became well again and he wanted to come back and he intrigued with some military who did not succeed in bringing him back. He was convicted, given the death sentence *in absentia*. He died overseas.

Q: *I assume UN votes came up all the time. How did that work?*

HOFFACKER: In Cameroon? They were usually pretty good. We had problems of course in Algeria. They usually voted against us. We had no aid program. In Cameroon I don't recall any problem. I used to go in and talk to them about certain UN issues. We did bicker over things like North and South Korea, China and Taiwan, but I made my representations and they did what they wanted to do. It didn't affect relations appreciably. President Ahidjo came to see virtually American president during his tenure. It confirmed our relationship.

*Q: Were there any problems with the Central African Republic, Chad or Nigeria?*

HOFFACKER: Always with Nigeria - border problems. Some of the boundaries are still not confirmed; there's oil on the maritime boundary.

*Q: Did we ever get involved in those?*

HOFFACKER: No, we just watched them.

*Q: How about in the Cameroon? Was there much communist representation? You were talking about Equatorial Guinea.*

HOFFACKER: They didn't like communism. They allowed a Soviet embassy; they allowed a Chinese embassy. Both Koreas were there. I don't know how that worked out. It's unusual to have both Koreas. But we didn't have Taiwan and China. They finally asked Taiwan to leave. It wasn't a major problem. The Cameroonians didn't like communists, and so they watched them. I had to go to Ahidjo on one occasion because we didn't have marines, and it was a big nuisance to have to sleep in the embassy to watch the embassy. We on the embassy staff had to do that. I went to him one day and I said, "We're not afraid of you the Cameroonians, but we know that the communists would like to bug us, and we can't have that. I'd like to have five marines." He said, "Fine." That's the sort of relationship we had, matter of fact. Not contentious.

*Q: How did the Peace Corps get along?*

HOFFACKER: They were great. Everybody liked them. They did good things. I was always glad to visit them or have them visit me.

*Q: Was there much in the way of trade promotion?*

HOFFACKER: We tried. Not much was accomplished. The oil companies took care of themselves. They knew where the oil was, and they came and handled it in their own way.

*Q: I suppose most trade was with the French.*

HOFFACKER: Yes. The French had it sewed it up.

**JOHN E. GRAVES**  
**Public Affairs Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1970-1973)**

*John E Graves was born in 1927 in Michigan. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degree from the University of Michigan, and served in the US Navy overseas from 1945 to 1946. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1962, he was*

*assigned to Leopoldville, Bukavu, Antananarivo, Rach Gia, Lomé, Yaoundé, Tehran, Montevideo, Sidi Bou Said, and Rabat. Mr. Graves was interviewed by Richard Jackson on January 12, 1999.*

*Q: Before we leave Togo for Yaoundé, is there anything we haven't touched on and should?*

GRAVES: The Togolese were always seen by the French as the most able Africans and were used as functionaries throughout black Africa. My experience in Togo confirmed the French evaluation. I had never seen black Africans that were so enterprising and clever. I was tempted to cable Washington: Don't assign any dumb Americans to Lomé because the Togolese will run circles around them and make off with the kitchen sink.

*Q: So, that was a direct transfer to Yaoundé?*

GRAVES: As I recall, yes.

*Q: What was the situation there? Cameroon had a split British and French colonial history and languages.*

GRAVES: Like Togo. All of the Cameroon was German in the colonial period. But the part that, after World War I, went to France was much larger than the part that went to the British. Americans tend to exaggerate the role of the Anglophone part of Cameroon.

*Q: So, you were there with Ambassador Lew Hoffacker.*

GRAVES: Right. I knew him well because we worked together in the Congo. By the way, our ambassador resident in Yaoundé was also ambassador to Equatorial Guinea.

*Q: Before we come to the Equatorial Guinea episode, let's talk a little bit about the Cameroon tour, how you found it, how it differed from Togo, what the problems were, what the embassy's interests and scope were.*

GRAVES: First, it was a much bigger country and a much bigger American operation. Secondly, the ethnic differences were more striking, the north being Muslim. President Ahidjo was from the North and Muslim. The French, when the colonial period moved into independence, usually worked it out so that the new leader was from a minority group and therefore needed French support. Ahidjo I found charming and reasonable. I sometimes went with Hoffacker to talk with him. But I knew Paul Biya, his private secretary, better because we played tennis together. (For me, tennis was a good source of contacts; I often played with Zack Noah who became a good friend while his son Yannick played with one of my sons who also became a tennis professional.) Biya eventually took over as President when Ahidjo was out of the country and supposedly dying. A victim of skullduggery. When he discovered he wasn't dying, he tried to come back. I think ever since then it's been downhill for Cameroon, which from an economic standpoint had good possibilities. It didn't have the huge amounts of oil which destroyed incentive and productive enterprise in Algeria and Nigeria. In the case of Cameroon, oil came late and gradually so the Cameroonians continued with their other economic activities, including agriculture. When I was there, it was upbeat in the sense that people had the impression that

things were getting better. The important thing for human beings is to have the impression that things are getting better, not worse.

*Q: We had a fairly substantial AID involvement. It was a large country.*

GRAVES: Yes, but it wasn't a huge AID program. The country was doing quite well. We also had business interests. I especially remember one that Hoffacker had to treat with Ahidjo. Africans tend to take on grueling jobs for a specific reason like acquiring a bike. When they have enough money, they disappear, often claiming illness or a death in the family. American bosses do not take kindly to this lack of reliability. But, under the French labor laws adopted by Cameroon, workers cannot just be fired. The procedures and indemnities are burdensome. The Cameroonians rightly claimed the pineapple plantation was violating the law. We had our problems, but by and large, it was a pleasant three years.

*Q: Was USIA in a post like that in those years commercially oriented in its outreach? Were you conscious of that as a theme?*

GRAVES: No, not much. It was still lip service. The name of the game was anti-Communism, which was an error. We should have been more supportive of American business.

*Q: The thrust continued to be anti-Communism.*

GRAVES: Right. This was 1970-1973. What really mattered was anti-Communism.

*Q: Other than the Equatorial Guinea episode, which we'll shortly come to, were there any other highlights of that tour or things you want to put on the record?*

GRAVES: There was a funny episode with Ambassador Moore, who succeeded Hoffacker. Moore was an experienced career officer and a first-rate human being. Like any good ambassador, he wanted to know his country, not just the capital, but also the hinterland. We had a military attaché and a military aircraft, a C-47 at the disposal of the ambassador. The pilot was a jet-jockey ace who didn't understand propeller aircraft. He used to practice landings in Yaoundé. Lannon Walker, the DCM, and I would make bets about how many times it would bounce before he got it to stay on the runway. The ambassador decided he wanted to visit eastern Cameroon, which is mountainous and prosperous. It's the land of a powerful and enterprising tribe, the Bamileke. The air strip was a flattened off mountain. So, you had to hit it early and judge the angle right. The pilot rightly flew over it a couple of times to study the terrain. I had pilot training in the Navy at the end of World War II and had piloted light aircraft in Vietnam. I remember thinking, "You're crazy to be flying with this guy. He'll never land on that." Sure enough, when he hit the strip, the plane bounced. You have really two choices when that happens. If you think you've got enough airspeed, you can gun it. But if you don't have enough airspeed, the plane doesn't fly. It just drops. So if you think you don't have enough airspeed, you put the nose down and you make a bad landing. That's what our pilot decided to do. But he hit the strip at a slight angle and one of the propellers dug into the ground and the motor was torn out of its moorings. Something went by our window. I knew what it had to be. Ambassador Moore, who was a prince, said, "Well, John, we're down safe and sound." I said, "Sir, we are down but not



sound. This aircraft isn't going to fly again. I think I saw a motor go by and we're lucky it didn't come through the aircraft. I still have a photo of the ambassador examining the gaping hole where the motor had been mounted.

*Q: This is the second crash you've described in your Foreign Service career.*

GRAVES: I was in several others.

*Q: It must be an unusual landscape which in later years had a mysterious episode with hundreds of unexplained deaths from natural gases.*

GRAVES: In Anglophone Cameroon there were mysterious deaths. No one knew for sure what was causing these deaths. But there was speculation that there was deadly gas coming off a lake.

*Q: John, I'm sure that one of the focal episodes of your Cameroon tour was the killing in Equatorial Guinea of the second officer in the embassy there by the chargé that I know you were very involved in. What was the lead-up to that? Had you visited Equatorial Guinea before or did you have any responsibility for that country?*

GRAVES: No, I had never been to Equatorial Guinea. When we got the first hint that something was amiss in Santa Isabel (now Malabo), Ambassador Hoffacker was on leave in the United States. Lannon Walker was the chargé in Yaoundé but he had never visited Equatorial Guinea either.

*Q: This is an episode that Ambassador Hoffacker has in his oral history laid out in great detail. Just briefly for readers of this, what happened and then how did you hear about it and get involved?*

GRAVES: Lannon Walker asked me to come up to his office to listen to the tape of a radio message sent out by Al Erdos, our chargé d'affaires in Equatorial Guinea. Hoffacker was our accredited ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, which is a very small country.

*Q: In the normal course of things, he probably visited every couple of months.*

GRAVES: Right. Not much more than that. We first learned there was a crisis in Santa Isabel by listening to the message sent by Erdos via single sideband (the horn, as we called it). Owing to kinky atmospherics, it was picked up and recorded in Accra, Ghana, but not heard in our consulate in Douala, which is only a few kilometers from Santa Isabel. The island of Fernando Poo where Santa Isabel, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, is located is just off the coast of Cameroon. So we got a copy of this message, which was pretty broken up and full of static. Lannon called me. But it was hard to get serious because we were close friends used to trading merry insults and the message appeared to be a hoax. He began by asking, "You know everything that's going on in Africa so what do you make of this?" I listened to the tape and allowed as how I didn't make anything out of it at all. "Who the hell is talking?" We listened to it again. Lannon finally said, "I've already listened to it five times and this is what I think Erdos is saying: The chancery in Santa Isabel is surrounded by Communists and I'm holed up in the

strong room with Leahy." That was about all we could make out for sure. There was also something more about Don Leahy, but it wasn't clear what the problem was between them. Lannon finally admitted, "I got in touch with Len Shurtleff (our consul in Douala) and he's on his way over there, but he may need help. I've laid on Hans' plane. We're going to Santa Isabel!" "We?" I groaned., "I'm not accredited to Equatorial Guinea and I don't speak Spanish." "Stop moaning, I took Spanish in high school. We're going to Equatorial Guinea."

We tried to get into Santa Isabel but it was closed down for the night. Trucks on the runway. Hans, a guy we knew well, a French commercial pilot who had a heavy Alsatian accent, knew the island. If he couldn't get in, no one could. So we had to wait until the next day.

*Q: Shurtleff had already gotten in?*

GRAVES: Right. But before we took off for Santa Isabel, Shurtleff reported on the horn that he was in the chancery and Leahy was dead. The Equatorial Guineans, the police and army, were threatening to search the chancery and he was going to have to clear out because the Guineans claimed he wasn't accredited and had no right to be in the chancery.

*Q: Shurtleff went first to the residence?*

GRAVES: Lannon and I had a tough time getting past airport formalities and into town. After each rebuke, I ribbed Lannon: "Lordy, your Spanish must be even worse than I figured." The taxi driver at the airport wouldn't have anything to do with us so we had to walk until we finally got a ride with an Uruguayan UN technician who spoke good French. He informed us that the local radio was reporting there was a American plot against Equatorial Guinea. He didn't want to take us to the residence because it was opposite the police station. In the streets no one would talk to us so we had trouble finding the residence. Santa Isabel was paranoid. We even had trouble getting Len to let us in to the residence. He was pretty upset.

After Shurtleff calmed down, he managed to tell us that on landing he had first gone to the residence and then to the chancery with Mrs. Erdos, her little son, and Mrs. Leahy. The place was surrounded by the police and a big crowd. Erdos allowed his wife and child to enter but not Len. He told Shurtleff through the locked door that he had done something terrible and Leahy was dead. The Nigerian ambassador, dean of the diplomats, finally talked Erdos into coming out with his family to take refuge in the Nigerian residence. Shurtleff pushed his way into the chancery, saw Leahy's body and all the blood near the entrance. He bolted for the vault. With the Guineans banging on the door, he managed to get Douala on the horn and report on the situation before he had to clear out.

*Q: Shurtleff was the consul in Douala and was a young junior officer?*

GRAVES: I don't think Len had ever seen a dead body before. He was in a state when we found him at the residence and we were in a mess. No way to communicate since you had to set up your call with the authorities if you wanted to phone outside Santa Isabel. We didn't even have a car. The ambassador's car was sitting out in front of the chancery and we had the keys for it, but the guards wouldn't let us touch the car or go into the chancery.

The next morning Lannon, the soul of innocence, accosted me with "I've got a great idea, John." "Stop right there! I'm not listening. Every time you have a great idea I end up...." "No, no, you'll love this one. We'll sidle over to the chancery and I'll chat up the guard and block his view of Black Beauty. You slip behind the wheel and take off with the car. "I got a better idea. I'll talk to the guard and you get behind the wheel." "No, no, I speak Spanish. I do the talking" So over we walked to the chancery, arguing all the way. When Lannon was in position he called in English, "Okay, take off, John!" At that point, Lannon's back was to me and the car. He couldn't see there was a gun barrel on my temple and I was trying to ease out of the car with my hands up. "Stop yakking in the wind" I called back, "and come over here and charm the guy with the gun." He turned around, saw the gun, and trotted over to palaver with my new-found buddy, who finally let us leave the premises. No car.

*Q: By this time, you had made contact with Erdos himself in the residence?*

GRAVES: Yes, but remember he and his family were at the Nigerian Ambassador's residence. A fine gentleman who took a lot of time and trouble with a surly Erdos and ran considerable risk for us. Our first problem was to find some kind of transportation and then make contact with our diplomatic colleagues, especially the French, since I happened to know they had a Japanese single sideband that was much better than our American-made horn, which anyway wasn't accessible to us because it was in the chancery. But they had to be careful about transmitting because all means of communicating beyond Santa Isabel without monitoring by the Guineans was illegal. For want of a better means, I finally set off walking, using only French to ask directions to the French embassy every time I encountered a likely looking pedestrian. It was slow work but I finally got to the French chancery. The ambassador wasn't there but the vice-consul was sympathetic and agreed to transmit a message to Yaoundé.

*Q: They relayed it then to the embassy, who relayed it to the Department.*

GRAVES: Right. They were very helpful during our long ordeal.

*Q: By then, Washington knows. David Newsom, the Assistant Secretary for Africa, knows that the charge has killed somebody in the embassy.*

GRAVES: We didn't really know for sure what had happened. We had to be careful about what we reported. We knew that Leahy was dead and that Erdos seemed to have gone off the deep end. There are a lot of aspects that never came out in the trial where I was a witness. For example, Lannon was napping when we got a phone call, which for once wasn't some guy spouting Spanish, which we of course couldn't understand. The voice said in plain American English, "This is the Secretary." (It seems the Department had a way of automatically dialing and repeating to finally get through, but the connection could be cut off at any moment.) I was tired and impatient so I demanded, "The secretary of what?"

*Q: Was it Cy Vance?*

GRAVES: No, the voice said, "this is the Secretary of State." It was Rogers. I stammered, "Yes sir, I'm listening." "Lannon Walker?" he asked. "No sir, John Graves." Then he articulated very carefully, "John, the one thing we don't want to happen out there is an autopsy, don't let anyone touch Leahy's body. Keep it under American surveillance all...." The line went dead. So I waked Lannon and told him I had just had a nice chat with Secretary Rogers. When he finally understood I wasn't just pulling his leg, Lannon was a bit peeved. He kept groaning, "Why didn't you tell me Rogers was on the phone?"

In any case, Washington's obsession with Leahy's body never surfaced at the trial. The Department succeeded in more or less obscuring the fact that the body had been in the hands of the Guineans. But truth be told, we had no idea what was happening to the body during the days it lay rotting in the chancery. When Lannon and I finally flew the body to Douala in Hans' plane, it was in a sealed casket, but we had to go higher than normal because of a storm and the casket blew its seals and smelled to high heaven. Like all tropical zone people, the Cameroonians don't take kindly to letting corpses lie around in the heat. They wanted to burn it on the spot. Lannon managed to get a few hours grace and cabled Washington. A B-52 dropped out of the sky and landed in Douala. (Imagine what it cost Washington, the wheedling and the IOUs, to get the Cameroonians and their French advisors to agree to letting a nuclear-armed B-52 land in Douala.)

Lannon, operator that he is, went with the body to Washington, and I went back to Equatorial Guinea alone. But I kept wondering, why take all this trouble to transport Leahy's body to the U.S.? Then there was the CIA station chief in Yaoundé who turned up at the airport when we were getting ready to fly into Santa Isabel the first time. Lots of questions, especially about Leahy. I remember telling him, "This is a great opportunity for you. Equatorial Guinea is full of North Koreans, Russians, Chinese. You can take my place and make some great contacts. Meantime, I'll just mosey over to Buea and inspect our post while you're vacationing with the Commies (We had a USIS branch post in English-speaking Cameroon.). Walker intervened to insist the Guineans knew who our colleague was and would never let him in. Out of luck. Still I wondered why our CIA station chief was so interested in Leahy.

*Q: So, you went back?*

GRAVES: Right.

*Q: What was your mission going back?*

GRAVES: Presence. Hold the fort until Walker managed to phone from the Department with more info or until Ambassador Hoffacker arrived. But shortly after my return, I learned from the French consul that the whole Guinean government and the diplomatic corps were invited to gather in front of our chancery to discuss the merits of invading and searching the embassy. That scared me. Bad enough that they would find our illegal radio and tear gas. Much worse if they broke into the vault and opened the safe to read our classified cables. Macias was paranoid and those telegrams would be enough to get me killed and the whole place burned down.

*Q: So, it was that kind of a cleanup rather than by then getting Erdos out of there?*

GRAVES: We had managed to get Erdos along with his wife and child to Douala in Hans' plane before carting the body out. They stayed overnight at Shurtleff's house under the auspices of our security officer and then went on, escorted by American marshals, to the U.S. There was a big problem with jurisdiction. Eventually, Erdos was tried in Alexandria, Virginia.

**MICHAEL P.E. HOYT**  
**Consul**  
**Douala (1970)**

*Michael P.E. Hoyt was born in Illinois on November 16, 1929. He received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from the University of Chicago and served in the U.S. Air Force overseas. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956. Mr. Hoyt's career included positions in Karachi, Casablanca, Leopoldville, Stanleyville, Douala, Bujumbura, Ibadan, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Ray Sadler on January 30, 1995.*

HOYT: When I reached the end of my tour there, I sought and was appointed as consul, principal officer, of our consulate in Douala, Cameroon. We don't have too many consulates in Africa. The main reason we have one there is that Douala is the air hub for that part of Africa. Our classified courier operation required a secure place for their bags. We met the couriers and stored their pouches in the consulate vault.

Anyway, it was a delightful place. My jurisdiction included what had been West Cameroon, an English-speaking area, plus the southern French-speaking area. A fascinating country. It was a place, though, where I learned that the consul in our system has a really tough type getting the attention of the capital. It is like the beltway mentality. In at a senator's local office, I find that our main task is getting the attention of the Washington office. That's what we have in the consulate. We knew the conditions, we knew local conditions. In particular I remember an incident where we had a very successful Peace Corps operation going on in West Cameroon, that is, the English-speaking area. But in the capital, the French embassy people were working very much against the Peace Corps. They were not in favor of a non-French operation being successful. They had, in fact, persuaded the Peace Corps director in Yaounde, the capital, that the Peace Corps just wouldn't work in Cameroon. And he then, in turn, persuaded the ambassador, without any consultation with me, and ordered the deputy director, the local director, of the peace corps, to go home.

I objected. I objected, one, that he was doing it without any reference to the local situation, without even a chance for people to demonstrate that it was working. I asked ambassador if he knew what we were doing there? I had been helping the deputy director carry on his program. Finally, the Peace Corps sent people out and saved the program in Cameroon, a very successful one.

**GLENN SLOCUM**  
**Regional Development Officer, USAID**  
**Yaoundé (1971-1976)**

*Glenn Slocum was born in 1940. After finishing graduate school at the University of Maryland in 1969 he joined AID. His career includes positions in Cameroon, Senegal, Paris, Washington D.C., and Burundi. Mr. Slocum was interviewed by W. Haven North in November 1998.*

*Q: What year was this?*

SLOCUM: 1971. I remember that Uganda was a strong possibility, but then the position was eliminated in an organizational change. In the decade of the sixties in Africa there had been small AID affairs offices in the smaller countries and major programs in what was then (and now again) called Congo Kinshasa (Zaire), Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Morocco and Tunisia. I think by the end of the sixties there had been a recognition that AID would be more effective if it regionalized some of those small offices into groups. So, the West Africa posts were centralized in Dakar with a Regional Development Office (RDO) set up there. For the interior countries of the Sahel an RDO was set up in Niamey, and, for Central Africa one was set up in Cameroon. So, some jobs had been created with this regionalization of the AID offices. Chuck Grader was to be the first regional director for Central Africa. He interviewed me and offered me the job. This was in the summer of 1971. I was assigned to French language training for about three months and then went to Cameroon in October 1971.

I had never been to Africa, had never been overseas until I had gone to Pakistan. The position was a new one which the Bureau had been trying to fill for some time. Therefore, as soon as I made my French language level, I rushed out there without the benefit of area studies at the Foreign Service Institute. I remember arriving in Douala in the early hours of a Saturday morning. I had a three-hour wait for the flight up to Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon. I can remember sitting in the cafeteria having coffee as the sun came up and the airport took on its daily rhythm. I was beginning to notice similarities between the Africans I was seeing around me and African Americans with whom I had grown up in Washington. They tended to be well-built, stocky types and dressed pretty much like the rest of us do in slacks and shirts, etc. Then I noticed four very elegant men, very tall and thin, with flowing garments and skull caps. They were clearly different from the majority of Cameroonians I was seeing for the first time. My perceptions of the four tall men in different garb reflect how little I knew about Africa. I was writing home to a friend as they came and sat down at a table next to me and I said, "You won't believe it, but four tribal chieftains just sat down next to me." Well, of course, later I realized that the north of Cameroon was Muslim and these were simply Muslims dressed in their traditional garb. It took me a while to learn about all these differences.

Cameroon was a fascinating assignment for many reasons. I have already described the north, largely Muslims with dry, Sahel-like terrain. The south was forest, giving way to savannah and grasslands in the middle. Two-thirds of Cameroon, the eastern part, had been a French colony, so most east Cameroonians spoke French. The other third, in the west, had been under British colonial administration from Nigeria, and English was the common language. (Cameroon has

about 150 tribes, each with its own language, so the colonial languages served as common tongues.) It was in many ways a microcosm of many parts of Africa. I didn't appreciate this in the beginning and it took me a couple of years to really appreciate how diverse Cameroon was. AID had been in Cameroon since the early 60s, but now the regional programs were developing. The rationale of the new regional development offices was that programs and their activities had to be regional and not just bilateral in scope.

*Q: What do you mean by that?*

SLOCUM: A regional activity was supposed to mean that all the countries in the region were eligible to benefit from that project. In reality, the country where the project was headquartered turned out to be the largest beneficiary. For example, one of the projects was to equip and train personnel for an agricultural economics faculty at the Agricultural University, just outside Yaounde at Nkolbisson. The regional aspect came in the form of scholarships offered as part of the project to students from Chad, the Central African Republic and Gabon. My recollection is that only a few non-Cameroonians took advantage of the offer. But most of the project activities took place at the University of Cameroon. The technical assistance team never visited the other countries, as I recall.

But there were some residual activities from the old bilateral days in those other countries which were continuing, although phasing out. I was there for over four years, from late 1971 to early 1976, and when the great Sahel drought struck in 1973-74, the demands on the regional offices to manage drought relief programs put a huge strain on the staff, and the Agency rethought the regional concept. Bilateral offices were reestablished in Chad and other Sahelian countries to handle the drought. So, you look back over 30 years in Africa and there has been a changing approach to regional offices versus bilateral offices. We have phased out of so many programs now that we are back into what it looked like in the early '70s. Most of the development program activities during my four years were in Cameroon, or at least until the drought hit and we were spending more time in Chad. The second director of the Regional Development Office after Chuck left in 1973 was John Koehring. With the turn of events in Chad, John found himself spending more and more time in Chad, and he really wanted to keep the regional concept going and manage Chad out of Yaounde with some staff stationed in Ndjamena. The severity of the drought impact throughout the Sahel attracted a lot of attention, Congress began appropriating significant funding for relief, and AID decided to "re-bilateralize" Chad, as well as Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Mali, Niger, and Mauritania. The RDO/Yaounde, as our office was known, became active in the Central African Republic (CAR) and began to develop some programs there. The drought-related decision to open bilateral offices in a number of Sahel countries had an impact on other programs as well, such as Benin, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, which eventually had their own bilateral and independent AID offices. Of course, all that has been drastically reversed today, and the number of full AID Missions must be about what it was in the 1960s.

*Q: Let's focus on Cameroon for now. What was the situation there at that time, economic, political, etc.?*

SLOCUM: I talked about the agricultural program. There was also a major multi-donor project to build and train staff for a medical school at the university, which became the second major project. We provided significant technical assistance and, I believe, we participated in costs of the infrastructure. France, Canada, and WHO were the other major donors. It was called the CUSS project, which is an acronym for “University Center for Health Sciences.” Steve Joseph, who later became quite well known in a number of senior positions both inside and outside AID, was the health officer at the time, and he really was the main influence in designing that project and getting it approved, with strong support from Chuck Grader on the policy side. My recollection is that Sam Adams, the Assistant Administrator, came out for a regional conference in the spring of 1972. They used that occasion to sign the program agreement to launch the CUSS. Today it is a major health training institution for central Africa.

There was another regional health project at the regional health organization for disease control, also known by its French acronym as OCEAC. It was the successor to the original measles and smallpox activity of the 1960s which was largely successful in eradicating smallpox from Africa and significantly reducing the incidence of measles. Perhaps the most visible project was the Trans-Cameroonien Railroad, known familiarly as the Transcam. AID doesn’t do this type of capital development activity much anymore, except in Egypt. Like the university health center project, several donors participated in the funding. It was an Italian construction firm. They were actually building this railroad through the jungle towards the north from Yaounde to a town called Ngaoundere. It was just getting underway when I arrived there and I think it was inaugurated just after I left in 1976. So, I really got to see most of that activity from beginning to completion.

*Q: Let’s talk about the medical school. Did that get completed and was it a successful project?*

SLOCUM: There was initially a lot of controversy about it in the donor community. The impetus for building this medical school was the government of Cameroon. I know that shortly before I arrived, the donors had been concerned that this was not the way to invest in the health sector, with high start-up costs and years before the benefits would flow to the people at a time when rural clinics were undersupplied. I remember Chuck Grader telling us that each major potential donor had scheduled meetings with the Minister of Plan, one after the other, to suggest that the CUSS might not be the best way to support the health sector in Cameroon. It didn’t take the Minister very long to realize he was being ganged up on, which drew his complaint. Because this was so important for the Cameroonians, donors’ objections were addressed, and the CUSS became more than just a doctors’ training school, but much more of a health training facility (thus the title of the institutions, “health sciences center.”) Donors’ concerns were met, and the facility did get built. It was just getting up and running by the time I left. What I can’t tell you is whether, in retrospect, it was the most reasonable investment in the health sector’s needs at the time. You must be aware of the famous story about the JFK hospital in Monrovia, which apparently doubled the Ministry of Health’s budget just for recurrent costs. Of course, by this time, the early seventies, all of that kind of analysis was done in advance.

*Q: Did it get into public health at all or was it strictly a medical school?*



SLOCUM: As I mentioned before, the training extended to the range of primary health care-givers: doctors, nursing, midwives, and others. I should stress that this was over 20 years ago, and I have not kept up with its progress, but I do know that the CUSS has become the best medical institution in the region.

*Q: Anything memorable about the Trans-Cameroon railway project?*

SLOCUM: It may have been the last of the heavy infrastructure projects in Africa. The other interesting aspect was its management structure, which worked very smoothly. The engineering and management aspects, including financial management, were managed by the French advisers within the railway authority. The construction firm was COGEFAR, an Italian company. The railroad entirely opened up the north to both passenger and freight traffic. I don't know what the eventual economic impact was. At one time the plan was to extend a spur to Bangui, in the Central African Republic, but that plan never got farther than the very early planning stage, due to the severe economic mismanagement of the Bokassa era.

*Q: What was our role?*

SLOCUM: Purely financing. We had no technical assistance.

*Q: What did we finance?*

SLOCUM: My recollection is that it was the rolling stock and a general operational fund [also steel railroad track]. The engineer from REDSO [Regional Economic Development Services Office] Abidjan approved the equipment plan and periodically reviewed the project. Because of the superb management arrangements, including financial management, AID did not have to do inspection trips very often, although that was a fascinating thing to do because you were literally cutting through a jungle. I remember a spot called "elephant's head" because it was the site where a piece of equipment had either killed the animal or come upon its remains. Transcam did become part of the tour for important visitors. You took a small plane to a town near the start of the project. I did that once with Larry Raicht, who at the time handled aid coordination with the French out of the embassy in Paris, a State Department employee. I accompanied him on my first visit to the railroad.

*Q: Did it have any impact? I realize it wasn't finished while you were there.*

SLOCUM: It opened up trade and movement of people and goods in an area that had been fairly isolated. The road system was very poor. Keep in mind this was 10 years after independence and the government was still sorting out its investment priorities. The roads everywhere were in quite bad shape, even the roads between the principal cities of Yaounde and Douala. Since I left, I understand there is now a fairly well functioning road system. The old railroad between Yaounde and Douala was also rebuilt in a subsequent phase. They had asked us to participate in that project as well, but there was just not the political will to get involved in the way we had been with this project.

*Q: Could you point to certain things that would suggest why it was a successful project?*

SLOCUM: I think the fact that it opened up a region of the country that had not been very accessible. This was rich pastureland, and it would not surprise me to learn that the railway opened up livestock trade considerably. Of course, it also eased the transport of agricultural products from the south towards the north. The main economic impact was the livestock.

*Q: Anything else you want to say about Cameroon?*

SLOCUM: There were other projects. One was called the Regional Textbook Production Center. This was a facility which made textbooks locally instead of having to import expensive textbooks from outside. It was called regional because it was supposed to be a facility that would produce textbooks for the educational systems of other countries in the region. To my knowledge it never became truly regional, but remained a purely Cameroonian institution serving Cameroon's markets.

*Q: What kind of textbooks are you talking about?*

SLOCUM: Primary and secondary school textbooks of all kinds.

*Q: Were they written from scratch or were there some translations?*

SLOCUM: I think they were a mix of both indigenous Cameroonian textbooks produced by their educational system and some reproductions from France. Sometimes they would buy copyrights from other sources, but my recollection is that it was essentially in French, although it may have become more bilingual later in time. We provided all the printing equipment and a printing expert whom we recruited on the operation and maintenance of the sophisticated equipment, and AID also contributed to the cost of building the new structure. We also participated in the design of the factory before ground was broken, sitting in on meetings discussing the design, size of production, etc. We were in on that from the ground up.

*Q: Do you know what happened to it?*

SLOCUM: Well, it was functioning quite well by the time I left, but I don't know whether it ever proved itself economically vis-a-vis the cost of imports. That it would be cheaper in the long run was certainly a factor in the design, but Cameroon later experienced some economic shocks. It was still a relatively poor country, but it had good resources. Oil was discovered next to Nigeria off the coast two or three years after I left, and my understanding is that Cameroon, like Nigeria, had squandered that benefit and made some investments that may not have been the best for the economy. So, my period there was during a very different economic context from that of its "oil boom" years.

*Q: Did you have any projects in the English-speaking area?*

SLOCUM: We had one cooperative project which was fairly successful. One of the things that made the country very diverse was that the legacy of the colonial system brought great differences. For example, on the French-speaking side, most of the primary and secondary

schools were public, and it was just the opposite in the west, where most of the schools were private, with missionary origins. So, there was a very big difference in how to manage the education sector on each side. Cameroon, with its hybrid colonial history, highlighted the differences between the two colonial administrations. The British tended to manage with a light touch, and to a certain extent empower local authorities to continue their own indigenous systems, where the French imposed a centralized, hierarchical administration. Each had advantages and shortcomings. The problem for Cameroon is that it had to adapt to two very different models, and the contradictions exist even to this day.

There was much more tradition of cooperatives in West Cameroon which could be fostered and encouraged than there was in the east. So, we were able to have a project through the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA). We also had a road project connecting two towns in West Cameroon near the Nigerian border. We provided all the equipment and engineering supervision and oversight to the construction of this road. It was already well along when I went there in 1971 and was dedicated around 1974. It was an all-weather road, not paved. I am sure by now they have paved that.

*Q: Why this road?*

SLOCUM: I do not know how it was picked, but I suspect that early elements of the AID program in Cameroon were focused on the west because of language, before AID developed greater French-language capacity by the 1970s, but that is just a guess.

*Q: What was its merit economically?*

SLOCUM: To open up markets between the livestock regions in the northern part of West Cameroon and the agricultural lands of the southern areas of what was then called West Cameroon. "Our" road's feasibility had been made possible by the construction in the 60s of a road linking Buea to Douala, the economic capital of the unified Republic. There had not been a road linking Buea, which is about an hour's drive west of Douala until the late sixties and at the time one had to go a very circuitous route to get back and forth between the two cities. I think the idea was that this AID-financed road would help to facilitate the passage of agricultural and livestock products to Douala for export.

*Q: We had a training school in that area at one point. Do you know anything about that?*

SLOCUM: Yes, it was the English-speaking branch of the Pan African Institute for Development (PAID), located in Buea, and headed by a Senegalese. We had an audiovisual specialist stationed there. The Buea branch of PAID brought in people from a number of Anglophone countries of Africa. My memory of this activity is faint. I think that the courses were in the general area of project management. The audiovisual specialist was teaching those aspects of management, how to use techniques in developing projects. I recall that he was a movie specialist but his orientation was very technical. He was a professor at Virginia Tech and had come out for a two-year excursion. He got into trouble occasionally because the Senegalese director, Ben Madi Cisse, who later became a fairly prominent politician in Senegal, had his own ideas of how the institute should be run, and the American advisor was very protective of the audiovisual

equipment and its use. They would sometimes clash over control of the equipment. Then Madi Cisse would get on the phone to Chuck Grader in Yaounde and say that the AID adviser was out of control. Our input was fairly modest, but I think it was useful. We were just beginning to recognize that bricks and mortar were not sufficient, that there had to be a real transfer of know-how. I think back in the seventies that was beginning to happen and this institute was an early effort at that.

One thing that happened, in the summer of 1972, was an impetus that didn't come from us, as I recall, but from either an unsolicited proposal or from an office in Washington. A group got together and proposed the first Francophone project management seminar for central Africans. This was another sign of growing French-speaking ability in American technical assistance. A team came out in the summer of 1970 to Yaounde to put together the seminar. One of them was Jim Lowenthal, who came with his wife and young son, Yuri. He was a graduate student and the junior member of a three-person team that spent the summer conducting these seminars. This was one activity that was truly regional. Participants were invited, and came, from Chad, Congo Brazzaville, CAR and Gabon. The coursework included a visit to a major rice irrigation project in the north, at Yagoua. The team produced a very detailed, analytical, hands-on kind of seminar on effective project management. As I said, I believe that was the first of its kind in the Francophone area. Even now, in 1998, one of my associates in the partnership that I am associated with, is finding that there is a crying need for those kinds of seminars for French-speaking Africans in both the public and private sectors. One of my partners, in association with an African trainer, is proposing these kinds of seminars. So the need is still there and, if anything, expanded. But, Jim Lowenthal, God bless him, who left us last summer, was at the cutting edge of that back in 1972. The other two people running that were a Belgian and a Frenchman. I don't remember how they organized themselves, either privately or through a university.

*Q: Probably Pittsburgh.*

SLOCUM: I wonder if this was the, or a, precursor of the program that David Gould initiated at Pitt which became so successful, and which he ran so well until his death in the downing of Pan Am 103 in 1988? I think we were just at the beginning of recognizing that we had to make a greater effort not just in identifying people and sending them off for training, but actual in-country, hands-on kinds of practical things they needed to learn in order to more effectively manage their own economy and development.

*Q: Were there projects in the northern area?*

SLOCUM: Aside from Transcam, we didn't develop any bilateral projects until the mid-'70s, following on the "reilateralization" of AID programs in the wake of the Sahel drought. We had a regional livestock project for northern Cameroon and southern Chad, known by the two towns closest in each country to the project headquarters, Assale-Serbewel. Scotty Deffendahl, who did a lot of work in Africa as a livestock expert, was the resident advisor. He was a Mormon instilled with a strong self-reliant streak who educated his two young kids at one point because of the isolated site in which he and his family lived in northern Cameroon. The aim of the project was to rationalize the livestock market structure among the nearby countries, including northern Nigeria. I think he worked mainly in Cameroon and Chad. I don't believe they got up to Niger.

The idea then was simply to help the local herders learn the aspects of marketing beyond the limited areas of their experience. I think there was also an animal health aspect to that as well. But, Scotty's major impact was on marketing aspects but social and environmental aspects were also addressed.

*Q: Do you think there was some benefit from it?*

SLOCUM: You know, I am not sure because of the way we approached activities in those days, how much of that really became sustainable, how much really took root. Scotty Deffendahl was as good a person as I can think of who really was motivated to work in a way that transferred know-how to the herders and to the local organizations supporting them. I believe he stayed with the project for several years. I should mention that this was a regional activity under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The LCBC, about which I have heard very little in the last 20 years, but I think it still exists, had as its members the bordering states of Lake Chad, Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. It was headquartered in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad. LCBC executive meetings were held in N'Djamena. John Koehring, the RDO head and my boss, would usually represent AID, and Scotty would address the livestock issues. The marketing mechanisms were improved, but I have no way of knowing how the livestock sector benefitted in the long run. Chad became very volatile politically in subsequent years. My suspicion is probably that the trading patterns began moving more south, as much for reasons of political instability in Chad as well the drought. As conditions in the north consequently worsened, there would have been a shift from the north Cameroon area of the project towards the south as Cameroon improved its roads north and then down to the railhead, from which herders could export livestock products further south. That is my suspicion but I would have to research that to know for sure.

*Q: Was this the time of the Mandara Mountain program?*

SLOCUM: That was just at the very early stages of development at the end of my second tour, about 1975. There was a desire to do more in the north because of the links to the Sahel region where so much interest and resources were being attached to the drought problem. The idea was to help maximize the natural and productive resources in place. I remember a major design team came from Utah State to do a prospectus which resulted in a paper on some objectives for that area.

*Q: You were there then in the period when there was the beginning of the transition to the New Directions philosophy. How was that viewed in Cameroon? Did it mean turning your program around?*

SLOCUM: Not immediately, because many of the program elements were still in the implementation phases, such as Transcam, CUSS and the Agricultural Faculty at Nkolbisson. The New Directions impact was felt on new program development, manifested in the recognition that more had to be done in the north. For one thing, the north had typically received far less donor attention than the other parts of the country. No, I think that the New Directions were seen as complementary and supportive of our program.

*Q: What was your understanding of why we were in Cameroon at all? My impression was that the U.S. had very little interest there.*

SLOCUM: I can think of a number of reasons. As I said earlier, AID had established a small bilateral office in Yaounde shortly after independence in the early '60s. The first president under independence, who was still president when I was there, Amadou Ahidjo, was seen as a stabilizing force in the region. Cameroon's neighbor, powerful Nigeria, the largest country in Africa, was so large that it had one of AID's largest bilateral Missions in the world. Chad, divided between its northern and southern populations, was in constant turmoil. The Central African Republic was ruled by a clown, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, who had no sense of governance. Equatorial Guinea was (and is) ruled by repressive leaders who terrorize their population. France took a special interest in its former colonies, notably Gabon and Cote d'Ivoire. Cameroon was in a slightly lower rank of importance for France, and Cameroonians preferred this degree of independence for reasons of pride and the country's unique status as a federation of the East and West Cameroon governments, which changed into a unified government while I was there. West Cameroon had been a British colony; East Cameroon French. Cameroon took pride in its joint "parentage" and used that to stay one step removed from French cultural control. Putting priority on this independence of spirit, Cameroon was looking for other sources of support. They didn't want to be seen as simply a former colony of France. I think for all those reasons Cameroon was well regarded at that time. Finally, the Agency had been looking for the logical country in which to locate its regional office, and Cameroon was the most stable and forward looking of the five countries to be served by that regional office. Those of us who served there loved it. It was a very nice country in which to live and begin my years of African service.

*Q: How did you find working with the Cameroonian people and officials?*

SLOCUM: That was not always as positive an experience. Cameroonian officials, at least the dominant French speakers in Yaounde, could be somewhat arrogant and difficult to work with, but part of the challenge of our work is to adapt to different cultures and views. I subsequently served in enough places in Africa to begin attributing different values or impressions of people. Keeping in mind that all my assignments were in French-speaking countries, I would say the Senegalese were the most artistic and intellectual of the Africans I worked with. The Burkinabe were probably the nicest and the Nigerians the most aloof. Over time you categorize your impressions, rightly or wrongly. I would say Cameroonian officials had a tendency towards arrogance and pride. On the other hand, at the very highest levels there was a good relationship; the Cameroonians really did want American support and the ambassador always had easy access, even to the president.

*Q: How was the Cameroonian bureaucracy to work with?*

SLOCUM: When I described the arrogance and pride of some Cameroonians, I was referring mainly to the officials with whom we worked. Looking back, I sensed perhaps a little more unpleasantness and haughtiness than I would experience elsewhere later in my career, but this is just an impression.

*Q: Did they have a professional competence by and large?*

SLOCUM: I would say so. I think the problems of corruption came later with the discovery and exploitation of oil and what that did to the economy. Once in a while there would be a problem. The technical adviser we assigned to the textbook center project reported back that the recurrent cost accounts weren't very reliable, pointing to the Center Director. But, in general, that was not the issue, it was really the question of experience in managing their activities. Because of its stabilizing influence in the region and its own internal stability, Cameroon attracted more donor support. In my second tour, reliable reports of requests for kickbacks made to representatives of other donors by fairly high-level people in the Planning Ministry surfaced. Unfortunately, this trend became standard with the advent of substantial oil resources after my time there, and I think the negative impact of this trend, greater resources poorly managed, continues even now.

*Q: What was your function and what were you doing?*

SLOCUM: As Assistant Program Officer I was learning how a Mission program office functions. As the Mission Evaluation Officer I was responsible for conducting or supervising the execution of evaluations of our projects. I recall carrying out evaluations of the textbook and cooperative projects. We were pretty short-staffed initially, as the new Regional Office for Central Africa had only five direct-hires. (Cameroon became a full bilateral Mission later in the seventies.) As a small regional office, we had to be flexible. Sometimes I did personnel management work. Because we had a Joint Administrative Office run out of the Embassy, and our financial control functions were in Washington, sometimes Chuck would be concerned that something wasn't being attended to and would ask me to do specific management tasks. Being spread out this way was a good way for a junior officer to get exposed to the breadth of a Mission's operations.

I had two very good program officers who taught me a lot. Jack McLaughlin was the first, who had spent a lot of time in French-speaking Africa. The second was Art Fell, before he moved to Dakar. They, along with John Koehring, were great teachers. In fact, I consider Art and John two of my godfathers. I count certain people as my mentors, under whom I "grew up," and John Koehring and Art Fell stand out as contributing mightily to taking a very inexperienced and raw piece of material and, well, making me a bit more experienced.

*Q: You later became a Mission Director. What did you find you learned from that first round of being in a mission?*

SLOCUM: One thing was how to write clearly and concisely, and both John Koehring and Art patiently taught me some of the basics. Another lesson a young officer needed in his first assignment overseas and not always of the highest maturity, was to keep cool. They taught me that the world doesn't change overnight and you can't control everything. It took me a lot of years to learn that well. Through their example, they also taught me to care about what we were doing, both with people in the country to which we were assigned, and more immediately with our staffs. The four years I was in Cameroon were a period of expansion of both staff and program. By the time I left, in early 1976, USAID/Cameroon had eleven or twelve direct-hire staff. It was a very dynamic period. John Koehring, whom I'm sure you know, is a very meticulous manager. He dots every eye and crosses every tee. I learned a lot from him about precision and taking great care in the work: the things that were basic. John had excellent

bureaucratic instincts and knew how to make the bureaucracy work for the Mission. Observing him in action was a great learning experience for me, which stayed with me for my entire career. Despite an apparent rigidity in his approach to things, he was probably one of the kindest people I ever knew in AID, a “softy” as one colleague once referred to him, something John would probably dispute.

Art Fell and John were excellent complements to each other. They were a superb team to work for. I have lost touch with John since he retired, unfortunately, but Art and I still keep in touch. Art is a very human person who genuinely cares about people. Where John would compose his messages by pen in his very small handwriting on legal-sized ruled paper, Art would sit at his typewriter, close his eyes for a few minutes, and then hammer away. Now, of course, with computers we can make all kinds of mistakes and move things around. In those days we didn’t have that luxury, and had to pretty much visualize what it was we wanted to say and how to structure the report. Computers have clearly improved our efficiency, but the old ways required more discipline, and both John and Art displayed that discipline.

This was my first long-term overseas assignment, and I retain very positive memories of my four years in Cameroon. I came to like the Cameroonians and the country very much, and in spite of what I said earlier about some of Cameroon’s officialdom. AID, frankly, was giving me a lot when I think back about how little I brought to it initially and how much I had to learn. I remember especially the spirit of camaraderie, the way people took care of each other, not just within AID, but with Embassy staff as well. As AID programs in Africa grew and staffs expanded in the 1980s, and then began retrenching in the 90s, I fear that spirit of camaraderie among the agencies eroded somewhat.

But another dynamic was at work, something that I didn’t fully appreciate until some years later. Over time and the growing experience of living abroad, with the coming and going of people, I came to learn to be careful about not investing too much in these relationships, because they are transitory by their nature. So, you become a little less giving, somewhat less involved with the community. But in those early days, the relationships were very important. I remember with great affection some of the relationships and friendships I had there.

*Q: A good point.*

SLOCUM: There was one other place, which we can get to later, Mauritania, where because of its isolation and the hostile environment in terms of the heat and desert sandstorms, people tended to put more energy into taking care of each other.

*Q: Any last thoughts about your Cameroon experience before we move on?*

SLOCUM: As I said, Cameroon was my first long-term overseas assignment, so even now, nearly 25 years since I left, I recall the experience as uniquely special. In later years, Cameroon lost its luster. President Ahidjo was, I believe, the first African president to voluntarily cede power some years later. But, the evidence indicates, he tried unsuccessfully to retake power a year later and spent the last years of his life living in forced exile and disgrace. His successor has over time consolidated his hold on power in ways that have not been consistent with democratic



principles. The slide into corruption and manipulation of political power by Paul Biya caused Washington to reassess U.S. policy towards Cameroon. About ten years ago, USAID closed down its programs there, one of the early “closeouts.” For those of us who had the privilege of serving there, we have a sense of loss in terms of what we left behind, and the impact and sustainability of our programs. We hope that the agriculturalists, doctors and health-care professionals we trained are making a difference; that the railroad and livestock projects opened up markets; that the cooperatives in West Cameroon continue to flourish. One hopes all of those things happened.

We have not discussed what the RDO/Yaounde did in other countries. Let me briefly describe Chad and the Central African Republic. In Chad, we set up an emergency relief program in response to the drought, and continued to manage that plus the ongoing portfolio until a bilateral Mission was set up in 1974. This was the beginning of what became the Sahel Development Program. Washington provided “packages” for us to apply. For example, guidance for setting up a complete filing system at the Embassy enabled us to set up an office in the Embassy in very short order. The drought introduced the move away from strictly regional offices and programs and ushered in a return to bilateral programs. In addition to the establishment of an independent AID office in Chad, RDO/Yaounde developed a bilateral health project in the Central African Republic, managed through an institutional contract.

If you don’t mind, I would like to give a little anecdote about Cameroon.

*Q: Go right ahead.*

SLOCUM: It is about a little boy named Mauriac. The apartment building in which I lived was right downtown, two blocks from the AID office. Yaounde was not a big town in those days. There was a huge avocado tree about four stories high and twice a year it would produce all these avocados which would fall to the ground and smash because of the height of their fall. One day Mauriac, who was 10 or 11 years old and whom I had gotten to know just in passing, appeared. I said, “Good morning, Mauriac. What can we do about all these smashed avocados?” He said, “Well, you get a friend to hold a blanket and I will climb up and throw them down to you.” So we did. We must have gotten a couple hundred of these avocados one time and gave them to everybody in the neighborhood. I was there for four years so by the time I left he was probably about 13. He was a very nice little boy, very sweet and honest and a good student. Within a year or two after I left, I had no further word of him.

Around 1995, as Director of East Africa here in Washington, I got a call from VOA. Mr. Atwood, the current AID Administrator, had made a trip to East Africa to launch the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative (GHAI). The VOA wanted to do something about Atwood’s trip on its French-language Africa service. Somehow word got out that I could handle French, so I got a call from a French-speaking news person at VOA here. She did about a five-minute interview on the phone, asking me questions about the GHAI and what it meant for USAID in East Africa. I didn’t think anything more about the interview until, four months later, there arrived at my desk in Washington a letter sent to Glenn Slocum, USAID, Nairobi, Kenya. It had gotten through to AID in Kenya and, recognizing my name, people there sent it on to my office here. This was a letter from Mauriac, who had been listening to his radio one evening in Douala, Cameroon, where he

now lived. Now, a 33-year-old Mauriac had recognized my name and believed I must be in Nairobi, so he wrote me his letter. I immediately responded and we kept in touch for a couple of years after that. It was very heartwarming after over the 20 years since I had left Cameroon to hear back from him.

**ARTHUR M. FELL**  
**Deputy Regional Development Officer, USAID**  
**Yaoundé (1973-1975)**

*Arthur Fell was born in Bloomington, Indiana. He attended the University of Indiana and later joined the US Army where he was assigned to France. He later went to law school at Indiana University and then joined an international law firm in New York. He joined US AID in 1969 and was assigned to the Cameroon, Senegal, the Sahel, and Kenya. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

FELL: 1973. I suppose this might be an insight into how USAID operates. The head of the west Africa office in those days was a man named Fermino Spencer whom you remember very well. Fermino Spencer was coming through Abidjan, and I remember sitting on the beach with Fermino. He asked me how do you like your job in the African Development Bank? I said I like it fine. He said would you like to go down to Cameroon and be the number two person in our regional development office in Yaounde? I said I hadn't thought about it very much but I guess I would. That was the way that assignment was cooked up. Next thing you know I got orders saying I was going to Cameroon.

In those days, as you know probably better than anyone, Haven, we've gone through many cycles as to how the agency operated in Africa. Right after independence in the 60's we started with offices practically all over Africa. Then the 40 country limitation was voted in the Foreign Assistance Act so the major assistance countries were parceled out all over the world. It turned out that Africa didn't get very many of them, so we created emphasis missions. Then the rest of Africa which was not going to be an emphasis place was sort of left to float. The justification by which we could operate in those countries was mostly regional. If we were working on a regional basis somehow, it would be OKAY to do projects if there was some sort of a tie-up. It wouldn't be strictly speaking bilateral projects. So for West Africa the configuration that was set up was a regional development office was placed in Dakar, another regional development office was placed in Niamey and another in Yaounde. Each of these regional development offices handled three or four countries around where they were set up. Starting in 1970 what was called the West Africa Capital Development Office and later became the Regional Economic Development Services Office in Abidjan and Nairobi to be service offices and also to be sort of like an accordion to handle places where there wouldn't be any coverage in the Regional Development Offices. So I was assigned to be the number two man in Yaounde starting in 1973. A gentleman named Jack McLaughlin since deceased who had served many years in AID had been heading up that office. Before that we had a major mission in Cameroon for many years, and then it had kind of dwindled down for some reason; I don't know exactly the reason. Well I guess Cameroon had not been an emphasis country. We really didn't have a strictly speaking bilateral program for

Cameroon. There were vestiges of what once had been a very large program which USAID, little by little phased out. The major project we had going on in Cameroon was the trans-Cameroon railroad. We were just finishing up. I went to Ngaoundere (in Northern Cameroon) to just do the last big trip to see that the systems were all working just before they were going to inaugurate the project. We had worked very closely. That project had been financed with the FAC (the French Cooperation European Commission) and the European Commission had been sort of the accounting agent for that project. We had let them do the management accounting and control of the project; we provided about a third of the financing for the whole project. It was done in two tranches. One tranche went from Yaounde to Bilbao and from Bilbao it went all the way up to Ngaoundere. We provided the rails for that project from Bethlehem Steel and the culverts for that project which came from ARAMCO. I think we provided some of the Caterpillar and bulldozer equipment which was used by the contractor which was an Italian contracting firm. It was a project of great international cooperation between our agencies. It was one of the major projects where we were working closely with the European Commission and the French.

*Q: How did you find that worked? Were there any major issues?*

FELL: I thought it worked very well. Practically no major issues until we got to the very end of the project. During the day to day operation of the project it worked very well. In fact Al Disdier's Capital Finance Office had a major hand in structuring the way that project had been set up. They insisted that a certain office be set up in the Cameroon Government that was very well staffed for managing and supervising the project, handling the accounting of the project and the actual execution of it. That was a very strong office that had been set up. We worked very closely with the French and the European Commission and had no problems until it came right down to the end. That came about around 1974. The two things I can remember when they inaugurated the railroad. The head of the office was John Koehring. We decided (I don't take major credit, but the idea came to me) that we really ought to contact everyone in USAID who had been involved in this project over the years and let them know this project has been completed and send them something to show they had been part of the project. There had been little medallions that had been made up, little coins with the trans-Cameroon railroad stamped on them and a booklet that had been published. We researched all the files and found maybe 35 people in USAID who had been fairly closely involved at one time or another in the analysis, the design, and the negotiations of the trans-Cameroon railroad. And we sent everybody one of those pamphlets or medallions. We got some very good feedback from that. This is one of the things about working in an agency like ours, you very rarely see the complete cycle of a project. You either see the beginning or you're in the middle of something, or you're winding it up. It is very rare that you see a whole cycle of something or even hear about the end results of what you were doing. I think a lot of people on AID who had worked on this project for many years (this was in 1974 and I think the project had its genesis in the early 1960's.) were very happy to hear that it had been successfully completed and what finally happened to it. Another thing that happened, and I have a photo in my files, Haven, we got all the Assistant Administrators from the Africa Bureau up to that time, except maybe Sam Adams, came to Yaoundé for the inauguration of the trans-Cameroon railroad. I remember Ed Hutchinson was there; I'm trying to think of the others: Klein. The Ambassador was C. Robert Moore, a wonderful man one of the absolutely most cultured, highly intelligent, extremely wonderful men that I've ever met. We had a picture of all

the Assistant Administrators from the Africa Bureau because this had been one of the major capital projects that the Africa Bureau had ever carried out.

*Q: Do you remember the scale of our input?*

FELL: Our input, I would hesitate to say what it was, I think it was somewhere in the neighborhood of \$30-40 million. Now it doesn't sound like very much but in those days it was a lot of money. I couldn't say what the whole project was; it was done in tranches.

*Q: You said it went well until the very end.*

FELL: Right to the end and then at the end we got hit with an overrun claim from the Italian contractor. I'm a lawyer and had worked as a lawyer, but I wasn't working as a lawyer any more because I was strictly in an operational capacity as number two man. But, they said look at these claims and tell us what we ought to do about them. I looked at the claims that were set forward by the Italian contractor, and for the life of me I couldn't see how they could have been any weaker. There wasn't one of them that was worth a nickel. One of the reasons why it was fairly easy to come to that conclusion was the office in the Cameroon government that had been managing this had done a superb job of keeping track of everything that had happened, keeping records and everything. I absolutely had a very hard time accepting any of these claims. The French were willing to accept these claims and to pay them, and the European Commission was willing to accept them. They wanted us to accept our pro rata portion of these claims. We found it very hard to recommend, even putting your best foot forward, to accept them. We were wined and dined and waltzed and given a lot of encouragement from the European Commission to come on board. I went to Brussels two or three times. Eventually these claims were sent back to Washington. Since this is kind of an unofficial historical record, I think we came to a conclusion in Washington that, in a way, to buy peace and to show that we were good neighbors and good cooperation we actually got them to reduce the claims considerably and to withdraw a number of them and we kind of stiffened the back of the European Commission and of the French. Eventually I got to know some of the inside people on the European Commission who admitted that this was kind of a game up at the European Commission to do that. But, it wasn't too welcome, the position we were taking up there. I think we eventually took a more flexible position; we agreed to pay maybe up to \$1,500,000 of the claim. Putting all that on a pro rata basis, \$5 million, I forget what it turned out to be, and the claims were settled. I was sitting there in the room when the deal was struck. The head of the Commission, Mr. Ferandi, who was a giant of a figure in those days in the European Development Fund, and the Italian contractor were sitting there, and they were speaking French for a while, and then all of a sudden they started speaking a language that none of us understood. It turned out it was some Sicilian Italian, and they started waving their hands and the next thing you know, they said okay we're all in agreement. What have you agreed to? No one could understand. They said, Well, we agreed \$5,000,000. Everyone paid. We paid our part of it and the project was concluded. Later on, other tranches of that project were done, but I had left Cameroon.

We had other projects in Cameroon in those days. We had a project with Southern University. Of course USAID since the time of Mr. Hannah (Administrator) had done a lot of things working with different universities and bringing American universities into the USAID program. In

Cameroon we had a contract with Southern University to help develop the economic school at the national agricultural college there. We had three American economists that were in Cameroon training, and they were writing articles and teaching in the school. The idea was that better economic analysis would be good for national planning. I think that was a moderately unsuccessful project or moderately successful depending on how one looks at it.

*Q: In what way?*

FELL: I think that as in many of these university contracts it turned out that instead of getting very high caliber technical cooperation unit, we got people who had been recruited off the street. It wasn't cohesive from the university itself and too much of the contract was spent on the care and feeding of the Americans and the American university and probably not enough on the locals and the local university. I think I saw this in other contracts we did both with universities and consultants. That is one of the lessons that I learned over the years. We tended to think that projects were going well when someone would give us a good briefing in our language, the way we wanted to hear it, and the charts looked like the charts we wanted to see. But, underneath, the local scene was going on. I don't think we were prepared to accept the messiness of the local development system. We wanted it clean-cut and presented to us in our way.

I'm going to jump ahead just a little bit because when I retired from the USAID, I came to the OECD working on aid reviews. I think one of the most fascinating aid reviews I worked on recently was Switzerland. We did an aid review of Switzerland. We saw a modus operandi that maybe in an idealistic way is kind of how the USAID envisions itself working but we don't really work this way. The way the Swiss were set up in Benin. I went down there and did a field trip. The Swiss, they don't talk about participatory development; they actually do participatory development. I remember when I was first asked to work on the Swiss aid review and having worked 20 years in Africa, if someone had asked me what had the Swiss done in Africa, I would have been stumped, I wouldn't have a clue because I never saw the Swiss. No one ever sees the Swiss because the Swiss are invisible in Africa practically and yet they have quite a sizable program. When I went down to Benin, first of all, you have to find their office which isn't easy because they don't have any big flags or anything around the office. There were no vehicles with Swiss flags painted on them. In fact, they don't allow it. It is illegal for them. They don't want their name on any project; they won't allow their name to be put on any project; they won't allow it. The way they operate, a lot of their projects are set up through what they call small support offices. They will hire local Beninese. Say they are doing an education project. They would hire one or two local Beninese and say, "Here's the work plan," which they had already worked out together with the local Beninese authorities. Here's the work plan, here's the budget, Go. You work with the local people, talk it out. We will be back in three months to see what you've done.

*Q: But there's no Swiss technical people on the ground?*

FELL: No. The locals do it themselves. The Swiss say let the local people handle it themselves. They get the budget; they have their own procedures; they have their own system. All we want to do is account for the money and account for the results. We'll talk about the methodology. We'll bring people in to talk to you for a week or two if you want any particular help, but we're not going to put technical people on the project; you're going to have to do it yourself.

*Q: These are relatively small projects I suppose.*

FELL: Relatively small projects. Right. But, some of them are considerable. Some of them would have a considerable also replicative effect of the type we're trying to get. For instance, a project they were doing was a project in organizing artisans and different types of professional people. For instance, they would get the bakers together and say OKAY how can you improve the standards of the bakers in cleanliness, in training, finance and accounting and work as a group to improve the professional standards of your own profession? They helped them to set up an association. We were talking about being a genius. Well, to set up an association in an African country, you almost need to be one. Few people know how to do it. The project got lawyers and Beninese specialists and they were asked to put this on one sheet of paper. What do you have to do to be legally set up as an association, not have any trouble with the authorities? The project taught the people how they could set up their own association, how you could set up your own little savings and loan association. They set up 50 through the Swiss project, 50 of these different types of associations. We probably don't have to go into detail on the Swiss project. I think that their approach of working is very participative, of working very closely with the local society, and of doing things at a pace of the local society. And I know there are other levels of working on policy levels and various things and they work on that level too. And perhaps with a little bit more patience than sometimes I've seen in some USAID. When you are trying to do change, I think you should take a much longer view of things than I've seen in some of the ways USAID has operated. We're much too impatient. We don't do the digging and the background and the talking and the local work in helping the locals find their own solutions which are durable and sustainable over time.

Anyway back to Cameroon, we had a very small office in Cameroon. There was John Koehring, myself, Glen Slocum, and Larry Berry, I think four of us in that office at the time.

*Q: But you were handling regional projects. What was regional?*

FELL: In addition to the Trans-Cameroon Railroad and a number of projects in Cameroon, we handled Chad. Chad was quite operational in those days of because this is after the Sahel drought, we had a lot of food operations up in Chad. So one of us would go up there on a rotating basis to work on the problems of the drought. We didn't have much of a bilateral program in Chad, but it was mostly food relief. We had a very small regional project in the CAR, Central African Republic, with the regional health organization that operated out of Yaounde. It was a regional organization that operated on the health side. Then we had a very small project in Gabon in Dr. Schweitzer's hospital. We built a wing on the Lambaréné hospital where Dr. Schweitzer's hospital was in Gabon. But we never found much to do in Gabon. We were theoretically in charge of Equatorial Guinea but at that time there was a madman who was president of Guinea named Garcias Macias. We decided there was very little we could do in Equatorial Guinea.

*Q: Did you get into the discussion on what constituted a regional project, all the hairsplitting judgments about what was regional and not regional?*

FELL: Yes we had that often. As a matter of fact I forgot , we did have a regional project between Chad and Cameroon working in livestock in northern Cameroon and northern Chad which was also a cooperative project with the French, working with the Lake Chad Basin Commission which was a regional organization. In those days we tried to work with local African organizations, one of which was the Lake Chad Basin Commission. These were unstable organizations in some respects. We never were sure that their payments were coming in from their member governments and were maintained by technical cooperation coming in from the outside. The French were helping; we were helping; others were helping. There were basically many difficult to reconcile differences between members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Ours was a livestock project, and we had both French and American people in technical cooperation on that project trying to introduce improved grazing practices and better marketing practices in that area. I think it was a moderately successful project.

*Q: Well you were there not too long at that time I guess.*

FELL: Two years. Then I moved to Senegal in 1975 which was a regional office, but we were in a period of transferring into a USAID mission in Senegal at that time. Offices had been set up in Mali and Mauritania.

*Q: Do you remember the contexts of why these changes were coming up?*

**HARIADENE JOHNSON**  
**Deputy Director, USAID**  
**Douala (1974-1976)**

*Hariadene Johnson received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from University of Texas at Austin prior to joining USAID in 1967. Her career posts included Ghana, Liberia, Tanzania, and Djibouti in addition to serving as Office Director of East Africa for USAID from 1977-1982. Ms. Johnson was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

JOHNSON: In '74, '76 I was in Cameroon and I worked on a project where at that time you submitted three documents. The first was a PID, a Project Identification Document; then a PRP, Project Review Proposal; and then a final PP, Project Paper. We submitted a PID. The Cameroonians asked the U.S. for help in a livestock health project. We submitted a PID to Washington for a livestock project, but it would be more than animal health. It would be a range management project. It was turned down by Washington. They said, "Redo it." Instead, we went to the PRP which was also turned down. We did a PP which was turned down, and we did another PP which was turned down. It started as the government and Cameroonians wanted an animal health project. They wanted us to give them some vaccines and help them do all the vaccinations We progressively turned it from animal health to range management, to agriculture and range management, to its final product, a project named was, North Cameroon Integrated Rural Development Agriculture and Livestock. The reason why I'm saying all that is because, it

made me realize that the Liberian project sort of evolved like the Cameroon project. I think one of our major mistakes in Africa was that we wound up caring more than the host country did. We wound up having more of ourselves invested in a project approach. In order to make it acceptable to us, we would make it much more complicated and complex in that Monrovia wanted a modern hospital in the capitol city. We turned it into an integrated country health program with primary health care. What we wound up approving and what we said they should do, you know, it was logical, it is sensible, it would be the best overall national health plan, but they wouldn't let them run it. It came around we wound up with that it didn't make sense to animal health, you should do livestock management, or you shouldn't just do range management, you should do agriculture and you should do rural development. It just became more and more complicated as we tried.

*Q: Why did it evolve like that? That's an interesting example. What were the forces that kept rejecting it and then adding more complexity and more components? What was driving that?*

JOHNSON: The easy answer is Washington as opposed to a field perspective. But, I think it was also....

*Q: Why was Washington running it?*

JOHNSON: Washington, because you had so many groups. You had in microcosm what amounted to lobby groups. People whose entire life had been spent on livestock. And, they knew if you were going to solve a livestock problem this was what their experience in the U.S. plus their international experience said that you should do about it. The agriculturalists were right, that you shouldn't just do a livestock project, you should do agriculture plus livestock and then if you're going to do that, you've got to have integrated rural development, and you know, it all makes sense. It is based upon a lot of lessons learned of why a single intervention project didn't work. Because, a single intervention simply doesn't have enough weight or it doesn't have a mass to act as an catalyst for all the other changes that need to take place. So, by experience, by training, by knowledge, both the field office and Washington kept making it more complex. It ended up with us being more involved than the country. Having more involvement in making the project a success.

*Q: And they were involved in this evolution?*

JOHNSON: They participated in it. They were members.. we had five different donors in a multi- donor project. That was the other reason. I'd forgot about that. The original team consisted of some people from Utah, Brigham University, who were the livestock specialists; a water specialist from Ethiopia who was a refugee of the United States but, he was a very good water engineer; two guys from France; and a guy from Belgium, all headed up to North Cameroon and worked on this project. So, some of the complexity of the project related to the fact that different international groups wanted to put a higher priority on one type of approach or another. Part of that was the U.S. portion of the team who happened to be very well grounded scientifically, did not know Africa; did not know French; they had no real feel for how to compromise. So, we had problems from the Americans on the team.



*Q: What was your role on this? We're getting ahead of ourselves, but that's okay.*

JOHNSON: When this took place, I was in Cameroon as Deputy Director to John Koehring who was Mission Director.

There's a separate saga: periodically, in my 30 years with the Agency, I had tried to convert to the Foreign Service on two or three different occasions, and there was always a different reason why I couldn't convert. In that particular '74 to '76, thanks to David Shear and John Koehring, I was in Cameroon for two years on TDY. John essentially had me working as the Deputy Director across the board without distinction in Cameroon, and David Shear gave me assignments on different desks. Whenever he would have a vacancy, you know, on paper I was the Mauritanian desk officer, the Mali desk officer, all variety of jobs I'd never had. Essentially, initially when we did the PID, I wasn't that involved. The agricultural specialists worked on that. Then, when we turned the PID down, John decided rather than redo it — another PID, he would just go to the PRP stage, he sent me up North to North Cameroon with a private team. Lynn Berry was the team leader.

*Q: He was the agricultural officer?*

JOHNSON: He was the agricultural officer and my main mandate from John was to somehow keep the peace between Lynn and the guys from the University—Brigham University of Utah and the two Frenchmen and the others. So, there was a lot of hubbub. A lot of controversy. I went in to Washington with the PRP to defend it and got thoroughly trashed. Sent back to post with instructions to redo it totally. Talked it over with John and John felt that if we were going to redo it we ought to move to the PP stage, so we moved to the PP stage. So, I went in to Washington with the PP and tried to get it approved. In the face of this total appreciation of the structure of doing a PID and PRP without an agreement, the PP was waste of time. We took what we felt were the valued criticisms and incorporated them in the next stage. That's the Washington project paper, a total disaster. No one would support it.

*Q: What were its major issues?*

JOHNSON: Major issues were the lack of a policy component, that it represented too much of just, (there's a term used in USAID, a derogatory term) a commodity drop where you really didn't think about what the commodities were going to be used for, you know, it was just a commodity drop. For Washington this project was essentially a technical assistance drop. You had some technical assistance going to this group over here and some to this group over here, and some to this group over here, but there was no overall coherent policy as to what all of these different groups were supposed to work towards or accomplish. The multi-donor concept of it, they felt would wind up with in essence, you know, building a bridge from this shore to that shore, but there would be nothing on the other shore to greet it. There was just too much chance that too many things would go wrong. Like I said, trying to respond to all of the different criticisms, the project had become so complicated in order to have a livestock component.

*Q: What was your feeling about the project? You had a personal involvement.*

JOHNSON: My opinion about the project is on my tombstone. They're going to put, "this was the project that she designed, 'the North Cameroon Integrated Rural and Agricultural and Livestock project.'"

*Q: Weren't there pressures also at that time about the New Directions Policy, i.e. focusing on the poor majority? Was that a factor?*

JOHNSON: Didn't really hit that much. But, my feeling was, I remember I called John Koehring up, I was in Washington and I called Koehring up and told him that I thought we just ought to kill the project. That there was no way that the project as written could respond to the criticisms as made, because the criticisms were right. There's a limit to what you can do by redrafting a piece of paper. My example use to be that, the Great Lakes are up here on a map. You can take the map and you can put the Great Lakes down in Arizona and they look nice, but it doesn't change things. The whole picture is still up there, you just rewrote the map. At this point, we were in the position of just rewriting the map and it was just totally out of control, and that we just ought to go ahead and let the project go for that year, step back, rethink what we wanted to do in North Cameroon; John wasn't prepared to do that. And, Howard Helman wasn't prepared to do that. Howard was an USAID officer in Paris at the time and he'd been doing liaison with the French and the Belgians trying to keep that portion of the multi-donor effort on track. So, Howie felt that there was a chance to save the project. What we wound up doing was, Howie and the two Frenchmen and the Belgians and the Ethiopian (Water Engineer, ed) and me, all went out to Utah. We met at Utah for about three weeks. The first step was they had the review of the project paper by the assembled Utah faculty. We had a thorough two day professional review of the paper and then we sat down to rewrite the paper with Howard doing non-stop interpretation of what the Frenchmen would say. Then he'd tell the guys from Utah what the Frenchmen said, then he'd switch back to English and tell them what they said and at the same time shaping the project.

*Q: They were in this meeting too?*

JOHNSON: Yeah. We had everybody in this meeting. Myself, and the two Frenchmen, and the guy from Belgium kept running out to the fire escape, because it was a no smoking campus. You were not allowed to smoke in any building. You were supposed to go downstairs and out in the middle of the street. Since there was a snow storm for most of the three weeks we were out there, the university allowed us to go out to the fire escape and smoke.

*Q: Were there any Cameroonians there?*

JOHNSON: Nope, there were no Cameroonians there. At this point, the Cameroonians were on an animal health project.

*Q: Where did you come out after that?*

JOHNSON: Howard did an extraordinary job of pulling together the English and the Anglo-francophone sections, as well as pulling together all of the different desperate pieces, you know, of something that seemed to make sense. So I rewrote the project paper, but Howard was the one

that was doing it. I was draftsman more than anything else. Then we took it back out to Cameroon. Howard came down from Paris and we had a couple of people from REDSO, I think,—the USAID regional office in Abidjan— who came and had a meeting with the Cameroonians. The first problem of meeting with the Cameroonians, was the Cameroonians were having a meeting with the Minister of Elevage (livestock), and we had a project review. So, the first part of the process was to get the Cameroonians to broaden out who our counterparts were and then I ended up going back up to North Cameroon, because North Cameroon was essentially a separate political entity almost. And, finally got a project paper that the Cameroonians approved and that Washington approved. As I understand it, from talking with people later, it was difficult to implement and the only part of it that really worked was the animal health project, because we did some training. You had more trained personnel up there in the north. It was a good thing in the long run.

*Q: Were there a lot of components at one time or another and did they work?*

JOHNSON: They worked as long as we had a technician out there and that we were funding the different things that they were doing. But, it had no lasting impact on North Cameroon as a political entity or as an organization. The way they made decisions is the way they ran things.

*Q: As you said at the start, we wanted it more than they did and we weren't doing what they were interested in.*

JOHNSON: Yeah, and I think the same thing was true for the JFK hospital. In order to justify to ourselves doing this hospital, we made it more complicated (with the health posts, ed) and then were surprised when the government of Liberia was interested only in the hospital. They had the one piece that they wanted.

*Q: What if you just did what they wanted, could we have had anything that was useful or effective. So, it was a dilemma wasn't it?*

JOHNSON: But, if we'd just responded to what that government wanted, you would wind up with inappropriate activities. You'd also wind up cutting off, I think what USAID's greatest strength is, this basic concept of people working in one country and moving to another country and having both life experience, as well as more formal lessons learned of what works one place and what works some place else. Ken Sherper (USAID officer) use to argue that USAID never did a project twice, because every project was new, because it had never been done in this country, with these technical advisors, with these host government people. So, it was always new, no matter what you thought you knew about that type of project.

*Q: You couldn't learn any lessons from before?*

JOHNSON: He pushed it to the limit. The things you should be aware of, but you can't be, he would argue, or he felt he was arguing, I think against cookie cutter projects. You couldn't say, this project worked in X country, so therefore we can replicate it. You know, we found something that worked and so let's just do it again, again, and again. And that didn't work, because every country is different, every cast of characters from the host government to the local

Mission are different. So, our greatest strength is in the fact that you do learn and that people learn as they go from one assignment to another and as you're exposed to different countries, but the history in that country is better than what worked and what didn't work elsewhere.

*Q: Interesting. Well, let's turn to Cameroon. Were there any special dimensions of the program in Cameroon that you were concerned with?*

JOHNSON: The Integrated Agricultural Development Livestock Agriculture Project.

*Q: Okay.*

JOHNSON: Like I said previously, the USAID program in the Cameroon had been concerned with regional organizations or with projects, which would make a regional difference, tended to be in the major capitol in Yaounde. Although, there were some programs that were active over in east Cameroon on the Anglophone area, very small projects. But, the DAP, the Development Assistance Program for Cameroon that was approved, called for a move from the regional programs to bilateral programs. It identified as the major bilateral, major development challenge, if you will, faced by Cameroon over that three to five year period as one of finding ways to connect the economies of north Cameroon and south Cameroon as a mechanism for heading off what could turn in to a Civil War. The strains and tension, at that point, were so heightened, so a number of projects were started with the overall attempt to overcome the differences between northern Cameroon and southern Cameroon.

With that as background, I think our most successful project was probably agricultural education where the government of Cameroon was interested in replicating essentially the American experience with a four year college that was oriented towards US Land Grant University A and M type of experience, agriculture and mechanical. They saw a need for those skills; they saw a need for the universities to concentrate on that. It was coming at a time when the Cameroonians were trying to move away from the inherited Anglophone and Francophone emphasis upon lawyers and government bureaucrats and, more or less, being the liberal arts type of graduate. In working with the government and with other donors, we had a major effort to try and develop a four year agricultural school that would be located outside of Yaounde, still in the south, we just couldn't get far enough north. But, from the very beginning it would be an attempt to look at agricultural problems for the whole country and look at their livestock problems, as well as agricultural problems. That was probably more successful.

*Q: Which university was involved? American university?*

JOHNSON: Consortium of American universities, as I recall, SECID: the Southeast Consortium for International Development. It was primarily historically black colleges. They had some difficulties with the contractor team, as always, of finding Americans who had fluent French and could function in academic atmosphere in Cameroon. That was probably the most difficult part of the exercise. Administratively within USAID, it was a point in which they were trying to increase the use of minority college universities and SECID, which was the Southeast Consortium of Historical Black Universities and Colleges, managed to produce with their first six faculty professors. They were all white. None of them worked for any of the SECID

universities; they were hired off the street. They had no internal cohesion or collaboration or back-stopping, simply because they didn't have the contacts at any of those SECID universities of being able to call up your buddy and say, hey, I've run in to this problem of grass and forage and what do you know and can you find me some literature. The first contractor team, I think was all pickup people. The second contractor team that had been placed as the tours of duty were up, you had a whole new team. Some of those did come from the universities and that worked much better. But, I would say that is another example where USAID's internal priorities took precedence over the development priorities in countries you were trying to work with. I think the Truce (sp?) Hospital made a major impact.

*Q: Was the Eye School effective and established?*

JOHNSON: The Eye School is effective and is still established. Cameroon has not yet had the Civil War. But, politics deteriorated after I left.

*Q: Or the hospital?*

JOHNSON: The hospital is still in existence.

*Q: We created the hospital?*

JOHNSON: Yes, we created CUSS. CUSS was the abbreviated name, the initials for the Cameroon University, something, I don't know.

*Q: Public Health College?*

JOHNSON: It still has some scholarships available to other Francophone countries.

*Q: But it was from training in public health?*

JOHNSON: It was training in public health and for medical doctors, an actual medical school. I think there may be one up in Senegal now, but it's still the major Francophone training program.

*Q: What about the Integrated Livestock project? I guess that was in northern Cameroon, right?*

JOHNSON: It was in northern Cameroon. The best thing I can say about the Integrated Agricultural project is that we avoided making some major mistakes that I think would have been environmental disasters. In trying to look at the north and what could be done in the north. What the southern government wanted was a major irrigated project which would have displaced several nomadic groups, probably would have had major health problems associated with the irrigation, which is what we ran in to again and again doing the irrigation projects. That the water would become very saline and very quickly. The salt would then kill the crops and the soil itself would be extra saline and salty. So, even if you tried to wipe out the water and just go back to dry land agriculture you'd damage the land, so that you couldn't do it. In many cases, damaged land to the extent that the herdsman couldn't use it for livestock forage. We managed to avoid doing some of those so that we didn't, we followed the "Hippocratic" the medical oath, first do

no harm. The Integrated Agricultural project worked as long as the donors put in money. After that it fell apart. Again, it worked because it was isolated and suspended from the system around it as long as the donor was there. When the donor left, then it became part of the system and it gradually fell back to its original state.

The other agricultural part of the project, the primary thoughts for that was the attempt to set up a planning council and help the governor of the north establish a donor assistance planning type of coordination capacity, simply because a number of donors were beginning to get active in northern Cameroon. That, I think, made a marginal improvement. It gave the governor some more trained people to work with. I don't think we made a major dent in the local politics or the types of interest that each party represented, simply because we didn't know enough. We, the donors didn't know enough to even work at that level. We were working at a higher level of a problem that was like three levels above some of the real issues.

*Q: We didn't understand the culture or the environment, physical or human or whatever.*

JOHNSON: Yes. Physical, political, ethnic heritage. I think at the level we worked we made a difference, but you then had to dig down two or three more levels for a lasting permanent improvement.

*Q: How about livestock?*

JOHNSON: Yes, we did the animal health portion that at the beginning they originally asked for. That worked; it worked well. They set up and gave some training; some veterinarians set up some posts, worked out rotation systems, did some education among the herders as to what diseases could be handled that way and what diseases they were better off using traditional methods.

*Q: And what parts didn't work?*

JOHNSON: Any real attempt to change. Donors were very much at that time concerned with carrying capacity of the land. I think I mentioned before, it was one of the early environmental kinds of concerns. We never managed to resolve our priority for carrying capacity of the land. With the individual herdsman, the priority was the more cattle the better. It was just as simple as that. For years and years and years, the more cattle the better it worked. The more cattle a man had, the more prosperous he was, the better he could handle emergency disasters, family health emergencies, sending kids to school, what have you. There was an attempt to say that you really have to cull your herds and you have to maintain smaller herds. In many ways, it was similar to some of the family planning arguments, that if you had eight to ten children you simply couldn't provide health care and education for all of them. And, the parents said yes, but those kids can go out in the field and work and I can get food. They essentially maintained a traditional approach that you had a limited capacity for cattle within your tribe, based upon your control of five wells and 50 acres around each well. They were very sensitive to the land each well provided. What they wanted donors to do was build more wells, at which point they could increase the number of cows. But, it didn't increase the land capacity and so you kept dealing with different expectations. I don't think we made a dent in their situation.

So, on the livestock program, one of the few times in my experience where we did look at the marketing issues. We were trying to encourage the Sahelian countries to market more at urban centers at the coast and that was simply that protein was given a high priority; it was a ready market for them. As a relief mechanism or a risk aversion mechanism, that was something that the nomadic tribes, the pastoral groups were very familiar with, which they undertook to do. If you had an emergency need for money you'd sell some cows. If the rains didn't come you'd walk the cows farther south. As a production ethnic, as you raise the cows, you put them in stalls and you force feed them, and you slaughter them, and you have cold trains....

The same was true for Cameroon, although it was all within one country and so in that sense it should have been easier for southern Cameroon to feed northern Cameroon. Northern Cameroon to feed southern Cameroon open centers in Douala and Yaounde. Unlike many other African countries, the capitol was in Yaounde, which was about half way up. Douala was the port city, commercial center, business; Yaounde was the university and the government. So, both of those represented places where meat was high priority. They flew in meat from France. Conceptually, it seemed that it ought to be easier to do in Cameroon, because it was all within one country. We never made major progress on that then and I don't think in the ten years since that there's been a major change.

*Q: When you were in Cameroon it was about the time, I believe of the New Directions Policy and push came out, wasn't it? That was in '74, '75, '76?*

JOHNSON: New Directions was Nixon/Ford. So, really the New Directions influenced, I think the thrust of the Sahelian program. You were reaching into the poorest countries; you were reaching out trying to, again with the whole attempt to go to immediate action to change lives.

*Q: What was your understanding of the New Directions push, compared to what was going before?*

JOHNSON: Essentially, as the New Directions, as I understood the politics of it, was a compromise between Nixon and Humphrey (ed?) from the Senate. Whereby, Nixon got the support that he wanted for Vietnam in the military effort in exchange for letting some of the more liberal Congress orientated people beef up the development program and change the development legislation. In changing the development legislation, they wrote it as a modified Peace Corp approach. That individual contact, one on one change was where change really happened and that the U.S. official development program should take on more of the characteristics of the Peace Corp program; that we should move out of capitol cities; we should move into the rural areas; we should have programs that impact immediately upon people; have a very strong PVO approach. It represented a major wrench institutionally for the USAID Agency. The Agency, how do I say this about myself and my colleagues —we were all too intellectual to begin with.

*Q: What?*

JOHNSON: Everybody at USAID becomes too intellectual. We spent ages and ages debating the philosophy of the new approaches, and that had congressional staffers, you know,... I would try and explain to them why some part of the legislation was too difficult or made it more difficult than it need be for us to do something. And, they would look at me in total wide eye amazement and say, "Why do you take it so seriously, do what makes sense, use your common sense, don't fall for the legislation." I explained that maybe the legislative branch, the executive branch had a tendency to have lawyers that said the legislation was important. I think that part of the whole New Directions philosophy was the Congressmen who voted for it didn't really believe in it and they never took it seriously on the Hill.

*Q: But, there was a debate between or at least there was this concept of the difference between the poor majority and the poorest of the poor. What was your understanding of the primary thrust of the conservatives?*

JOHNSON: Well, at that time I was working with the PL480 programs, technical assistance programs, and capital assistance programs. The PL480 legislation itself, actually invited that phrase, that the food should reach the poorest of the poor. The USAID legislation never actually said those words, but in the food aid program, you're entitled to free distribution or your food for work programs favored poor. Your Title I programs, which were sales programs, almost by definition didn't reach the poorest of the poor, you know, because you didn't have any money to buy. The hours were spent trying to agonize over the official export vehicle that Title I provided which would go maybe to your cities and your elite, but would thereby free up food that might otherwise be compensated and be available to farmers. More subsequent honest or vigorous analysis, you know, really got into the issue of whether donated food, basically disrupts, interrupts, makes more difficult, depresses internal domestic food production, that it's harder for the indigenous farmer to find the market at a fair price for his products when they come in and are directly available at the port and it all goes in to some type of commercial production system. I think the whole food aid debate got much more familiar, I was more in to the food aid debate I guess, than the New Directions and the other areas.

*Q: But, when you were in the Cameroon, did you see any evidence of the New Direction? Was it in the type of program you were carrying out?*

JOHNSON: Well, the Sahel program was the push. The Sahel program was very much devised in terms of reaching the poor majority. The whole thrust in back of it growing out of the humanitarian relief effort. It simply pushed us in that direction.

*Q: Were you in Cameroon at the time of the Mandara Mountains program?*

JOHNSON: I thought we killed the Mandara program. No. No. I was there when they did some of the original initial studies and essentially killed it.

*Q: It started, but it didn't last.*



JOHNSON: Al Hoban was the anthropologist who came out and did some initial work on the Mandara Mountains. And, basically his report was so negative that we spent the rest of our time trying to talk the government out of doing what it wanted to do.

*Q: What was the problem with that? What was the program? What were the initiatives behind that?*

JOHNSON: The basic initiative was that you had a large section of land that was currently in this government's viewpoint not used, and you could therefore, put in irrigated agriculture, you could move in farmers, and you could open it up, there was a new frontier's type of argument. (The government wanted to move the indigenous people in the Mandara Mountains out to the low lands, ed) You could open up a whole new geographic area and add it to the productive string, you know, the capital, etc. etc. etc. Al Hoban who was the anthropologist, looked at the area and said, one, it's currently utilized right now, it's just utilized by other people; two, you've got some major physical problems in terms of trying to do irrigation in the area; and three, the area is so isolated from any transportation, logistical support environment, that you're kidding yourself if you think that agricultural production can then be used to come into the major cities. The major thing he did that I think influenced us was the argument that the area is currently used and laying out how it was used and who used it, and gave us some facts to talk to government officials about, who essentially proceeded with it. You know, it didn't phase them. (It's like the early U.S. again. On the initial maps of the U.S. the entire mid west, it's labeled the great American desert.) As far as the people in the capitol city, few of whom had ever been up north in Mandarin mountains; you know, it was unutilized land. The poor majority areas became more known in Washington, it affected the kinds of documents that were written and the kinds of analysis that you undertook. In the field, I think it was perceived or felt as a push to get action going to move away from institutions and capital cities. That you needed to be able to show results at the local level. I think part of that just got so tied in to the idea of moving in to bilateral programs and the starting up of bilateral programs in Central Africa Republic where the rural health project was the major initiative and the major effort. Vocational training was another major program. The nurses mid-wife training in Gabon. The selection of projects and the types of things that were undertaken became as much internalized, I think for people in the field as action projects, rather than institutional projects or policy projects.

**HERBERT JOHN SPIRO**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cameroon (1975-1977)**

*Ambassador Herbert Spiro was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1924. He attended Harvard University and spent some time teaching at the Free University of Berlin. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994*

*Q: How did your appointment to be Ambassador come about?*

SPIRO: Senator Scott had been asking the appointments people in the White House for a couple of years, and there was a vacancy, and it was considered suitable. It turned out to be much more suitable than anybody could have imagined.

I'd gone to Hamburg because an uncle, who had left Hamburg and gotten stuck in Shanghai in 1941 and then after the war joined my parents in San Antonio, had gone back to Hamburg in 1956 and he died in March of '75 and I'd gone back for the funeral. When I came back, Larry Eagleburger who was Kissinger's Executive Assistant, called me in and said that I was about to be nominated to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea concurrently and was that all right. I said, it was fine.

The amusing thing was that Cameroon got started as a German colony, but Bismarck didn't really want any colonies in Africa. And Bismarck said at one point, "I'll be damned if I'm going to permit the establishment of a German colonial empire on the French model." But there were some very persistent rich merchants in Hamburg who kept pestering Bismarck, who had his estate near the city, and he finally gave in, they were so persistent. A German consul, who signed up native chiefs for treaties of allegiance and support, got to the Cameroon coast just before a British consul with the same mission.

Cameroon is the only country named after shrimp. And it still has the best shrimp fishing banks in the world and the American company, General Foods, which runs a large shrimp trawling fleet, in one of whose trawlers my younger son and I went out, which is one of the sort of activities that ambassadors engage in.

The British consul was late, so it became a German colony which was then divided between France and Britain as League of Nations mandates, which became United Nations trust territories after the Second World War. But it started as a German colony.

I was sworn in on August 1, 1975, at precisely the time that President Ford and Henry Kissinger were at the European Security Conference in Helsinki, Finland, which meant he couldn't be in my swearing in. I'd invited a couple of Ambassadors whom I knew, including the German Ambassador von Staden, to the swearing-in ceremony. And he had told me beforehand, or one of his top embassy officers, that I must have been selected by the famous State Department personnel computer because I was from Hamburg and Cameroon had really been more of a Hamburg colony than a German colony.

The idea of a State Department personnel computer was so ridiculous and so off-beam and so contrary to the arbitrary method by which both political and career officers were picked to be Ambassadors. I mentioned this in my little acceptance speech.

But it came about because Hugh Scott thought I'd be very good and because, this was not soon after Henry became Secretary, it was soon after Ford became President. Hugh Scott and Jerry Ford were very close to each other, Hugh being the Republican leader in the Senate and Jerry in the House. In fact, Senator Scott had told me that before President Nixon picked Jerry Ford to be Spiro Agnew's successor, he called both of them in and Hugh Scott might just as well have

become Vice President. Anyway, I'm sure it was because the Ford White House was more responsive to Senator's Scott's proposals than the Nixon White House.

*Q: What was the situation, we're talking about the '75 period, both in Cameroon and in Equatorial Guinea?*

SPIRO: Cameroon was very good, a man who'd been President since independence, very solid, conservative, unflamboyant man, Amadou Ahidjo. They had just found oil but they went about its development very slowly and they didn't make excessive promises. The human rights situation was better than in most other African countries. They were genuinely nonaligned, they had for example both South Korean and North Korean Embassies, they had Soviet and Chinese Embassies, they were responsive to our proposals. I've always thought that our AID was the worst of our Foreign Services, and we can talk about that. They made very good use of our Peace Corps people who were superb young people.

Washington wasn't much interested in it. We had to work very hard to get them to vote with us on issues like the perennial Cuban resolution at the UN that Puerto Rico was a colony. We had to persuade them that it wasn't and then they would vote with us or abstain, being actually honestly nonaligned.

At one point Ambassador Scranton, who was then our Ambassador to the UN and who had been the Governor of Pennsylvania, from whence I knew him slightly, made the annual trip of the American Ambassador of the United Nations to certain key countries in order to get them to vote with us on certain key issues at the UN. He came in time for our observance of the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. He came about 2 weeks before July 4, 1976, so that I had our ceremony which was a *Vin d'honneur*, a champagne cocktail party, to which I invited the entire Cameroonian government from the President on down, which had never been done, they'd never been in an embassy before, they all came and Scranton was the Guest of Honor. We had very nice little speeches about the Declaration of Independence, and independence and the meaning of it, and freedom, which was perfectly well received, but proclaimed a concept of freedom which went beyond anything that you can find anywhere in Africa even today.

Anyway, so we had to work very hard and they usually went along with us. The nice thing was that Washington didn't really care for other things and they were fairly responsive to my suggestions. We had no congressional delegations visiting except on a private visit. Congressman Quie, who later became Governor of his home state Minnesota, was visiting his sister who was with a Lutheran mission hospital.

The AID people were resistant and stupid and self-serving with a few exceptions. I think one reason for that was that most of them had to be placed somewhere, they'd been in Vietnam, and Cameroon is four-fifths Francophone and one-fifth Anglophone, although both languages have constitutionally equal rights.

*Q: They'd just been kicked out.*

SPIRO: They were sent to us. I had one major experience which we may want to get back to, I'll just talk about it briefly. Cameroon had completed a railroad from the Port of Douala, where we had a consulate, to Ngoundere, a town about 200 miles up country. They were then engaged in extending that railroad further to the north. All the European countries and Canada, which had a particular interest in Cameroon because it is also bilingual and bicultural in the same two languages, were supporting this, and the World Bank was supporting it. And the United States was being advised not to support it by these stupid and recalcitrant and self-serving AID characters. Not so much the ones in country or the country director but a man in Washington, one of many bureaucrats, who said that United States can't support it because it's against the law to give support for railroad projects.

I went home for consultations, which I couldn't do on State Department money because we were on a tight budget. The AID officers from Washington could do more traveling than an Ambassador. I happened to have got an invitation to give a lecture at Heidelberg University in Germany, so I piggybacked my Washington trip on the Heidelberg thing, for which I had to get approval from the Department, which I got.

Before I went to see the AID people, I went to see a Harvard contemporary of mine, John Brademas, who was Democratic Majority Whip, and I told him what the problem was and that Cameroon had a very responsible government and they were developing in a serious way. He sent me to a Pennsylvania congressman, whose name I've forgotten. I first went to see (Republican) Congressman Larry Coughlin, who just retired in the last election, he didn't run for reelection, whom I'd known from Philadelphia and he passed me on to this Pennsylvania Democrat who was an expert on the AID legislation. He explained to me that it was not only not against the law, but that the law specifically provided that, where the United States had previously helped with a railroad project and/or the railroad project was likely to help other countries in the region--and this one going up North would help Chad and the Central African Republic--there were several others, and if it fulfilled any one of those requirements, it was not only covered by the law, there were extra funds provided for it, ready for it.

So after a long and fairly bitter fight, in which the AID bureaucrat fought dirty, like not sending me wires of information, it was pushed through and the United States participated in this aid for the extension of this railroad, which became a great success. But the funny thing was, two years after I'd come back--after Jimmy Carter in the first of many major mistakes, accepted my routinely rendered resignation -- you can hear that that is a rehearsed phrase, I use it often--I ran into this local AID bureaucrat who said, "Well Mr. Ambassador, I got your project through," which he had fought tooth and nail. Not only that, but he was the guy who was put in charge of a number of African regional railroad upgrading programs for AID on the Washington end.

But it was a well run country where it was pleasant to be Ambassador. It was interesting for other reasons because they were put together along with many other African countries in this artificial way. There are 200 languages in Cameroon because they'd gone through the German colonial experience which was pretty rigorous. The Germans were pretty nasty and sometimes brutal colonial masters, and then the very different French and British. And they committed themselves to working together between these 2 or 3 traditions.

They, and this is a long story very briefly told, they'd become natural diplomats, they had to get along among themselves. They had therefore supplied many diplomats for the African continental plan, for the OAU, for example, and for the UN. The Chairman, of what later became the first Committee of the Law of the Seas Conference, was a Cameroonian, a senior career Cameroonian diplomat. And that meant that when Richardson had become Ambassador for the Law of the Seas, by this time we're early in the Carter administration, he sent two of his principal aides who had been with him before at Defense and Justice and everywhere else I think. One of whom was Richard Dorman who later became OMB Director and the other one was the son of Ambassador Smith who'd been the Ambassador to the SALT negotiations, way back. They came over to Cameroon in order to meet with this Cameroonian diplomat who was the head of the main committee of the Law of the Seas Conference.

Cameroon was fine, it was fun. Incidentally, since this is about becoming an Ambassador, before I presented my Letters of Credence to President Ahidjo, there was the annual Peace Corps volunteer conference in the capitol at a local hotel. The volunteers who had been there for one or two years came back to exchange information. I was asked to come to that conference and to meet the volunteers and to give them a pep talk.

I'd seen lots of Ambassadors in operation, but I had not been an Ambassador before, and I'd seen lots of movies. And what does an Ambassador do at a more or less ceremonial thing like this--the beginning of a conference in a hotel, no functioning yet because he hasn't presented his credentials. So I went around and did what both Ambassadors and politicians do, I went around and said (there was this guy with me who would say, "This is Ambassador Spiro."), I'd say, "How are you and where are you from?" Expecting them to say, Williamstown, Massachusetts or Austin, Texas or Berkeley, California. But without exception they answered with the name of the town or village in Cameroon where they were stationed, they had completely identified in one or two years with their Cameroonian hosts.

Then during our tour, I'm including Betsy in this, obviously she was a very good Ambassador's wife and more than that. She actually, while we were there in 1976, wrote a pioneering article on the role that human rights should play in American foreign policy. When the Carter-Ford debate took place, we heard it over short-wave, it sounded like Betsy Spiro in the voice of Carter, and Betsy Spiro in the voice of Ford, talking to each other. Speech writers, or advisors to both of them, had read this article which was published just in time for the campaign. Appropriately, Betsy is now Deputy Director of an office in the Bureau of Human Rights.

We visited many Peace Corps volunteers in backwoods places and they were really doing a splendid job. Which surprised me because when the Peace Corps was first invented by President Kennedy, I was very critical of it because in the beginning it looked like a bunch of rich kids just wanting to do their "tour" abroad. In the beginning, I think it tended to be that way.

Cameroon was fine and there were no problems and they made use of my special qualities. The majority of them, and the dominant component in the government of Cameroon, were the Francophones, although the fifth of the population that was Anglophone, had more than proportional representation. But the Francophones were dominant. In their Parliament and in their Cabinet they always had simultaneous translation.

But the Francophones especially, like the French at home, have enormous respect for intellectuals, I never considered myself an intellectual, we don't have an intellectual class, but they did.

*Q: But you had the professorial, you'd written things*

SPIRO: I was a professor. I had brought deliberately, I think I had to get special permission to take the major part of my library along. We had bookshelves constructed in the Residence and that impressed them and that got me entree where my predecessors and successors would not have had it. I was asked to give a lecture at the university which was otherwise very reluctant to have political foreigners.

It also meant, I'm almost as down on the US Information Service as I am on AID of that period, it may have improved although I doubt it. We had some really bad USIS people, except for the junior persons. One failure that I had, we had a second tour woman who was the Press Officer under USIS who had served somewhere else before, a young college graduate. She was the only junior or mid-level person in the embassy, who constantly had all sorts of local journalists and other intellectuals at her home to entertain, including especially Africans, Cameroonians.

So I recommended her for a Meritorious Service Award at the end of my first year. The Public Affairs Officer, a fellow named Jerry Prillaman--who rose to heights later on, not on my recommendation--said, you can't do this without my approval. It turned out to be true, an Ambassador cannot recommend for special awards AID or USIA officers, he has to get the Country Director's or the Public Affairs Officer's permission. His excuse was, this would be very bad for her career if she gets recognition too early. She did not get the recognition then but I think she's had a successful career since then.

I had made a couple of trips to the northern-most province and provincial capital called Maroua, partly because it was near a wonderful, totally natural, national park, lots of elephants and animals in it. We had only one consulate in Douala, the port city, but there was a wonderful AID officer named Tex Ford, who's obviously from Texas, in Maroua who had been with AID since he was a Young Farmer of America, probably growing alfalfa in Texas. And he'd gotten several awards for work he'd done in Latin America and he'd been in Vietnam and I think in the Philippines, he's great.

On one occasion, a Jehovah Witness missionary had strayed across the Chad border into Cameroon, he'd been held, as an illegal immigrant. The plane that normally went up to that city, which was 300 miles away from Maroua where Tex Ford was stationed for AID, was grounded, so our consular officer, another young woman, couldn't fly up to get the missionary released. So Tex Ford drove his Land Rover, or his jeep, to the other town, the border town. And he knew everybody there because he'd gone around distributing Carter peanut seeds from the Carter peanut seed farm. He knew everybody, they loved him, he was nice, he's a Texan, he was jolly, you'd get along with him, a tall fellow. And he got the missionary sprung.

And then the US Information Service people had habitually, from the time of independence, sent the same French-speaking American professors to the same countries--because they happened to know them, because they were there, and they spoke French and there was a kind of symbiotic relationship between the potential pool of speakers and French West African colonies. Some of them were okay but most of them were dull and they got duller as time wore on.

I tried to get Stanley Hoffman to come and he couldn't and I tried to get Lawrence Wiley, name mean anything to you? A famous Harvard professor who wrote a famous book in the 50s about a little southern French village. These were well known in Cameroon and elsewhere. I finally was able to get Professor Nicholas Wahl, who was then at Princeton and is now the head of the French center at NYU, to come out. This is after Carter's election and before Christmas of 1976.

I asked the USIS people to set up as many occasions for him to speak, in a two-week period, as possible and especially to include Maroua in the far north of Cameroon. Jerry said, well, we've never done anything up there before. I said, well, you do it now. Well, we don't have anybody up there. So I got on the phone to Tex Ford and I said, can you do this? To make another long story short, it's an interesting one. He got 300 people to come, all the elite of the northern province and it was an enormous success. With prodding, Prillaman and the others set-up a meeting that was attended by 1200 in Ngoundere, it was the centrally located provincial capital. But it was very hard to get them into this.

Then I tried, and this time I succeeded, to get Meritorious Service Awards, two of them, for Tex Ford, from the State Department for his consular services, he got that, he didn't get the USIS one but in the end he got that one too. But there was just this recalcitrance and "service narrowness."

*Q: That's reaching down, they want the award, not you.*

SPIRO: Right, but I wanted to place it with somebody who had done extraordinary things, beyond and above the call of duty and of his bureaucratic niche.

Equatorial Guinea was a totally different story and one that I've written up. The Spanish had done nothing for their colonies, they pushed Equatorial Guinea into independence for totally ulterior motives before there was any preparation. The motive was to get Third World countries to vote with Spain on the issue of Gibraltar at the United Nations. There was no independence movement. There were no college trained people.

There were 2 separate colonies, Fernando Po, the island, which physically looks very much like the big island of Hawaii, and Rio Muni, the mainland colony inhabited by 2 different tribes. Spain pushed Equatorial New Guinea, as the combination of these two, into independence and under a brutal tyrant named Macias who belonged to the dominant tribe. He instituted a brutal regime which led to the flight from the country of about 300,000 Equatorial Guineans, many whom went to Spain.

We never had a resident embassy there, we had a Chargé d'affaires and one communicator. When I was on the Policy Planning Staff, this is a dark chapter in the history of the Foreign Service, do you know anything about this in 1970? Do you have any others on record on this?

*Q: I think I have somebody but you might explain.*

SPIRO: The Ambassador to Cameroon was also concurrently assigned to Equatorial Guinea, he would visit twice a year. In 1970, maybe it was a little later when I was on the Planning Staff, I got all the cables from Africa. There were these frantic cables from the Chargé in Fernando Po, which has been renamed by the brutal dictator, that a vast Soviet fleet was assembling around the island and was about to take it over.

What actually happened was that the Chargé murdered the communicator, for which he later served 7 years in a federal prison, I think. He possibly went mad because the embassy was right next-door to the prison and I was told that he could hear the screams of the prisoners as they were being tortured night and day. There were also intimations of homosexuality.

*Q: Yes, I think there was physical evidence of this.*

SPIRO: There was physical evidence. Then, very much to his credit, the Nigerian Ambassador in Equatorial New Guinea, who was a former Colonel in the Nigerian military regime of the previous period of the civil war, saw to it that the Chargé was gotten out, sort of under guard. He was flown from Douala to Washington and arrested at the airport and tried and sentenced. Then he joined the retired Foreign Service officers club, I think.

Anyway, there was this background in US-Equatorial Guinean relations. We couldn't be too loud because we had a Chargé who went mad.

So I was appointed concurrently to both, I presented my credentials to Macias in the company of the man who was then our consul in Douala, who later became my DCM, an FSO named Bill Mithoefer. That was like something out of Evelyn Waugh's novel, Scoop. We took along an LP record of the Star Spangled Banner and a bunch of football songs because they had said that they wanted their National Guard to play the two National Anthems when I presented my credentials. We were worried they'd play, you know, "Fair Harvard" or "On Wisconsin," but they actually played the National Anthem, it was a pretty good rendition. I was able to use my Spanish from San Antonio, I had an interesting conversation with Macias who's Spanish is excellent but who, as I have said, was a brutal tyrant.

Lots of resident Ambassadors in Yaounde, Cameroon, would make 2 trips a year to Fernando Po. We always took along bags of bread and rolls because Macias had declared that bread was a colonial invention, and would not permit flour to be ground or imported, so that you didn't have any bread coming out from the mainland to the diplomats who were stationed there - that was really a hardship post. We closed it after the murder.

*Q: I was going to say, it really didn't make much sense.*

SPIRO: But it was reopened in the Reagan administration, I think. One of Senator Jesse Helms' aides for whom he insisted on getting an appointment, barring which he would not let someone else be confirmed, got that appointment. Apparently it hadn't approved very much.



It was interesting being on the island. It reminded me very much of Hawaii and they had a Spanish cattle ranch high up. They had, until a few years before that, they imported thousands of Nigerian Ibo workers because the local tribe didn't like to do that kind of work. The Ibo workers were being exploited and persecuted. The Nigerian government in an expedition, again headed by this wonderful Ambassador who had brought out our murdering Chargé, had evacuated 6,000 Ibo workers. Since then the production of cocoa, and this is one of the best cocoa beans from Equatorial Guinea, from the island, had a higher cocoa butter content which is how you measure them, than any other cocoa in the world. It had been most productive but after the Ibos were evacuated by the Nigerian government, it went down. Things were just awful.

President Macias had invited me to visit the mainland colony on the occasion of the day on which they celebrate the final victory over colonialism. So the Consul, who had meanwhile become my DCM, and I, in a Peugeot, drove for 3 hours to the Equatorial Guinea-Cameroon border in March of 1976. At the border we were greeted by people who beat the ground with branches cut from bushes, and "Abajo el colonialismo Espanol," down with Spanish colonialism and then they lift up the bushes and "Arriba el gran maestro," long live the great teacher of the people, etc., etc., about 10 different titles, Macias.

This is a separate story which I have written up and I'll be glad to send you copies of it, I don't want to take any time with it now.

I spent a bizarre 3 days there. At the border, it's sort of a no man's land between the 2 countries. The Chief of Protocol, who escorted me back to the border, accused me of being not an Ambassador but an assassin and a spy; and he accused President Nixon, who was not in office any more, of being a communist and a spy; and he denied that his President, who had visited China, was a communist; and it was really bizarre. We were in no man's land. I feared for my life for a while, because they could have shot me if they wanted to.

We figured it out afterwards, that they'd been planning to create a diplomatic incident which would get them publicity. But that didn't happen and we drove the 3 hours back to Yaounde and I sent a cable to the Department recommending that we break relations. Meanwhile, they had gotten a commercial telegram because Cameroon did not have an Ambassador in Washington, they did have one at the UN, declaring me and the DCM, "*personae non gratae*." The US government then suspended diplomatic relations with them and instructed me to present the Demarche stating that, to the Equatorial Guinean Ambassador in Yaounde, which I did. Whereupon he asked for asylum from the Cameroon government, he didn't want to take that message back.

*Q: Had anything happened during your trip other than the*

SPIRO: Yes, a number of things had happened. First I had a conversation with the President which went off perfectly well. I was lying on the beach, they have beautiful beaches, and dreaming of all sorts of wonderful things that a really good American AID program could do with them, with all the talented and savvy Spanish speaking Mexican-Americans we have in

Texas. It would be just great for tourism and the mainland counties had rich country, pigs running around and so forth.

And then we were invited, I'd expressed interest in it, to go to an up-country lumber, precious woods plantation which was being run by a French company and a French manager. We flew up there and we had tea with the French manager in the presence of the Chief of Protocol from the Presidency, who later turned out to be the villain.

I looked, as I often do, it's a terribly impolite thing to do, I looked at the teacup which we were served the tea in, to see where it came from. Oh, I said, this [china] is from China. These were French people, so one of the charges against me was that I said they were communists. I had said nothing about the President's trip to China, I don't think I knew about it, I didn't care about it. We were beginning to have non-diplomatic relations with the mainland Chinese by this time.

*Q: By this time we'd had relations with China.*

SPIRO: Oh sure. Although I was not allowed by the Department, I'd tried to invite the Chinese Ambassador to my residence, unless he invited me to his, which he didn't, so we never did.

Then on our way back, I was taken to his native village where Macias had set up a brand new hospital but it had no patients in it, nor electricity, it had no water. When we were in the President's village, where we spent the night, they tried to put me and Mithoefer into different houses and we insisted that they couldn't do that. We were already getting suspicious because there were all sorts of crowds on our route.

As I say, I describe this systematically and fairly amusingly, everybody agreed with the conclusion that he was trying to set up a diplomatic incident which they could then exploit because it was total backwater. He was trying to get back in and he had this terrible internal human rights record.

Speaking of the Chinese, this is also an incidental story, our sons were then 14 and 12. The younger one spent the first year with us and attended the American International School in Yaounde, and the older one was boarding in St. Albans here and came back for holidays including summers. The younger one was coming back by himself and on a flight from Paris to Douala, he found himself sitting next to 2 men dressed like Chinese functionaries.

*Q: Mao suits.*

SPIRO: One of them was studying a dictionary. He got into a conversation with the one sitting next to him and he said, "My father is the American Ambassador to Cameroon." They said they were going to Cameroon as development assistants or else diplomats. And so Alexander, who was 13 maybe, got into a very good conversation with him defending US-China policy, US foreign policy in general. He's now a lawyer who, in his first year out of Georgetown Law School, earned more money than I earned cumulatively in 11 years after I got my Ph.D., not adjusted for inflation....

When he came back, I actually sent a cable on that. You know they use all sorts of abbreviations in the State Department, which Secretary Vance I think tried to eliminate, the heading was: AMSON's conversation with CHIDIPS - Chinese diplomats.

A week later, this is Christmas actually, there was a farewell diplomatic party at the airport for a departing Ambassador, which the Chinese Ambassador attended. My wife, Betsy--now in the Human Rights bureau of the Department after serving in Oslo, Johannesburg and Reykjavik, in reverse chronological, order--approached the Chinese Ambassador and said, "My son had a wonderful conversation," she can do this very well, "with two of your diplomats on the flight from Paris to Douala last week. He just thought they were so friendly in talking..." The Chinese Ambassador, who spoke no language known to man, through his interpreter said, "No, no such diplomats. Never happened." Which just illustrates the larger point that one's family, if you're lucky, do an important part of the job.

*Q: Oh they do, absolutely, no doubt about it.*

*You left there right after the elections?*

SPIRO: As I say, it's the first of many major mistakes, Jimmy Carter accepted my routinely rendered resignation. We left the end of May of 1977, the President of Cameroon gave a very nice farewell luncheon for me.

When I'd come back from consultations, real consultations, in October of '76 during the campaign here, I called upon him after my return and he was very much interested in the elections. He listened to the Voice of America, French version, everyday. He said he thought that Carter would win. I said, I thought Ford would win, he said Carter, and I said Ford. He said, "You want to bet?" This is in French.

I said American officials are not permitted to bet. He said, not to worry, he wasn't permitted to bet either but didn't I want to bet? I said, all right. He said, champagne? I said, all right. I thought he bet a bottle of champagne. Of course he bet a case of champagne.

The British Ambassador, who was a short fellow, known as Bertie, looked like a caricature of a British diplomat of the 19th century. Because at formal occasions when we wear striped pants and tails, he wore fore and aft sort of hat

*Q: fore and aft, yeah*

SPIRO: and saber

*Q: The whole diplomatic uniform.*

SPIRO: Right. He told me, I don't think it was true, that Cameroon imported more champagne than the sum total of British development assistance, which he said was \$300,000 or pounds. But I don't think that was true.

So President Ahidjo said a case of champagne. I said, all right, and we shook hands on it. I reported this conscientiously to the Department and said if President Ford wins, I would get a case of real French champagne because that's what he serves. He doesn't drink himself. What he doesn't know is that if Governor Carter wins, he would get a case of upstate New York Regency champagne which we could get at Burkas (on Wisconsin Avenue NW), then, for \$3 a bottle. You know that Carter won and I ordered a case of Regency champagne from Burkas and had it sent to him.

The day before our departure, the President gave a luncheon in my honor, at which he awarded me Legion of Valor (for which I had previously gotten permission from Washington). Champagne was served, but the bottles were in napkins at this farewell luncheon, and I asked him if this was the champagne he won from me, because I wanted to make sure that he had received it. He said no, he was saving that for my return. Which is one of the nicest things, quite touching...

**FREDERICK E. GILBERT**  
**Deputy Regional Development Officer, USAID**  
**Cameroon (1976-1980)**

*Frederick E. Gilbert was born in Minnesota in 1939. He graduated from the University of Minnesota and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Upon joining USAID in 1964, his assignments abroad included Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Tanzania, Sudan, Ivory Coast and Mauritania. Mr. Gilbert was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

GILBERT: I went to Cameroon in 1976. And I spent four years there.

*Q: What was the situation in Cameroon at that time? Why were we having a program?*

GILBERT: Cameroon was treated as an honorary Sahelian country during the Sahel drought and in its aftermath. Yaounde was the site of one of the Regional Development Offices (RDOs) that we talked about earlier. RDO/Yaounde had responsibilities for Chad, which became a CILSS country, and for the Central African Republic (later Empire), Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. During the Sahel drought, the RDO was responsible for administering emergency assistance for Chad and, to some extent, for Northern Cameroon, which has a lot in common with the Sahelian countries. Cameroon was the route of choice for shipment of food assistance to Chad. It traveled by rail from Douala to Ngaoundere and then by road to Ndjamena. Some of the bilateral projects on the books when I arrived there in 1976 bore all the hallmarks of Sahelian medium-term projects.

*Q: But they were not included in the Club du Sahel.*

GILBERT: Cameroon was not a member of the CILSS and, thus, did not participate in the Club/CILSS forums.

I was assigned to Yaounde as Deputy Regional Development Officer, replacing Art Fell.

*Q: It wasn't a full mission at that time?*

GILBERT: No, it wasn't. I think there were only six U.S. direct-hire officers. John Koehring was the Director. Al Henn was the Regional Health Officer. Norm Greene was the Regional Human Resources Officer. John Woods replaced Glenn Slocum as the Regional Program Officer, arriving at about the same time I did. Tex Ford arrived not long afterwards to serve as the Regional Agriculture Development Officer. I can picture the guy he replaced, but I can't think of his name. Then somewhat later Eric Witt arrived as an Agricultural Economist International Development Intern (IDI). Tridib Mukherjee, who later became a direct-hire, was there as a project technician, I believe. There was no Management Officer at the outset. That role was pretty much exercised by John's Administrative Assistant and John himself. For someone whose previous field service was in Ghana and Nigeria, it had a distinctly "mom and pop" feel to it. We were really busy with developing the new elements of the program while also winding down the earlier generation of regional projects.

*Q: Was it rightly called a regional office?*

GILBERT: Yes. The office was responsible for managing a number of regional projects that covered Chad, CAR and Gabon as well as Cameroon. These projects focused on health training and disease control, agriculture, livestock, development administration training and low-cost housing. These projects may have covered Equatorial Guinea in principle, but not in practice. Equatorial Guinea at that time was still "Heart of Darkness" country under Macias, who was a real monster.

*Q: Not the Congo?*

GILBERT: Congo-Kinshasa or Zaire always had its own full bilateral Mission until the late 1980s. But, now that you mention it, I'm surprised that we weren't given some responsibility for Congo-Brazzaville, but I'm quite sure that we didn't have it. Maybe that country was totally off AID's radar screen. Alternatively, USAID-Kinshasa may have covered it.

Soon after I arrived, in about November 1976, we handed over all responsibility for management of AID projects in Chad to John Lundgren, the Director of the Country Development Office there. I believe my first field trip involved accompanying John Koehring to Ndjamená where Lundgren was just setting up shop. When we pulled into the compound that contained both his office and his house, he was literally crawling around well up in a large tree for reasons that I can't reconstruct.

I recall that there was a certain tension in the air about what the relationship would be between that office and us. I think there may have been some uncertainty whether we should retain some kind of substantive oversight function. As it turned out, apart from some financial management backstopping, our main responsibility for support of the Chad operation was to help assure the movement of project commodities and, occasionally, emergency relief supplies to Ndjamená.

There may also have been an understanding that our technical experts might be called upon for advice from time to time, but I don't recall that that ever amounted to much.

*Q: Did we have bilateral programs in each of these countries?*

GILBERT: Bilateral programs were to be developed in Cameroon, Chad and CAR, but not in Equatorial Guinea or Gabon. I mentioned the problem with Equatorial Guinea. Gabon had too high an average per capita income to qualify for AID assistance.

*Q: So you were shifting away from the regional programs.*

GILBERT: Yes, in part. Most of them were coming to the end of their intended spans. These included Central Africa Livestock and Meat Marketing, National Advanced School for Agriculture (a Cameroonian institution that served the region as well), Gabon and Cameroon Low Cost Housing and the Pan African Institute for Development (PAID). Our nascent bilateral program in Cameroon consisted of some projects that were, in effect, medium-term projects and were similar in thrust to those coming on stream in the Sahel. Projects in this category were North Cameroon Livestock and Agriculture Development (earlier known as the Mindif-Moulvedaye Project), North Cameroon Seed Multiplication, and North Cameroon Rural Health Service. But other bilateral projects represented continuations of Cameroon-based elements of regional projects. These included University Center for Health Science (CUSS), Practical Training in Health Education and Cameroon Low Cost Housing. Meanwhile at least one regional project, PAID, continued as such. This made quite a diverse portfolio. Given that and the challenge of working in a Francophone environment, it was an exhilarating experience.

*Q: How was it different?*

GILBERT: Well, a number of things come to mind. One is the formality and fussiness of Francophone administrative culture. I worked there for four years. Even two or three years into that period, many Cameroonian contacts still addressed me as "Monsieur le Directeur Adjoint." They addressed one another that way as well. If they felt playful or informal they might exaggerate one another's titles. I can remember the Secretary General in the Ministry of Economy and Plan and one of his colleagues calling one another "Mon General." And there was never a question of getting beyond that to being on a first name basis. If one developed a genuine relationship with a Cameroonian, it would only lead to calling one another by family names, as often as not still preceded by "Monsieur". The French generally went rather quickly to that stage, but I can't recall being on a first name basis with more than about five French and Cameroonians with whom I sang in a madrigals group. At first, not wanting to sound officious, I would introduce myself as "Gilbert" rather than "Monsieur Gilbert." I can still remember the stricken looks this produced on some Cameroonian and French faces. Gilbert is more common as a first name than a family name among the French, so they thought to themselves: "This crazy American is introducing himself to me by his first name and must, therefore, be expecting the unthinkable – that I respond in kind! Quelle horreur!! I soon learned to quickly add, "Frederick Gilbert." If I said "Fritz" instead of "Frederick," that would chew up a couple of additional minutes because it would never be heard properly the first time or two, so that went by the boards. All of this is not to say that I didn't develop strong relationships with a fair number of the

Cameroonians and the French. Eventually one got used to the veneer of formality and attached no undue significance to it.

Also, it was really striking to me how denatured some of the Cameroonian civil servants seemed as Africans and how hard they worked at being cosmopolitan. Every time we signed a project agreement there would be a little ceremony and out would come champagne and canapés to celebrate the occasion.

Another thing that struck me was strictly Cameroonian and/or Central African and had nothing to do with language or administrative culture. We were developing and implementing quite a few new projects, and this required that we negotiate on a variety of small and large issues with Cameroonian middle managers. Most of the time it went more or less as well as one would expect in many other African countries. But, from some of these individuals, we ran into a buccaneering, "what's-in-it-for-me" attitude that you had to see to believe. It was shocking how crudely interested some of them were in the commodities as opposed to the substance of the project. We were often pressured (unsuccessfully) to provide vehicles for use by officials who had little responsibility for the activity in question. With these types I sometimes had the strong feeling that if one were alone with them and safe enough from other ears, there would have been a blatant demand for a "backhander."

It brings to mind an old saying to the effect that it takes generations to produce a gentleman. I believe most of the people who were civil servants in Cameroon had adequate formal educational backgrounds. But a very high percentage of them were members of the first educated generations of their families. Education and gentility don't necessarily correspond any more than affluence and gentility do, but I think these guys were the first in their families to find roles in the modern sector. In contrast, the fathers, and sometimes the mothers, of many of the Ghanaian and Nigerians with whom I worked had been clerks, teachers or other professionals. And some of them came from families with long histories of education and modern sector employment.

But this difference may only be part of the explanation for what I observed. I believe the other part is that the interior sections of the country had been subjected to rather harsh brands of German and French colonial administration. Both colonial powers' reliance on forced labor for public works caused much illness and many deaths and left a legacy of bitterness that Cameroonians would occasionally and fleetingly mention. I noticed also that the police and gendarmerie behaved in more frankly predatory fashion than was common even in Nigeria. We never sent people, especially those without official passports, on field trips without arming them with Ordres de Mission (a "To Whom It May Concern" letter explaining the purpose of the travel with several impressive looking stamps on it) to protect them from harassment en route. I believe that the combined effect of these factors was to create a gulf between grassroots Cameroonians and their government and to furnish them with examples of anti-social modern sector behaviors. As for those who lacked countervailing influences in their upbringing and education, it is regrettable - but not all that surprising - if they came to the modern sector ill prepared to behave as we would think proper. That's what I believe lay at the root of my encounters with a minority of Cameroonians who were called upon to represent their country but, instead, mainly represented themselves in a pretty shabby manner.

It seemed to me that the Cameroonians who came from the North or from the Coastal parts of both the Francophone and Anglophone sections of the country seldom exhibited the quality that I found so startling. I also should reiterate that I worked with many civil servants from the remoter parts of the country who exhibited all the dedication and integrity that one could hope for.

One of the most striking things about the Cameroonians as a group compared to the Ghanaians and Nigerians is how little given they were to jokes and laughter. As one who has actually been informally reprimanded by at least two bosses for being too much given to levity, I felt this difference acutely.

Maybe the most important thing about the Cameroonian Government was that it was overstaffed and under-skilled, especially at the lower levels. The reason for this was historical. The Anglophone parts of Cameroon, which had been governed by the British as part of Nigeria under a U.N. trusteeship, voted in 1961 to join newly independent Cameroon. That result was a federation of the Anglophone and Francophone parts of the country. In 1972, a few years after a procommunist rebellion had been bloodily suppressed, Cameroon was declared a unitary state. This meant that the government of the Anglophone part was abolished and its workforce was integrated into the national civil service. This resulted in massive overstaffing except at the higher skills levels. At the lower end, most had little to do and lacked French language skills. However skilled and motivated some of these people might have been at the outset, most had long since succumbed to apathy by the time I got there. On entering the ministry buildings one walked among clerical workers who were openly sleeping on their typewriters. The average level of activity rose gradually as one went up the grade scale. At the professional levels, the staffing situation shifted from surplus to shortage.

*Q: What were the main lines of our program that you were working on at that time?*

GILBERT: Let's see. In agriculture, we were concentrating on the Northern Cameroon-focused Seed Multiplication and Livestock and Agriculture projects. These dated back to the immediate post-drought period. The Seed Multiplication project was, I believe, started with emergency funds and then gradually grew in scale and evolved into a conventional, more broadly focused seed project. Later we got involved in agricultural research and agriculture planning projects at the national level. The North Cameroon Livestock and Agriculture project was known locally as the Mindif-Moulvedaye project after the two districts where it started. It had both animal health and range management components. It seems to me that we had a lot of trouble getting it off the ground. While John was still there we hired a young guy named Ric Carron to develop an implementation plan with the concerned agriculture officers in the northern center of Garoua. I can't recall clearly what happened, but I can remember moving forward in an incremental way using mainly short-term technicians on preliminary logistical and infrastructure improvements, such as drilling wells and setting up watering points. I vividly remember that we were having trouble finding water until some international expert using the local equivalent of a birch rod, on an unpaid basis, told us where to drill. (Sander Levin, then AA for the Science and Technology Bureau who was passing through on a visit, took the rod and planned to use it as an example of appropriate technology when he testified before Congress.) John left in late 1977, and I was Acting Director for about a year until Jim Williams arrived.



*Q: As the director?*

GILBERT: Yes, as the Director around the beginning of 1979. Some time in early 1988, we became a full USAID Mission, by the way.

*Q: What was the core of the problem with the North Cameroon Livestock and Agriculture project?*

GILBERT: I had a lot coming at me during my time as Acting Director, including the development of a program strategy that I presented in Washington in February 1979 once Jim had arrived and approved it. North Cameroon Livestock was just one of many that we were trying to get approved or launched into implementation. So I don't recall the details. But I think we ran up against the same problems we been encountering with other livestock-range management projects in the Sahel. Briefly, we realized that it didn't make sense to improve livestock health, improve access to drinking water and improve the herds genetically without also addressing range management issues. But figuring out how to make marginal changes in these systems that would actually add up to a net improvement was an extremely daunting task. The systems were extremely complex and difficult to understand. Without a comprehensive understanding, the potential for unanticipated negative consequences was enormous. And it would be unconscionable and unworkable to make such changes without the informed consent and support of the livestock producing community. I believe these realizations were sweeping the Sahel and they engulfed us at about the time I was getting ready to leave, and that project had about reached the point where all that could usefully be done by way of preliminaries had been completed.

*Q: Well what other programs...*

GILBERT: Well, we had an interesting project called Mandara Mountain Water Development. Someone from another donor agency or an NGO had identified over a hundred sites where construction of small dams could provide household water supplies and support small-scale irrigation plots. It was also determined that the dams could be built on a labor-intensive basis during the dry season. Once that project was launched and going along pretty well, we got the idea of launching a Mandara Mountain rural development or, maybe even, integrated rural development project. But that turned out to be a non-starter.

*Q: Do you remember the context of why we got involved with these projects?*

GILBERT: I think so. This was during the time when AID launched a campaign to focus its programming on the "poor majority." But in some quarters of AID this got translated into "the poorest of the poor" And the Mandara Mountains were a very hardscrabble part of Northern Cameroon. The mountains were very densely populated and very intensively farmed.

It really is an intriguing part of Cameroon. It is analogous to the mountainous parts of the middle belt of Nigeria, to the Dogon country in Mali in West Africa and to the Nuba Mountains in Sudan. The people of these areas seem to constitute remnant populations that took refuge in the mountains when the nomadic herders and mounted raiders who were the ancestors of the present-

day settled, mostly Muslim majority populations (such as Cameroon's Fulani) migrated into the surrounding plains hundreds of years ago. Typically, these mountain dwellers have remained stubbornly pagan. In the Mandara Mountains, as in the Nuba Mountains and the Nigerian middle belt mountains, the populations share many cultural traits. In each of these areas, though, there is a surprising variety of languages. Like the Dogons, the people of the Mandara Mountains are skillful farmers and work like they're killing snakes. They make extensive use of terraces and cultivate every square centimeter of available land. They have even found ways of integrating livestock into their systems so they could have manure for their crops. But their technology was essentially Neolithic. Owing to this and overwhelming population pressure on the land, theirs was a nearly self-contained subsistence economy.

But how could they be more deserving? I'm sure that I was among those to whom it seemed that, given their poverty and the Agency's interest in integrated rural development, developing a Mandara Mountains Area Development project on the base of the Water Resources project was the obvious thing to do—a “no brainer” in today's vernacular. Well, it turned out to be a “no brainer” in another sense.

As part of the design process we needed an agricultural assessment to determine the scope for increasing agricultural incomes and launching other economic activities as part of such a project. We turned to MSU for this task because we all had high respect for them, and there was a contractual mechanism that offered ready access. What happened next was rare indeed. Very seldom do assessments recommend against the thing in question, but that's what happened in this case. They said, in effect, that it was good of us to want to help these people, but our idea wouldn't work. The technology that would allow them to support a larger population or to raise the level of living on the available resource base simply didn't exist. The main hope for the people of this area was to increase their access to basic education and skills training so their young people could find livelihoods in the larger economy and, thereby, begin to integrate the Mandara community into the larger society.

The integration and the outflow of young people part was, no doubt, music to the ears of our counterparts because this is what they had been hoping for when they encouraged us to get involved in the Mandara Mountains. We had gradually become aware of this sentiment and were wary of it because we felt they had impure motives: to Islamize and otherwise to bring that population into a more normal (read dependent) relationship with the northern power structure. The recommendation to educate and train the potential migrants may have been less welcome; we understood that the northern power structure wanted the Mandara Mountains to supply labor to commercial farms owned by the “Al Hajjis,” i.e. the powerful merchant class who were a major force in the economic and political life of the country. We knew it was thorn in the side these folks and the authorities that the people of the Mandara Mountains retained their pagan folkways, were neither Muslim nor Christian, and managed to eke out an adequate livelihood without significant reliance on the larger economy of Northern Cameroon.

*Q: Did we have a program there?*

GILBERT: The Mandara Water Resources project went ahead but I don't think we built as many dams as initially thought possible. There was also a small NGO grant for construction of hand-

dug wells in parts of the Mandara Mountains where aquifers were close to the surface. We also financed a project called Training for Young Farm Families that was implemented by a Swiss NGO and partially served the Mandara area as well as other sections of Northern Cameroon. But there was no systematic programmatic response to the MSU findings that I know of.

*Q: CARE was working there at one point? I remember visiting a well pump that they provided.*

GILBERT: Yes. I don't remember much about that.

*Q: It was pretty small.*

GILBERT: We were involved in professional-level agriculture education at the National Advanced School of Agriculture a few miles outside Yaounde.

*Q: This was a university?*

GILBERT: Well, as I recall, it was part of the university system but mostly provided sub-degree-level training. Later on we undertook the intellectual spadework for a University Center for Agriculture Education at Dschang (in the northern part of South West Cameroon). We also had a project with the agriculture and livestock part of the national research structure called ONAREST. That project involved providing improved breeding stock to small mixed farmers in North West Cameroon. Our involvement in seed multiplication led to the establishment of a National Cereals Research and Extension project toward the end of my time in Cameroon.

The biggest project we had was Trans-Cameroon Railway Phase III for realignment of the track between Douala and Yaounde. That project was in the preliminary discussion stage when I arrived in 1976. To my initial consternation John Koehring asked me to serve as project manager for Transcam III while continuing to carry my Deputy Responsibilities. I was right to be concerned about the workload implications, but it turned out to be one of the most rewarding aspects of my Cameroon sojourn.

Jim Hradsky of REDSO was responsible for hands-on capital project development work. That turned out to be quite complex. It involved engineering, economics, social soundness and environmental studies, which meant not only that he was frequently in Yaounde, but also that all sorts of other interesting people were continually coming and going as well. He did an excellent job. Moreover, it was a multi-donor project so that I had to work quite closely with a wide array of the higher-ups in donor missions and embassies as well as in the concerned parts of the Government, particularly the OCFT, which was the independent authority responsible for planning and managing the development, as opposed to the operation, of the railway. Overall coordination on the donor side was the responsibility of the European Community Delegation, and a member of the Delegation served as Technical Controller for the project. I was also the point man for dealing with some difficult issues concerning the transparency and fairness of the procurement arrangements for the various aspects of the project. This was an interesting problem because the European donors as a group were inclined to be cavalier about these issues. As luck would have it, they came to a head while I was Acting Director for the better part of a year.

*Q: What was the purpose of the project?*

GILBERT: There were several bottlenecks between Douala and Yaounde and maybe some to the north too. The idea was to straighten the track alignment, put in additional sidings and install better signaling and switching equipment so as to make it possible for the trains to go at a higher average speed and move more freight.

The OCFT was headed by one of the most efficient and likeable people I ever met, Jacques Houdet. I noticed once that he wore the red lapel pin of the Legion d'Honneur and asked him how he earned it. He said in French, "Monsieur Gilbert, you don't have to do anything to earn it, but you have to do it for a long time." The pressures of that job and, probably, some personal grief probably caused his death of a heart attack while I was out of the country on leave in 1978 or 1979.

*Q: But the project was approved?*

GILBERT: Yes, and considerable progress was made on implementation before I left in 1980. It had to be signed off on by the Director of REDSO/Abidjan as well as John Koehring. Hradsky and I realized that if we hoped to get the project approved on a timely basis, we had to maintain control of the documentation process ourselves rather than let it come under the control of REDSO. The danger was that it would have been difficult to prevent REDSO reviews and wrangling over drafts that were necessarily imperfect, but that we knew how to fix. We wanted to resolve the issues we understood to our own satisfaction in hope that REDSO's eventual review would mainly focus on any issues that we didn't know what to do about. Put another way, we didn't want them snatching at issues that we were still working on directly with various design team members and with OCFT. So I arranged to give Hradsky purchase orders so that he could get the paper typed outside of REDSO and its paper flows. That tactic worked. Once we had resolved all the issues that we could see to the best of our ability, we simply sent the final package to REDSO for its concurrence, and the project was approved in a fairly timely fashion.

*Q: Well, we will come back to that. This was a multi-donor project? Who else was involved?*

GILBERT: It was a multi-donor project. The French, the European Community and, I believe, the German international development lending arm (KFW). The construction contract went to an Italian firm called IMPREGILO that had done previous work for TransCam.

*Q: What was the U.S. part of this?*

GILBERT: Good question. We couldn't supply the operating equipment because of the incompatibility of U.S. and European specs. I'm trying to remember the elements that we picked up. The project was divided up into separate bid packages for various donors' financing because most donor-financed procurement was tied. I'm having trouble remembering.

*Q: I believe it was steel track, steel rails, maybe other things?*

GILBERT: You're right. Steel rail was, I believe, the most important part of the U.S.-financed package. I think we may also have financed some of the construction machinery – such as bulldozers and earth moving equipment – that were needed by IMPREGILO. It was great fun to be associated with a project that progressed and contributed in such a tangible way. It was also pleasant to visit the worksites, sometimes by special train, to inspect progress and enjoy quite good meals at the IMPREGILO camp. I imagine one would have to write a memo to the IG now if we did that. Now that I think about it, we were probably suborned on these occasions!

*Q: But I guess it was finished after you left?*

GILBERT: Well, it went forward like clockwork compared to so many of our efforts. I remember attending the dedication of the realigned sections including some new depots, staff housing, signaling equipment, switches and sidings. However, the final reporting and financial closeout may still have been underway when I left.

*Q: Was it your impression that it was a successful project? It was often hard to tell I guess, until later.*

GILBERT: I think it was a successful project. I think it met an important need. The country had very few paved roads running in any direction, but most strikingly only a portion of the road between Douala and Yaounde was paved and the first stretch of paved road going north from Yaounde began at the Ngaoundere railhead and went through Garoua and Maroua to the Chadian border. So the rail line was the backbone of not just the transport net but also of the economy of eastern Cameroon, which was the bulk of the country. The improvements were selective and carefully designed to enhance the efficiency of the system. Engineering and economic studies bore this out. It also served Chad since it depended on the rail line for most of its imports and the evacuation of its exports. As I recall the project came in pretty much at cost and on schedule.

The other major project that I recall from those days was one that grew out of some health care training activities that we had with the Medical School (CUSS) and the Ministry of Health. We had a Harvard University team working at CUSS and at the University Hospital during the whole four years I was there. I believe that they and a group who were working on in-service training of Ministry primary health workers both managed to introduce some training in the provision of family planning services. The new project was called Medical System for Cameroon (MEDCAM). There was a Title XII-type collaborative design arrangement with a group called MEDEX that was associated with one of the top Medical Schools in the U.S. As I recall they had made a name for themselves in establishing decentralized community-level primary health care structures relying mainly on nurses and midwives backstopped by physicians and higher-level health facilities. MEDEX sent out a quite capable and hardworking young MD/MPH to work on a technical level with the Cameroon Ministry of Health and CUSS. Among other things, it involved setting up something called Pro-Pharmacies, which would be community-controlled, would stock only basic drugs, would procure independently from private wholesalers rather than depend on the Government Central Pharmacy and would be financially sustained by the community.

This concept had revolutionary implications. Nurses and midwives were already providing most medical services at the village level as best they could on an informal basis. But the idea of making sure they had the requisite training and official sanction for their performance of these services ruffled feathers among many Ministry of Health doctors. Also not depending on the totally nontransparent and quite inefficient Central Pharmacy posed problems whose exact nature no one seemed able to clearly explain. There was also the need to plan the renovation and equipping of health posts and health centers and the training of nurses, midwives and pharmacy assistants needed for phased expansion of the system. I can't remember for sure, but I'm pretty sure that we were planning to start with pilot areas. So we were working both on Ministry of Health-level primary health management and planning issues and on district and village-level delivery-of-services-and-medicine issues. It was necessary that USAID Cameroon participate in this process since we were unprepared to give MEDEX carte blanche which they, in any case, did not want.

I was asked to coordinate the common effort that involved MEDEX, the USAID Health Division and the Project Development Office. Sometimes these parties' points of view diverged sharply. Thus, I was continuously engaged in resolving issues that arose among the AID parties while managing the U.S. side of a dialogue with the Ministry of Health. We needed to consult the Ministry of Health but avoid letting this degenerate into separate dialogues or, worse yet, negotiations with each U.S. party. The Government had designated Dr. Atangana, the senior technical person in the Ministry of Health, to coordinate this work with us. Leading our discussions with him in French was a key part of my responsibilities.

I think most of those who were involved in this felt that, though frustrating at times, this was a very worthwhile effort. I would even say it was exhilarating in that we were actually working daily in hands on collaboration with senior, technically competent Cameroonians frankly discussing real issues and opportunities and arriving at agreement on the substance of a far-reaching and workable project. It was so wonderful that it turned out to not be true. The project got approved, but the Cameroonians never signed the project agreement.

It was a big project, probably \$30-40 million in grants and loans over five or six years. The loan part would have covered the construction and commodities elements. The loan element required an additional step or two in the review and approval of the signature package on the Cameroonian side. That slowed things down, but it doesn't seem to explain the Cameroonians' failure to sign.

My personal view is that it broke down for reasons similar to those that caused a planned Ghana Medical School project to abort in the mid-1960s. A consortium of U.S. medical schools had collaborated in the planning of a medical school and in the design of an AID-financed project to provide a large technical assistance team to help establish and run it. The Ghanaians rejected the project. The Ghanaians went ahead and set up a medical school on their own. Afterwards the leaders who accomplished that freely admitted that they did so because it became clear that they would not be masters in their own house if the planned technical assistance team materialized.

MEDCAM involved a pretty large – say, six or eight person - project technical team, but I think the main problem for the Cameroonians was that the agreement addressed all the potential

problems so thoroughly that it was viewed as invasive by important vested interests in the Ministry. As I recall, the Cameroonians prevailed on us to allow the Central Pharmacy to be the conduit and custodian of the supplies for the Pro-Pharmacies but that we insisted on and got provisions in the agreement that required Pro-Pharmacy supplies to be procured, stored and distributed under a special transparent management structure which amounted to a proto-reform of the wider Central Pharmacy management system. The Central Pharmacy was widely considered to be corrupt and certainly maintained a very cozy arrangement with French pharmaceutical companies from which it procured supplies.

*Q: Were you there at the time...or was it after you left?*

GILBERT: I was there while most of the process preparatory to the signing was underway, but I left a couple of days before the end of the fiscal year. As I recall, we had planned to sign while I was still there, but the ceremony had to be canceled at the last minute because the Cameroonians said they couldn't complete all the approvals required on their side for the loan element of the project. I think that led to a quick decision to defer the loan element and rejigger the project agreement to provide for the grant element but to include language looking forward to loan, other donor or Cameroonian funding of the construction and certain commodities. A new signing was scheduled early on the last day of the fiscal year so that Washington would have all day to deal with the problem if it didn't work out.

To understand why we would still be uncertain about the second signing ceremony, you have to understand the process for approving a new project agreement on the Cameroonian side. Once we reached agreement with the substantive ministry, the package would go to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. When they were satisfied, it would go to the Prime Minister's Office and from there to the Presidency before going back to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. This process could take a long time. I should have mentioned above under the heading of "What was different" that this process was totally opaque and that our counterparts scrupulously respected that opacity. I would be fascinated to know what penalty they must have feared if they were indiscreet. So once the agreement was revised – despite the shortness of time and even though we had some vague assurances that they meant to move quickly - we had no way of really knowing the extent of the review it would undergo.

*Q: Where was the Ministry of Health in this?*

GILBERT: Well, we had gotten their nod before we sent it to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. Also, I forgot to mention that Economy and Planning would also have checked formally with the Ministry of Health – and some other ministries - before sending the package to the Prime Minister's Office.

Anyway, John Woods went over for the second signing and was told that it would have to be deferred again. John reminded them that there was no way of assuring that the funds could again be made available in the next fiscal year. But there was nothing our counterparts in the Ministry of Economy and Planning could do. I'm not sure whether Ron Levin had arrived yet.

*Q: He was there then.*

GILBERT: I bet he loved that.

*Q: I can supply a footnote here because I was on the other end in Washington at the time.*

GILBERT: I would like to hear it.

*Q: I remember trying to hold onto five million dollars and sending messages out asking when are you going to obligate because we had to move the money somewhere else because, with the end of the fiscal year, we would have lost the money, and there were other people who wanted this health money. And so we kept holding on to it and holding on to it while sending messages to find out if you would be able to commit it. And then being told at the last minute...*

GILBERT: I can imagine the frustration. What did you ever do with the five million?

*Q: We transferred them to some other program. I don't remember which. There were other candidates lined up, but we really wanted to see MEDCAM go forward. This was a very important project.*

GILBERT: And I think it was a terrific project. I had the feeling that the guys we were dealing with in the Ministry of Health had genuinely taken ownership of the project. Dr. Atangana was the equivalent of a Secretary General in the Ministry of Health. And the other technical members of his team were pretty high quality people. On the other hand, the minister at that time was a politician who seemed ... well, primitive, even feral. When you walked into his presence you had the feeling that you were almost in danger. I mean, the guy just gave off the most god-awful, nasty vibrations. Nobody had a good word to say about him. He represented some traditional power group in the country and, no doubt, owed his position to that fact.

*Q: Was he hostile to outsiders or Americans?*

GILBERT: I don't think it was a matter of feelings. I think the concerns were more material.

I think we had the feeling that it was a waste of time for us to attempt to handle him. That was Dr. Atangana's role and we had every reason to believe that he was briefing the Minister from time to time – at least it was apparent that he was taking occasional cues from someone on the Cameroonian side. If he wasn't going to the Minister, the only other guess would be that he was being guided by his technical colleagues and that they hoped that by maintaining a strong consensus they could get the Minister to go along. Ideally he was doing both. If Atangana was relying on a consensus among the senior technical people to carry the project forward, the Minister may well have felt that he had to appear to go along formally even if he opposed it. I'm sure there were ways he could kill it behind the scenes when it was under review in the Prime Minister's office or the Presidency.

A few years later, when transiting the Abidjan airport, I bumped into the Cameroonian named Vessa Njoya, who had been the Secretary General of the Ministry of Economy and Planning. He and I had become quite friendly. I asked him to tell me what happened, hoping that he could be



frank now that he had left that job. He sort of “crossed his heart and hoped to die” and pledged that he never understood what happened either. That may or may not have been true, but I can imagine that it might be. A Secretary General is roughly equivalent to a Permanent Secretary – the highest civil service position. But there was less of a dividing line between the political and the civil service in Cameroon. Many ministers had been civil servants earlier. But that does not necessarily mean that civil servants were political so much as that development sector Ministers were most often technocrats and largely not privy to the inner workings and political calculations of the Prime Minister’s Office and the Presidency.

*Q: So what is your own conclusion about why? Because this is an interesting phenomenon.*

GILBERT: Well, the fact that we never got the least whiff of a coherent explanation of the Government’s unwillingness to accept the project makes me think that the real explanation was unacceptable. They never offered issues that they wanted us to deal with because they didn’t want them fixed – they wanted the project to go away. Also, if they had raised the issue that I think bothered them the most – which was the project’s involvement with the Central Pharmacy – that would have tipped their hand.

There may be some lessons to draw from this. One reason I was asked to coordinate the design process was that two of three USAID Cameroon health staff (apart from their boss who supported it) were highly skeptical of the project and tended to drag their feet when asked to help with the design. And they kept telling us that the thrust of the project was just too contrary to the Ministry of Health’s ways of doing things. The Health Division Chief just couldn’t get their active cooperation. Ray Rifenberg, the Project Development Officer, and I managed to secure a level of teamwork with the other Health Division staffer that allowed us to move forward with the MEDEX representative to complete the design of the project. However, since the reluctant, foot-dragging health staff members were correct in their assessment, it turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory. I conclude that – even though they couldn’t support their argument very well - these guys’ gut feeling turned out to be valid. So the lesson I took from this experience was that when you are in a position of authority you can win arguments that you ought to lose, and one needs to guard against that.

*Q: What was their principal objection to it?*

GILBERT: Well, basically that it was just politically unrealistic.

*Q: Why was that? What was about it that was unrealistic?*

GILBERT: I think their basic point was that it would disrupt financial flows from corruption and, otherwise, upset too many vested interests.

*Q: Okay. I am with you.*

GILBERT: Another lesson was that one needs to be careful to not design projects that are too good. Maybe we were trying to do too much. Maybe we should have taken a more gradualist approach to our agenda. Then we might have gotten in the door and been able to learn how

things really work, including “who’s naughty and nice”. Then we could have augmented the project to address realistically a fuller agenda.

*Q: A more incremental approach?*

GILBERT: Right.

*Q: That is interesting. I don't recall any first hand knowledge but my recollection is that it overwhelmed them in a sense. There may have been all these vested interests and they were probably a very significant factor but it was too large an effort to be scaled therefore there was fear that it would dominate the situation so much that...*

GILBERT: That is similar to the Ghana med school experience. The Cameroonians, a lot of them, may have just concluded that they wouldn't be the masters of their own house anymore.

*Q: And that incremental approach which is basically slower and doesn't commit large funds would have been wiser.*

GILBERT: Yes. One problem was that the nay-saying staff members were quite junior and not particularly known for their wisdom. So their mutterings sounded like negativism and slander. Another was that the MEDEX concept was inherently grandiose and not susceptible to incrementalism. To take an incremental approach would have required telling MEDEX and the Cameroonians that we wanted to cancel the collaborative design of the project. We would have had an awkward time trying to explain to MEDEX, the Cameroonians and AID Washington why we decided to do that. The naysaying didn't start (at least not to my knowledge) until MEDEX was on the scene and at work. Also, if we had gone ahead on a smaller scale without addressing the issue of the Central Pharmacy, I'm pretty sure that, within three years, we would have found ourselves wondering why the project concept was not being realized even though we had spent so much money constructing and equipping various facilities and on training staff.

*Q: Well, let's pause there.*

GILBERT: I remember something else about Cameroon that might be worth discussing. As in other countries we looked for projects that seemed to make sense in terms of the guidance of the day concerning AID priorities. But as far as I can recall we never developed a project without the active encouragement of a Cameroonian agency and, at least, the concurrence of the Ministry of Economy and Planning. However, we quite often got word from Washington that people in the State Department or some visiting Cameroonian had intimated that we were not being responsive to Cameroonian priorities. I don't believe these comments ever came from representatives of Economy and Planning. Instead they came from people who wanted us to finance some activity that would be far outside the AID programming parameters of the time. But when Goler Butcher paid us a visit she apparently remembered this and used a session with the Minister of Economy and Plan to ask him about our responsiveness to their priorities.

*Q: She was Assistant Administrator, wasn't she?*

GILBERT: Yes. She was the Assistant Administrator for Africa. Once I could see where she was heading with her questioning, it made me quite uneasy. Certainly it was true at one level that we were not particularly responsive to their priorities. They might have preferred to have us building new ministry office buildings maybe or doing all sorts of things that we wouldn't find consistent with our precepts.

*Q: You mean the Cameroon government would not...*

GILBERT: If they just gave us a list of what they really wanted us to do it probably wouldn't have been very resonant with AID's precepts at the time.

*Q: Right.*

GILBERT: Anyway, Goler asked her question, no doubt mentioning – among projects like MedCam, North Cam Livestock, Mandara Water Resources - some fairly obscure things like an NGO project in the north. After brief reflection, the Minister said, "Well, yes, everything you are doing has a place in our national priorities and as long as other donors are doing the other things on that list and we have enough donors collaborating effectively, our essential needs will be addressed. I thought it was an astute answer. Without giving a quotable quote he was saying, in effect, what you are doing is defensible and useful but not really as responsive as it might be. I think they would rather have had us more involved in infrastructure and industrial development than in the areas smacking of social engineering that attracted our interest. On the other hand, I don't think I remember their ever making a formal request for projects that we couldn't support. They had a very heads up embassy in Washington that tracked aid matters closely. This was something that John Koehring encouraged. He always stopped by and briefed them when he was in Washington.

**MABEL MURPHY SMYTHE**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cameroon (1977-1980)**

*Ambassador Smythe was born and raised in Atlanta. Her family roots trace back to West Africa. She attended Spellman, Mount Holyoke, Northwestern and earned a PhD from the University of Wisconsin. Her husband served as US Ambassador to Syria and Malta after which she was nominated to be Ambassador to Cameroon. The following are excerpts from an interview by Ann Miller Morin conducted in 1986.*

*Q: What did you see as the most important part of your job when you went to Cameroon?*

SMYTHE: When I went to Cameroon, I saw the most important part of my job building and maintaining good relations, increasing our ability to understand the Cameroonians, fostering their ability to understand and appreciate our point of view. The business of making friends was

more important than pushing specific policies. The policies followed the friendship, rather than the other way around, and we happened to have some things going for us that were very useful.

For example, Cameroon was understaffed when it came to research and ability to know where its interests lay in matters such as our position in the General Agreement of Tariff and Trade. We were interested in helping developing countries through giving them advantages in selling to us when they were the chief suppliers of some product or other. Cameroon did not realize that it was our chief supplier of wrapper tobacco for cigars, and as the primary supplier of that, they were in a position to ask for a tariff reduction on their product. We were able to let them know about this provision, to point out that they were, in fact, eligible for a tariff reduction.

There were many times when they were not aware of some other international provision that we could help them understand. They simply didn't have the staff and the people who were trained to do certain kinds of jobs. We saw our role in Cameroon as demonstrating our international friendship in ways that they could see clearly benefitted them, and that would put us in a position to collaborate with them on matters of mutual interest. So identifying those and then pursuing them helped us in establishing friendships.

*Q: Do you see the economic give-and-take as the most important way to increase--*

SMYTHE: Well, with any developing country, economic development is very close to the top, if it doesn't head the list.

*Q: Would you say it's even more important that, say, cultural affairs and exchanges? That's often used as a foot in the door.*

SMYTHE: The cultural affairs and exchanges are so often a way of achieving the economic understanding and contact. I first got my diplomatic experience with educational and cultural affairs in helping improve the access of foreign students to the colleges and universities in the United States. I was involved with international students at a time when we were growing in our primacy in technological and scientific training around the world, and people were beginning to see that there was a great importance in getting access to that kind of training. So that it is difficult for me to draw a line between them since I see them as so important to each other.

*Q: And intertwined, yes.*

SMYTHE: Yes. The whole question of being able to talk with each other depends on this cultural interaction and understanding. Until we have that, we sometimes can't communicate on things which are terribly basic.

*Q: You had told me that on your way to Cameroon, when you stopped off in Liberia, the American ambassador to Liberia, who subsequently went to Moscow--*

SMYTHE: No, that was not the American ambassador. (I was officially visiting Beverly Carter, who was American ambassador, and *in absentia* attending a conference in Geneva at the time.) It was the Cameroonian ambassador to Liberia that I got to know during that period of time, who

was later sent to Moscow. We had some very fruitful discussions, and an opportunity for informal briefing and his view of what was important between our countries.

*Q: Did you find that was particularly helpful to you when you got to Cameroon? Did he offer any insights that you were unaware of before?*

SMYTHE: He helped me to round out impressions of Cameroon, and he had an international understanding. The current Cameroonian Ambassador to the United States was francophone. It was more difficult for him to communicate easily in English than for this one, whose "native" foreign language was English, who had gone to English-speaking schools, so that, yes, he did round out my impressions, and it turned out to be a very useful forum. And we talked about Liberia and Cameroon. So often in approaching one country, you can learn from comparisons with another.

*Q: Because Cameroon is a bicultural country, isn't it?*

SMYTHE: Right. It's a tricultural country (with French, English and at least one African language), and while they're working very hard to make all young children bilingual in French and English as they go through school, it's a very difficult objective to reach, and it will take some time.

*Q: You must have had an ongoing and important AID program.*

SMYTHE: Very much so, and the AID program was one in which I had a great deal of interest. As an economist, I had been interested in economic development for a long time. The thing about the AID program that particularly appealed to me was that it was in the process of being Africanized, in a sense. We had enacted legislation, thanks to Senator Hubert Humphrey, that required joint action between the host country and the United States' AID program in selecting projects, in carrying them out, and in staffing them, and it was the policy already in our AID program in Cameroon to have a Cameroonian co-director, or even director, so that when the Americans picked up and moved on to another site, the experience of that program would be left in Cameroon with someone high enough in the hierarchy to understand how the parts interrelated. I have sat in meetings in which the Cameroonian experts on health and agriculture and water resources and education and whatever else would sit around the table with the American experts and talk about whether there ought to be catchment dams in a certain place, and they'd look into the incidence of waterborne diseases and whether the dams would exacerbate the problem or whether they would be useful, whether there were countermeasures that could be taken. It was, in some ways, trying to be a model program for our AID agencies around the world.

I had the privilege, after being in Cameroon nearly two and a half years, of taking the assistant director of AID for Africa, Goler Butcher, around to see some of my favorite projects, and she, thereafter, took the world director of AID over to view what was going on there. She told everybody about the importance in Cameroon, and it became something of a showplace, because the projects were being examined very carefully before they were put into place. They were being taken seriously by the Cameroonians and were really addressing actual issues that they saw

as problems, so that we were not frittering away resources on show things, but doing something that seemed to be useful.

I remember my favorite project. What was my favorite varied with times and experiences, but at one time when I was going around the north I was particularly attracted to the centers for training young farm families. The reason this seemed so important to me was that it addressed the issue of how you get people on a village level to understand that there are some agricultural techniques that are more effective and bring them greater prosperity. They had tried originally to work with one family from each village. They'd have a center which would be in an area which could reach, say, fifty or 100 villages very easily within ten miles. Well, if this were so, why not take one person from each village? They had tried that and found one person would go back, and if that person didn't have a great talent for leadership, people would say, "We never did it that way," and wouldn't listen too much to one speaker.

So they started taking five to ten families from a village, and then when they went back, if one of them said something, he had several others to back him up. They would take the wife and up to two children to live in the community for a year. They'd see all of the phases of preparing the land and planting and fertilizing and weeding and harvesting. They'd see cultivation, they'd see a spring, they'd see all kinds of flood control or control of insects or whatever, and when they went back, carrying with them a pair of oxen, which they hadn't had originally, and a set of tools and the kind of seed that had been more productive and other things they needed to make a success of farming. If one farm wasn't just right that year, you had several. In general, the average of the farms of people who had had the training turned out to be much more impressive than the average product on the other farms which weren't being cultivated the same way. It aroused a great deal of interest and curiosity, and people didn't have to preach. All they had to do was work and let people see what happened.

*Q: People would come with the questions.*

SMYTHE: They would come with questions. It was a very exciting thing to be part of. Every year they learned something new, some better way of communicating. One of the things they did was avoid saying, "All right, we've taught you. You're on your own. Go away and we'll deal with other people." Every year they reinforced the training by training additional people. After the first group had gone, they didn't have to take five or six from one village; they could take one or two from this village and initiate some more *new* villages. So that the system spread and was reinforced each year, and the teachers in the center were charged with going out to the villages and inspecting what was happening and answering questions and consulting with their graduates and seeing whether the trained ones were forgetting something or whether they had run into a problem that hadn't been dealt with at the center, so it was, in a sense, making students out of village farmers and keeping them that way, keeping them in the mind-set that we have something yet to learn, and until we reach nirvana, we will still be learning.

*Q: And yet, making them teachers, too.*

SMYTHE: Yes. Unwittingly or not, they were teachers. More people came to them, and their children tended to predispose the other children to know more about what life was like outside.

*Q: And they would stay a whole year, one complete cycle?*

SMYTHE: A whole year. The beautiful thing was that this introduced animal traction. It helped people learn that they could cultivate more land than they had originally been given, because it was presumed they'd have to cultivate with the hoe. Once they got the animal traction, they could do four or five times the land they could have done by hand, and gradually the villages were becoming more prosperous and better able to do things. They were also demanding things. At the center, they had wells and a water supply. There was an experimental center where they were learning something of solar generation of electricity and where the center itself used solar power to light incandescent lights at night, so that they had some lighting at night and some pumping of water, which is a very tedious and backbreaking kind of activity. They were able to draw water and put it in a central place where finding your water, getting your water, would be much easier, so water systems were getting started.

*Q: In that part of the world, was it typical for the women to have to get the water?*

SMYTHE: Yes. The women were particularly required to carry the water and children carried a great deal of water. Some children I've seen carrying as much as a gallon or more of water were very small, and an orthopedist told me that the compression of those immature vertebrae created some serious problems of child health. They had, of course, invented little carts made out of heavy iron piping joined together with wheels on it, so that when the men carried the water they had these carts. They would put on as much as a small truck could carry and push it by hand, and that would reduce the amount of time required, but it was still backbreaking.

*Q: This was taught them at the centers?*

SMYTHE: At the centers, they would have access to such instruments and so on, but they were learning some of the shortcuts to managing the water supply, and using water pipes to move water from one place to another, and pumps.

*Q: Fascinating! We tend to take all of this for granted, and, yet, in Lyndon Johnson's Texas, when he first came to Washington, that is how they did it there, and the women were always bowed. Somebody was saying that the reason they loved Johnson was, "He brought us the light," and this is what happened to your people.*

SMYTHE: All of these things were happening at a time when villagers were just beginning to look beyond their own villages, and they found that if they went to a place where there were new techniques and other ways of learning what was going on in the world, they could communicate to the villages that there was a life out there beyond what they had know. The Cameroonian government was broadcasting material on nutrition, on public health, on a number of other issues, so that even people in the most rural areas could hear by radio some of the things they hadn't seen with their own eyes.

*Q: Had they had electricity before?*

SMYTHE: They had electricity in the major cities, but in many of the villages, electricity was slow to come by. I don't know that I talked to you about the ambassador's self-help program. I had \$90,000 a year to allocate to small local efforts to do something that would benefit a village, where people would supply the labor and we would buy the materials and make it possible for them to build, for example, a rudimentary dispensary or a community meeting house or something of the sort. One of the things that we funded was simple machinery that would help them save hours. For instance, the women in one village said that they spent so much time shelling the peanuts. There was a former Peace Corps volunteer who had invented a simple machine that would shell the peanuts and the hulls would go out one way and the nuts would come out another, and this would save them time. Instead of spending time shelling these--well, ngusi seeds were something that had to be shelled. Peanuts they could sell before they shelled them sometimes, but they got better prices if they were shelled.

The ngusi seeds were very time-consuming, and those were particularly important because if they didn't have to spend two hours shelling them, they could spend one hour going to a meeting and becoming literate. So there were some literacy classes, there were some classes in sewing, there were some classes in other things that they could attend at a meeting house *if* they had a machine. So I made a proposition: if they would earn the money for half the machine, we would pay for the other half. So that made our \$90,000 go a little farther and, at the same time, it was not handing down something. They put forth some effort and could say, "We earned this."

A number of these self-help projects went into things of that sort. We would provide the money for all the materials, and they would build latrines for the village or for the school, and this would mean children had a sanitary facility that they would be able to use, and the local people would learn about using such facilities.

*Q: And then hygiene can come about.*

SMYTHE: Yes. There are so many things to learn, and they can be taken out to the remotest villages by these means.

*Q: You said, I believe, that there was a Cameroon director for each one of the teams.*

SMYTHE: Each one of the AID projects.

*Q: At that center, too, there would be a Cameroonian?*

SMYTHE: At that center, the director or co-director would be Cameroonian. If there were not a Cameroonian qualified to do the work, we'd get the nearest thing to it and qualify him by having him work with the qualified person until he knew the ropes.

*Q: How was the soil down there? Is it good soil?*

SMYTHE: Some of it was. There were many places that were good, and they had identified some places in the center of the country which would be good for raising grain. The land was not all under cultivation at that time. Some of it was just grasslands, but some of it was quite good in



quality. There were some parts of the country where it was much too dry and where rainfall was limited to two months a year, and rain was not guaranteed for those two months. It would be scattered. In some years it would be overabundant. Sometimes it would come down in sheets.

The rain that came in torrents would sometimes run off so fast that you needed to have catchment dams or it did very little good. So there were always problems. Africa has a number of climatic problems that we don't really encounter in much of the United States.

*Q: Were there many waterborne diseases endemic; for example, bilharzia?*

SMYTHE: Oh, yes, there was bilharzia. I think filariasis is tied to--I think the filaria worm grows in water. One of the things that had been suggested was that we put ducks on the ponds that we built, to eat the liver flukes that live in the water, but there are problems with that. That wasn't the answer. That was only one of the suggestions. But there were so many things of that kind that we had to think about.

In the part of the country where there were only two months of rain, sometimes very heavy, we were going to build thirty-five or forty catchment ponds. These would be very small, but they would sequester the water so that the agricultural use of water could be assured. It could be meted out very carefully. But evaporation was going to steal a great deal of the water, because the land gets very hot as soon as the rains are over, so that much of it would be lost by evaporation. They were thinking of how far it would be possible to put a plastic cover or something of that sort over a part of the lake without doing something to the animals that lived in the lake and depended on oxygen from above. So not all the problems could be resolved very easily. Everything was complicated.

*Q: But it must have been very rewarding for you.*

SMYTHE: Tremendously rewarding, because Cameroon was a country where people were determined to move ahead, and it was a country where Westerners were particularly pleased to see a kind of caution in the way they moved. Unless you have a somewhat conservative approach, much of what you put out is likely to be dissipated before you organize a discipline to use it, and Cameroon had the discipline and the will to use in disciplined fashion, so many things really did pay off.

*Continuation of interview: October 23, 1986*

*Q: How did you manage to keep your household going? Getting back to the post, when you were ambassador, where you had to be the ambassadress, too.*

SMYTHE: Well, what happened was that the first month was absolutely dreadful. I was busy trying to get on top of all the names and all the briefings and all the language lessons and whatnot, and to come home for lunch and mediate an argument over whose day off it was tomorrow was more than I wanted. But my marvelous secretary was on the receiving end of my distress one day. She said, "I read something that said that Anne Cox Chambers had an

administrative assistant who took care of these things. I will try to find the article, because I thought, 'What a good idea for you!'"

So I went straight to the administrative officer and explained my predicament and said, "What might we do?"

He said, "Oh, that would not be a problem. We'll hire someone, and that'll give us a nice job."

So I made known that I was looking for a house manager, and, quickly, a British woman made known her intent to apply for the job. I said, "Wait a minute. We've got wives who want jobs. Hurry up and get me some candidates so I won't have to insult anybody. I'll just say, 'Oh, isn't it too bad. I didn't know you were interested until I had appointed someone.'"

So we got someone who badly needed a job. She was a librarian and who was delighted to unpack my books and put them in some order for me. She was a bored wife who wasn't sure she liked Cameroon. She had been to only one other post. I found out later she hadn't liked that one, either, but in retrospect it seemed a terribly nice post. After she left, there were people waiting in line to apply, and I never had a problem, except that in the summer of '78 my house manager was going home and I had hired the PAO's wife to succeed her. The PAO's wife was going home on vacation, so I needed somebody in the interim. It just happened that I had invited one of my New York neighbors to come and spend a while with me, and she wrote and said she was coming over to spend as long as we'd like. She was the woman I told you about, who had run a hotel for forty-five years. She came over, and I said, "Nan, you're just what the doctor ordered." She was somewhat uncertain, but she did try it and was a decided success.

*Q: People are afraid of protocol, don't you think?*

SMYTHE: I told her she needn't worry. We had an officer in the embassy who would brief her on that, and all she had to do was keep the servants straight and see that they cleaned the house and that the meals were planned and so on. She did a perfectly delightful job for me, and I enjoyed having her. At the end of the summer, she accompanied me to Ibiza. Bill Mithoefer had a home in Ibiza. His mother lived there year-round, and they had built a little house for him so he could vacation there with her, and she rented it sometimes. He said, "Would you like to use my little house?" I said, "Yes!" and Nan and I went to the little house.

It was really a two-room, three-room, house--a living-dining room, the kitchen was really a hot plate and a small refrigerator, and a bath and a double bedroom. We had a fine time. She stayed three weeks with me, and we explored Barcelona together and went out to Ibiza and then she went on home from Spain.

*Q: Was your daughter able to visit you when you were ambassador?*

SMYTHE: No, not in Cameroon. She could have, but I was coming through now and then, and I visited her in London when I would come through. She had a project that she was working on, and I think she rather shrank from the idea. She had an idea of diplomatic life from her sixteen-year-old days when she was in Syria, and she thought she would just as soon skip it.

*Q: Did you have a very frenetic social life in Cameroon?*

SMYTHE: No, not nearly as frenetic as in Syria. It was lively; I had an American community that was inclined to entertain informally and to do lots of things together, and we enjoyed being together. Everyone was friendly.

*Q: I suppose you invited everybody on a rotating basis?*

SMYTHE: Yes. I even kept lists of people to know who had or hadn't been invited to the movies at the house and things of that sort.

*Q: Did you include the Marines and the communicators?*

SMYTHE: Yes. In fact, the Marine ball was held at the residence. I have pictures of that. Many of them were good people who could contribute to many things.

I tended to have focused events, discussions, very often. I worked closely with USIA on that. I was thinking of our conversation yesterday. USIA got, if anything, even more attention than AID much of the time because of its proximity. Its projects were right in our lap, in the same building, and I would very often be part of those or work with them on those or contribute to their thinking on them. For instance, when they did groups, they published a little booklet in French and English that people could read regarding the background of it, what it meant, and how it was received in the United States, and so I wrote a little preface about the significance of those and that sort of thing and took part in the discussion of it. Because of my academic background, I tended to get involved with lecturers who would come over from various universities, perhaps more than might otherwise have been the case.

In a small post, it was important to appear often and to be interested in all kinds of events, such as a meeting of the teachers of English in Cameroon, who wanted particularly to have the British ambassador and me say something about English and its relevance to world development and so on. I had had this experience with the psycholinguistic experiments and other things to draw upon, and I told them a little about our experience with English in the United States in accommodating immigrants who came in with a variety of languages. It was fun in a lot of ways dealing with professional groups, because many of them took themselves very seriously and wanted to underscore the importance of what they were doing. But it was also important for them to understand that there is a light touch, as well, that has to be applied.

I had a chance to follow up on the woman who was--well, she was one of the leaders in the bilingual educational movement and wrote a book on bilingualism in Cameroon and her experience with teaching English as a second language. She was, herself, a Francophone, who had developed an astonishing command of English. She was really very, very good. When she came over here as one of the foreign curriculum consultants to work with a group of colleges in the Phelps-Stokes orbit on how to include Africa in their curriculum and that sort of thing, and I had great respect for her. I saw her again when I was in Cameroon in 1987.

We had a very good connection with the Ministry of Economic Planning, of Economy and Plan, they called it. We had a designated member of that ministry who was an anglophobe and who, therefore, was particularly comfortable speaking English and who had been educated in the United States. Now, we lost him about two-thirds of the way through my tenure there, because he became the first managing director of the Chase Bank Cameroon. Chase Manhattan Bank opened its branch in Cameroon in 1979. I had two conflicts. The first one was that I was invited to a conference in England, which was a sort of think-tank, about "where should international policy be in the next twenty-five years," or something of that sort. It was a Windsor Castle symposium. It was something I would have enjoyed doing. Bob Wade, who used to be our resident minister to UNESCO, was organizing this, and I had worked with Bob when I was on the UNESCO delegation, so that I had planned to go. Then the shooting war began heating up in Chad, and there was a very real possibility that we'd have to evacuate the U.S. embassy in Chad. So I gave up the Windsor symposium, and I didn't know whether I was going to be opening the Chase Bank Cameroon until fifteen minutes before I stepped on the plane.

David Rockefeller arrived that morning, I think, and the president invited us for lunch. Rockefeller was greeted as a chief of state--outriders, all kinds of flags flying, and everything else. He was going to fly to Douala for the opening of the bank after lunch. During lunch, I was passing notes back and forth to a member of the presidency about a plane. We had chartered a Cameroon Airlines plane, and it was waiting in northern Cameroon, in Maroua, with orders to fly to N'Djamena and pick up our people and evacuate them to Yaoundé. The only trouble was, word had come that there was too much shooting; it wasn't possible to have them come. We were waiting to see whether all would clear, and by the time lunch was over, my deputy came to say the shooting was so bad that they had decided to close the airport and there would be no evacuation today. They'd sent everybody home.

So I went down to Douala, stayed for a reception, and took the first plane back in the morning, something like 7:00 in the morning. I went straight from the airport to the embassy and sat down and was looking over my mail when someone came in and said, "We'll have to go back to the airport. They have just landed a plane from N'Djamena. So I went down to the airport, and here was a plane. No one had been allowed to disembark yet because nobody had any clearance or anything; these were refugees. So I got on board the plane, and here were all these people. It was a cargo plane, and they were sitting knee to knee, four rows longitudinally down this plane, of all the American workers in the embassy and some Third Country nationals who worked for the embassy. We had some people from India and we had Peace Corps volunteers. We had everything. I just opened the door and said, "Welcome to Cameroon," and one lady burst into tears.

She was feeling safe for the first time. You see, those cargo planes don't have windows and you couldn't look out and see anything. She didn't know where she was. She wasn't sure. There was a Firestone official who had gone to prospect for setting up a rubber plant somewhere, and he had thought maybe N'Djamena would be a place and had looked it over. He was so happy to be evacuated.

We had already prepared. We had been ready for at least a week. We had worked out our plans when the shooting first started. We had already done a canvass of how many spare bedrooms

people had and what would be the procedures if we had to evacuate a planeload, where would we take them for processing, and the answer was the American Club. It was the dry season, so we weren't expecting rain or anything. We had the staff at the American Club all prepared with a menu and everything else that they could prepare--lunch for 233 people, it turned out to be. I don't know that that many were on one plane, but they could do it.

We went to the American Club. There was food for everybody. I took my batch home first. I had two that were staying with me and so they just went in my car, and we took the man from the Firestone place. He went to the hotel. We had already canvassed the hotels and reserved a block of rooms so that the hotel would be ready to receive us. So it went very smoothly. We had even collected surplus clothing in case people needed clothes. Anyone with spare luggage sent it over, and we knew where we could get extra blankets and that sort of thing. It had been worked out very well. We had one of the best young administrative officers in the service, Warren Littrell, who was a thoroughly responsible young man, but he was also very practical and didn't believe in spending any time on unnecessary window dressing.

I had been asked the previous August or September if I would take the deputy assistant secretary slot, and it awaited Robert Keeley's appointment as ambassador to Zimbabwe. All of that took time and they said just don't mention it; they would let me know when it would be time. They let me know in February, and I was gone in three weeks, because I had been waiting and there were a lot of things to do and they had selected my successor by then. I didn't want to have too long a time. My successor [Hume Horan] didn't need to have much language training or anything. He was an Arabist and could function in northern Cameroon with Arabic. He probably had had French in the past, but he had to brush up on it.

He was a career person. He was then a deputy assistant secretary in the consular area. I got to know him and talk with him. One of my predecessors, Bob Moore, had been very kind. He had invited me over for dinner and had invited also all the people he knew from various services who had some interest in Cameroon, and they all helped brief me before I went. I thought that was awfully nice. So I wanted to do the same thing for Hume Horan.

*Q: This is skipping back again, but I didn't get your reactions to your very first days. I wonder, can you recall back then? You were under unusual stress at the time. Can you remember how you were greeted and exactly how you settled in?*

SMYTHE: I do, indeed. The president was away because it was Ramadan. He had gone to his home village, I suppose, near Maroua. The word was he wasn't coming back until after Ramadan, and therefore I had a month to wait. Not quite a month. I had at least three weeks before he'd be coming back. Meanwhile, I would be in limbo. I couldn't go around in public, and anybody who wanted to see me had to come unofficially in *sub rosa*.

I had one or two people who came to see me. One of them was very anxious to see me because I had appointed him a Phelps-Stokes visiting professor to the United States, but I had never met him because he had an automobile accident and had to stay home instead of coming. He needed medical care, and we were afraid to risk it. So we promised him another slot if he would

postpone, and he did, and I don't think he ever got his other slot. He went to the States, though, but he never got another slot on that particular program.

Anyhow, that meant that I did my public sightseeing in unofficial fashion. My deputy took me around to show me the city. I remember tripping on the stairs. I had some very lovely, but not very practically planned, marble stairs going upstairs in the residence. I came in and was greeted in Douala, because when you come in on a large plane, you don't go all the way to Yaoundé. They can't land 747s and 767s, planes of that size. I was on a little plane, though. I had taken Cameroon Airlines from Liberia back to Cameroon, but we were supposed to go through customs in Douala. So I got off, and the then-consul had been in Jerusalem when we were in Damascus, and we had met and had some background in common, and he was about to leave. He was due to leave within a month after I came. I just saw him in the airport. We didn't attempt to go home. And I met one of the people from Yaoundé who was on his way out, Chuck Croteau, who was the economics officer, and I didn't get to see him again until I was in Morocco in 1982, and ran into him.

My first day, after that little half hour or so in Douala--I guess we were there an hour or so--I went on to Yaoundé, and the whole embassy was there. Poor things, they had been waiting for me, and waiting, because our plane was very late and we had spent a lot of time in Douala. There was the protocol officer, and I got to meet my present stepdaughter for the first time. She was at the airport among people waiting to greet me. I had heard of her and her husband because they were one of the first husband-and-wife teams both in the Foreign Service. She was USIA, he was a political officer, both on their first tour of duty overseas.

I had heard of her before I left, because she was a public affairs trainee when she went to Cameroon, and she was about to have to take leave without pay because her time had expired, but her husband's tour wasn't over. I remember the recommendation of the DCM that she be given consideration for some other kind of appointment, and they did find another appointment, so she remained for a year and three months after I got there. She left just before Christmas of 1978. Meanwhile, I got to know them very well, because her mother had the same kind of cancer Hugh did. She knew it and was worried about it, and we had quite a bond over that. In the first six months I was there, her grandmother passed away and then her mother died, and her husband's father died before they left Cameroon.

*Q: These are the things that are difficult on Foreign Service people.*

SMYTHE: Very, very hard.

*Q: Because you can't go home for all of these things.*

SMYTHE: Well, she did. My first Christmas in Cameroon, I remained. She was worried about her mother and was afraid it might be her mother's last Christmas, so she and her husband just took leave time and went at their own expense for Christmas. The mother lived only about six weeks after that.

That first day, it was interesting to see everybody, and they seemed to be a friendly group.

*Q: Is it a large group? Is it a large embassy?*

SMYTHE: Not a large group, but as African posts go, yes, because there were about thirty Americans in the AID program; we had a Marine security guard group; we had a Peace Corps group; the largest Peace Corps in Africa at that time, I think. There were five professional staff positions in Peace Corps, and there was USIA with only--I guess they had about five people, too, Americans. And then there were lots of Cameroonians, some of whom came to the airport, too, so that we had a good representation. By the time I invited each of them and their spouses, both Cameroonian and American employees, and third country nationals, and asked each one to bring a Cameroonian friend to introduce to me--this was my first affair at the embassy--I had to plan for 250 people.

I'll tell you the story of that. I had first gone to sub-Saharan Africa in 1957, when you found very few Africans at embassy parties. Even though the countries were independent, there was a tendency for the embassy to relate to the European embassies and for there to be a kind of diplomatic kaffeeklatch atmosphere. One of the things that we had agreed upon before we went out, and that was true not just for African embassies, at our ambassadors' seminar, [Ambassador Smythe attended the briefing course for new ambassadors. Ambassador Anne Armstrong was one of the course leaders. Others in attendance were Lawrence Eagleburger, Rozanne Ridgeway and Arthur Hartman.] was that we were there to relate to the people of the country, to make them know more about us, and help us know more about them. We were not there to become better acquainted with other people's ambassadors. So I started out making one change there, that we would have largely African guest-lists at our parties.

The first party to which I was invited after I arrived had four Cameroonians present, and two of those were our employees. So I sent around a notice that we were there to make links with the country. We would expect everyone to try to find out as much about the country as possible and to meet people and to interpret the United States for those people in terms that would make them more understanding of us and our point of view. We had a very limited representational budget, and it would be reserved for those entertainments for largely Cameroonian guests, so don't expect compensation if one was not entertaining Cameroonians.

That first embassy party brought in a lot of people who were not used to being at the embassy, who didn't really understand how embassy entertainment went or what to do with it, and among our employees were the ones who were not usually included. I included all the drivers, everybody, at that first party. This was my getting-acquainted with them. It set one kind of tone. They felt at least I was not unapproachable and that we were serious in our interest in knowing more about Cameroonians and how they felt.

We had people on the staff who understood and accepted this and worked with it. For instance, when something would appear in the paper--our PAO was named Ted Kennedy. He's a very humane, wonderful, warm kind of person, with a German wife who is a flag-waving American. She really loves the United States and is pleased that her children are American.

But to go back to Ted, himself. When they printed something in the paper that was not sympathetic to the American point of view--it was when the Soviets walked into Afghanistan, and we asked for a Security Council vote against the invasion. The Soviets had handed out a version, and the local editors uncritically printed it. So Ted sat down and explained what had happened. "Oh," [the editor] said, "I didn't know that. We will print that." They printed a very good retraction and explained what actually happened, and how there was almost unanimous voting against this in the Security Council and the General Assembly and the reprimand to the Soviet Union in the General Assembly. The sympathetic approach of explaining things not only took care of our point of view for that occasion, it began making people aware of how you have to read critically what you are receiving before you decide what to do about it.

We received an announcement that from now on, diplomatic agents showing films would have to have the films approved by somebody downtown. With Ted's usual approachable, sympathetic, reasonable, way, he asked, "Why on earth would you do a thing like this when we're performing a service in a city that has no English-speaking theaters?"

"Oh," they said, "that isn't for you. The North Koreans are swamping us with things that we don't approve of, and we have to send out a general announcement, but you can forget about it."  
[Laughter]

*Q: Was it part of your job to try to get the Cameroon vote in the U.N. to go along with us?*

SMYTHE: Yes. I would sometimes make representations directly on specific issues, and explain what our point of view was and why we held it and what the payoffs were for them and that sort of thing, and before the General Assembly we would have someone come out. The first year I was there it was George Dalley, deputy assistant secretary for human rights, who came out to go down the whole list of major issues that were to be discussed; and he was prepared to explain in some detail what the various possibilities were on not just human rights issues, but the entire spectrum of issues.

Very early in my tenure there, we were asked to send in suggestions for the way in which we were doing things, and one of my suggestions was utterly predictable for anybody who was familiar with the way things were, and that is you don't wait until you have a crisis and need a vote to start cultivating. You start building your groundwork and get communications so that you can do a sudden request, but you can't expect to do it until you've laid the groundwork for it. We had a feeling that Washington was paying attention to this. I had been watching African policy for a long time and had been concerned that we seemed so ill-informed about African points of view.

It's somewhat like the reactions to "The Africans" on television, the Ali Mazrui series. Now, I don't think that Mazrui has done his best scholarly job of presenting even all African points of view. He's done more with Islam than he has done with the other religious areas, and there are plenty of other religious points of view that deserve to be told. But if we really asked him to tell us how Africans feel and what their point of view is, we're not really very smart in refusing to listen to it and see what they hate about us, what they distrust about us, where they don't understand our point of view, and we need to explain better to them why we have it.



*Q: The fact is, we don't understand their point of view.*

SMYTHE: We don't understand theirs, and will not as long as we refuse to listen to an Ali Mazrui, because he has a heck of a lot of influence among the intellectuals there, and he is reflecting a prevailing sense of values. I found with my graduate students at Northwestern that I was appalled at some of the things that they took for granted, but then I realized if I had been taught from the time I was a child that the United States is the chief capitalist country in the world and that capitalism can be defined as exploitation of people, not caring about people or human rights or anything else other than profits, we would understand the difficulty they have with giving us the benefit of the doubt. Many of my graduate students accepted this view before they arrived in the United States, but after they had been here for a while, they began explaining to other people, "Well, it's not exactly that way."

Many people complete their education over here and go back to Africa. We have Northwestern graduates all over the world doing all sorts of interesting things. At the time I returned to Northwestern to teach, we had about 140 African students in residence at any one time. That's a substantial number, and a good many of those are people who are going back to be highly influential. If you look at our list of holders of the Ph.D. who have gone back to Africa, what you find is cabinet ministers, members of parliament, highly rated professors and university officials, people who head agencies and organizations. You don't find very many who have fallen to the bottom of the heap. They are automatically in demand because they are so rare. So what we have to do is to take advantage of the fact that they know something about the United States at first-hand, and make it comfortable for them to come to us for help.

People used to come and say, "You know, our book budgets are so small." Knowing that in advance, when I went to Africa, I took with me a good number of books. I left home a good number of books, but I took the books that I felt I could leave in Africa at the university. Some of them were books on Africa, but some of them were just straight textbooks of various kinds that I thought they would be enriched by having. Some were reference books that could be left with them. I took one sentimental thing: I took a set of children's encyclopedia books that the American children could also use while I was there, and enjoy.

I left some books that were for a book sale organized by the women of the embassy; I believe it was for the American school. Any recreational books I had--I think that's what happened to my copy of The Thornbirds--I just left them there so they could be sold for a training program for handicapped people. The blind were making baskets and brooms, the deaf were the carpenters, the crippled were doing the sewing, and there was a fourth category I forget now. These were sheltered workshops. The products of those workshops were being sold, and I would take visitors over to buy what they could, because many people were inspired by the products, and some of the products were quite useful and lovely. The women who were raising funds for this cause sold the books, and there were a lot of things that we sold. I tried to use the same techniques we'd use here, giving to Goodwill and so on. I gave books to the university when I left, and some went to the professor who had been appointed to our exchange program and couldn't come. He died only two or three weeks ago, so that's one friend in Cameroon who is no more, but his work was so

healing for a country that had been divided. Cameroon is not one that was as deeply divided as some, but in the 1960s there was a good deal of strife for supremacy there.

*Q: What about the belief so many Africans have, that America is a colonial power? Or, also, that we're such racists. Did you come across that?*

SMYTHE: Yes. I came across some influences, but one of the ways of allaying that is to explain in sufficient detail how things arise and what we do about them. When we showed *Roots*, we had a whole program. We started off by having the Cameroonian employees of the embassy see it first, and we asked them, "Do you think we ought to show it?"

Some of them said, "I'm not so sure. It's pretty strong stuff."

Then others said, "Yes, show it, but know to whom you're showing it and explain to them some questions about this."

So I was asked to chair a panel of people who would talk about it, and the panel was made up of 1) the Fulbright professor who was there at that time, and whom I see every year at the African Studies Association now, 2) two professors who had had Fulbright grants to study in the United States and who felt they had had extensive experience, and 3) a man who had not visited the United States, but who had read widely and felt he had a point of view to express.

So we had this invited crowd. They watched the first two hours or an hour and a half of the program; then we turned the lights on and went inside and sat around for discussion. Well, it was absolutely fascinating. I had asked the black Americans and Africans in the embassy to come over and feel free to comment. One question from an African that was extremely interesting was, "We can't understand why you glorify that primitive life that we're trying to get away from." [Laughter]

*Q: That's something you never would have thought of, would you?*

SMYTHE: We wouldn't have thought of that. So I explained the romanticism in dealing with Africa that it sprouted from a sense of being able to be proud of one's heritage now, after so long a time of being deprived. You know, they understand a lot of this, and pick it up. If there's one thing I pride myself on being able to do, it's handle controversial material through a dispassionate exposition of the factors involved, and it works every time. If you can keep your ego out of it and let them attack what they want to attack and you can say, "Yes, that's reasonable to attack, and there are some Americans who attack it this way, and there are others who apologize for it and want to hold onto some of the old values, and this is what we have done about it." When they can sit down and talk that much, then light begins to dawn.

One other person who came to the embassy was the editor of *Foreign Policy*, this long, narrow one. What was his name? He's not with it any more. He was a very provocative kind of speaker, considered leftist by Americans, as pretty far out, but such a lover of the United States that he was a too little defensive, sometimes, if Africans would attack. It was very interesting to see how he would explain things, while thinking of himself as very critical of American ways of doing

things. I think the more varied Americans they can send out who can criticize out loud and not have me upset by it, for instance, or anybody else upset by it, the more they begin to understand what we mean by our free press and freedom of discussion and inclination.

*Q: The fact that these things are said out loud, and written about in the press, is the best illustration I think we have that the system works.*

SMYTHE: Exactly. And they are impressed by it, they are very much impressed by it. To see our diplomats, and some of them--for instance, we had a young fellow who was trained in agriculture. They could not mistake the fact that he was African in descent, and they could not mistake the fact that he had been well educated and knew what he was doing and felt strongly about it, and they could also see him interacting with other AID people. This kind of thing is terribly important for them to see.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was on the Advisory Commission for International, Educational, and Cultural Affairs, we were talking about what to show them and what not to show, and the more we showed, the more easily they accept the fact that Americans are crazy: they'll let you say anything; they'll accept it, but they hate to hear you object to something that they really love and feel strongly about. Somehow it works, and they keep on being able to accept some things that are good about Americans. If you just give them time and a chance to say their piece, they'll hold still while you say yours. I ran into some pretty negative types every now and then. I did a speaking tour for USIA last year, and it was very successful because of this business of not being defensive about the United States, but standing my ground at the same time.

*Q: Did you ever get any comments that you're not representative of black people in America because you had special privileges? Did that ever arise?*

SMYTHE: Not really. Not very much. They would sometimes worry about the fact that my physical appearance isn't typically African, but they know so many Americans now that they realize there's a spectrum, and I was able to talk about the intermarriage and the mixing during slavery and that sort of thing so that they understand it. But they do want to hear about this. In Cameroon, you know, they had their own minority problem. The English-speaking feel themselves a minority. They feel it isn't fair for them to be restricted to their proportion of the population. They feel that if merit prevailed, they would have more of the high offices than they now have, [Laughter] because they feel that the British prepared them for independence better than the French.

Now, regardless of what your judgment is of their assessment or how qualified they are of assessing this, it's a very interesting thing to talk about. I have talked with English-speaking people, themselves government functionaries, and I said, "We have had the same kind of minority difficulty in the United States. We've got to carry along a minority which feels that it has been put at a disadvantage, and I think one can understand this. But there are some things you can do that are easy to do. For instance, as a diplomat, I have never been invited to attend a ceremony in the English-speaking part of Cameroon. I have been invited to--and I cited two or three places where the diplomatic corps had left Yaoundé and had gone to take part in some special celebration. Now, if the president should go into the English-speaking area and invite

people to go with him, this would make a difference. And if he memorized a short speech in English, he could do very well."

They accepted this and talked about it and I kept talking about it, and before I left they scheduled a five-day visit to southwestern Cameroon and stayed there and consulted with the local people, with the conversation chiefly in English. When someone demanded a translation into French, the president said, "I understood that, and I'm not English-speaking. It is your job to know English well enough so you can understand it. We'll not have translation here." So they have made at least a beginning.

It must have been February or March of this year when I read in the *New York Times* that the president of Cameroon was coming here, and the day that the embassy gave a reception for the president, I had not received an invitation. I said, "Well, I've recently changed addresses. They probably don't know I'm here." The person who called me was one of my predecessors, who is now with Shell Oil Company--he's their international man--and he, of course, was invited. So he said, "I will take the responsibility of calling the embassy and tell them that I have told you to come. So you come and I'll meet you at the hotel at a certain time." So I met him at the hotel, and there was Paul Engo who is Cameroon's permanent representative at the U.N., and we had a little reunion. I went in and I saw that the crowd was largely Cameroonian. There were very few outsiders and there were no other ambassadors except Lewis Hoffacker (the one who had called me) and me, until later on Myles Frechette came in, so I did see him. I had met him in Cameroon last summer.

Anyhow, the president he made a speech in English and brought down the house. The students could not applaud him enough. It was a real sensation. And he had been struggling with English when I was there. We had to speak in French, always. He had taken English lessons, but he didn't have the security to speak. And on this occasion he read his speech, but it was in English. He said, extemporaneously, "We are a bilingual country, so I shall speak in English." And then he read his speech. Well, I thought that was marvelous, and the students thought it was marvelous, and he left a very good feeling there.

*Q: These people who are in the minority, the English-speakers, are they from different tribal backgrounds or is just that geographically they were under the British?*

SMYTHE: It's geographic. The British had the mandate for western Cameroon, and the French had the mandate for the east. That line was not always a good respecter of tribal origins. It isn't as bad as the major lines between countries, and there is some mixing over the boundaries. But I think that they're on their way. Now that enough cabinet ministers are coming out and demonstrating that they are bilingual, there is a real expectation that the children will know both languages. There's a real expectation, and what they need to do is to put absolutely fascinating reading matter in English that is not readily available in French.

*Q: Drive them to it. [Laughter]*

SMYTHE: Yes. Then you'll find that they'll do it. Anyhow it's gone fairly well.

*Q: Continuation of interview: October 23, 1986*

*Could you tell me, if you know, who first recommended you to be an ambassador?*

SMYTHE: You know, one or two people have told me that they recommended me. One of them was Benjamin Mays, who attended Bates, Muskie's alma mater. Mays was president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, which is a block from my childhood home. Mother and Mrs. Mays were very good friends, and she and Dad had a good deal of contact with the Mays family. He thought well of me, because I sent one of my Japanese students to apply to Morehouse. Dr. Mays gave him a scholarship, and the young man graduated with honors, and was so appreciative of Dr. Mays that every time he got anywhere near Atlanta, he would go and see him. He became one of the leading, I think *the* leading expert on economic development in Japan, and he was invited to come to the U.N. or to various meetings in the U.S. at least twice a year.

Last year I was sort of a semi-leader of the group of ambassadors who went to visit in Japan. I persuaded him to give a talk on how it was that Japan, which had such poor natural resources, had developed so spectacularly after the second World War. He had it all worked out. His explanation was so lucid and so convincing, and I thought to myself, "I would like Japan to become more cosmopolitan, but it has stood her in good stead to have people who are so attuned to the same values, so willing to work hard for the good of the country, so that instead of having a huge foreign debt, she has a huge debt to her own citizens." That simplifies an awful lot of deficit problems.

Dr. Mays was one who wrote a letter and sent me a copy. A woman I had not met, but who turned out to be a friend of some cousins of mine, said to me one day after I had come back, "I was on the committee that decided you should be appointed ambassador." She said that the Carter White House had wanted to distance itself from the kind of prostitution of ambassadorial appointments to big donors and had asked that committees be set up to screen people who were nominated to be ambassadors. They had all the background and credentials and so on, and while I am not sure whether it was this particular letter that was responsible, somehow my name came up. I had served already on an advisory commission and on the U.S. Commission for UNESCO and the Advisory Council on African Affairs, so I had a track record in the State Department. But I didn't really know. I gathered that a number of people had been appointed to go through the list of persons suggested and indicate which ones were ready and which ones weren't and where they thought the appointments might be most relevant.

*Q: Did you meet President Carter at this time?*

SMYTHE: No, I didn't meet him when I was appointed. When Hugh was appointed, we went to call on Lyndon Johnson at the White House, but the Carter White House was apparently overbooked and they didn't run all ambassadors by there. I thought it was a mistake, that it's always to one's advantage to be able to refer to, "As the president said to me. . ."

*Q: And to have the picture on the piano.*

SMYTHE: Yes. It makes a difference. However, when I became deputy assistant secretary, we would sort of take turns escorting chiefs of state to the White House, or ambassadors who were presenting credentials. I arrived at work one day and was told that the Ambassador from Lesotho was presenting her credentials that day and I would be the person to accompany her. I thought this would be a great opportunity to see how it's done in the United States, and a woman ambassador, too, had symbolic interest. She turned out to be a very fine person and became a friend. She had gone to graduate school in the United States, so she was accustomed to American ways and American English. What impressed me was Carter's handling of the interview. He had done his homework. He knew what exports and imports were involved between the two countries. He knew her biographical background and was able to refer to her years at the Enoch Pratt Library School.

*Q: All this without notes?*

SMYTHE: Yes, without notes. I just read this week a statement by someone from the Carter years who said that Carter was one of the most brilliant men he had ever known. He was capable of absorbing material in this fashion, and he had such a modest demeanor and was not a striking man in any way, so that I suspect people were inclined not to understand the depth that was there, his ability to grasp material and integrate it. And I was impressed with the way Mondale did it. I went to see him at the White House when the president of the National Assembly of Niger, I think, was in town, and, again, he had been well briefed. He was comfortable in talking with the visitor and remembered little personal details that confirmed that he had taken time to learn.

*Q: That's amazing, isn't it, with all the other material they have to know, and the number of appointments they have per day.*

SMYTHE: Absolutely. Now, I must have seen President Carter on at least six or eight occasions after that. I went to greet two chiefs of state. The president of Rwanda was the first one, and I took him to the White House. Unfortunately, the only appointment we could get him was in the middle of the reception that the Carters were having for a Congressional Black Caucus weekend attended by 2,000 people, all of whom seemed to be at the White House. President Carter excused himself and came downstairs and had a few minutes with the Rwandan president, and a ceremonial picture was taken so that the guest could take back photographic evidence of their meeting.

The next one I got was the prime minister of Madagascar. He's no longer living; he died a year after he'd been here. He was already past eighty, I think, but he seemed younger. I took my sister that day, because he was coming in at National airport on a scheduled plane. It wasn't coming in at Andrews Air Force Base, as they do when they arrive on personal airplanes. She was absolutely fascinated by the way they commandeered the lounge and put security people around and saw to it that he disembarked and was greeted first, and then we moved to the waiting cars, leaving the area to the other passengers. It was very smoothly done. These young security men who take care of it must have to go through it so often that they really know what they're doing and make no waste motions and overlook nothing that has to do with his security.

I passed the outriders and the police escort cars and all the rest of it yesterday. I can't remember who was here, but I had received a notice from the Council on Foreign Relations that Quett Masire, the president of Botswana, would be here about this time.

I thought I would attend that one, because I'm going to be in New York on Monday interviewing prospective presidents for Spelman College. This is to be at 8:00 Tuesday morning. I haven't seen President Masire since the funeral of Sir Seretse Khama, and he had such a warm regard for the American friends that I was with, two Americans who had known him in his student days and in his earlier government days, that I thought it would be nice to see him again and see what he is doing and saying, now that six years have passed. It was July of 1980 when I met him. As a matter of fact, I remember the very day, the 23rd of July, because on the 24th we went to Zimbabwe and met with Robert Mugabe. It was a very interesting experience to be in Southern Africa and to see those two countries. But it's been cancelled, so I have no worry about Tuesday morning.

Anyway, I thought he was coming past, and it must be a heady experience to be riding through Washington and seeing the city and seeing so many things that are totally different from one's own background. It meant a great deal to the president of Cameroon. He had come over in the Kennedy days, and my first trip to southeast Cameroon was an occasion when I could take an old film of that visit to President Kennedy. It was fascinating for me to see the audience watch the film. They were so astonished. When he said goodbye to President Kennedy, he sat back in one of these stretch limousines that has never been seen in Cameroon. For them, a small Mercedes sedan is the biggest of cars, and to see this huge thing for their president, and to see him drive off with the Cameroon flag, was just the kind of thing that thrilled them all.

The second thing that they paid most attention to was a shot of one of our thruways with all the cloverleaves full of traffic. I think it may have been the Los Angeles freeway. Cars were in every lane, in every direction, and they just showed this intersection of two highways with the four cloverleaf roads, and when they first saw it, they didn't know what it was. Then the lens zoomed in and they could see it was cars on a road, and an audible sort of appreciative sigh went up at that. These are the things that aren't strange to us, but that really strike them between the eyes.

*Q: The vastness of everything.*

SMYTHE: Yes, the plentifulness of transportation. They know what traffic jams are in Lagos, but that's not the same thing as this, with thousands of cars going through every second. It's a very impressive country to a visitor from a very small developing country.

*Q: Was there any reaction one way or the other to you, a woman, being appointed ambassador?*

SMYTHE: I was looking for that to see what might be the reactions. The president reacted to it in a very interesting way. He is a Muslim, a devout Muslim, but African Muslims are not Arab Muslims. He said, "You will be a role model for our women." And do you know, within six months, 10 percent of the National Assembly was made up of women. I'm not suggesting cause and effect, but he was aware of the emphasis on human rights from Carter.

There is something I should put in here. On my CV, there was a line about my serving as deputy director of research for the NAACP for the school segregation cases. I had just come back from two years in Japan, and they asked if I would work with it, and I was delighted to do so. First of all, I didn't have a job; and in the second place, I saw this as making history. It was the most fascinating thing I've done, in many ways. But the thrust of that was he thought of me as a civil rights worker. And I had another line on my CV: I was scholar-in-residence for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in '73, '74. So here are two things that tie me to civil rights.

I learned later on that he had been a little concerned about this ambassador who was coming. In the first place, a woman, and it must mean a wild-eyed radical of a woman [Laughter]; but human rights, as it was then being enunciated from Washington, sounded strident to many ears in one-party countries. The idea of having a civil rights advocate come in and criticize what was or wasn't happening in Cameroon was a little unsettling, but apparently there was not a feeling that this would be enough to refuse *agrément*, and they ended up responding with reasonable dispatch, I think. So it went through, but I was notified, it seems to me, in February or March, and the announcement was made about the 24th of April.

*Q: It took that long to get agrément?*

SMYTHE: It took a while to get it done.

*Q: You think it was your perceived politics rather than your gender that was upsetting them?*

SMYTHE: I think so.

*Q: In other words, they didn't really care whether you were a man or a woman?*

SMYTHE: I think I was the first woman ambassador that ever set foot in Cameroon, and they had not had one themselves. I think they still have not had one. But they had two women in the cabinet. Their minister of social welfare and the vice minister of education were both women.

*Q: It's curious, isn't it? Diplomacy seems to be the last breakthrough. It's all right to have them working at home, but you can't send them abroad to represent you.*

SMYTHE: Yes! And the interesting thing is, many women might have a better flair for diplomacy, I would think, according to most stereotypes, than many men. There were two women, I think, accredited to Cameroon. There was one from Pakistan and there was another one. She was resident in Nigeria, so she didn't come very often. I saw her only once.

*Q: Were these chiefs of missions?*

SMYTHE: Yes, but accredited to more than one country. simply because they couldn't afford that many embassies. I don't think we had another resident woman while I was there, but I think after I left another woman appeared on the scene. They were already having international women's conferences, and one of the first occasions for me to act as hostess after I presented my credentials was a tea for the women who were attending such conference. Then I found out that



women who had grown up in a francophone tradition had never heard of a tea, didn't know what it was. One woman looked at this spread with little sandwiches and cakes and coffee and tea and asked if she could have a martini. [Laughter] Isn't that incredible? But I suppose it stems from a British tradition, and the French never heard of it and never practiced it. But we used to have teas and coffees all the time in Syria. That is part of their heritage, as well.

*Q: What sort of a relationship were you able to develop with the head of state? He was, as you say, a Muslim, and therefore, probably uncomfortable being with a woman. Was he, perhaps?*

SMYTHE: Not so much. He got so that there were times when we would talk essentially alone. He would have an interpreter around, but most of the time he could manage with my French and I could manage with his. He didn't attempt to speak English, but he declared that he could understand it and was quoted as saying to his cabinet that he understood it and they should learn to understand it, because it was a bilingual country, with the attendant obligations.

*Q: How much French had you had? Did you have more of it back here? You didn't have much time.*

SMYTHE: I had had French in high school and college and had passed my doctoral exams in French and German, but that doesn't require very much French.

*Q: That's mainly it's reading, isn't it?*

SMYTHE: It's really reading and translating, and that's far different. I had taken some French lessons and been tutored in French when I was in Damascus, because I needed that more than I needed the Arabic. Everybody in the diplomatic corps already spoke some French, and most of them spoke English. I had a kind of immersion in French while I was getting prepared to go overseas. My French grammar was excellent when I was a student because that was my meat. I liked the grammar better than I did the speaking, but I had lost a lot of that and had forgotten a lot of the details. Some of them came back, but not very many, and I hadn't ever been fluent in speaking it. So I worked on that, and I got to the point where I suppose I was about a three.

I was able to do some things. For instance, when I went to Zaire, USIS interviewed me for radio, and I warned them that they'd probably have to splice and put it together, but they were able to manage by simply cutting some of what I said, when I'd stop and ask the interviewer what the word for something was, and that sort of thing, but I could manage. I had overcome my shyness about speaking if you weren't sure you were correct in grammar, but I never got so that I would really launch out into public speaking in French. I could have done it if I had really taken the bull by the horns.

*Q: Of course, you had an awful lot of other things to do and a lot on your mind at this time. You brought your own secretary with you?*

SMYTHE: Yes. I had an absolute ideal. In the first place, I knew the kind of temperament that she had. She could get along with *anybody*. She was bilingual in French and English. Her mother was a French war bride, and as a little girl she had been taken to France to visit her grandmother

and her other relatives, and that went on until she was fifteen and quite good at French. She warned me that her education in French had not gone beyond a teenager's vocabulary, and therefore she couldn't discuss very complicated subjects. Her French was so incredibly natural that people could not believe it when they heard it.

*Q: How did you find this gem?*

SMYTHE: She was my secretary at the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Now, let me tell you: this gem, that wasn't all she had. She had done a stint in the Peace Corps--in Africa! She had been in Niger, and, as a matter of fact, had become so devoted to Niger that she made it her business to introduce herself to the staff, and the ambassador considered her and six other people in Cameroon as honorary Nigerians. So she was invited to everything that they had in the Niger embassy, of an appropriate size, all the receptions and so on.

She was a couple of years younger than I was. She had maturity, utter discretion. She would have made a diplomat *par excellence*. She cared about little things like politeness and tone, courtesies like standing up when a visiting ambassador came to call, and she taught the others in my office the same thing if they seemed not to know. Perfect on the telephone. She said, "I'm a Katherine Gibbs graduate of sorts, but I'm not really a fast typist and I'm not a great one." Her shorthand was not terribly good, but shorthand is not for this period in history, anyway. It's an old-fashioned, time-consuming thing that ties up two people, so we could do with other kinds of mechanical recording. It was her personality, her complete discretion--I could trust her without any question--and her ability to empathize with the people of the country. She would say to me, "I heard one of our Marines make a disparaging remark about the people, and maybe they need to be taught more how to handle relations with the local employees." This was such a help.

*Q: Another pair of eyes for you, and ears, too.*

SMYTHE: A pair of eyes and real understanding.

*Q: Well, also, it would seem to me that, given the awful circumstances just prior to your going out there, it must have helped you because she had been through it with you.*

SMYTHE: Yes. To have a friend. She had been through it, she understood. She was really hoping that I could take her along, and I was hoping she would. I didn't want to deprive the Phelps-Stokes Fund. The president [Franklin H. Williams] is a former ambassador himself to Ghana and to the U.N., so he readily understood and put nothing in her way, and she loved every minute of it.

*Q: Was she your confidante, to a certain extent?*

SMYTHE: Yes, she was, in a way. She was my family. She would come in. One day, she'd say, "You know, I haven't had a squeeze from my ambassador for quite a while." [Laughter]

*Q: Not your ordinary ambassador-secretary relationship! You mentioned yesterday that economic development was your principal interest. Does that mean that you spent most of your time and interest with the economic section, and AID?*

SMYTHE: No, but it does mean that they knew that I was interested and would come and share with me plans that they had, or concerns that they had, and I would ask them to brief me on what was going on. Of course, when people like CEOs or heads of the chocolate manufacturing association came through Cameroon, they'd come and call on me, and the economic officer would go out of his way to suggest that I meet so and so who's here. I made some good friends that way, and it was very helpful to me because my background is in economics.

I was convinced that we needed to beef up our approaches through regular business channels, and many business people simply did not know how to approach Cameroon, how to approach a developing country. I began forming some opinions about what could go wrong, and collecting case histories. One program fell flat because the person who had been involved in it in the corporation got promoted to another job that took his attention somewhere else. The person who succeeded him had no background, and simply the chemistry of this person and the Cameroonian representative clashed, and there went a well-thought-out thing with a good feasibility study. It simply fell flat. I had to pick up the pieces.

The foreign minister was terribly disappointed because Cameroon wanted American business to come in. They wanted to learn economic management, commercial management. What I had hoped was that we could have an American manager come in and help him to relate to a Cameroonian manager, who would learn the importance of keeping out of the commercial sphere some of the customs that disregard productivity. For instance, in Nigeria when we were working on the book, we encountered a woman who went to Kingsway Department Store and helped herself to things and said, "My son is manager of this department. I can have anything I want here." With that kind of cultural practice, you have to find ways. In the first place, having the people who are responsible understand what that does to their ability to report the kinds of results that they're supposed to produce. It can be done, but it takes a lot of good human relations to do it.

This was a project where a corporation proposed to have the country take 50,000 acres and devote it to the production of corn. Corn was cheaper shipped from Iowa than it was from Cameroon farmers, so what we wanted to do was to enable them to produce some corn and be able to feed the animals that we were using in some AID projects and, as well, feed people and other animals. The project agreement was all but signed, and then a shift of personnel took place. The new one coming in had no particular interest in it, had no background, and the other fellow did not have sufficient time to brief him adequately. So he came to Cameroon expecting to do in a weekend what you do in a weekend in New York or Chicago, and it didn't work that way. So one of the things I was doing was trying to translate local perceptions and ways of doing business to the business people who were coming in. In fact, I was thinking that when I left the diplomatic corps, I would perhaps do some consulting on how to go into a developing country, how you form contacts, and what you do when you get them. What you do when you get them isn't saying, "Now let's get down to business. How can we do this and how much will it cost?" You simply can't do it that way.

*Q: Is there a great deal of ceremony in the interaction of people?*

SMYTHE: There is. Part of the ceremony is demonstrating that you care enough about the people to be trusted, and until that takes place, you can't really make much progress.

*Q: Millions of cups of coffee and that sort of thing?*

SMYTHE: Not only that. You can't do it in one trip. It's done most successfully if you have a person there who can represent the company in your absence after you've gone back home and who can continue to talk with the people and report back to the home office. But to expect to go out and work out things is very visionary. It doesn't work that way, even though Cameroon had some well-trained, Western-educated people who did understand how they did it at Harvard, because they had graduated from the business school at Harvard. The man who was negotiating oil leases from Cameroon had a Harvard M.B.A., the man who went to head up Chase Manhattan's Cameroon branch had an M.B.A. from an American institution, so there were people who knew and who had some background, but after they stayed in Cameroon a while and been subject to Cameroon ways of doing things, they needed a refresher course sometimes, and they need to be helped to bridge the gap between the two ways of doing things.

It was absolutely fascinating, and I found that when I would sit down with people and talk with the elders about how things could develop, they were willing to listen because they thought there was something miraculous about what we could do. They would take it very seriously--I found this later when I was at Northwestern. I sent business interns over to work in some of the countries, and one colleague who had gone to Kenya and worked with the Kenya Women Finance Trust, as it was called, said it astonished her. They didn't ask how much experience she had; they simply listened to everything as though she had the answers, and if she had done a year of *graduate school*, in business, then they should honor what she had to say. Her own natural humility and efforts to understand other people were flummoxed by this at first. She didn't know quite how to accept gracefully the tribute they were making to her education and, at the same time, to acquaint them with the fact that they were giving *her* a great deal, and that she appreciated it. It takes a great deal of understanding.

I think we need a great deal more interchange and experiences in each other's countries if we're going to do business. The more we can do of that, the better, I think, because without business contacts and business investment in countries, they don't develop.

*Q: Did you do a lot of representational entertaining of these different groups?*

SMYTHE: Yes, and we would have people who were knowledgeable about business matters, USIA would have people coming over who would talk about American business and how it operates, but they were just learning. They were not used to it, either. They were used to handling college professors who would come over, and, after all, a university is the most worldwide of the cultural organizations. There is thought to be something of an international standard or pattern of behavior, which wasn't always true of commercial ways of doing things. The fact that there were different laws and different accounting methods and techniques,

different banking requirements and procedures, these made the commercial life a lot stranger than we would normally expect. American commercial people are not deeply devoted to learning. They want to do things quickly. They don't want to stop and study and have to wait. We are so used to pell-mell activity.

*Q: Did you have other cultural events come through with USIA? Did you have many of the wonderful black musicians come through, for example?*

SMYTHE: Yes. We didn't have as many as we might have. I'm trying to think of a group. There was a group that was essentially a gospel-singing group, and they were very successful. I hadn't heard of them before, but they came to us from Nigeria and the Nigerian telegram said that they were really very good and connected with their audiences very well, so we looked forward to it. I went to their program which was given on the university campus, and they were very well received. We didn't have any huge groups, like orchestras or dance groups, but Cameroonians were very glad to have the ones that we did have. One pianist, for instance, who comes around, or one--as a matter of fact, instrumental performers are very much prized. They want to know about instruments that are not totally familiar, and if the performers are good people who are curious also about the host's instruments, they enjoy getting together with such visitors.

*Q: What about leadership grants? Did you arrange for many leadership grants?*

SMYTHE: We had a fair number.

*Q: Did you, yourself, bother with that, or did you have your political people or your economic people do that?*

SMYTHE: Well, in an embassy that small, I was very close to all of the programs that we had, and we would talk every year. We made up a list of the people who were promising young leaders to send in, and why. We went out of our way to see that people who had something to give, or who were likely to be very prominent themselves, would come over and get an experience in Washington. Sometimes I would write to people that I knew had an interest in common with the ones who were going, and see that they were involved. I find myself still doing it.

*Q: What about your DCM? Did you inherit a DCM?*

SMYTHE: I inherited one and found him a very interesting person. Did you ever know Bill Mithoefer?

*Q: No.*

SMYTHE: He had spent sixteen years in Africa, I think, when I arrived there, and he was being advised to leave Africa and broaden his background, because he was in the political cone, and Bill is still in Africa. Well, Bill is possibly the most prolific collector of African art, if one is prolific in a passive pursuit like that. He was one of the most assiduous collectors of African art in the Foreign Service. He's well known, and some of his art is on display in the Museum of

African Art here. At the time I met him, he admitted to a market value of a million dollars or more in African art. He had learned what is valuable and what isn't, and in addition to getting authentic art--and he was a fairly experienced judge of what was authentic--he would not invest in pieces that weren't elegant. They might be ever so genuine ethnically, but he wasn't going to get just anything because it was of anthropological interest. He wanted it also to be of artistic interest.

When he went to Liberia, Bill had a standing arrangement with me that he'd buy African art, and every now and then I'd get a cable from Bill describing what he had found, "Shall I buy it?" And usually I would say, "Yes, buy it," so I got some of my best pieces through him that way.

*Q: His tour of duty ended, I suppose?*

SMYTHE: I think it ended theoretically five or six months after I came, but we were about to be inspected and I suggested that they let him remain longer, until the inspection was complete, since I was new and his successor would be even newer. So they let him stay until the 1st of November, 1978. I had arrived September 1, 1977, so I had him for over a year.

He was sort of a diamond in the rough, not a smooth article, but Bill had some qualities that were really very good. Number one, was he didn't mind working around the clock if need be, and he had a lively curiosity. We went to the airport one day to greet someone, and while I was in the middle of greeting whoever it was, he sidled off and sought out an airplane pilot he had seen standing by a small plane, and found out that this was an American pilot and made friends with him, and found that he was ferrying Jonas Savimbi around. [Laughter] So he had that kind of common sensibility to keep finding things.

He became acquainted with everybody. What he did was to develop friends on his own level, or a couple notches below, who'd be flattered to have the American DCM pay attention to them, and many of them were extremely loyal to him and he found out a lot of good things. He wasn't the world's greatest writer, but he had learned how to be concise and to put down on paper what he needed to know, and he was a fairly prolific reporter. He worked very well, and I didn't need an elegant smoothie who would impress everyone with his sophistication at a post like that. I needed somebody who wasn't thrown when he needed to deal with grassroots people and find out things. I enjoyed working with him. Every now and then I was exasperated,, too, because he was inclined to laugh a little too loud, to be a little less elegant than he needed to be, but on the whole it worked and people felt good about him.

Peter Lord came. I wasn't happy with getting rid of Bill at the end of the time because he had enough knowledge of the place, and unfortunately, I had arrived at the same time as a new admin officer, a new GSO, a new consular officer, and a new budget and fiscal officer. So we were going to have about 90 percent of the embassy turnover at one time, and I wanted to hold him and then have the new one come in when I'd be halfway through my time and then he would extend over past another one. It didn't work out that way, but they gave me a list of four or five people who would be available, and I went over the list and got some recommendations. I was going to be in Washington, so I made it my business to find the ones who were going to be in Washington and talk to them. It looked on the face of it as if Peter Lord would be a good person

to come by, and I talked with people who said that he was a very good number two man. He had worked with three women ambassadors, almost in succession.

I found him to be a thorough kind of person, ambitious, strong in a lot of good ways. For instance, he was a very fair-minded person. In supervising the staff, you would count on him not to be accused of picking on someone or favoring somebody to the detriment of somebody else, and many times he would come up with a remark about someone who was not perfect in something, and point out some of his or her strengths somewhere else. I find that a very useful kind of balance to supply, especially in a small embassy. It's too easy to have things devolve into cliques and a kind of in-group, out-group performance that destroys morale, and when I went to Cameroon, I had been warned that morale had been a problem. I don't know all the reasons, but there had been something like four marriages that had broken up (one of them being Bill Mithoefer's), and the wives were in the United States and the husbands out in Cameroon. I was forewarned and therefore worked very hard to see that every wife who wanted a job was helped to find one, and we were able to provide 100 percent employment. Not necessarily the dream job, but a job that had enough good in it so that people felt that they were not being misused.

Now, I had one--and I hope I learned a lot from it--one situation in which we were going to have a family liaison officer for the first time, and it would be one of the wives of the embassy. Four of them applied. One of them was the wife of the officer to whom she would report, so there was clearly a problem of conflict of interest, and so she wisely decided to withdraw her application. That left us with three people. One, a young woman who was--I don't remember whether she was pregnant then or whether the baby had already come, but she wanted the job. There was a second applicant, a wife who really wanted to advance her career; meanwhile she needed something to keep her busy.

The third one was one whose marriage broke up, after they and I had left Cameroon. It didn't happen there; at least, I don't believe so. Anyhow, she was a charming, intelligent person. (All of the candidates were good people.) Any one of them could have done a creditable job, and the task of deciding among them was going to be a tough one.

I formed a committee. Bill Mithoefer and I agonized over how we could best avoid doing it in such a way that people would be embarrassed, and, luckily, there were four people and only one position, so that anyone who didn't get it had company in not being selected. The committee came back and reported that they didn't have a definite recommendation to make; they didn't want to do that, but they had asked these questions. They had listed a series of six or seven questions to ask people in the embassy, and particularly the wives of embassy officers: What do you need a family representative for? If you had to choose one, which of these candidates do you think would best meet your needs and why?

The answers surprised me--the charming one, they thought, would not be as attentive to them. She had her own program and lots of initiative, but they didn't think she'd listen to them. The former missionary, they thought, might be less than understanding of people who were not religious, and they were afraid she'd be less tolerant in some subtle ways. The other candidate they had no strong objection to, and she had had a bit more experience because she had been working with the American Club and managing things, so that they knew her a little better. There

was an implication that they felt more comfortable with the third one, who had the club experience.

So I called them in one at a time, starting with the unsuccessful ones, and explained that they were seen as qualified, but that the overall evidence seemed to point to another candidate. So they knew they weren't going to get it before she knew she was going to get it. They both sort of accepted it. The charming one that they thought wouldn't listen to other people was the most deeply disappointed, because she saw herself as having devoted more time to appealing to Washington to send us a family officer, and she felt that she was, in a way, entitled to it. She had thought of it and wanted it and had said she wanted it. Well, I had realized they wouldn't be happy. The former missionary and her husband threatened a discrimination suit because the successful candidate was black, and therefore, they decided, there had been favoritism. So I sat down and talked with them at some length and then told them a little more than I had told her at first about the feelings of some people, and in the end they accepted it. They withdrew, and that was the end of it. I paid a little extra attention to her to make sure that she was aware of her value. And what happened was that when Chad was evacuated and some real organization by women was needed. That was her meat, and she was excellent at it. She liked the charitable end of things, and she did have a tendency to want to decide things for other people; and she could do this with people who were feeling a little helpless and needed mothering. So she was a real success there.

We found a job for the one who had withdrawn because her husband would be her boss, and she accepted that. I hadn't fully realized that this was another marriage that was going down the drain. It was too bad, because her good qualities appeared not to dovetail with his needs. I hope she's found happiness somewhere else, because she was a nice person, too.

*Q: Do you think that the Foreign Service life contributed appreciably to the breakup of these marriages?*

SMYTHE: I would say, yes, if it weren't for the fact that I see just as many breaking up right here. I don't know. I look at people in that age group. I don't know but one family of the young people who grew up with my daughter--the five or six girls who were her closest friends--that really succeeded and seemed to grow up, so that a person understands that life is not going to be like that pictured in the ads. Something has to give, and you simply can't have a fairy tale existence. It isn't there. That isn't what you work for; that isn't what you hope for. And, strangely enough, if you had it, you might be appalled at how dull it could be. [Laughter]

Fortunately, we had a lot of highly intelligent, well-prepared young people, and the wives did have things to give. Those who gave, in the American school, for example, could be very happy.

I went by to see one of those wives last year when I was on the USIA speaking trip. I stayed with her in Tanzania. She was getting up at 6:00 in the morning so she could be at the American school at 7:00 or 7:15 to do her day's work. She was working like a Trojan and she was perfectly content, and her children are all doing well, and her husband is not straying. I said to myself, "Where there's this solid commitment and people don't expect the moon, they're making it." But I don't know how you do that in a time when people get their kicks from taking a drug, for example, instead of writing a poem. Life is difficult--I grant that--but is it really so difficult that



so many people can't cope? I just don't accept that. To go overseas is such a privilege for people who have the sense of commitment and the realization that it's not going to be easy, that there are all kinds of problems to face. As for the problems of safe water and running toilets, those things are really not a very big part of our happiness. And we do supply them, so people are very fortunate. Somehow they are more dependent on each other, and if they don't ask the impossible of each other, they can make a very good life. Now, my secretary, who is this marvelous human being, was happy as a clam. She looked up all the Peace Corps volunteers that she had known when she was one, and those that she hadn't known, she made friends with and had over to her house. Heaven, for her, was a peaceful home where she could share what she had with whoever came by. She was happy as could be and looks back on those days with great pleasure.

*Q: Don't you think, if you can have only one attribute in the Foreign Service, the one you must have is curiosity?*

SMYTHE: Absolutely. I was going to say adaptability, but you don't adapt unless you are curious about what's there. There is so much to see in the world, and enjoy. The arts in Cameroon were delightful. You could get such comfortable clothing, tie-dyed things, and there were lots and lots of arts around to watch. There were games. People were good-natured. They were basically friendly. You could practice languages, and if you got tired of one, there were 190 others.

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*The following excerpts are from an interview by Ruth Stutts Njiiri conducted in 1981.*

*Q: What were your first impressions of Cameroon?*

SMYTHE: My first impressions of Cameroon were that it was a pleasant place. For one thing, one was struck by the temperature. Yaoundé, the capital, has a very mild temperature, a really temperate climate that doesn't stray very far from 74 degrees mean temperature year round.

The second thing was that the people were friendly. They were not particularly curious about one, so that one didn't feel in the middle of a great deal of curiosity. People held their own council but were accessible, and I found them relatively easy to meet.

It was a friendly country that saw the United States as doing some things quite well, and the President had declared his interest in seeing closer commercial relations with the United States as well as good political relations. So when we had a message from the Department of State asking for our suggestions for making policy toward Africa the best it could be under the Carter Administration, I sent back a comment that one of the things that I'd like to see was constant consultation with African leaders as our friends, not waiting until there was a crisis and we needed to ask them a favor, but building up a kind of relationship all along that would survive problems and would help them feel that they knew us in depth, and vice-versa.

That became pretty much a part of our policy, not because I said it, but because many people believed the same thing. And our relations with Africa became, I believe, warmer and more friendly during that period than they had been perhaps ever before. It was a gratifying time to be present.

I remember one of the early tests of that... that approach to relations with Africa, when the Horn of Africa became a hotter spot than it had been previously and there were border skirmishes between Ethiopia and Somalia. I went to call upon the President and talked to him about what we saw as the possibility of doing something about this enmity between two neighbors. He was discouraged at that point about the possibility of doing anything that would bring an early end to the hostilities, because the problem was so deeply rooted in the cultures of the people involved.

We must have talked for an hour about the possibilities: whether the OAU [Organization of African Unity] could speak with one voice and say to both, "We are determined that you ought to cease hostilities and find a way of settling your differences without going to war..."

*Q: Excuse me, this conversation was with the President of Cameroon?*

SMYTHE: ...the President of Cameroon.

*Q: ...who was?*

SMYTHE: Who was Ahmadou Ahidjo, then celebrating his twentieth anniversary as the leader of Cameroon, because he was a leader of Cameroon for two years before Cameroon became independent— leader of the larger part of what is now Cameroon.

President Ahidjo took very seriously the challenge of trying to work out a response to this, but he is also a realist and he was aware that one could not get the Organization of African Unity to speak with one voice on this, because each of the sides ... each of the two sides had its own adherents and these split the OAU.

We talked about the possible ways of doing a number of things but did not come up with a solution that satisfied us and we felt really would create a commitment to peace on the part of all the parties. So we had to leave that conversation with future action to follow. But in that one hour's conversation, I had an opportunity to get a sense of the man and to build up a great deal of confidence, first of all, in his judgment, in his sense of responsibility toward other areas of Africa beside his own, and his thorough commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Since then he has served on almost every good offices commission that the OAU has developed, so that I know that we are not alone in seeing him as a man who values peace and who would like to see a negotiated end to each dispute that takes place. He's a remarkable man and one of the most valuable memories I have is of the times I talked with him about events in Africa and indeed in the world in general.

*Q: Your appointment came during the Administration of President Jimmy Carter.*

SMYTHE: Yes.

*Q: Would you describe the attitude of his Administration toward foreign policy in Africa?*

SMYTHE: There's no question in my mind but that the people in the Carter Administration accepted the idea that partnership would be the key to resolving issues with Africa. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on working with the African states, the leaders of those states, to devise elements of policy that would be agreeable to both sides and that would be understood by both sides. We knew that our interests would not always be parallel; that sometimes we would have to go one way and our African friends would have to go another. But we hoped that we would always be able to talk to each other about the reasons for our differences and to soften the effects of our having different needs at various times so that we could come back together and work cooperatively on issues where we would have an identity of interests. I think there was no question that there was this kind of commitment.

People who are deeply interested in Africa and who are emotional about Africa can sometimes complain of the Carter Administration, as they have about all Administrations, that they didn't go far enough toward the ideal. But no Administration can declare a foreign policy in a vacuum, and many times complaints that the Carter Administration did not go far enough or did not, for example, forbid our business people to invest in South Africa, or take other such steps, failed to take into account that President Carter did not have the authority to issue an edict that would bring about that result and that it was politically impossible to get through Congress such a proposition.

It was very difficult for President Carter to keep the Congress from lifting sanctions on Rhodesia. And at the end, they were lifted a little too soon. But he had been able to stave off the worst that might have happened, which is the lifting of sanctions in the middle of negotiations on the independence of Zimbabwe. And sanctions did stay on long enough for that independence to be in sight when they were finally lifted.

I found during that period of time that concepts of how American Government works are frequently inaccurate, because people do not understand the nature of American Government and the system of checks and balances. It's only human to assume that things are ... things normally conform to our own personal experience.

If, for example, someone in our society is seen as taking an... I'll give you an example. I went to see President Ahidjo shortly after the Senate of the United States had voted by a vote of ...51 to 42 I believe, to lift sanctions on Rhodesia. The House had upheld sanctions and the Senate voted to lift sanctions. And, when I walked in I said, "I suppose you have heard the news about our action on. sanctions?" He said, "Oh, yes, isn't it a pity your Senators voted to lift sanctions?" He said, "You haven't; your Government has lifted sanctions." I said, "Oh no, Mr. President, our Government has not lifted sanctions. The Senate voted for lifting of sanctions, but the vote was so small it cannot override a Presidential veto and the President is going to veto that measure if it gets past the House." "Oh," he says, "then sanctions have not been lifted." I said, "That is correct."

And he was much relieved. But in his view, if a powerful unit of Government says something, that is the Government. His is a centralized Government, and you don't have Parliament voting something that the President does not agree to uphold, so that this was a new experience for him.

Now there are very few people in African governments who have had sufficiently extensive experience in Washington and enough interest to have uncovered the subtleties of how we operate that way; so I saw as one of my important functions educating people to how American Government works. And it is so thoroughly different from their own that it is sometimes hard to grasp.

Another example, the kind of thing that needs attention. We cannot, as individuals, apply African experience ... measure African experience against our own backgrounds and come up with the right answer to how you do things there. But sometimes we can use our experience to advantage if we hold tight to the fact that we can't really judge by our own.

For example, I tended to see the difference between the parts of Cameroon that had been under French mandate and which therefore were formerly considered francophone, and the parts under British mandate, which were formerly anglophone. Now Cameroon is a united government now, with both English and French official languages, even given the fact that there are more people who grew up speaking French as a lingua franca. And remember, there are large numbers of Cameroonians who speak neither English nor French. But, taking into account that educated Cameroon children fall into two categories rather naturally -- those for whom the French language is the first Western language, and those for whom English is the first Western language -- there are naturally some tensions between the two. Because a good part of the English-speaking part of Cameroon voted to become part of Nigeria at independence.

This left a smaller English-speaking portion in Cameroon. And it is said that about four-fifths of Cameroon, or roughly four-fifths of Cameroon is originally francophone and the other fifth originally anglophone. The Cameroonians are making real attempts to teach both languages and encourage people to use both languages.

I saw some missed opportunities in getting the country to feel more truly bilingual, but the bilingual policy had made it possible to unify the country, at least officially. There were some anglophones who felt that the Federation was better: that to have a regional policy in which the anglophones pretty much ran their part of Cameroon gave the anglophones a larger share of power than simply having a proportional number of seats in the Legislature and a proportional number of people in the Government, and so on.

Well, one can argue this a great deal. But I saw a parallel between the minority that spoke English as a first language... first foreign-first Western language, and the minority black people in the United States. And I said to some Government officials with whom I had become pretty close friends -- I had a group of Government officials and their wives who were primarily anglophones, to talk to on one occasion -- and I said, "When we were trying to promote integration in the United States and to make the minority feel more a part of things, we went out of our way to publicize appointments for minority people to high-ranking Government jobs. We went out of our way to include minority people in all activities." I said, "Since I have been in

Cameroon, I have been asked to travel to Douala to dedicate a bridge, to travel to Ngaoundere to see a factory opened, to various sites to inaugurate new buildings. But I have never been invited to the English-speaking part of Cameroon to do one of these things. Why don't you make sure that people see the highest-ranking people in Government going to the anglophone side to inaugurate a new school or a public facility, or whatever?"

"Second, I would like to see publicity given to some of the things that you're already doing. You have appointed an English-speaking person as dean of the College of Letters and Social Sciences. More should be said about that; he replaced a Francophone person. I think the English-speaking community would be very interested.

"And third, I have heard anglophone ministers give speeches in French. I have not heard a Francophone minister give a speech in English. I think it's important that those who lead the country give speeches in both languages, not just one language."

So this kind of suggestion, informally talked about, may well have reached the highest levels of Government. Before I left, about a month before I left, there was a series of meetings in the anglophone west at which the President spoke. He spent four days in the anglophone section of the country going around to various parts of the country conducting meetings and speaking with the people.

And I was concerned about one other thing. I had not heard of their taking high-level visitors like chiefs of state or other interesting people to the anglophone part of the country. So I tried to see that people who came from the United States, particularly people who were not fluent in French, went to where they could talk with people without having to have a translator.

When Andrew Young came to Cameroon -- he was still Ambassador to the U.N. at that time -- we had a motorcade that went to Victoria, which is a prefectural capital in the Southwest, one of the capitals of the English-speaking part of the country, and Buea, which is the official capital of the southwest.

We took him there and the Governor and other people in the territory were deeply impressed and so appreciative of the opportunity to see him. They said, "Nothing like this has ever happened here!" The leaders began, I believe, to understand how useful this kind of public relations device can be.

When Patricia Derian, the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights came, we chartered a small plane and took her to visit in the anglophone section of the country, where she and I met with people in a fairly typical community. We visited the local coffee cooperative and saw the people processing coffee. We went to talk with the public ... with the delegate to the National Assembly, who had a feast in our honor, and women who came and danced and presented gifts to Secretary Derian.

And one of the highlights of our visit was a visit to the Fon, who is the local paramount chief. He wanted to show us the Afro-A-Kom, which is a piece of statuary that was spirited out of the country, sold to an art collector, brought to the United States, recognized as a missing piece of art

that was traditional in its importance in Cameroon and returned to the country by Warren Robbins, director of the Museum of African Art.

They wanted us to see that piece of sculpture, but it was kept in a place sacred to men. So here was a dilemma: two women, the visiting Assistant Secretary of State and the American Ambassador, who would not be able to see it. So they put their heads together and our interpreter came back to us and said, "The Chief has decided that you will be made honorary men in a ceremony."

So they had a ceremony and transformed us into honorary men and we were taken into the sacred building where it was kept and allowed to see it and even photograph it, though the light was not good enough for the photographs to be very helpful. It was one of the interesting kinds of things that happened on our trip.

I think that the business of bringing together the anglophone and the francophone parts of the country involves so much. It involves not only language. There are some of the same cultural groups on both sides of the line, but there are some cultural groups that are found almost exclusively in the anglophone part of the country and some almost exclusively in the francophone part of the country. So it's going to take some understanding and commitment to bring about genuine unification of the two kinds of country.

Cameroon is trying to unify the laws and has a legal commission working on this, to develop a legal system that will draw upon the British Common Law and French Napoleonic Code, but be truly Cameroonian. They have had the educational people working on promoting bilingualism and teaching the two languages in the schools. And all of the Cabinet ministers assured me that their children were learning both languages in school ... being able to ... and would be able to communicate.

I think to have a genuine bilingualism where people are equally comfortable in both languages, is probably too difficult to achieve for it to be attained very soon. But if people can get along in each other's languages, I think the point of unity will be well on its way, and it's important to reach that stage of development. But that's one of the remaining bits of unfinished business that the President is very well aware of.

*Q: While you were in Cameroon, what role did you see black Americans taking in the shaping of foreign policy?*

SMYTHE: We had a number of black Americans who were in the Embassy and in the AID mission. Their role was pretty much indistinguishable from that of other people, because the white Americans who served in Africa, particularly the younger generation that is coming up now... that has come up in the past fifteen years I'd say, perceives the importance of consultation, the importance of interaction. I might say that the older generation still needs guidance and help.

When I first arrived, I noted that several of the affairs that were given by officers in the Embassy would have very few Cameroonians in attendance. There would be a lot of diplomats from Europe and a lot of Americans, but they hadn't caught on to the fact that our representation funds,

entertainment funds, were for getting to know the Cameroonians better. They were not for getting to know the Germans, the Swiss, or the French, and so on. So I sent a memorandum saying that we would not consider as reimbursable entertainment efforts which did not include a majority of Cameroonians. And affairs which were primarily for Americans or foreigners would not be considered representational affairs.

And my first affair to get acquainted at the Embassy was a reception at which I asked all members of the Embassy -- Cameroonians as well as American -- to bring their spouses and a Cameroonian friend. Each one was to come in with a Cameroonian; and if they did not know a Cameroonian to introduce to me, I had gotten a couple of volunteers to help introduce them to people that they might bring along. And this would help them to meet more Cameroonians. Well, that helped get things started and we had a good many Cameroonians who came. It was a very big party, because by the time we had put all the Embassy employees and wives down, we had about a hundred and sixty, a hundred and seventy people, counting all the agencies, including AID and the Marine Corps, and all the rest.

When we went on to add the Cameroonians, we had about two hundred and fifty people, and that got me started knowing people and got some people to knowing me. Some of them indicated that this was the first time they had been in the American Ambassador's Residence. So we were reaching into a category that we hadn't gotten to before.

And thereafter it was easier and I would sometimes have films. I would send invitations to see films in the Residence to people, anybody I thought could understand the English soundtracks or who was working on English.

Once in a while I had special showings for high-level Government employees who were studying English and who might like to be part of a smaller group. We would be able to get video tape recordings that would not be suitable for very large groups, and it worked out very well. A number of people who were not really fluent in speaking English would come and watch the films. Incidentally, among the people who would come and watch the films occasionally were the Soviet and Chinese Ambassadors, neither of whom spoke English... (laughs). The Chinese knew a little English, but he didn't use it very often, though he tried sometimes.

The possibility of reaching more people requires a multi-pronged effort. Some people who would come to diplomatic receptions in the evening were not accustomed to coming to sports events during the afternoon. Once in a while we'd have a sports day and invite people over in the middle of the day to come and play tennis or swim or play croquet on the lawn, or whatever. And several times we had people in for games; and some people who liked that would not have been so interested in the other -- in the films, for example, or in other kinds of things. But with sports events, you can accommodate people who don't speak the same language. A tennis game is a tennis game. And that gave us a certain amount of flexibility in how we operated.

I sometimes found it possible, too, to stop by and call on people. For instance, I had been in Cameroon only three or four months when I was out one sunny afternoon and heard that there had been a terrible auto accident. One of our Embassy drivers had witnessed it. The son of a

Minister of State had been killed. He was only sixteen; he was riding his motor bike and he ran head-on into a bus and was killed.

I happened to have some white roses blooming in my garden, so I sent them over with a note of condolence and then went to the funeral, which was attended by all the Government functionaries. I found that I was the only diplomat in attendance. But the Minister seemed to appreciate the fact that, as a neighbor -- I lived two blocks from him -- I had called upon him and then gotten acquainted with him. My own recent experience with death in the family made me feel quite sympathetic to what it must mean to him to lose his only son at that age. So in spite of his being ideologically one of the more leftist members of the Administration, he always seemed to count me as something of a friend, and we never had any personal difficulties. Once in a while when there was an occasion for him to deal with ... be part of discussions on United States policy, he would listen as a courtesy to me anyway. And I always thought of the friendly regard that one might have is worth pursuing even though we may not have happy occasions on which to establish it. You just never know when you may need the rapport that is established with people.

*Q: What were your perceptions of black Americans back home, their involvement in the shaping of foreign policy?*

SMYTHE: Back home? Ah, I see what you're saying. Before I answer that, let me say one thing that I forgot to mention.

We had a great many black Americans of prominence who came through, and I tried to make it possible for them to get the widest possible exposure that they could have. Our intercultural exchange programs also had a good many black Americans coming through: black American performers or speakers. So I always tried to see that as many people as possible would be exposed to them. And this, I think, gave the Cameroonians a healthy respect for the calibre of black Americans that were available, and a great many black Americans had a healthy respect for the Cameroonians that they were able to meet.

We were not very much directly affected by black American input in foreign policy, because more of the efforts of our Americans here were directed toward independence for Zimbabwe or policy toward South Africa. Cameroon was very much concerned about South Africa, and the feeling that black Americans agreed with Cameroonian policy toward South Africa was, of course, a plus.

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*Q: Today is June 3, 1981.*

SMYTHE: One of the areas in which black Americans had an interest in Cameroon was in the promotion of business relations and investment. A number of black business people came through Cameroon. Some came with Andrew Young; some came separately. His brother, Dr. Walter Young of Atlanta, came to Cameroon twice while I was there. Jake Henderson, Jr., who was working with a group of private investors who were interested in developing business in



Africa, and representatives of his firm were there several times. And my cousin, Eugene Dibble, came over several times.

The Minister of Economy and Planning was very gracious to persons who came over. At the same time, I think that Cameroon recognized that larger firms had a great deal more economic power to dispense, but at the same time they welcomed smaller firms which would be able to invest and which might have qualified people to help set up new business in Cameroon.

One of the things I tried to do was to visit places that were producing goods and services in Cameroon. In Yaoundé, for example, there was a press that published books ... books that were used not only in the university, but also for the general reader. There was a sugar Factory about two hours away from Yaoundé. I visited the wood pulp factory and the aluminum foundry in Edea, and a tannery in the central part of the country, a couple of textile mills and rice polishing plant in the northern part of the country. So they had a number of things which were already going but plenty of opportunity for other kinds of developments.

During my tenure there, one thing came to fruition. Chase Bank, Cameroon opened. That was something which had been in the works before I arrived, and there were some companies which came while I was there and which continued to work on projects. And since I have returned, I have been in touch with some that are going back to follow up on earlier contacts. It's obvious that for economic relations to develop, it takes time. They don't get set in one visit. It takes time to cultivate confidence in each other, a feeling of knowing what the opportunities are and assessing them and deciding what is likely to work and what will not. I still retain a commitment to encourage people to look at Cameroon, invest in it, and do business there if they find that it works out for their plans with their company.

I understand that there is a black company that is going to have a representative in Cameroon who'll be able to answer questions from business people back here who are interested in setting up something special. And the National Business League through ...what is the name? ...they have a foundation, and I can't remember what they call it. It's named after a black hero like Frederick Douglass. Booker Washington Foundation, that's it. The Booker Washington Foundation has had representatives in Cameroon who have been working with our AID program to develop possibilities for private black investment in Cameroon.

*Q: Andrew Young, the black American, was the U.S. Ambassador to the UN during your time ... yes. He was a controversial figure in America, particularly among white Americans, but it was felt that he was very instrumental in improving relations between America and Africa. What were Cameroonian impressions of Andrew Young?*

SMYTHE: When you bring that up, memories come crowding back. And perhaps the most poignant one was our arrival at the Atlantic Beach Hotel in Victoria, Cameroon. And finding a paraplegic sitting at the entrance, waiting to see Andrew Young, about whom he had heard for such a long time, and handing him a raffia handbag on which was woven, WELCOME ANDREW YOUNG.

We went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where a room had been set up for an exchange of civilities between two members of the Cabinet and Ambassador Young, with his delegation in attendance. A number of government people who were concerned with international trade and international relations were also present. After Andrew Young had spoken, he left that gathering. There were to be some other speeches after he had spoken and the Ministers had responded. He and I left the gathering so he could dedicate the new building to be used by the U.S. International Communications Agency in cultural relations with Cameroon.

As we went outside, I saw that the entire grounds around the Foreign Ministry were filled with people from the government offices who had come down just to get a glimpse of him. And being the kind of person he is, he insisted on going over to shake hands with a few people. Well, the group closed in on him and the security people were worried because there were so many people around. I went and got into my car -- I felt that that enthusiastic crowd was not a place for me -- and he shook hands and people greeted him so warmly. Then on our way through the streets, when they saw who was coming, they would stop and shout and wave and always he would gather crowds. There was such a reception for him!

The Ministry of Economy and Planning presented him with a Cameroonian robe and cap of the kind that the Minister himself wore when we were having a reception for him at the Embassy residence. He went upstairs and put it on, then came back. I had a picture of him in that robe up on that cabinet. It's in this box now...(slight laughter), expressing his appreciation directly and at the same time expressing his identification with the people of Cameroon.

We had more members of the Cabinet to call at the residence that night than ever before, because everybody wanted to see him and talk with him. He also had a way of expressing what he felt very directly. He would explain how he felt about things so that people knew it was honest, unvarnished truth. But it was never ugly or abrasive. He has a natural warmth toward people.

And I remember one member of the delegation had left his suitcase behind and didn't have a change of underwear, he went downtown to buy some undershorts and they cost approximately twenty-five dollars in American money for two pairs of undershorts. In his speech before the assembled people concerned with business in Cameroon, Andrew Young said, "Now if we were doing business with you in Cameroon, you wouldn't have to pay that kind of price for underwear. We would see to it that you got a better deal in prices and would be able to sell at a much lower price." And the way in which he did it was done with warmth and humor and it got a good warm laugh. Since that time a number of people have remembered that incident and have talked about the possibility of solving some of the economic problems in terms of prices by using American suppliers.

*Q: Would you describe the political climate in Cameroon when you were there?*

SMYTHE: Cameroon was a stable political country in terms of... there were occasional realignments of the Cabinet, one in particular in November of 1979, when some people were retired or moved from one position to another. Some appointees were brought in for the first time; always the balance of anglophone and francophones was being maintained. The President is a key figure in the Administration. Not very much happens of any importance that doesn't involve

the President's approval. He doesn't have to approve every jot and tittle of what is done, but any policy matters ultimately come from him or from his very trusted advisors. The President does not have a kind of cult of personality. He's not a charismatic figure, but he has a kind of wisdom that comes from experience and enables him to get disparate people to work together. It's astonishing sometimes to see how he co-opts people and gets enemies to work on his team, and work constructively. I was fascinated by that.

A second thing is his sensitivity to nuances. When I first arrived, I had a message for him and it was addressed to Al Hadj Ahmadou Ahidjo, which uses the title due a Muslim who has been to Mecca. I was told that Al Hadj was not to be used because it was a religious title, and he felt that as representative of all the people, some of whom were not Muslim, he should not use a Muslim title. In private circles which were restricted to Muslims, fine; but as a Chief of State he was simply President Ahmadou Ahidjo .

I found that an illuminating aspect of, of how he felt. I also got the impression that he was able to listen and to learn as well as to tell how he felt about things. He had to be able to listen and learn or he would not have lasted so many years. I got the impression that he would like to begin thinking of retiring even though he was still in his fifties, but that a good many people in the country feel that it is difficult to replace him with someone whose ability to make judgments has been proven. I talked with some members of his team, who believe that the Prime Minister, who is officially his successor if anything should happen to him, they believe that he would be a person who would quickly gather up the kind of following and the kind of loyalty that he would need to be effective.

The attempt of President Ahidjo to institutionalize what is happening in Cameroon has probably been sufficiently successful so that things would go on much as they already have if he were to leave.

Now from an American point of view, there are Americans who feel that the system is a closed system. When you go to vote, you're given one slate of names; there is not democracy as we know it. I agree with that. I think it's certainly not as we know it. But after I looked into their procedures through what happened with one friend of mine who was nominated and elected to Parliament, I decided that Cameroon may have about as effective a democracy as we do. Not everybody agrees.

There is a tight central system, a great deal of concern for security. But when my friend was asked to stand for Parliament, he had to go back to his home district, spend some time there, talk with the local people, and be approved by the local council as someone who did understand the people and their problems and could represent them. He had to be approved by not just the village council but a district committee that had to see how he fitted in with their district aims and objectives. There was a committee that had to examine his record and see whether he was of the moral character that they wanted, whether there was any objectionable feature in his background. There was a group that dealt with his competence to exercise the kind of judgment that would be needed, and he had, oh, seven or eight levels of committees and groups that had to approve of his qualifications.

So I began thinking: Are our elections as thoughtful as that? Once in a while we have people who manage to get through elections who are not so democratically elected, and in Cameroon there is insistence by the Government that people vote. They consider it very important to have most of the voters turn out. And most of the voters vote for their candidate, because if they don't get a big turnout, or if they have too many ballots that are not for the candidate, then something is wrong.

So I have revised my impressions as to how democracy might be carried out in a system, a traditional culture in which there has been a good deal of negotiation. And I do know that they work from eighteen thousand candidates down to four thousand between the initiation of the process and the final vote. So there's a good deal of room there.

If there are too many people who believe something that the Government does not believe, the Government finds a way of accommodating some of that policy so that it will bring the dissidents into the picture again, keep them as part of what is going on.

There was an incident at the university. The students went on strike and protested a ruling by the university administration. Law students had been taking three years to get their degrees, and it was decided by the administration that they were not able to cover all the material they should; henceforth, they should take four years to get a degree. The students felt that if they took four years to get a degree, they should get something different from the degree given to the people who had studied only for three years. And the university administration turned them down. The Ministry of Education, which supervises the university and all the rest, or perhaps a representative of the Minister, went out to the campus, talked with people, considered all the evidence and decided that the students had a point: that it would be sensible to give a different degree after four years of study. So that was decided and that was the end of the problem. So a problem does not have to be resolved by changing the Government; it can be resolved within the Government, and that is the claim of the Ahidjo people.

I said one day, "When are you going to have more than one political party?" They said, "We are going to have more than one political party, but you should have seen us when we had twenty-eight political parties -- almost all of them tribally-oriented without a commitment to the whole of Cameroon. That didn't work. So we can't have parties until they can be inter-tribal and really deal with issues that are very broad. Just having tribal groups doesn't work." I accept that as a rational point of view that makes some sense.

*Q: As a female Chief of Mission, how were you received in a strongly Muslim country such as Cameroon?*

SMYTHE: I think, well, Cameroon is not a "strongly Muslim" country. Perhaps a third of the people are Muslims, and the Chief of State and several members of the Cabinet are Muslims. It's said that about a third of the people are Christians and another third are animists. My experience was that this was accurate. But I think one has to say that African Muslims, black African Muslims, are not the same as Middle Eastern Muslims, and they do not have the same attitude toward women.

President Ahidjo said in our first conversation: “We have a great many able women in Cameroon. You will be ...” he did not use the words ‘role model’, but I think it was what he intended, “you will be a role model for people, because we are encouraging our women to take positions of importance.” And indeed they were.

The first month or so after I had presented my credentials, I had a reception for a group of women who were attending an international conference in Cameroon. And the Cameroonians I invited included the first woman, an MD, to teach at the medical school; a woman magistrate; the senior woman member of Parliament. And within a year, President Ahidjo and his Government had seen to it that ten percent of the members of the National Legislature were women. That is a better record than we have in the United States. They had twelve out of 120. I had a special luncheon for them and invited them to meet some visiting American women, one of whom had been president of the League of Women Voters, and they found it exceedingly interesting.

There were increasingly women in positions of authority and some of them were extraordinarily poised and able. There were two people, women, in Cabinet positions. The Minister for Social Welfare and the Vice-Minister of Education were both highly trained and able women. It took perhaps two years before another woman ambassador came. And then the woman who represented India in Lagos was given the responsibility of representing her country also in Cameroon, and she came over to present her credentials. She was not resident there, but that made two of us who were on diplomatic rolls, the first two, I might say, that Cameroon had received.

I found a great deal of interest in having me interact with the women of Cameroon, but at the same time I was aware that it was still a novelty. It was still “we point with pride to this woman or that woman,” and there were still a good many reservations about full equality for women. But at diplomatic affairs, the diplomatic women and the Cameroonians certainly understood that when they tended to have the women sitting together and the men sitting together, my duties involved my sitting with the men and talking politics, not staying out of the conversation, because one does pick up useful information at diplomatic affairs. And they simply accepted this as part of my function there, and I didn’t perceive any sense of rejection, or rejection of the idea, or resentment against my being part of the male circle as a result of this.

*Q: What was your relationship with the diplomatic corps?*

SMYTHE: With the diplomatic corps, which was a small one, relationships were really quite personal and easy and so on. Again, they accepted the fact that I would not necessarily remain with women while men talked business. I tried to mix it up and do both things. I tried not to seem to try to get away from the women all the time, and sometimes I said, “Well, girls, I have to go back to work,” and move to join the men that way. But I tried to take with me one or two of my male colleagues when we were sitting down talking with the women and so on. Very often they went along with this. If we were in an Oriental or an African home, it was much more difficult to do. In the home of a European ambassador, it was much easier because the Europeans tended to mix it up more naturally.

*Q: As a woman of color representing the United States, did you find any advantages or disadvantages to this?*

SMYTHE: There was, I understand --- this is not for publication yet --- I understand that the Cameroon Government was a little suspicious of my civil rights background. They were afraid that black Americans were so aggressive about civil rights that a person of this background would be critical of what they were doing in civil rights in Cameroon. And I heard indirectly that they wondered why I couldn't be sent somewhere else. But once I was accepted there, once I arrived there, I didn't see any sense of resentment or concern and we could talk openly about my views of this and that kind of procedure. And I was interested in talking with the Minister of Justice, for example, about how they managed to reconcile the various systems of law that they had. In addition to the British and the French, there was also a traditional kind of law, and there was the Islamic law, religious law in Islamic places. And one Islamic ruler, the Sultan of Foumban, told me, "Sometimes I have to take one hat off and put on another." He says: "True, I am a Muslim ruler, but I am also the modern Mayor of this city and I have to uphold the laws which have been passed by the Government of Cameroon. So I have to remove my Muslim hat and put on the hat of the Mayor of the city." And that kind of awareness of what is involved seemed to be widespread and officials were certainly aware of the variety of sources of law in existence.

In terms of other possibilities that black Americans have, Africans very often forget about our racial roots because they haven't had the same kind of experience, and have a majority government which really has no white settlers. There are few whites who live in Cameroon, but they are mostly perceived as transients who will be there for a while and then will go on back to France or wherever they came from; because of this, there was not a great deal of identification of whites with Cameroon society. They saw us as culturally like whites, rather than like Africans.

The issue of American racial experiences came into focus when we showed the film "Roots." We had the entire series of "Roots" to show to Cameroonians in various ways. Some sessions were held in my residence. When the program was first introduced, we had discussed how best to use it, how best to help people understand it. A lot of Cameroonians had different views, different values from the black American values. We saw this as an affirmation of our roots. They saw it in quite different terms and one of them said, "Why is it you are glorifying the past when we are trying to get away from it? We want to modernize; we don't want to return back to the past which first of all wasn't as idyllic as it's depicted there; it was a time of economic deprivation, of great hardship from time to time," and so on.

And we had a very interesting discussion of the differences between having your roots all around you, accepted and verified and acknowledged, and having roots which were relatively unknown, not accepted, not really thought through. And they began to see how we were searching in ways that they would never have to search for their own roots or their own backgrounds.

We also talked about racism and, fortunately, the story of "Roots" depicts both whites who identified with blacks in their struggle for a better life and whites who made it difficult for them and who rejected blackness as something evil and foreign and different. Our having panel discussions after certain segments of the program was important to help people view what was

involved. Our USICA people showed this to the Cameroonian employees, and some of the Cameroonian employees said, "We can understand this and take this, but we think maybe you shouldn't show it to Cameroonians in general. They wouldn't understand. They will think Americans are terribly hateful people, because they'll identify Americans as slave owners and people who are willing to flog and maim people, and so on." It was a very interesting kind of experience.

Before "Roots" came, we published a little booklet that summarized what it was about. I wrote an introduction to the booklet, in which I tried to set "Roots" in the context of its universal human appeal, and explain why it had an appeal to Americans who were not slaves, who were not poor and who were not black. The interchange and the opportunity to discuss it were very important. People's perceptions of what life in the United States was like, and what race meant in the United States underwent a good deal of change in the process of seeing all of this and discussing it. We had some very interesting reactions from people who had been to the United States and people who had not been to the US, as well as participation by Americans, some of whom were permanent residents of Cameroon and married to Cameroonians.

*Q: Can you just tell me briefly some of the things which you might have wanted to do but were unable to do while you were in Cameroon?*

SMYTHE: What are my frustrations?

*Q: Yes.*

SMYTHE: Cameroon provided one with enough to do so that there was never a feeling of empty-handedness. There was always something that needed to be followed up and that could be followed up. I had a special feeling for the expansion of the university. Before I was named to Cameroon, I heard that the university was sending a delegation to the United States and wanted our cooperation at the Phelps-Stokes Fund. After I had been named, the Ambassador spoke to me about this issue and said that the delegation that had been planned for early 1977 was not coming in '77 but would be coming in '78. He wanted my cooperation.

When 1978 came about, I was able to come to the United States and accompany that delegation through some of its visits, not all, but some of its visits to universities and foundations and government agencies, and to be a part of the discussions on what the United States might do to help with the development of the university. Now AID projects, and this was an AID project, require a great deal of time, and I had to leave Cameroon before we could provide enough money for us to put into action the proposals that had been accepted by AID. Again, at a time of budget stringency, you have to decide what to do first. And since the university expansion program had not yet begun, we postponed it a year, in order to eke out our money and make our money go farther. But this year we would have implemented that program. I would like to have been part of that. And I am acutely aware that since the discussion, since the time when I visited with the delegation that came from Cameroon to visit the United States, the chancellor of the university has changed; the Director of Higher Education and the Minister of Education have changed. I have been succeeded by another ambassador. The AID mission in Cameroon has changed in its leadership. And I am not sure how many people who are now associated with that project have

the institutional memory of how it started, what it involved and what agreements we had as to how we were going to go about it.

It is not very often that a university which has been part of the francophone university family approaches the United States for help for its development. I saw this as an opportunity to help the university develop toward some very important and practical ends that could be served. They wanted to develop an agricultural school, a business center and technological center. All of these would be areas in which the United States could be very helpful. I believe that it will come about, but I am not sure that it will come about without losing sight of some of the objectives that we had in mind when we started.

So that's perhaps the first frustration I would say that I had, and, of course, there's always the frustration of leaving a number of friends, of leaving a kind of active ongoing program in which one has a part. I miss seeing what is being done there and participating in it. But I have confidence in my successor, whom I got to know before he went over, and in a number of people on his staff, who are likely to carry on the tradition of the Foreign Service in ways that will be very important. And I have heard some items about how my successor is operating that indicate his interest in the human touches that are important as well as the day-to-day obligations of an ambassador that have to be carried out, so I think Cameroon will be all right, and the United States program will be all right.

*Q: What direction would you like to see American foreign policy take in Cameroon and in the rest of Africa?*

SMYTHE: I would like to see the kind of feeling of warm personal relations built up. I think it is important for us and for Africa that we view our relations with Africa as close and mutually satisfying. I think there is a feeling on the part of the new Assistant Secretary designate for African Affairs that this should be so. Personalities change in ways in which people do these things. They change. But I think the feeling that we have a sterling asset in the interest that black Americans have shown in African affairs, as well as in other affairs -- I wouldn't for a moment restrict black American input to areas that are related to Africa or even other parts of the diaspora. It seems to me that we have such a special relationship available to us there that Africans respond to, and as a result, it is important for them to see a George Dalley or an Anne Holloway or a Mabel Smythe explaining American foreign policy. And I hope there will continue to be abundant input from black diplomats as we go about our business overseas.

I would like to see a continuation of the point that I made earlier: that we work very closely together so automatically that we don't have to look around for a way and means of communicating when we are in a crisis and need to discuss things with our African counterparts. I'd like for the relationship to be so continuous and ongoing that it's simply natural to look to each other for cooperative action when anything happens that requires it. I also want people... You know, having grown up in an ambience that looked toward equality and integration and so on, I am acutely aware of the importance of seeing blacks as part of the total body politic, not a little corner that is special all the time. I want to see us involved in all foreign policy. I want to see us take our place and make contributions where we can.



I hope one of the things we do is keep a great many black Americans attracted to the Foreign Service or get a great many attracted. We still do not have the number we need, but our affirmative action programs had begun to remedy problems at the lowest levels by taking... Each new class has a number of blacks in it. Now given attrition, given the fact that we haven't had a long history of getting into the Foreign Service, we need to continue that for another decade before we can say, all right, we have people all the way through our foreign policy professional ranks. We're going to need to continue to have a good many black appointees, disproportionately more perhaps, simply because there are not enough blacks already in the system at the upper levels to supply a fair share of the top positions.

I would like to see our country have the advantage of that, because it really does make a difference when outsiders know someone who has been involved in the movement toward civil rights in the United States and know that that person understands and represents American foreign policy. That gives a kind of credibility to the foreign policy in the eyes of those who see themselves as taking a similar role internationally in having to work into a position of greater influence.

I hope that we will continue to work very closely with African organized opinion such as the OAU, the Organization of African Unity, so that we naturally turn to them, and defer to them, in their area of the world just as we'd expect them to defer to us when it comes to the Western hemisphere and our concerns here.

*Q: Ambassador Smythe, you're getting ready to leave the State Department in two days. What instructions would you give to black Americans about becoming more involved in the shaping of American foreign policy?*

SMYTHE: I'd like to say two things: One of them is, keep coming; keep being involved; keep making sure that people understand our concern for foreign policy and our intention to be a part of it. But the second thing I'd like to say is that there are many ways to accomplish one's objectives. We have seen a good deal of confrontational approach ... of the confrontation approach to getting what one wishes to have. That is only one of many approaches. I would like for the institutions and organizations which are working for foreign policy to have a whole quiver of arrows, not just confrontation. I'd like also to have cooperative relations, ways in which people with the ... those who are in power to influence foreign policy as well as attack some of them when they do what is wrong in our eyes.

But I don't think one can pick out just one strategy and go with that. I think we have to have a much more comprehensive way of approaching foreign policy. And when we feel strongly, I would like to see us work very hard to understand what is the point of view of the people who are making policy. Why do we feel that way? Where does the power lie? To what extent can we persuade people to act in ways that we see as fitting our personal interests and our collective interests?

We're still not very sophisticated in the way we approach foreign policy. We tend to take doctrinaire positions and to have people either right or wrong, almost. I think that sufficed when we were at the very early stages of sophistication. Now we should be shrewd enough to look into

the subtleties of positions we are taking and try to work out positions that will be realistically achievable, positions that can be defended on logical grounds, on all sorts of rational grounds, and positions which provide a variety of approaches. I think that to wed ourselves to one approach or ... and one policy and one strategy is to use less than all the tools that we have to work with. I'd like to see us become much broader and much shrewder in the way we press our ... our recommendations on the Government. When we become better able to defend our positions, better able to understand all the political influences that must be taken into account, I suspect we will be better able to achieve our own aims. I'd like to see us move toward that.

**PETER P. LORD**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Yaoundé (1978-1981)**

*Peter P. Lord was born in Italy in 1929. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1952 he served in the US Navy from 1952-1955. Later on, he earned his master's degree from Columbia University in 1965. His career has included positions in Khorramshahr, Caracas, Arequipa, Lima, Bridgetown, Lusaka, and Yaoundé. Mr. Lord was interviewed by Lambert Heyniger, in April 1998.*

*Q: In principle, an assignment back in Washington at that time was for four years, but you left after only two. Any particular reason for that?*

LORD: There must have been some flexibility there because I was eligible for an assignment overseas. Again I was interested in a DCM job and the one that came up this time was Yaounde, Cameroon.

*Q: This is your second assignment as DCM in Africa and you arrived there in 1978.*

LORD: Yes.

*Q: Tell us first about the American embassy in Yaounde. Who was the ambassador?*

LORD: The ambassador was another woman, my third woman ambassador, Mabel Smythe.

*Q: A career officer?*

LORD: A political appointee.

*Q: A political appointee in Cameroon?*

LORD: Yes. Her husband had been a political appointee as ambassador years before in the Middle East and he died shortly before she went out to Yaounde.

*Q: Any relation to Henry Smythe of the atomic bomb, the famous professor?*

LORD: I don't think so. She was a delightful personality. Everybody liked her.

*Q: Did she like Cameroon?*

LORD: She did. She was a black American who had previous experience in African affairs.

*Q: Had she been teaching about Africa?*

LORD: She had been in New York with a foundation which promoted American/African relations. So, she took the job with relish and made friends everywhere.

*Q: Had she been there long when you arrived?*

LORD: She got there in the summer and wanted the DCM who was there to stay until she got her feet on the ground and until an inspection scheduled for November took place. That was arranged and we arrived middle or late November and spent the next three years there.

*Q: How was the embassy in Yaounde different than the embassy in Lusaka?*

LORD: The entire U.S. mission in Yaounde was a bigger more complex mission than either of my two earlier ones.

*Q: Why?*

LORD: We had a big AID program, a big Peace Corps program, a larger USIA operation with three or four Americans in it, but it was still a small U.S. mission. We had an ambassador, DCM, no political officer, an economic officer, consular officer, admin, GSO and regional security officer. So, the embassy side was pretty small. The AID side was the biggest there. So, it was a big country team to coordinate.

*Q: So, this was in that sense a more interesting job for you?*

LORD: It was a very interesting and challenging job in that sense. Cameroon is complicated, too, in that part of it is Francophone and part of it is Anglophone. The western part of Cameroon had been part of Nigeria and at the time of independence a referendum was taken to see whether that part wanted to join Nigeria or Cameroon. They voted to join Cameroon. The Anglophone part is definitely in the minority. They feel disadvantaged by the Francophone majority in the south and north.

*Q: Most of the government including the prime minister and the ministers are more apt to be Francophone than Anglophone?*

LORD: Yes, the majority are, but the president at the time, Ahmadou Ahidjo, was a very skillful balancer of ethnic and regional groups. He had not only the Anglophones in the west, but also

other tribal areas which are perhaps more important in the north, south, and east. The northern part of the country is Muslim. Central Cameroon is dominated by one tribal group. Southern Cameroon, where Douala is, the commercial center and the larger of the two cities...

*Q: Douala is larger than Yaounde?*

LORD: Yes, it is the commercial city.

*Q: Why is the capital in Yaounde?*

LORD: That is a good question. I can't remember the answer to that.

*Q: Do a lot of people in Cameroon speak both English and French?*

LORD: Yes. If you are an Anglophone and have any national ambitions you have to learn French. It is more that way than the French learning English.

*Q: I don't think you had had previously a French speaking post.*

LORD: I had not although I had satisfied my Foreign Service language requirement when I entered with my school French.

*Q: Did they give you a refresher?*

LORD: I did have an FSI refresher before I went out and that was tremendously helpful.

While Cameroon was made up of this marvelous mosaic of regions and ethnic groups and language groups, it was a difficult place to make your way in some ways because it was pretty much an autocratic state run by Ahidjo. He didn't want his government being too friendly with any outside power, particularly the United States. The Ahidjo government was friendly but kept us at arms length. The French, of course, had the inside position there since it was a former French colony.

*Q: Also the British as well?*

LORD: Well, no. Some of the people in the Anglophone part of western Cameroon probably had ties with the British embassy, but the government was a Francophone government by and large.

*Q: So this is a second assignment where cultivating relations with the host government is kind of a challenge.*

LORD: Certainly Zambia was that way, and Peru under the military was somewhat that way, too.

*Q: Did you have for example a hard time making appointments to deliver demarches or talk about bilateral relations?*

LORD: No, you could always get your hearing at the foreign ministry but you weren't always sure if they understood or were sympathetic.

*Q: One thing that we certainly found in the embassy in Dar es Salaam was that USIS was very helpful in terms of having functions where there either was an American basketball team or American film festival or something like this that people in the host government wanted to come and see and then you might have a chance to at least get to know them a little bit.*

LORD: Yes, that would help break the ice. The AID program was a good bridge, too. It had a large staff with good contacts with the ministries. It all added up to a sizeable relationship.

*Q: The fact that we had a large AID mission did not improve relations?*

LORD: Basically, the relationship was friendly, but they just didn't want to get too close. There was an active social life, and you ran into government and private sector people, but it wasn't as easy as some other places.

*Q: Did you get a chance to travel around?*

LORD: Yes. We got all around the country. I climbed Mount Cameroon, as a matter of fact, which is near the coast in Anglophone Cameroon. It is 13,000 feet high and rises right from the coast, so you are climbing most of that distance.

*Q: That must have been an overnight trip.*

LORD: It was an overnight trip. We went over to Buea and up halfway the night before, starting in the early morning for the summit. Unfortunately, the clouds came in so we did not reach the actual summit. It was windy and rainy. Fortunately, there was a hut fairly near the summit where we could take refuge and warm ourselves. Then we started down.

*Q: Peter, I know that you are a rower, did you have a chance to do any rowing?*

LORD: No. There was no water there. There is nothing to recommend the location of Yaounde. There is no river- (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying that Douala is high so that the climate...*

LORD: No, Yaounde was high enough (over 2,000 feet) to have a comfortable climate. Douala is right on the coast and has a very humid and uncomfortable climate.

*Q: That's why the capital is Yaounde.*

LORD: Maybe. While Yaounde is tropical, it is quite comfortable, although humid.

*Q: Do you have any wawa (West Africa wins again) stories?*

LORD: I have plenty of those stories since things don't always work as well in Cameroon as they do elsewhere. I should add that another facet of the job in Yaounde made it interesting and that is that embassy Yaounde had in the past been accredited to the government of Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea is adjacent to Cameroon's southern border on the continent, but its capital, Malabo, is on the island of Fernando Po. Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Equatorial Guinea had been suspended several years earlier when the previous ambassador and DCM had been declared persona non grata by one of the worst tyrants of Africa at the time, Macias. He, together with Idi Amin of Uganda and Bokassa in Central Africa, probably were three of the worst African autocrats. In any case, I had been in Yaounde a year when in August, 1979, I think, Macias was overthrown by one of his own lieutenants largely because things had gotten so bad there that the economy had ceased to function, and no one had been paid for six months, including the army. So, the senior military leadership took action and deposed him.

Soccer was a big sport in Cameroon. Every once in a while, there would be a big match and everybody would turn out from the president on down. So, the diplomatic corps had its own seating. It was a colorful event and sometimes of political significance depending on the political situation. The French still had a resident embassy in Malabo, and the French ambassador told me during the soccer game about the coup there. We reported that very promptly.

One of the reasons that I was assigned to Yaounde was because I spoke both French and Spanish. Equatorial Guinea, being a former Spanish colony, spoke Spanish pretty much. After the coup, the Department sent the deputy director of Central African Affairs at the time, Len Shurtleff, and myself to Malabo to establish contact with the new government. I was the first to arrive. The new government wanted to make a good impression on the U.S. because it needed help. So, I was met at the airport with a driver and limousine. Later the same day or the next day, I can't remember which, Len Shurtleff arrived via Madrid on a Spanish flight. We made contact with the new government.

Malabo was a remarkable place to visit at that time. It was virtually a city that had ceased to function, where nothing worked. There was no electricity; water was in very short supply; nobody on the streets because the people had been terrorized. It was a ghost town which I saw gradually come to life during frequent visits thereafter. We made initial contact with the government on that visit. I was the main liaison and reporting officer thereafter. So, I would make periodic visits there. I also found the frequency for the government radio station and was able to listen to their broadcasts from Yaounde and record, much as we are doing right now, all the decrees that the new government issued, new appointment of personnel, enunciation of policies, etc. So, my job took on a major new component, that of tracking developments in Equatorial Guinea and reporting them. Each trip to Equatorial Guinea was an experience because...

*Q: How did you get there?*

LORD: I can't remember the first time I went, but we subsequently chartered a small aircraft to get there. Air Cameroon started service at one point. If there were more than one of us going from the U.S. embassy, or if I was the only one and there were others from another embassy or from the World Bank or Cameroon government, enough people to fill up a small plane, we

would go that way. Sometimes there would be transport to meet us at Malabo and sometimes there wouldn't be. In the beginning, the government took good care of me. They always found a place for me to stay and I was put in the VIP house the first few times - a place that actually had electricity, although not all the time. And if the water wasn't running, they would bring big jugs of it. Another time, I stayed in the only hotel that was functioning. Gradually more and more visitors were coming in from the World Bank, UN, IMF, Spanish aid, etc. and the place was swarming with foreigners to the extent it was taxing the infrastructure and the support services.

*Q: You began then to take your own tent.*

LORD: Well, eventually, the Spanish brought a cruise ship down and tied it up to the dock and it was used as a floating hotel. Malabo has a delightful round harbor with high sides and entrance from the sea that is very protected, a former volcanic cone, which is why it is so round. At one point was the hotel where we stayed sometimes and right along one side of the harbor were diplomatic residences, including that of the French ambassador, who had been there through it all. So, that was a real experience living with Equatorial Guinea as it evolved. The Department wanted the embassy to find a consular agent to represent us there. We had had a prior embassy there, a two person embassy, and you may recall that one of them killed the other.

*Q: It was the desk officer who was in the next office to me, Al Erdos. He absolutely lost his mind.*

LORD: It is the kind of place where you could lose your mind.

*Q: He shot his communicator.*

LORD: I think so. Anyway, the Department was reluctant to establish another embassy in a country that was so small and inconsequential at the time. I checked around and came up with various possible agents and went in to see the foreign ministry with a proposal. I found a Spanish diplomatic representative in there as an advisor to the foreign minister. This particular person I had met on my way to post when I stopped in Madrid for consultation. The Spanish felt strongly that the consular agency was not what the situation required. They didn't want to have to bear the whole load of bringing Equatorial Guinea back into the modern world by themselves. They wanted other western embassies in there, especially the U.S., to help shoulder that load. So, the idea of a consular agent was knocked down at that meeting by the foreign minister, who obviously got his advise from the Spanish. Despite the Department's preference that we not open an embassy there, we felt that the American embassy Yaounde should recommend that one be opened because here was a small country that was casting off its ties with the Russians and Chinese who had established themselves there in a big way under Macias. The economy when I arrived really existed on a barter basis with the Chinese. The "scotch" whiskey was Chinese; the beer was Chinese; everything was Chinese. So, eventually the Department did agree to establish a small embassy and by the time I left, a resident administrative officer had arrived to help establish a U.S. embassy office under Ambassador Smythe, who remained resident in Yaounde but was accredited to Equatorial Guinea.

*Q: Let's leave it there and resume next time with further information about Equatorial Guinea.*

LORD: Good.

**CONSTANCE J. FREEMAN**  
**Peace Corps Director**  
**Yaoundé (1979-1981)**

*Constance Freeman was born in Washington DC and raised in Minnesota and Washington DC. She attended American University and the University of Colorado. She did population research in India, was an economics lecturer at the University of Zambia, and joined the Peace Corps which took her to the Congo and Cameroon. She officially entered the Foreign Service in 1983 and served in India and Kenya.*

*Q: So you were in Cameroon for...*

FREEMAN: For two years.

*Q: So it was '79 to '81.*

FREEMAN: That's correct.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about the embassy. Mabel Smythe, what was her background, and how did she view the Peace Corps?*

FREEMAN: Mabel Smythe was the ambassador for about the first six months that I was there. And she was replaced by Hume Horan, who was coming from Saudi Arabia. This was long before he was ambassador there, but he was ambassador in Cameroon. Mabel knew Peace Corps and was supportive of Peace Corps, and was in the background and was very nice to me.

The problems that I had with Peace Corps, or my focus with Peace Corps, in that first six or eight months when Mabel Smythe was there, were internal, because the administrative system had collapsed in on itself, pretty much.

*Q: The Peace Corps?*

FREEMAN: Peace Corps. I had a group of volunteers without assignments, who were not very happy. So it was cleaning up the mess from the prior administration.

*Q: What had happened before? I'm not trying to point fingers, but just to get an idea of bureaucracy. What, in your perception, had happened before that caused this unhappiness?*

FREEMAN: What had happened a year or so before was that the American administrative officer left, actually to go and be what was my deputy in Congo, Brazzaville, and a local Cameroonian had been hired to be administrative officer. He'd been the cashier, but the director



then in place didn't trust him. And so she refused to sign any cables of obligation. Cables of obligation go out every month, and that's the way you keep track of your expenditures. And the budget that had been done didn't really have anything in it or exist. In other words, there was a loss of trust and a loss of management within the post itself. Also, a new project had been put together that integrated rural development, which looked very, very nice on paper, but was only skin deep. So then there were volunteers who'd been brought in for training without postings identified for them or housing or real jobs, etc. Now the training people had done a wonderful job in trying to cope at the last minute, but there were lots and lots of problems. There were people who were posted to places where they didn't fit very well. They were all supposed to have motorcycles, and didn't. A lot of other things had had follow-through. Several new vehicles had been ordered, and they arrived shortly after I arrived. But they weren't in the budget, so there was no way to pay for them. So it was an administrative mess.

The problem was, I had no administrative experience. And the only person that I had was an administrative officer who was a Cameroonian and had been the cashier and was very good at that, but he wasn't particularly good at budgeting, because he hadn't done it before.

So we all sat around a table one Saturday morning and said, "Okay, here's the budget, here are the instructions, what do you think they mean by this?" And we worked it through. We worked through the problems, and it took us about a year to clean out the mess that was left behind.

Fortunately, the man who had been an administrative officer in the Peace Corps before, was my deputy in Congo, joined the Foreign Service, and was re-posted to Cameroon in the embassy. And so, for the second year, while he didn't do it, he was there to back me up.

It was one of those classic experiences of learning by doing. I didn't know anything about budgeting and administration, but since there was nobody else to do it, I had to learn it, and learn it fast. We did pretty well, because by the time I left, it was running like clockwork. My then-deputy became the director, and he had been a part of that whole exercise of putting it back together. And so Peace Corps, Cameroon, was in pretty good shape after a couple of years.

*Q: You're in Cameroon. You had a sort of disarray, and also you mentioned there was some problem about assignments and all that. When you arrived there, did you have any idea of what you wanted to do? I'm not too sure how the Peace Corps sets its priorities. Could you talk about a Peace Corps director arriving and having to put things back together again, aside from the administrative problem, to accomplish the goals of the Peace Corps. What were you up to?*

FREEMAN: I think, with Peace Corps, as with most places, you can have grand goals and ideas, but when you hit the ground, the first things you have to deal with are the problems and the realities that exist on the ground. And you need to reorganize whatever it is that you find, so that it works better than it did when you found it.

There were two major problems in Peace Corps, Cameroon, when I came, and neither of them was programming. Programming would have been the area that I would have concentrated on. But the first one was this whole administrative mess, and the other one was morale, because there had been so many problems in the programs previously. The volunteers were cut off from

the central office and were very angry about that. So I spent much of my first year traveling around the country, visiting volunteers at their sites, and reassuring them, doing what I could for them there, seeing their counterparts, going to their schools, giving them backup in their local villages and towns, counseling, taking care of problems on the ground, and also making them aware that the Peace Corps office in Yaoundé was there for them, and that if they had problems, we were there to help solve them, so that they started coming back in and using the [central] resources to deal with their difficulties in the field. Also, I did a lot of training and a lot of the [winnowing] of volunteers in the selection process. I went back to Washington to do that.

*Q: You're out in Yaoundé. How do you choose a volunteer? A volunteer arrives at the airport, and there he or she is.*

FREEMAN: Well, we had two different models at that point. They were experimenting with something that I thought was very good, but was too costly to continue. It was what they called the CAST system, which was an acronym, and I can't remember what it stood for. They called in the potential volunteers for that program a month or six weeks before they were scheduled to depart, and put them through a month's training process and various kinds of screening and psychological evaluation and exposure, through all kinds of play-acting, to the kinds of things they would confront as Peace Corps volunteers. It was a mutual selection process. They had a chance to get a much better sense of what would be confronting them, and we had a chance to take a look at them. At the end of that time, as I recall, we deselected, or they deselected themselves, maybe about a third of the group.

When that particular group of volunteers that worked in cooperatives got to Cameroon and was in training and then went to their sites, they had a lot of cohesion with each other. And they did an extremely good job in very difficult positions, because they were coffee and cocoa cooperatives. They were the middle point between the farmer and the traders, mostly Lebanese. The cooperative was designed to represent the farmer, so that they couldn't be exploited by the traders, but, in fact, the cooperatives were often very, very corrupt. The volunteer was the assistant to the head of the cooperative. And so one of the things I was able to do in this CAST thing, this choice process, was to tell my volunteers that one of the things that they would need was some degree of moral relativity. That, we could argue, it was better to have the cooperatives than not to have the cooperatives. They performed an important function for the farmers, but they were by no means clean as the driven snow. And that if they didn't feel that they could operate in an environment where they would be seeing some corruption and rakeoff and misweighing and all of that, then they needed to think again about whether that was the program for them.

I was also able to talk with them about what exactly they were meaning to get out of this. At that time, most volunteers came in ready to save the world, but often had not thought through very carefully what their own personal goals were. And that was very important, because when you hit the three- or four- or five-month period in your village, the excitement has died down, and you think about 18 more months sitting there in this drab hut, and go, What am I doing here? Then they need to hang on to the thought, "I want to find out about the world, want to see if I want to go into international relations, need to learn French," whatever it is, but is a concrete

personal goal for the volunteer there. The ones I was able to go through that with thought it through beforehand.

Another way we chose was when they didn't do this very costly gathering together of people ahead of time, but had a short, maybe a week's pre-training and then sent them out to Cameroon. There we trained them in-country, rather than training them in the U.S. They were not sworn in until the end of training. And so, while it was far more disruptive if they were deselected (whether they did it themselves or we did it; usually it was a mutual decision), at least we still had some intensive interaction with the volunteers before they went to their sites. That didn't mean we didn't have some volunteers who needed to go home before they completed their two-year tour, but not a whole lot in Cameroon. Cameroon was a very popular country for volunteers, because the Cameroonians liked volunteers, and there was a tremendous amount of diversity in the country, and so they tended to have a very good experience there.

*Q: When you put a volunteer in, was the idea that they were going to be in that village for the whole tour, rather than to move them around?*

FREEMAN: That's right, because the point for a volunteer is to integrate into his or her local culture, to become as much like the folks in their village or town, for a time, as they possibly could. That was the Peace Corps experience.

Now one of the very interesting aspects of Cameroon was that Cameroon was probably one of the most sexually open societies I've ever lived in. That was in pre-AIDS days.

*Q: You're talking about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, which is...*

FREEMAN: Sexually transmitted.

*Q: Sexually transmitted and deadly. But this was prior to that.*

FREEMAN: Yes, this was 1979. It existed then, but we didn't know anything about it. And so we had all kinds of issues surrounding that very open sexuality.

One of the first that confronted me were a number of Peace Corps babies. These were volunteers who had had children with local women, what they called their "country wives." It was a Cameroon custom that if you lived with somebody for a while, they were called your country wife. This was extremely traumatic for the volunteer, particularly when the volunteer was getting ready to go home. What do you do? In fact, in Cameroon, at least the male volunteers felt that, to some extent, they were being tracked. They were considered very attractive and valuable as partners, and mulatto babies were valued. And so they would be approached by local women, or, you know, these were young folks, and their hormones were running wildly. Anyway, the big problem was, I'd say, "For goodness sake, use condoms," and they had a hard time with that, because to use a condom in Cameroon at that time meant that you felt the woman you were going to sleep with was a prostitute. And so there was tremendous pressure on them not to use condoms. So I instituted a system whereby the medical unit would provide some kind of contraception for country wives as well. That wasn't necessarily Peace Corps policy at the time.

*Q: Was this the sort of thing you did without going back to Washington and saying, gee, what a great job I'm doing here?*

FREEMAN: It was better than having Peace Corps babies, so we didn't ask a lot of questions. And then they might be male volunteers. I didn't have a single female volunteer who wasn't approached by her boss, at some point in her tour, for sexual favors. And it was even more difficult to figure out what to do to assist them with that dilemma, and even more, what to do to assist the incoming volunteers, the trainees. I was never able to develop a real training system toward that. The thing that seemed to work best was to put the new female trainees together with the old volunteers and have them tell stories, because they each had a story of how they had handled it, and it gave everybody an idea, one, that you're not alone and isolated in this, and, two, what tactics you might use.

At the beginning of my tour there, in most Peace Corps experience in Africa, there had been no real problem with rape. Sexual relations frequently in Africa at the time were much more open than they were in the United States, and our theory was that Africans didn't really need to rape. But I had three rapes when I was Peace Corps director in Cameroon. That was one of the biggest problems that I had, because I had not been trained to deal with rape counseling, and that's very touchy stuff. In all three cases, I needed to provide support to the volunteer for at least a couple of days before I could get them out on an airplane and back to Washington, where they could be given some more expert counseling. That was scary, because what I said or didn't say had the potential to affect how they dealt with the problem and their life into the future. Since I wasn't trained, I just had to do the best I could. And they all three came back.

*Q: I think we are talking about a period now where this has become...I don't want to denigrate it, but an exquisite art about how you deal with rape. There are rape specialists and all that. Whereas before, all of us, myself included, as a consular officer, it was sort of by guess and by golly, which probably worked as well, if you were sympathetic, as all the other stuff. This is a personal point of view.*

FREEMAN: Well, I hope so, and I hope that those three women didn't suffer from the fact that I had no training at all to deal with that, and that all I could provide was a lot of empathy and encouragement to talk as much as they could about the experience they'd had. But that was one place where I felt that I was really inadequately prepared for my job.

*Q: As a consular officer, I didn't get this training, including all sorts of other sensitivity things that I think we've honed into fancy skills. I still come back to think that one's gut reaction is probably the best.*

*Now to the actual work. You had a morale problem and an administrative problem, but now you've got them on the ground. What were they doing?*

FREEMAN: I had volunteers in a whole variety of programs.

I've mentioned the cooperatives program, where they worked at offices as backups and assistants to the directors of the coffee and cocoa cooperatives.

I had teachers teaching math and science in Anglophone Cameroon. That was fairly clear. And then they did secondary projects as well.

I had rural development volunteers, who essentially were put into villages and towns and told to find a way to help rural development. That was the hardest one. That was the program I'd inherited that was on paper and didn't really have a whole lot of content. They did a variety of things. Some of them did credit counseling or helped small businesses or whatever.

I had a health extension program, which was also difficult because they were supposed to be doing extension education on building latrines and why you should use them, or covering water sources and why you should cover them and be careful. That was a joint project with USAID, which was providing the materiel for it. And that was fraught with all kinds of bureaucratic difficulties, just coordinating the two organizations, which had very different ideologies and purposes and backups.

I had a couple of volunteers in the game parks, who were working with conservationists in the game parks.

I had another large and very successful program helping people in villages to dig and maintain fishponds. That was the whole pisciculture thing. They ran around the country on motorcycles and inspected their fishponds, and a lot of them made a very important contribution.

And then I had a couple of special-placement volunteers.

There were about nine programs ongoing, and they were doing all kinds of different things. Everybody was in a stage of pre-training or in-service training or training to depart, so a lot of what we did was to manage that. And we managed all the administrative things, like trying to get them living-allowance checks.

It was a very interesting, very exciting time when the volunteers' living-allowance checks were caught in the Paris mail strike at Christmastime 1979, and the January checks didn't arrive. After Christmas, nobody had anything, and they didn't get their checks. I was too new to realize that there were 10 tricks to the trade of how you could get partial checks out or you could get some cash out. I was simply told by the financial office in Paris that since we could not prove that the checks were definitively lost, they were only held up in the mail, they couldn't be reissued and we'd simply have to wait. At one point, I was supposed to go upcountry to visit several of my volunteers, and they threatened to throw me in a half-drained fishpond if I arrived without those checks. At that point, I figured out a way to get half of the checks.

But what the volunteers learned through that experience, and many of them came to me and told me this, was they probably got closer to their counterparts in their villages than they ever had before, because, for the first time, they really had nothing, and they had to depend upon other people in their villages to feed them and take care of them. It equalized the situation for them,

because no matter how much you try to have a volunteer live on the same level as their counterparts, they're still looked upon by the people in their villages as wealthy and different and a way to get money. But when they were really poor and they needed help, it changed the dynamic of the relationship. And so a whole handful of them came to me, admitting reluctantly that that was one of the best experiences they'd had during their Peace Corps time. Well, it was not my best experience.

*Q: Looking at the program, here you have, for the most part, still quite young people coming into the program to do these good things. Looking at it from your position in Yaoundé and even after you left, what do you think was the impact?*

FREEMAN: I think that for Peace Corps overall, the most important impact is the soft-option impact of people-to-people relationships, memories, understandings. It's a communication program. But you can't have a good experience about what it's like to live in another culture, particularly on the village level, or really understand the dynamic and the culture of the people there unless you're making a contribution, unless you're doing a real job. The debate always is: How much real development do volunteers do? As far as I'm concerned, that's not the debate. The debate is: To what extent do volunteers and their counterparts really learn to understand each other better? But they can't, without the job. To a large extent, the fishponds that are dug often get filled in again. The water sources are uncovered. The latrines collapse in on themselves. A lot of that happens. And the kids may or may not remember the math and science that was taught to them. A lot of them do. So teaching is the easiest, and it's the most straightforward, and frequently has the most long-lasting impact. And that's been the problem with development, [long lasting impact]. But that experience that the volunteers bring back to the United States, never again can they say that Africa is alien, far away, 100 percent those people, them and us. When you meet Africans as I do on a regular basis - leadership, private sector, government, whatever - so many of them have had exposure to the Peace Corps. They've had a Peace Corps teacher, a Peace Corps worker working in their village; they've had contact at the universities; they've had it in the cities, whatever, and that's been a positive experience. And so, for them as well as for us, it helps to erode the them-us concept, which I think is very important.

*Q: You've been around the government in various positions over time, have you found that the Peace Corps volunteers have inserted themselves into the body politic and have had an influence?*

FREEMAN: I think, increasingly, in AID and, to some extent, in the State Department, a Peace Corps or a Peace Corps-like experience is becoming part of the expected training for going into those jobs, certainly more in AID than in State. But there are lots and lots and lots of returned Peace Corps volunteers in the various international fields. It's almost a union card, because it's the unique kind of experience that gives you a feeling for other cultures, other places, and makes them less other. Now I myself was never actually a volunteer, as we know, having gone through this far. My teaching at the University of Zambia as a local hire was about as close as I got to it, except for being a director. So I'm one who had a Peace Corps volunteer-like experience. So it doesn't just have to be that organization. But this is something that I advise my interns here, if they're interested in Africa and want to work on Africa, and they have not had a volunteer-type experience, that this is invaluable to get a feeling for what a piece of the continent is really like,

and, frankly, whether they want to continue to play with this or not, because it's far more real after you've done that than it is before. It isn't just a book thing.

*Q: Let's look at Cameroon per se. You were there '79 to '81. What was the political situation, economic situation, American interests?*

FREEMAN: We didn't have a huge presence there. We had some commercial interests out of Douala. Hume Horan traveled around the country a whole lot. Cameroon had some problems on the border with Nigeria. But it was the quintessential Francophone country, so we didn't have nearly as many commercial interests as we had in some other countries. So we were always trying to make a place for our business people. Cameroon had discovered oil, and it was managing its oil very well. Ahidjo was still in power. Nobody knew quite how much oil there was there. There was a lot of corruption. And we were aware of that in [the] Peace Corps, too. School teachers' salaries weren't paid for the first year that they taught. It got caught up in the system. I did not get involved deeply in the political/economic issues, or the embassy's issues while I was there. I was on the country team, and I served on the country team, but there has to be separation between Peace Corps and embassy and AID, and I was separate from that official U.S. government. I carried an official passport, not a diplomatic passport. And so, by and large, at those country team meetings, I kept my mouth shut, even when I knew things that were relevant to the discussion, because my information was privileged; it came from volunteers. I only contributed when it would have an impact upon the welfare of the volunteers or if it was really important. So, while I listened, that wasn't what I did, that wasn't what I was involved with, that wasn't my everyday set of thoughts and concerns. That was reserved for the volunteers. We had a very small staff and 150 of them, so I was pretty busy with that. But I did travel all over the country.

*Q: You say this was essentially a Francophone country. There was an Anglophone side to it, but essentially it was Francophone. One, were the French influential? If so, the Peace Corps must be anathema to them, in a way.*

FREEMAN: Not really, because the French have the French *coopérant*, so there were lots and lots of French volunteers, too. Now they didn't understand the Peace Corps volunteers, because French volunteers earned... My French teacher there, a young woman, her husband, who was in his 20s, earned more money on his *coopérant* living allowance than I did on my Peace Corps director's salary. It was also the exchange rate. So it was a different function. But they didn't particularly care about volunteers one way or the other. The French dominated the economy. They dominated the society. They dominated the clubs. They dominated the restaurants. It was very Francophone. Two of the districts were Anglophone. They're the ones that bordered Nigeria. And it was a very different atmosphere. The Francophones, be they Cameroonian or French, were very closed-mouth. It was very difficult to get to know them well. The Anglophones were very open. I always laughed that when I went up into the northwest province to travel, if I had fallen asleep in the Land Rover as we went over the border, I could tell as soon as I woke up that we were in Anglophone [country]. It just looked, smelled, and felt different. It was Nigeria, not Cameroon. When Dick Moose visited, he was coming through as assistant secretary, and we were trying to set up a dinner for him with some people who would really talk about what they thought and what was going on. I decided to concentrate on Anglophones and not on

Francophones, not just because of the language, but because I knew they would be more candid. And they were.

*Q: I interviewed somebody who was mentioning that, in Africa, you could tell on a border if you were in a French place, because the African elite all dressed very impeccably. Whereas, when you got to the Anglophone side, while not quite tweeds, it was a much more almost casual type experience.*

FREEMAN: For me, champagne was the symbol. You were supposed to entertain and to live and do all that you did on an equal level with your counterparts. That's true for volunteers, and we felt that we should carry that on at staff, too. Well, in Congo, Brazzaville, I had to break some of those rules to live just a little better than my counterparts. One air conditioner for the house, a covering for the dirt floor, and one fan were the three things that I had that my counterparts didn't have. In Cameroon, I couldn't possibly keep up with my counterparts. And I drew the line at serving champagne, which cost an arm and a leg. They served champagne at every party, and for breakfast and the whole business. And food was just incredibly expensive. It was a very, very expensive place to work. And [the] Peace Corps had no representational funds whatsoever. So I did a tremendous amount of entertaining, and it all came out of my own pocket.

**ROBERT J. KOTT**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Yaoundé (1980-1981)**

*Mr. Kott was born and raised in New York City. He earned degrees from St. John's University in New York City and from the University of Oregon. After service with the Peace Corps in India, Mr. Kott joined the Foreign Service in 1971. An African specialist, Mr. Kott served in, Togo and Cameroon as Economic and Political Officer and in Malawi and Senegal as Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served in Indonesia and Canada. Mr. Kott was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

KOTT: I went to Cameroon. That wasn't my first choice, but sitting over at FSI, sort of out of the loop, we all know what that means in terms of the next assignment, I certainly was not the apple in anybody's eye at the time, being a bit removed. So an assignment was hard to come by. I almost lucked out. One day on a Friday afternoon I came over from FSI, went back to AF (Bureau of African Affairs) and was visiting around with some friends and ran into Bill Swing, who was the Deputy Office Director at AFC (Office of Central African Affairs) at the time.

*Q: Central Africa.*

KOTT: That's right. I said, "Bill, hi. I must be the last guy to have heard that you have been assigned as the new Ambassador to the Republic of the Congo." Not Zaire, but Congo Brazzaville. We have not had an ambassador there for a number of years. This was one of those pseudo-Marxist states that we had very bad relations with, we haven't had an ambassador there



in something like 13, 14 years, only a Chargé d’Affairs. Bill said, “Well, Bob, you know I have been looking for a DCM. Would you like to be considered?” This was out of the blue, I was just walking out of the Department, and I am looking for a job, by the way, and I said, “Bill, I’m flattered, in fact I’m flabbergasted”. I didn’t know Bill all that well, we have not worked together, we have worked next to each other, AFW (Office of Western African Affairs), where I have been working on the Nigeria desk and AFC, where he was the deputy still. “Of course, I would be delighted.” And he said, “There is one glitch, in terms of the positions. I am taking the existing position, which is the Charge position, and I’ll encumber that as ambassador. That means we will have to get a new position created for you to be DCM. And that may take a while.” To make a long story short, it took something like 10 months, I couldn’t sit around doing nothing so I took what was available, which was the economic/commercial position in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Subsequently Al Rienda went to be Bill’s DCM and the rest is history. That would have been a wonderful career move for me had it happened. Unfortunately, the stars were not lined up right.

*Q: The timing was just a little bit off.*

KOTT: The timing was off. The timing is everything in life. Anyway, I went to Yaoundé, Cameroon. Probably my least favorite posting in my Foreign Service career. Not that I detested it or disliked it, but it was not something that I was thrilled with. Yaoundé was a tough place. Cameroon was a tough place. Not a particularly friendly place. I found Yaoundé to be filled with awfully officious people and being a mere Second Secretary I think I was at the time, it was kind of a hard place to do business. On the commercial side it was virtually impossible to do business for two reasons: number one the commercial center was Douala and not Yaoundé, and secondly the French influence, of course. Very similar to Togo, both historically having been a mandated territory and ultimately, of course, ruled by the French during colonial period as a mandate. And their overall influence vis-à-vis ours. I think it was probably politically a bit more interesting, but I wasn’t on the political side of things. My first ambassador there was Mabel Smythe, a political appointee, famous perhaps from academic circles as part of Smythe and Smythe. Her husband and she wrote a book, I think called “Nigeria”. They were both academics. He unfortunately died, probably mid-life, mid point of his life, what would have been a normal life. But she went out there as a widow and was appointed by President Carter. She was there the first year I was there and was then succeeded by Ambassador Hume Horan on his first ambassadorial post.

*Q: Who apparently is doing an oral history interview, judging by some notes left in front of me left by another interviewer.*

KOTT: The other aspect of my job there, besides economic/commercial. About a month after I got there... the DCM, Peter Lord was on leave when I first got there. When he got back I guess at our first meeting he said, “Well I understand you are an expert in military assistance and that you’ve been trained in this.” I said “What? This is the first I’ve ever heard of it. What are you talking about?” He said, “You are going to be our military assistance guy because we don’t have any defense people here.” To which I could only scratch my head and say, “Where do I start?” That was quite a challenge. They sent me up to Stuttgart, for two-week wonder course on what it means and how to effectively deal with the military. Eye opening, because I had to learn a new vocabulary from the Foreign Service vocabulary, a whole new way of doing business, etc, etc. I stumbled through that during my first year. It was interesting. We were selling a significant

amount, by African standards, of equipment to the Cameroonese. Mostly C-130s and the spare parts for C-130s. Wreckers, which are vehicles that take tanks out of pits and tow them away and things like that. I remember that quite in particular. It enabled me to have some fairly high-level meetings. I used to see the commander in chief of the Cameroon Armed Forces, on that kind of business. So it was interesting. I didn't always know what I was doing, because, again, I didn't know much about the military, it was my first exposure to the military.

*Q: Was there a Defense Attaché that covered Cameroon, resident somewhere else?*

KOTT: Well, if there was I never saw him. But happily for me, unhappily for Chad, you may recall what happened in Chad and the ongoing civil war and the most recent iteration in 1980 resulted in our evacuation of our Embassy in Chad where we did have a Defense Attaché and we made him an offer. Ambassador, I guess it would have been Ambassador Smythe who was perhaps still at post, asked this fellow if he would like to come and park himself in Yaoundé at least until he could get back into Chad if not in fact have the Pentagon establish a billet in Yaoundé, which in fact they did. And this fellow encumbered it. So he became a Defense Attaché over the period of few weeks or months so I unloaded my burden of military assistance program to him.

*Q: But in the meantime you had quite a bit to do with EUCOM (US European Command)?*

KOTT: Yes, mostly by telegram in those day, happily. Simple to have time to fudge my answers to these esoteric issues and questions.

*Q: Did you also coordinate the Self Help program as you had in Lomé?*

KOTT: I was on the committee but the Vice Consul was the Self Help officer. So that was not a part of my direct portfolio. But I was on the Self Help Committee, so we would decide what projects we'd fund and that sort of thing. Most of my time was on the economic portfolio and commercial in as much as you would travel to Douala about once in every six or seven weeks. First that's where all the American oil companies were based, because they were doing off-shore productions. Nascent, small production, but growing. As well as where the commercial interest was for the country of Cameroon as the largest city in Cameroon.

*Q: Douala is the larger than...?*

KOTT: Yes, much larger. That's where the international airport was at the time. You had to enter the country at the sea-port, through Douala and then take a shuttle to Yaoundé. Yaoundé was rather isolated up in the mountains. Better climate, but really a government town. Not a terribly interesting place.

*Q: There is American or International school there?*

KOTT: I think it was on the American Club grounds. I guess there it really was an American school.

*Q: Almost an Embassy school.*

KOTT: Almost an Embassy school, at least originally. I was not involved, the DCM was of course on the board. We had very small children at the time.

*Q: Today is December 5, 2000. Last time we were talking about your Assignment from 1979 to – '81 in Yaoundé, Cameroon as economic officer, you did commercial work as well. I think you talked in general about your assignments there and the difficulties of doing a lot of work in the capital where the commercial business center was 500 miles or whatever away on the coast where at the time we had a Consulate. Why don't you talk just a little bit more about your experience in Cameroon and particularly to what extent did you travel to Douala and do some of your work there.*

KOTT: Yes, it was a little bit frustrating, because of the physical separation of the powers, if you will, Yaoundé being, Yaoundé being the political capital and Douala being the commercial capital. I would try to go down there about every six or eight weeks. We did have a Consulate down there that I could rely on to support my visits. There was a Cameroon Chamber of Commerce centered in Douala that I worked with fairly closely. We occasionally had some successes. We had a Trade Investment Mission come out, lead by the then Ambassador to the UN, Andy Young, which included the head of the OPEC and the head of the Ex-Im Bank (Export-Import Bank). They made attempts to make some breakthroughs in Cameroon. I think they were probably in the end rather futile, because the French had such a lock on the place at that time that probably the only hope for American breakthroughs in the commercial sector, and I think this held true for many years if not still today, was in the very, very large enterprises where we predominated, such as oil. Or insurance, or banking. There was a Citibank, there was Mobil Oil, there were some other U.S. oil companies exploring and producing oil in Cameroon. It was a nascent producer in those days. But other than that it was tough for little guys trying to penetrate the market. I remember very clearly working with one such man. He was trying to build a small-scale steel mill. He was just strung along by the Cameroon bureaucracy and at every turn was thwarted for one reason or another, it was a very futile effort.

*Q: To what extent was USAID present in country? Did we have Peace Corps volunteers?*

KOTT: Both. Yes, the AID program to Cameroon as I recall was fairly substantial. I can't recall the dollar figure but we had a fairly large AID mission. We did have Peace Corps volunteers there throughout the country. And we had a small Self Help program as well. I don't think that it was as effective as the one I described to you in Togo or another countries.

*Q: Were you running the Self Help Program?*

KOTT: No, I was on the committee, but I wasn't running it. I think the DCM chaired it.

*Q: And the AID program I suppose had an economist that you worked with?*

KOTT: Yes, although his focus was, as I recall, mostly on the impact of their economic and development projects, whereas I did the straight economic reporting. I would clear them with them of course.

*Q: To what extent was the IMF, the World Bank, a strong factor that you were involved with?*

KOTT: I don't recall that I was terribly involved with them. I was probably a Second Secretary at the time and... Cameroon I found to be a terribly protocol conscious society. Second Secretary just didn't cut it really. It was hard to get appointments with ranking government figures, even for ambassadors, more so for Second Secretaries. So really, it was a question of just basically doing the reports.

*Q: You also were saying that the geography of the country was such that it wasn't easy to get away from the capital.*

KOTT: Indeed in those days, and I know that it has changed, I used to like to say, "All roads lead to nowhere." If you left Yaoundé you went deeper in the rainforest. If the rubber trees didn't get you, something else would. It was a very isolated post, Yaoundé. Hard to get around the country. I did make one trip to the north, to the far north, up to the Chad border, with another colleague. It was a week-long trip. We put our car on the train and at the end of the rail line about half way up to the north, we disembarked and got in our car and traveled around. The north is a very different, Sahelian kind of atmosphere, very different than the rainforest where Yaoundé is situated or the coastal region where Douala is. But getting around the country was terrible. Subsequently the IBID has funded a major road that goes from Yaoundé to Douala and now you can do it in about two hours, whereas in my day there was a rudimentary road that would take you eight to nine hours in the dry season, and people would frequently be killed traveling on that road.

*Q: Whereas the north was sparsely populated?*

KOTT: More so than the coastal region, and like I said very Sahelian in nature. Much more akin to what's now Burkina Faso or Mali, that kind of an ambiance. Heavily Islamic, very different than the people who lived in the forest, the Bantu people of the forest.

*Q: You were able to get around pretty well with your French in the north?*

KOTT: Absolutely. French is the lingua franca of most of the country.

*Q: How about the English speaking part of the country, because there is such...?*

KOTT: Yes, English is a lingua franca, too. In my day; I don't know how it is carved up politically today, but back in the late '70s and early '80s, I think there were seven provinces, two of which were English speaking and five of which were French speaking. Cameroon; interestingly, there is an affinity between Cameroon and Canada and the story goes that that's because alphabetically they sat next to each other at the UN and at some point in time back in history, the Cameroonian Ambassador at the UN and the Canadian Ambassador at the UN became very good friends. And of course they shared some other similarities. Both are officially

bilingual nations. Probably two, the only two nations that I can think of that are officially bilingual, French and English. Whereas Canada's population is 80% Anglophile and 20% Francophile, it is the inverse in Cameroon, 80% of the people are living in the area that is officially French speaking. Of course, most of the people don't speak French or English, they speak tribal languages which are many.

*Q: What about the influence of the large neighbor? We know that Canada certainly feels the influence and weight of the U.S. to the south. How about Cameroon and Nigeria?*

KOTT: Yes, of course. And unfortunately for those two, those latitude countries, unlike we and the Canadians where at least for the past 175 years we have been at peace, we've all heard of the world's longest undefended cliché, that separates or perhaps unites U.S. with Canada more than it separates; unfortunately Nigeria and Cameroon have gone to war, at least border wars, a number of times if I'm not mistaken. Happily not when I was there. When I was there the situation was in fact much worse in the north with the Chadian civil war spilling over into Cameroon. But to answer your question on Nigeria. Yes, I think the Cameroonese since independence felt a certain, that sort of the elephant in the grass syndrome vis-à-vis the Nigerians, always having to look over their shoulder. They perceived a real territorial aggrandizement on the part of the Nigerians especially towards the English speaking provinces of Cameroon.

*Q: When you went to the north, did you feel the chance of the war at that time?*

KOTT: No, when I went up there we didn't. Although we knew what was going on and we were cautioned about getting too close to the border. Certainly not crossing over into Chad. But subsequent to our trip the war broke out in full force and in fact the Embassy evacuated with their people coming down to Yaoundé.

*Q: The Embassy in Chad?*

KOTT: Yes, the American Embassy in N'djamena. I think that was the second evacuation for them. There was an earlier evacuation, prior to my arrival to Cameroon and I think subsequently Embassy N'djamena set up shop basically at Embassy Yaoundé.

*Q: Anything else we should talk about in connection with your assignment in Cameroon?*

KOTT: No, I don't think so. It was fairly uneventful, Ray, and not my very favorite assignment. But we'll move one because things got brighter after that when I went off to Malawi as DCM.

**HUME HORAN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cameroon (1980-1983)**

*Ambassador Hume A. Horan was born on August 13th 1934 in the District of Columbia. Horan served in the US Army from 1954-1956 and graduated from*

*Harvard University in 1958. In 1960, Horan entered the Foreign Service. Ambassador Hume's overseas career includes posts in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Jordan and as Ambassador in Saudi Arabia. The interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy 2000 – 2001.*

*Q: Then 1980, whither?*

HORAN: I got to go to Cameroon! The person responsible was David Newsom, I am pretty certain, who was then Under secretary for Political Affairs. He never so indicated, but I had a hunch, having worked for him in Libya and Washington, that he had liked my work. So when it came time for me to move from CA, I think it was he who put in a good word for me. The actual first call came from Director General Harry Barnes.

*Q: He was the Director General at the time?*

HORAN: Yes. Harry asked, "Would you be interested in either going as Chief of Mission to Haiti or Cameroon?" I said, "They are both great. I would be delighted to go to either place. Thank you for the consideration." Then in January or February, I guess it was, he called on a Saturday morning. My daughter took the call. Washington had just had a heavy snowfall, and I was in our front yard building an igloo with the children - a skill I'd been taught in the U.S. Army. It came out excellently, by the way, to the children's astonishment. I quickly called Harry back, and he said, "Hume the committee that meets on Ambassadorial appointments has chosen you for Cameroon." I was really, of course, tremendously happy, because everybody wants to be a Chief of Mission. I was especially happy that I was chosen for Cameroon. The country was both Francophone and Anglophone. I had always wanted to work in a French-speaking country. When I joined the service, soon after, I got a 4-4+ in French. I never ever used French on the job. Here was a chance for me to go someplace and seriously use and work on French. French for work. That made me happy.

Also the country was extraordinarily beautiful. It had strong artistic and literary traditions. There would good opportunities for travel. They had an interesting President, Ahmadou Ahidjo. Ahidjo had in colonial days been a telegrapher! He had little formal education, but worlds of seat of the pants savvy. He gradually worked his way upwards in the administration, becoming the strong authoritarian - not dictatorial - leader of his country. Steady, unflashy, calculating. He had, in his economics and politics, a small shopkeeper's mentality. Under his direction Cameroon put down a left wing ethnic rebellion with the help of the French and lots of human rights violations. But back in those days no one knew Cameroon existed. By African standards, Cameroon was quiet, peaceful, prosperous. They had discovered some oil. Ethnic relations were adroitly kept by Ahidjo on an even keel. The country was not deeply indebted. Ahidjo emphasized agriculture - partly because of his own poor, rural background.

Simultaneously, I was also accredited to Equatorial Guinea, a statelet just off the coast, a nightmare country, where the just-executed dictator, Macias Nguema, had killed about one out of five of all his subjects. His goal was to restore perfect African authenticity to Equatorial Guinea...by killing everyone who had white shirts, shoes, or some sort of printed material. Equatorial Guinea is partly on an island and partly on the mainland. The official capital, Malabo,

is on the island. Nguema's hometown, however, was at MONGOMO on the mainland. The very name, Mongomo, has a foreboding sound. Out of a fantasy horror tale. I was reliably informed that in his Mongomo office, Macias would hold court, his desk surrounded by a semi-circle of the skulls of the former leading witch doctors of his Fang ethnic group. Macias actually did believe in his own invulnerability. So did his political opponents! The end came when he murdered his nephew, and then invited the nephew's brother to Malabo for a little "tete a tete." The brother was Director of the National Guard and did a palace coup. At a subsequent trial - with international observers - Macias was sentenced to death and executed. All along, he maintained that no bullet could ever kill him - but that if by some mischance he were to die, he'd come back from the grave and get revenge on all the members of the jury. When I went to visit his grave, the taxi driver wouldn't bring me closer than a quarter of a mile to the site. Even though it was noonday.

Once when I went to Malabo, I stayed at the best hotel in town. There was no water, no electricity, no food, nor even sheets on the bed! Fortunately I had some supplies with me. "EG" is now on the way to becoming a mini-Kuwait of Africa! In a year or so they'll be pumping half-a-million barrels of high-quality oil a year! Imagine the abuse and corruption. Hold onto your hat!

*Q: You were there from '80-'82.*

HORAN: '80 to '83

*Q: Oh, '83. What were American interests in Cameroon?*

HORAN: Developing oil. Shell had found oil offshore, high quality oil, and was beginning to pump it. I attended the inauguration of Shell's offshore oil pumping station. American businessmen in general found Cameroon a congenial place to work. The French were important, but Ahidjo would maintain, "I know there is more to the world than France, and I will spread my bets accordingly." Our businessmen had a good reception. During the Chadian civil war, we were worried about developments there, and especially the Libyan role.

Several of our government agencies were following the Chad conflict closely. The security of the Embassy's classified holdings was a particular worry. When the civil war had suddenly broken out, the Embassy staff was cut off from the Chancery. The staff was all evacuated, but the classified documents were left in the Chancery, protected by nothing but the bricks and mortar of the building. I made quite a few trips up to Kousseri, the Cameroonian town just across the Chari river from N'djamena. Evenings, you could sit on the veranda of "Les Relais du Logone," and watch the tracer and other shells across the river. But what to do about our classified holdings? We knew the Embassy must have looked like a becalmed Spanish treasure galleon, to Libyan and Russian "Francis Drakes." In the event, the U.S. government sent a very impressive team of experts to Kousseri. I asked for and received authorization to unleash them whenever there was a lull in the fighting. The authority, I felt strongly, needed to be with me. If we had to go back and forth with Washington, the opportunity to get in and out quickly, might be lost. I was working with a very able officer up in Kousseri. One day he said, "Mr. Ambassador, now is now! Everybody is out of ammo. And we've learned a Libyan penetration team has just arrived in N'djamena." I sent the team in - the Libyans had just hours before made an unsuccessful

penetration attempt! When they heard or saw that our people were coming, I think they were wise to skedaddle! We'd had some very serious-looking Americans up there to straighten things out! Our men quickly got into the Chancery, and its most sensitive holdings went heavenwards via thermite barrels on the roof. Whoosh! It was quite a visual display.

*Q: Did we have Peace Corps in Cameroon?*

HORAN: Yes, very fine Peace Corps, great people. Along with the GI Bill, Rural Electrification, and Social Security, the Peace Corps is one of the smartest things the U.S. government has ever done. The President of the University of Yaounde once said to me, "You know, Mr. Horan, why there has never been an anti-American demonstration at the University?" I said, "No." He said, "It's not that we favor your policies toward South Africa or Angola or whatever, but demonstrations don't get started here because almost every student has known and liked a Peace Corps volunteer. Some agitator will shout, 'Americans are terrible...' And someone else will retort, 'Oh no! I know American Peace Corps Volunteers. They're wonderful. They live just as we do, they are not arrogant like the Europeans. They actually help us with seed multiplication and health and education. They let us read their interesting American magazines!'" He concluded, "Your American Peace Corps has done a lot to make my job as University President easier." It tells you something about how the Ahidjo regime viewed the University, that its President had been the Chief of Police!

*Q: How about your relations with the French ambassador?*

HORAN: I am something of a Francophile. I like French literature. I have read widely in it. After I got to Cameroon, my French got better. I think the French appreciate an American who shows a genuine - not fawning - interest in their language and culture. They have this complex, the French, that they are slipping, and so they're the more ready to respond with surprised gratification to a friendly America approach. They saw me as an American with no particular hang-ups, who seemed to like them, and was prepared to pay two visits on them for every one they paid back on him. Who even sent his son to the Lycee Fustel de Coulanges! My thought was, "What the hell, I am not going to play 'Mr. Stiffneck.' I want to get the job done, and in Cameroon that means getting along with the French. So I had no qualms about reasonably deferring to my French colleague. He had been in Africa a lot longer than I. He had lots of assets, including a French battalion behind the Presidency. Also, I thought, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

French business practices were absolutely abominable - that means very unhelpful to us. But I figured if I were in their position, I would do the same. We had zero rapport on economic matters. Many is the tender response by an American firm, that vanished behind the air conditioners. But let it be said for the duplicitous French, that I was always convinced that our main strategic interests ran parallel. We were both opposed to Qadhafi's adventures in Central Africa. I was also convinced that if something terrible should ever threaten our Americans, the French would be there to help. As they later proved during the evacuation of Brazzaville. There, they put their own troops at risk for us.



*Q: What about AID? Were we doing anything there? It sometimes seemed to me that some of their projects had few lasting effects.*

HORAN: Yes. AID had lots of projects under way. But don't ask what they had accomplished. Once, before the arrival of a large Congressional delegation, I asked my AID colleague: "This is our golden opportunity to show them one of our flagship projects. What do you recommend?" He had nothing to show them. He said, "There are some elegantly designed projects - unfortunately still in the development stage. But as for past projects, I don't know..." I thought to myself: "AID maintains a large Mission in Yaounde. It is as large as the Embassy. AID has been here for decades. But there is no flagship project or projects to show for all this work? Just a very big travel budget back and forth from the USA, and many voluminous, unreadable reports!

I am something of an AID cynic. What are the countries that have triumphantly graduated into financial independence as a result of foreign aid? Not many. You've got Germany, Japan, and then South Korea. Imagine! In 1956, South Korea and Ghana had the same per capita GNP!

I've observed these large and very costly AID establishments, awash in paper regulations and interminable horizons, where nothing ever seems to come to a conclusion. I once visited a seed multiplication site. The project had been concluded. It was abandoned, no more seeds, no more multiplication, no more farm activity. When AID withdrew its direct support, the local farmers handed the fire-hardened sticks to the women, and went back to drinking palm wine. When the fuel tank is empty, the car stops moving. I think also of the "Pump case." We provided pumps to some villages so women would not have to trudge miles to fetch water. Instead, they had a *borne fontaine*, a cistern in the village. Well, the pumps stopped working. We looked into the problem. Some little twenty-five cent gizmo had to be replaced from time to time. We asked the men: "Why did you not repair the pumps?" a: "Why should we care? It's a woman's job to haul water. So the pumps stopped working? Tough noogie."

AID's own procedures, opaque language, and bureaucracy also make it hard for State to get its oar in. When I would get together with the AID director and ask, "What are we doing?" the double-talk could leave your head swimming. Unless you are right there at the moment of conception, your ability to affect the selection of a project is limited. I mean, we're talking about a ten year project or a fifteen year project - which started five years before. At what point do you make your decisive intervention, when is your Ambassadorial wisdom called upon?

My lukewarm assessment of AID is that it does little harm. It provides WPA jobs to smart young Americans who want to keep their foreign affairs and economic skills honed. Better AID, than starving as a TA at the University of Oregon. AID also hires a lot of local employees, pays local landlords, and sends people off to the States for training. It provides an intellectual stimulus, a window to the modern world for its host country. These things are all good.

*Q: Well, was there a Soviet presence there?*

HORAN: Yes, there was a pretty good sized Russian embassy, and a pretty good sized North Korean presence. There was the usual, "Who is doing what to whom." We kept an eye on their activities, and they kept an eye on us. Trolling for defectors. At times, there would be a Russian

who seemed unhappy in his work, but they all managed to get transferred back to Russian before we could do much about it.

*Q: I somehow had the feeling that there was a wonderful relationship between the KGB of the Soviets and the CIA that they both staffed Africa full of people looking at each other with very little. That is what they did. There could have been a state agreement, all right we won't do anything you don't do anything, and we could have quartered the number of people in our embassy and their embassy.*

HORAN: Yes. Yes, it is so true, Stu. With the exception of Chad and the Libyans, our bilateral interests in Cameroon on the intelligence side were very moderate. The Russian's interests were very moderate, too.

*Q: How about with the president; did you have much dealing with him or not?*

HORAN: Yes, I had a lot of dealings with him. He made time for Americans because, you know, France is his strong right hand, but the United States, you know, must not be neglected. He was pragmatic, tough, uneducated, but with a lot of real life experience kind of man. He dealt with the realities of power. He was not particularly corrupt. He did not build himself, you know, big palaces and the like. Actually towards the end of his administration he did start building quite a lovely palace in outskirts of Cameroon. It was a petty bourgeois kind of regime. It had its bad aspects, some repression, not much imagination. But Africa had seen and has seen lots worse.

*Q: Well now, what would he talk to you about? I mean, what sort of relationship did you have?*

HORAN: He was concerned about the Libyans, quite concerned about the Libyans and the instability in Chad. He said, "Cameroon had gone through its civil war already." It had been a very painful experience, and he didn't want to see that kind of instability in the region spilling back over into Cameroon. He wanted American companies to come into the country. He didn't want to have to depend only on the French for his economic sustenance. American oil companies he thought were very good, and he generally wanted to have more American business. He said, "My relations with France are excellent, but I am not French." He said, "French is not my main language. Hausa is my main language plus one or two of the other languages in Cameroon, so you Americans must not think that when the French say this is our protected preserve, that it really is. I don't regard it that way. The world has changed since the 1930s and the 1940s and 1950s."

*Q: Were there any events or something we should talk about before we move on?*

HORAN: a few reflections: it is nice to be in a country when something major that people have been anticipating or not anticipating happens. To be in Saudi Arabia when King Faisal gets assassinated, for instance. Such events are a kind of milestone. "Ah! Were you there when that happened?" In my last year in Yaounde, Ahidjo suddenly abdicated! What a surprise! It seems the doctors had told him, "Unless you get out of the job, you may be dead in six months. Your blood pressure is beyond the gauges. You just will not survive."

Paul Biya, who is still president of Cameroon, replaced him. He was well-educated, smart, fluent in English as well as in French. He had much to recommend him, but he lacked Ahidjo's hard-headedness and practical touch. He allowed himself to be turned into an African "Big Man," and the country has gone downhill ever since. North-South relations, Muslim vs non-Muslim relations have become hostile. There was even a failed northern-inspired coup attempt. It just shows that notwithstanding a person's glossy exterior, when it comes to just getting the job done, "Slow and steady wins the race."

I was in Yaounde for maybe the last state visit that Sekou Toure made out of Guinea. We The Ambassadors were all lined up in advance - so many potted plants. Out of the plane emerged Sekou! What a presence! Although in the latter stages of heart disease, he still looked like a big 10 halfback. In his silk bou-bou, and leopard-skin cap, he was Africa's Mr. G.Q. Elegant! Toure favored us with an hour and a quarter of the most amazing oratory. Ahidjo then mumbled a few remarks. What a physical contrast! Next to Sekou, Ahidjo looked like a houseboy who had just come out of the kitchen.

Later, I was presented to Sekou at the Presidential Palace. He seemed charming. He spoke by name of former American Ambassadors in Guinea...and their wives. At the time, I did not sufficiently know what a monster in human clothing Sekou really was. Diallo Telli! Camp Boiro! The *diète noire*! The paranoia and crazy economics!

Finally, I'd have to say I drank more champagne in Cameroon than I ever have before or since in my life. Cameroon was, I think, the world's number one importer per capita of French champagne. Dom Perignon in water tumblers. Water tumblers! I really did enjoy it, but I reflected that Cameroon's champagne import budget was the same as our economic assistance budget to Cameroon. Just about the same.

**DAVID HAMILTON SHINN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Yaoundé (1981-1983)**

*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: *Where did you go then?*

SHINN: I was assigned to Cameroon. I had not sought that assignment, but my time in Washington was up and the personnel system came up with this opening, much to my surprise. The system treated me well during my career. Some of my other assignments came from my own contacts, but in this case, it was the system that placed me.

Hume Horan, whom I had not known, but had met once or twice, was going to Cameroon as ambassador and was looking for a DCM. I learned to have enormous respect for Horan. His philosophy was to find a DCM who he thought would become an ambassador. He thought that I fulfilled that requirement and selected me from a list given him by Personnel. I went to Yaounde for two years, coinciding with Horan's time there.

Q: *What was the situation in the Cameroon in 1981? What were our interests there?*

SHINN: When I arrived, President Ahidjo was still in power, having been the leader since independence. His government was very Francophone despite the fact that it had a significant Anglophone minority. We had cordial, but not particularly warm, relations with this government. The French were the dominant foreign power in Cameroon.

When I first arrived, our embassy in Yaounde also had responsibility for Equatorial Guinea. Horan was accredited to Equatorial Guinea and the U.S. had an office in Malabo. That changed in 1982 when we appointed a separate ambassador to EG. But when I first got to Cameroon, we made regular trips to Malabo for reporting and contact work. Later, we continued to support that embassy through the consulate general in Douala, Cameroon. Douala was just across the water from Malabo. We spent a lot of time supporting Malabo.

The principal issue with Cameroon concerned foreign assistance. We had a relatively large aid program, which was reasonably successful. The most interesting political development in Cameroon during my tour was Ahidjo's voluntary resignation in 1982. He went to France to live and turned the government over to his hand-picked successor, Paul Biya. By the time I left, Biya was firmly ensconced in the presidency. It was interesting to watch this peaceful transition; there was no violence. It was one of the few instances in which an African president voluntarily resigned; everybody was quite happy with the transition and it worked well.

Oil had also been discovered in Cameroon. It had not been exploited to any great extent, so that no economic benefit had yet accrued. Everybody assumed that oil would give Cameroon a bright economic future. Unfortunately, this did not turn out to be the case, but that was the expectation in the early 1980s.

The other major issue, which was of interest to Washington, concerned activities on the Cameroon-Chad border. Chad was going through a civil war. The capital of Chad, N'Djamena, is across the Chari River from Cameroon. On the Cameroon side of the river is a town named Kousseri where the embassy had a safe house. We used it occasionally as a place to monitor events in Chad. For a while we had no personnel in Chad because of the poor security situation in that country. Eventually, we did assign a *charge d'affaires*. The embassy in Yaounde was responsible for the support of the small staff at embassy N'Djamena.

From my point of view, the most interesting part of the assignment to Yaounde was to fill in for Peter Moffat, the *charge d'affaires* in N'Djamena, Chad, which I did twice. On the first occasion, he took annual leave for several weeks. He did not have an experienced officer who could fill in for him; I was sent from Yaounde. It was a wonderful opportunity to run my own operation as small as it was. I arrived in Kousseri the day before the Goukouni Oueddei government fell. The

rebels led by Hissene Habre took over from Goukouni Oueddei. There were several days of fighting in N'Djamena. The fighting spilled across the Chari River into Kousseri where evacuated staff from N'Djamena and others from Yaounde came under fire for part of an afternoon. We returned to N'Djamena when it became clear that Habre was firmly in control. We established relations with the new president and I stayed for several weeks until Moffat returned. It was one of those opportunities in the Foreign Service when you happen to be in the right place at the right time. If you handle things well in the eyes of Washington, it becomes a career enhancing situation.

*Q: How did we evaluate Habre?*

SHINN: He had been in government before, but never as head of state. Hissene Habre was one tough cookie. He was a fighter. He was reasonably well educated, but didn't have any major academic credentials. He was in charge because he was tougher and nastier than most of his rivals. He was a leader; people did follow him. He led his men into N'Djamena and defeated all other armed factions. I found him an interesting individual and in a roughish kind of way, a likeable person because he knew what he wanted. He wanted good relations with the U.S. I believe there had been some covert contacts with him before he took power. There certainly had been reports of U.S. support for Habre when he started his campaign from the Sudan border. We may have supported him because he was opposed to Chadian elements that were being supported by Libya.

I had a brief and successful relationship with Habre. He remained in power until 1990. He was overthrown by General Idriss Deby. His reign brought a prolonged period of dictatorial stability to Chad.

My tour in Chad came at an exciting time. N'Djamena was basically a destroyed city; the main street was all shot up. It was the Wild West. Incidents of violence continued. I remember playing tennis one afternoon on the embassy compound, which overlooked the Chari River. All of a sudden, I heard things zinging past my ear and realized that they were bullets. We had no idea where they were coming from, but we didn't stick around to find out. The game was quickly called! But that was the way Chad was at the time. It was not unusual to hear live fire filling the air.

*Q: What was the situation in Equatorial Guinea?*

SHINN: It was a pretty sad place at the time. I don't believe that anyone knew then about the huge oil reserves that have been found since. I would guess it is now in the process of a complete transformation. During my time, it was a very poor country run by a dictator who is still in power. It was hard to do anything there; everything was a struggle. Even the weather worked against one. Malabo was just depressing - hot and humid. Mosquitoes loved it. I found it one of the most difficult places in Africa. I always felt sorry for Allan Hardy, the first American ambassador there. He worked very hard to set up the embassy but had an abbreviated Foreign Service career after that assignment. Malabo was just a real tough place to work; Nouakchott was "Paris" compared to Malabo.

*Q: Tell us a little about how Ambassador Horan operated.*

SHINN: He believed in giving responsibility to people. Hume is one of the smartest people I ever met. He is just incredibly intelligent and one of the best read persons I have ever encountered. He reads in four or five languages. He was a person with strategic vision. He knew how to go about achieving the goals he had set. He tried to get good people around him so that much of the tactical work could be carried out by the staff. He would oversee what was going on, but let his people carry out the day-to-day operations, although he would gladly pitch in wherever he might be needed. Hume will always be known for his management style: get good people to work for you, set out clear goals and then let the staff find the best way to achieve those goals.

He is now studying Japanese. Undoubtedly, he will master that language as well. He was one of the best, if not the best, Arabic language officer in the Foreign Service. I remember after being an observer to one conversation involving Hume in Arabic in the Sudan. One northern Sudanese in the conversation shook his head and said that Hume's Arabic was better than his. He was shocked that an American could speak the language better than many Arabs. He was literally shaking from this demoralizing discovery.

*Q: Was there any great concern when Ahidjo resigned and was succeeded Biya?*

SHINN: There was some concern because Ahidjo had been Cameroon's only president. So this was a major change. On the other hand, people had high hopes for Biya. He was considered to be the modernizing influence behind Ahidjo. Ahidjo represented the past and Biya the future. He was well educated and even though a Francophone spoke excellent English. He was seen as someone who could bring the Francophones and the Anglophones together to launch Cameroon on an harmonious new track.

For the rest of my tour, our hopes for Biya seemed to be coming to fruition. Unfortunately, the whole structure came apart a few months later. There was a lot of fighting in Yaounde between members of various political parties and Biya did not handle it very well. He is still in power today, but I am told that the country has not really progressed as it should have. Corruption seems to have taken over.

*Q: What was the history of Cameroon?*

SHINN: It was a German colony until the end of WW I. Then it was divided with the largest part coming under French rule and the balance under British rule. Following a referendum, the English speaking part joined the Francophone portion at independence. By the 1980's the German influence was long gone; there was no sign of it.

*Q: Had the English speakers been absorbed when you were there?*

SHINN: Not totally. They were a minority that always felt they had not been given equality. They hadn't.

The major tension in Cameroon was between the Francophone and the Anglophone, not ethnic or tribal although the language divide does represent to some extent an ethnic divide. But while I was there, the language question was the pre-eminent dividing factor.

*Q: Was this another French area?*

SHINN: Somewhat less so than most of French-speaking Africa. The Anglophones had influence; they tended to seek out other English speakers. As a result, it was easier to work there than in Mauritania or Chad, for example. The French were not as influential as I have noted in other areas.

*Q: Were any of the communist countries or Libya trying to get a foothold in Cameroon?*

SHINN: They tried, but did not make any significant gains.

*Q: How about events in Nigeria?*

SHINN: Nigeria was producing oil and it was earning foreign exchange, but the extraction and distribution got tied up in corruption, as it did later in Cameroon. That has been the “albatross” around the Nigerian oil industry.

There were periodic border problems between Nigeria and Cameroon. Some of these issues are only now being settled. There were occasional border disputes. Relations between Nigeria and Cameroon were not always friendly.

*Q: Did you get any visits by high officials?*

SHINN: We had some CODELs; I don’t recall anyone above the assistant secretary level coming to see us. There may have been, but I don’t remember any.

*Q: I know this was the time when Chet Crocker spent all of his life on Southern Africa. What were your relationships with the AF bureau?*

SHINN: Policy for Cameroon was largely left to lower levels. We had a close relationship with the Central African Division, but the AF front office was concentrating on southern Africa. There wasn’t much interest in what was going on in Central Africa. What interest there may have been focused on the Congo which was the neighborhood heavy weight. All other countries were of relatively minor significance, which in some respects was a blessing. I learned during my career that I would rather be left alone by Washington than have it breathing down my neck.

*Q: You left Cameroon in 1983 and went to Sudan.*

SHINN: Right. I joined Hume Horan as his DCM. It was a very different situation. It was an active post in which Washington had considerable interest. I stayed in Sudan until 1986.

**CHARLES H. TWINING**  
**Consul General**  
**Douala (1983-1985)**

*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 Charles H. Twining in 2004.*

*Q: This would be in 1983. Where did you go?*

TWINING: The African Bureau proposed that I move down the West African coast to the seaport of Douala in Cameroon, in 1983. I served as Consul General there for two years. When I arrived, Cameroon had just lost its first and only president in late 1982, when President Ahidjo stepped down for health reasons, in favor of his Prime Minister, Paul Biya. Just after I arrived in Douala, President Biya came to Douala to tell people about the things he was going to do. He pledged to introduce democracy into that one-party state, a step that he took seven years to carry out.

*Q: What were the post's primary responsibilities?*

TWINING: With a small but active staff, the Consulate General focused on several key areas. First was commercial: Douala was the commercial capital of Cameroon as well as the regional commercial capital. Second was consular: we issued more visas in Douala than the embassy in the inland capital, Yaounde. Third was political: the government in the capital felt that Douala was a city of opposition. People spoke more freely in Douala than in seemingly uptight Yaounde. The consular district covered the bottom third of Cameroon, from the border of Equatorial Guinea, on the east, to the border of Nigeria on the west. It went from heavy rain forest, beautiful black-sand beaches, a sometimes active volcano on Mt. Cameroon, to rolling green hills up in the North West Province. There was a dynamic Cameroonian and non-Cameroonian business community, missionaries and linguists, a great Peace Corps program, and solid AID activities. It was a super assignment.

*Q: What was the government of Cameroon like at that time?*

TWINING: Cameroon, at that time, had been independent for 23 years. It had united the half of former British Cameroon that voted to join French Cameroon, with French Cameroon. Cameroon remained French and English-speaking, with a pidgin English often serving as the lingua franca. In the government, the president of the country was a French speaker, and the vice president was an English speaker. The president of the National Assembly was an English speaker. In reality, the government was very much controlled by the French speakers, who dominate to this day.

*Q: Did we have any issues in Cameroon?*



TWINING: I suppose the simple answer is “No.” It’s true; we wished there had been more openness in the country. We were encouraged by President Biya’s promise that on his watch, he was going to do so, but Biya had proven to be a cautious leader who never enacts changes quickly. Our commercial relationships were good. An American oil company, Pecten, now part of Royal Dutch Shell, had a large operation based in Douala, working off the coast of Cameroon. I think we respected the way Cameroon was a moderate state in the international realm. It supported the free enterprise system and respected that we had economic-commercial interests. The French were the important foreign player in Cameroon, as in most of the Francophone states. We weren’t there to take over the French position. We couldn’t compete with the French. Our aid was never near the level of French aid. We had not educated as many Cameroonians in the U.S. as the French had done in France. That was the reality of Cameroon. It was a very pro-French, single party state, though there was also room for us to conduct our diversified relations.

*Q: Did you have a French counterpart in Douala?*

TWINING: Yes, of course.

*Q: How did you get along with him or her?*

TWINING: We had fine relations. I have found that I’ve always been able to have good relations with French counterparts. Indeed, it is important. There was an attempted coup in Cameroon in 1984. I happened to be traveling some 50 miles away from Douala, in the middle of nowhere, when my driver turned on the radio. We heard that there had been a coup attempt. While focused especially on Yaounde, there was also coup activity in Douala. When an element of the military rose up, thankfully the coup was put down. The failure had the effect of causing any ambitious military officers to think twice before wanting to stage a coup again. That was the one and only real coup attempt, in 1984. By the time I was able to get back to Douala, things had become almost entirely under control again. Vice Consul Karl Wycoff had done a fine job calming the American community and International School and keeping in contact with the Embassy in Yaounde. One of the people with whom I could link up and compare notes subsequently was the French Consul General. I realized just how important that tie was. I was glad we had a good solid tie.

*Q: Did you have any consular problems, Americans in trouble or that sort of thing?*

TWINING: No, you had your share of Americans who were penniless. You had your share of Cameroonians and traveling Nigerians who would try anything to get an American visa. You had those normal problems that you have anywhere. There was the crash of a Cameroon Airlines plane as it was trying to land in Douala. While no Americans were among the dead, one American was very badly injured and had to be evacuated.

One special responsibility of the Consulate General was to provide support to our Embassy in nearby Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea was a very tough place. We had a very tiny embassy there consisting of an ambassador and a junior officer. Once a week we had to get goods over there so they could survive. The Embassy Americans would come back and forth on

a plane that my office chartered for them. They would sometimes have consular problems that we had to try to help out on. At one point, in fact, Washington asked me to travel over to the capital, Malabo, to make sure that our Embassy people were standing up well under the stresses of a tough dictatorship. They were well, but conditions were hard. I remember going into a market that had absolutely nothing in it. One lady had been selling a few wrinkled yams. That is all I remember for sale in that market. There was simply no way for our people to survive on the local economy. Equatorial Guinea had reverted into a subsistence economy, basically.

*Q: Were there those who thought at the time, "What the hell are we doing there?"*

TWINING: Yes, you had to ask yourself that question. If you remember Equatorial Guinea in the terrible days of the first dictator, Nguema, our number two there stabbed the communicator fatally. It was a very nasty business. It was the stresses of the time, probably more than anything else, that made him go off. That is the kind of thing that caused us worry about our people in Malabo, even under a different chief of state. Nevertheless, many people felt it was important for us to have a post and be present everywhere in the world. I think there are very good arguments to be made for that. Equatorial Guinea was one of those that indeed we made that argument for.

*Q: Who was the ambassador in Cameroon?*

TWINING: When I was in Douala, the ambassador in Yaounde was Myles Frechette. His deputy was William Milam. So, they were up in Yaounde, a couple of hundred miles away, jointed then by a very bad road from Douala.

*Q: Myles Frechette was almost an exile from Latin America, I think. He had gotten crossways with the Cuba lobby. It was basically not his fault, but he was just the wrong guy at the wrong time, trying to push our Cuba policy. The powers that be in Miami, went after him.*

TWINING: That seems to be the case. While he was not an Africa person per se, Ambassador Frechette spoke excellent French and was a top-flight professional. He was able to operate without any problem in Cameroon. He was a quick learner.

*Q: How was life for your family in Douala?*

TWINING: Douala was excellent, with fine restaurants and great social life. I had wanted to keep my sons in the French school system, but others pressed me that if there was an international school supported by the State Department, then I should put my children in that school. I lost that argument. But kids adapt easily and were very happy in school. Store-wise, we could buy almost anything we needed. Cameroon is a rich country. Even in those days, the stores were fine stores. You didn't want for very much. Pecten Oil brought in a large number of families and supported a Cub Scout troop, for example, in which my oldest son participated. It was a good atmosphere. The Cameroonians are a bright, dynamic people, and life was agreeable.

I came up with a theory that people who live on the ocean are more open to the outside world than the people living in the middle of a rain forest. Yaounde was in the middle of a rain forest. Residents of Douala were linked up with Coastal West and Central Africa, flew easily to France,

looked out at the U.S. They spoke beautiful French. They, too, wanted the best of consumer products, if they had the money to buy those products. They were people of the world. It was very easy to fit into Cameroonian society in Douala. The whole family loved it.

*Q: Did the Cameroonians get to Paris whenever they could? We're talking about the government class, the top people?*

TWINING: Again, I didn't see the government class as much as I saw the business class. But they headed off to Paris just as often, and you drank lots of champagne with them. Not to omit the fact that there were slums and crime in Cameroon, and a rural exodus, in which lots of people came to Douala to try to earn more money than they could digging holes in a dry field somewhere. Yes, Cameroonians in Douala very much looked to France. The elite looked to French fashions. Even those who were less than elite were people who were more at ease with foreigners, and I think with foreign trends, it made it much easier.

*Q: Any other comments regarding the Douala tour of duty, e.g., travel, similarities to other tours of duty?*

TWINING: There were many opportunities to travel in the Douala consular district, and it was important for us to do so if we were to stay on top of developments, as well as maintain contact with our own citizens and answer questions or give other kinds of assistance, as required. The Embassy provided us with a good four-wheel drive vehicle for that purpose. There was a large Peace Corps contingent throughout Cameroon, including in the provinces for which I was responsible, where they were engaged in teaching, fisheries development, agriculture, and cooperatives. It was always fun to drop in on them, see how they were doing, and bring them news of the outside world. We oversaw an active self-help program throughout the consular district, with some of our funds used to support Peace Corps-generated projects, and kept an eye on AID-sponsored activity. In many ways much of what we did was similar to the Vietnam assignment, trying to support local development while maintaining a feel for the situation, particularly as it affected U.S. interests. For an activist like myself, it was ideal.

The consular district covered a unique area. It included all of the portion of former British Cameroons which federated with, and was later united with, French Cameroon. (Another part of British Cameroons voted to join Nigeria). One was forever aware of the sensitivities of the English-speaking minority and perceived or real discrimination by the majority francophones, the below the surface independence movement among Anglophones, and the need to support genuine integration. It is perhaps not surprising that the leading challenger to President Biya when the winds of change opened up Cameroon in 1990 was a friendly bookseller, John Fru Ndi, located in the largest Anglophone city, Bamenda, in the North West Province. Once he emerged, he incarnated all sorts of hopes of the Anglophones. Even in 1983-85, it was important for us to know key Anglophones such as Dr. John Foncha and Samuel Muna, as well as the francophone Cameroonians, of course.

Among the francophones were members of the dynamic Bamileke ethnic group, located in the West Province of the consular district. This amazing group generated a slew of industrious businessmen and other entrepreneurs who had a unique system for mobilizing capital, the tontine

system. Bamileke also dominated Douala's vibrant commercial sector. Such well organized individuals inevitably drew the suspicion of authorities in the then one-party state, convinced the Bamileke wanted political domination as well as commercial. It was an interesting scene to observe.

*Q: Well, then you moved on. Where did you go?*

TWINING: The African Bureau had amazing stability in the 1980s, with Chester Crocker as the Assistant Secretary of State for eight years. DAS Jim Bishop called me after two years in Douala.

**S. DOUGLAS MARTIN**  
**Commercial Counselor**  
**Yaoundé (1983-1985)**

*S. Douglas Martin was born in New York in 1926. During 1945-1945 he served overseas in the US Army, upon returning he received his bachelor's from St John's University in 1949 and later received his law degree from Columbia University in 1952. His career included positions in Germany, Washington D. C., Yugoslavia, Poland, Laos, Austria, Turkey, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Mr. Martin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in January 1999.*

*Q: This was what? '84 to –*

MARTIN: This would have been '83. I went to Spain. We did some assessing there, and some others went to the Far East and did some assessing Singapore. That worked out very well. I got along very well with the head of the Foreign Commercial Service. I was over complement. I know they would have been willing to give me a job in the Department, but I did not want that. I wanted to go overseas, and the head of the Foreign Commercial Service offered me a job as commercial counselor in Yaoundé, Cameroon because they wanted to have somebody in a post in West Africa, an underdeveloped area. The Secretary of Commerce had gone to West Africa, and he said we should have a presence here, and it should be a regional presence. So the job was offered to me, because Cameroon at that time was the only country in West Africa that could get ten-year money from the banks and was doing quite well. I had somebody working for me in Douala, the port and commercial center. I used to go there about once a week, and we had trade missions coming through. My area covered all of West and Central Africa, so I went to neighboring countries, for example, Equatorial Guinea. We didn't have very much trade with them, but I paid a visit there and as far as the Congo and Brazzaville Congo (Old French Congo).

Gabon was the next country over and I went there. The concept of a regional officer, comes to anybody's mind, when they start thinking about having people overseas. But ambassadors, however, are very nervous about anybody with regional responsibility that includes their country unless they're assigned to that country. The ambassador to Gabon, I thought, was trying to sabotage me. He really didn't want anybody coming from another post to where he was the ambassador. Very often you have that. That's a problem that the Foreign Service is going to have

to overcome, because the wave of the future is to have posts that are regional. We don't need an ambassador necessarily in Equatorial Guinea, and we haven't had in the past. Usually it was some other ambassador, like the ambassador in Cameroon who was also accredited there. It was a place where you wanted to have an ambassador because sometimes things were happening there.

Anyway, Cameroon. Again -

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

MARTIN: I was there from '83 to '85. My career was winding down. I was due out in '86. I was trying to stay as long as possible. I left Yaoundé in October 1985 and went back to Washington and rejoined the Board of Examiners, but just for a month. I retired January 31, 1986. Before I retired, the Department of Commerce asked me to be on its senior promotion board. I had never served on a promotion board. Early in my career I had seen how a board can work sometimes when the head of the board had a program and he wants to put it through. That was when I was on the board of governors of the Officers' Club in Berlin. We had that with the promotion board. A very strong guy who was the head of personnel in the Department of Commerce, and was later fired for sexual harassment, and he went to jail for some kind of dishonesty. He wanted to push through what he thought was right, and it was hard to oppose him, because I was just the guy from State. We had a public member, and two members from Commerce, who were Foreign Commercial Service guys and this guy in charge, who was trying to ram through some of his candidates. I was a little surprised at how somebody like him, who's strong and smart, can run a board. I think that some of the people who came out low-ranked were people that he may not have liked, and some of the people he promoted were people he favored. Still, I think we did a good job, by and large.

*Q: Going back to when you were in Yaoundé, what were our commercial interests during this mid-'80's period in West Africa?*

MARTIN: Our commercial interests were trying to find something for American business to get into, because we were excluded by the French. This is the old French Africa - not exactly, but anyway, Cameroon used to be called "The Cameroons." It was a German colony. At the end of World War I, it was taken over by the League of Nations and divided in two. There were the French Cameroon and the British Cameroons. At the end of World War II, there was a plebiscite, and the northern part of the British Cameroons opted to go with Nigeria. Then you had a country that was one-third English-speaking, with a tradition of English in the schools, and two-thirds French-speaking.

The British, whom I admire very much for their system of indirect rule and how they managed to run an empire with very few people and not putting in much in the way of resources, ran one of the greatest empires, territorially speaking. But they didn't do as good a job in education as the French did, because they didn't try to impose British culture on these people, they just put limits on them. The French actually taught people their language. Anywhere you went in Cameroon, in Gabon, and in the French Congo, people spoke French very well. They spoke correct

grammatical French, and they had an idea that the French language was superior to their own language. They called their language *mon patois*, but they spoke French.

The commercial interest we had was to try to find some kind of a niche, because that was all we could do. The currency was tied to the French currency. The currency of West Africa was supported by the French. Because of that, the trade went to France. For an American company to operate there was difficult, unless they were able to somehow find a niche and deal in French. I would advise companies to try to operate through an agent in France or, if they had a subsidiary French company, to let them do it. If they had a really specialized thing that was needed in the country, I advised them to find a French counterpart that they could somehow hook onto. That was the way to piggy back onto a French entity. Just coming straight and doing it was useless. There were three American banks in Cameroon while I was there, and they were really doing very, very little business. They were getting money from the American AID program as some of it somehow found its way into these American banks, financing things. We were trying because there was a need to promote trade with old French Africa, just as there is a need in some other countries where we don't have much trade. You don't need anybody in Canada from the Foreign Commercial Service. But you do need people where it's been missed through the normal trade policies. You need more than trade policies to promote trade. You need trade promotion, and the way to do that is to get into trade fairs, trade missions, and learning about the country and advising people on how they might find some kind of a niche.

I did meet some American businessmen there. There were people that came through that thought maybe they could find something. The United States has all these agencies that promote foreign trade – OPIC [Overseas Private Investment Corporation] and the ExIm Bank, AID programs, and the "Paunch Corps", i.e., the International Executive Service Corps. But there wasn't a lot that could be done. Still what there was could be the beginning of something bigger.

There was a fellow who wanted to sell water because in Cameroon people use to buy water from France. Because it was a monopoly, nobody tried to come in and establish a water company that would get water out of the ground, and meet the standards of the water coming from France. I was trying to help him, but when the Cameroonians realized the opportunity, they got into it themselves. They had good water. They had mountains in Cameroon where you had good spring water.

In another case, I was trying to help a fellow make a movie. He was getting close to 40, and he ran a movie theater. I asked him what were the most popular movies that he showed because there was a big movie inventory in Douala. He used to come in from this little place where he was a chief, and get movies for his movie theater. The Kung Fu movies, martial arts, he said those were knockout movies as everybody loves them. Because of his interest in the movies, he wanted to make a movie, and I was trying to help him. I went to visit the International Executive Service Corps in Stamford, Connecticut and they said they were ready. They had a guy who was going to come over, we just needed \$80,000. To this fellow, I said, "If you can get the \$80,000, I can get the guy to come over and live here and help you make that movie." It was going to be basically a travelogue. It was going to be two people coming from France, a young couple, and they were going to meet and eventually fall in love while they went around Cameroon and saw these different things. Again, in Cameroon, nobody ever says no, but it is very hard to get

anything done. This guy said he thought he could get the \$80,000, but it just went on and on and on, and when I left, he still didn't have the \$80,000.

There had been a movie made there a few years before I got there. I don't know whether you saw a movie called Greystoke, about Tarzan. That was made in Victoria, in Cameroon. I went to a restaurant there, and this guy was telling me about Greystoke and about the apes, and he said a lot of apes were in costume, and he was doing an imitation of the apes. And I've since seen a movie about Cameroon called Chocolat, a wonderful movie. You have a feeling, sitting in that theater, that you're in Africa because it's such a slow-moving movie, and it's so bright, the hot sun, and you have a feeling you're in Africa. It's a good movie from that point of view.

Again, in Cameroon, it's hard to get anything done, especially in trade. We had a number of other projects we were trying to get started, and somehow when you went to the ministry, presented the project, they listened very carefully, but then nothing happened.

When I came back to Washington, I was on the Board of Examiners for a couple of weeks, and then I retired, and continued for that season on the Board of Examiners, as a retiree. To sum up my Foreign Service career: I think that the Foreign Service is a great institution. I always considered myself very lucky, even at the time that I got in. I thought I did a great job in some places, some places less so. At the end, my career was really going downhill, and that was too bad. But so what?

It would have been nice to be an ambassador. Had I gone into Africa earlier I might have done it. I never had a connection in the Bureau of African Affairs. I would recommend to anybody, and I do, that they consider the Foreign Service, and if they get in, to go to Africa. Other people seemed to be better able to pick a post and get the one they wanted. I was always willing to go wherever they wanted me to go and to do whatever they told me to do. I was not an economist but spent my career doing economic work. I'm not a businessman - I have no business sense - but I spent a lot of time promoting trade. I'm not an investigator, but I did some end-use checks that amounted to investigation, and I think I did a pretty good job. I think I had a good attitude, and so did my wife. I was very lucky to pick a good wife. She actually was brilliant in languages. Wherever we went, she would learn the language. With Turkish she had a little bit of a hard time, but even in Turkey, where I couldn't learn the language though I studied it and did great in the exercises, even in Turkey, she did a great job and learned to communicate with our maid. In Croatia, there were a lot of Hungarians, and speaking Hungarian helped her. People spoke German there, and of course, she had gone to school at the University of Munich, and one of her first languages was French. She loved French, so in Laos we had a lot of French friends. So my wife was a tremendous asset. The new kind of Foreign Service wife is offered jobs and my wife fitted right into that. She was happy to work. She worked in Nigeria and also in Cameroon. She was the travel lady. I told her she could get anybody anywhere in the world, providing they started off in Yaoundé and finished up in Yaoundé. She used to go down to Douala and talk to the travel agents there in French, and she always made friends with the French. She liked the French and always made friends with French-speaking people. That was a lucky break for me, too.

So I would recommend the Foreign Service to anybody. When I was on the Berlin Task Force during the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was on the fringe, but still, associated with something very major going on. People had that chance. Now the Foreign Service has changed. As somebody said about the army, the army is not what it used to be, and it never was. The same thing is true of the Foreign Service. The Foreign Service has been changing since before 1926, the Rogers Act, '24. But maybe it's no longer an elite service. That's too bad. I think one of the indications you can see, if you look at the obituaries in State Magazine, they're just like a paragraph long and it's almost as if they don't care about the Foreign Service people who have died. They're just given the least acknowledgment they can. One of the dangers that I see - because I see a lot of personnel stuff - is the Civil Service almost taking over from the Foreign Service. When a job is hard to fill, it gets offered to Civil Service people, and retirees. I think the total number in the Foreign Service is probably shrinking, and I don't know what the long-term implications of all that is.

Another thing is that there are so many different people in international affairs now. You've got the foundations, lobbies, think-tanks, universities, and congressional staffs, all getting into international affairs. It dilutes the importance of the Foreign Service.

### **KATHRYN CLARK-BOURNE**

**Consul General  
Douala (1985-1987)**

*Kathryn Clark-Bourne was born in 1924 in Fort Collins, Colorado. She received a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Washington. She later received a master's degree in mass communications from the University of Minnesota. Ms. Clark-Bourne's career included positions in Iran, The Netherlands, Nigeria, and Cameroon. This interview was conducted on August 2, 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: In '85, where did you go?*

CLARK-BOURNE: I went to Cameroon, to Douala, as Consul General.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

CLARK-BOURNE: '85 to '87. That was interesting because the capital of Cameroon is Yaounde, which is up north in the mountains. Douala is a seaport and is far larger. The capital is almost a country town in comparison. All the businesses are in Douala, which is the economic center. The only international airport at that time was in Douala. I think they now have one in Yaounde. So, anybody who wanted to go to Yaounde would have to come to Douala and then transfer to Cameroon airlines for Yaounde. They had offshore oil and a good-sized seaport, as I've said. We and the Brits had banks and businesses of various kinds. Equatorial Guinea was next door and our Embassy there had a representative, a local employee, in the consulate general. Everything that came over for their capital came in through that port, so he took care of all that kind of stuff.



All shipments for the embassy came in through Douala, so he took care of transferring them to Malabo. All shipments for Cameroon, Chad, and Central African Empire, also came into the port of Douala, so much of our time was spent handling those shipments

We had a commercial attaché but did not have an economic officer. The economic officer was stationed in Yaounde. So, I sort of covered the political and economic scenes. I had an administrative assistant and a good-sized Cameroonian staff. But, as far as consular activities, there were not really that many and there were not that many Americans around.

Half way through my tour, it seemed a waste of resources to keep this as a consulate general. I thought it should be downsized to a consulate, unless they were willing to transfer the economic section to Douala where all the economic activity was, which they weren't. Well, Washington agreed with me. This was interesting because I made the same recommendation in Rotterdam when I was there and nobody would listen to me. So, I spent my last year there downsizing the CG. I managed to find a position for every local employee that I let go. Fortunately, new American businesses were coming in that needed staffing.

I had another challenge shortly after I arrived in Douala. I was exploring the building, trying to find out where everything was. I noticed a ladder going up into the attic and climbed up the ladder to see what was up there. The building was an 'L' shape. We were at the bottom part of the L and the leg up had several apartments that Cameroonian citizens lived in. This attic was open over both areas. I was appalled at the security risk and wondered why it had been allowed all that time. So, I immediately went in to the Department recommending that we take over the other wing or move. USIA had an office downtown and coincidentally, they were looking to move at that time. So, we got them to agree to move in and got the tenants out. We remodeled it the way USIA wanted it. As we did not have a good motor pool or parking area, we took advantage of the remodeling and got walls put up for that. So, that was a nice challenge.

*Q: What sort of a government did the Cameroons have when you were there?*

CLARK-BOURNE: Well, as in Guinea, a civilian government, but sort of what we would call "dictatorial," not absolutely open. We were so involved in working with all of the shipments that came in and the business scene that I did not get too much involved with political things.

Also, the Ambassador, Myles Frechette, was not too cooperative when it came to reporting. For instance, when I had been in the Office of Fisheries Affairs, I had worked very closely with people in NOA and NMFS. One of the guys over there had said, "By the way, when you go to Cameroon, we would very much like a report on their port and fishing activities. Could you do that for us?" I said, "Sure, let me get a chance to get settled in." Well, I did, and the Ambassador reprimanded me for sending in the report.

*Q: He was who?*

CLARK-BOURNE: He was the Ambassador in Yaounde. He said, "You should have asked the Economic Officer to do that." Well, I had been told the Consulate General had a certain amount of leeway in reporting.

*Q: Of course it does.*

CLARK-BOURNE: And I sent copies of everything to him. In this instance, he sent a cable to the Department telling them that he was withdrawing that report. Of course, Commerce already had it and I got a nice cable from them thanking me so much.

*Q: Were there problems of corruption and theft and all that in the port? One hears that sometimes getting things into ports of some countries are quite difficult. Here you had quite a volume of things coming in.*

CLARK-BOURNE: We had a lot of things coming in and we never had any problems. That doesn't mean that there might not have been problems. Maybe they respected embassies.

The very first week I was in Cameroon, I had an interesting experience. I received a cable saying that a representative from the Smithsonian was coming in with a large shipment of antiquities from one of the kingdoms up in the Northwestern part of Cameroon, which the Smithsonian had borrowed for an exhibit that had been shown around the States. In fact, I had stopped in New York City and had seen the exhibit on my way to Cameroon. I was asked to make arrangements for her to get everything returned. Well, this was quite a challenge. We, of course, had to get trucks. There was a lot of stuff. There were barely one-lane dirt roads in some places. I'll never forget the first night when we stopped to stay overnight. I had to rent a room just for the antiquities, because she would not leave them outside. She was too afraid something would happen to them. We got them up in the mountains to their owners, who were very kind to us. It was good for me because I got to see some of Cameroon before I got stuck in my routine in Douala. It was an interesting time.

*Q: You left in '87?*

CLARK-BOURNE: That's right.

**EDWARD BRYNN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Yaoundé (1987-1989)**

*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: Well, then '87. Whither?*

BRYNN: To Cameroon. I had not given too much thought about where to go after the Comoros, but Jane and I wanted to stay out of Washington. I cannot remember being involved in the assignment process until one of the efforts by Washington to get in touch by phone actually succeeded. Would I go as DCM to Yaounde? Jane and I were both quite happy to go there. I had not met the newly appointed ambassador Mark Edelmar before I arrived in Yaounde, in August of 1987. I had arrived in June. He had been there six weeks before I came, and by the time I arrived it was already apparent that he was concerned about several aspects of this whole diplomatic adventure. First of all, his wife Nancy, a very elegant woman, was very, very disappointed. She, I think, had come out of Washington on the strength of an assumption that this was a fairly grand life with lots of support, and she found Yaounde was a much more difficult post that she had anticipated.

*Q: Had they been in the Foreign Service?*

BRYNN: No. Mark had been the deputy administrator in AID. He was a political appointee. He came out of Missouri and had been the budget guy in the state government in Missouri under then Governor Christopher Bond.

*Q: Well, it's pretty rough. This is not a normal place where you put a political appointee; put him into a small European or Caribbean country.*

BRYNN: Yes. And he succeeded Miles Frechette, who was a man of considerable powers.

*Q: I'm interviewing him now.*

BRYNN: Oh, you are. He ran a very highly geared shop, I think that Mark simply was overwhelmed by the challenges posed by Yaounde and, I think, terribly distracted by his wife's unhappiness. I'll share a story because it's true. I don't mean it to reflect badly on Mark. Jane and I arrived, I think, on a Friday evening, and they were very nice. They were at the airport to meet us in Yaounde, a gracious gesture. Mark said, "We'll get together on Monday morning. I'd like to find out what our relationship should be." And I said, "Well, that's what I would like to do, too." I said, "You don't want to do it over the weekend?" He said, "No, my wife and I like to be left absolutely alone from Friday afternoon till Monday morning. If you have to evacuate the post or something, include us, but otherwise..." I said, "Fine." So I went in on Monday morning and I went into his office. I had gone in over the weekend just to see what the physical premises looked like and whatnot. I sat down with him, and he said, "Ed, I don't know you personally, obviously. This is the first time we've ever had a chat. But you have a good reputation in Washington and I think we're going to get along fine." He said, "I've been here six weeks, and I'll tell you I don't have a very clear idea of what I'm supposed to do." I said, "Well, I would say there are four areas that an ambassador should be focused on. One is representation, hosting events that will help Americans and Cameroonians get together." He said, "My wife doesn't like to do that type of thing very much. Would you be willing to take on a major responsibility there?" I said, "Sure, we'll be glad to do that." I said, "The second one is traveling around the country and showing the flag and visiting projects." He said, "I get air sick, sea sick and car sick. I can't do that very often-." I said, "Okay, then I'll take care of that." I said, "The third area is to

be involved in management of the post,” and he said, “From what I can see, the State Department is so extraordinarily badly managed that I really don’t want to have much to do with that. And anyway, I know that that’s a DCM’s responsibility.” I said, “Fine.” And finally I said, “Well, sir, there’s the reporting requirement. Get an overarching sense of what our relationships are in Cameroon and what our policies and objectives are and inform Washington.” And he looked at me - he had glasses that sort of magnified his eyes - and he said, “I hate to write.” So that was it.

*Q: I assume you went home to your wife and said, “Look, you’ve got a job.”*

BRYNN: Well, as a matter of fact, Jane soon had a job. After a very short stint in Yaounde she realized that if she did not work she would find herself spending a great deal of time at the Residence. When she was asked to be associate director for Peace Corps she accepted immediately. So we ended up having a very, very full schedule.

So at the end of my conversation with Mark, I said, “Well, sir, what do we do?” He said, “You’re very much in charge. All I ask is at the end of the day you let me know on a sheet of paper what decisions you’ve made. I may disagree with them, but I will never undercut you,” and he was absolutely true to his word. In some respects, it turned out to be a very fulfilling assignment.

*Q: Let’s see. Just to get the dates, you were there from ‘87 to...?*

BRYNN: To ‘89, August ‘87 to July ‘89.

*Q: Was he there the whole time?*

BRYNN: No, that’s the other story. I used to sit down with him every Monday morning. Obviously by the beginning of ‘89, January ‘89, he was very concerned about his wife’s unhappiness. They, in fact, had been taking longer and longer breaks, every three months going back to the States for a month. When I saw him on this particular morning - it was in February - I said, “Sir, you look very, very distressed,” and he was; he was really close to tears. He said, “We’ve decided over the weekend that we can’t stay for a full tour.” I said, “Well, by this summer you will have been here two years, and that’s not extraordinarily irregular if you decide you have to leave.” He said, “I’m not communicating correctly. I promised my wife that we would be out of here in three weeks.” And we met the deadline; we got them out in 18 days. We got Washington to agree, and we got the Cameroonian President to give him a medal. We wrapped up everything. They left at in the middle of February.

*Q: Before we go to talking about the Cameroons, we might as well finish this. What was he doing?*

BRYNN: He was religious about reading everything that was put on his desk, and we kept his desk full. He got his wife involved in an esoteric project to catalog and preserve a number of artifacts, statues and masks and things like that, that had been collected by a Benedictine monastery outside Yaounde. But that’s it; that’s about all.

*Q: I thought he’d go out of his mind with boredom.*

BRYNN: Well, he's a great reader. He's a very intelligent guy. I think probably, if he hadn't made the decision to leave when he did, he probably would have gone downhill pretty fast. But he was certainly in no sense ever an embarrassment to the community; he just wasn't deeply engaged.

*Q: There is a difference between a DCM going to a reception or something and an ambassador. This can send signals. How did this work?*

BRYNN: We were mildly successful in making sure that the ambassador went to some of the top things, made sure he did some of the National Day events, and to see President Paul Biya from time to time. I think we met the minimum there. I thought it was a little bit more painful that he was not more accommodating in receiving, in doing the entertaining. On the other hand, I think the Cameroonians accepted that this was the way things were and, after the initial shock of it all, accommodated themselves to the fact that this was the way we were going to run things.

*Q: The Cameroons: what was the status there in the late '80s, economy, political?*

BRYNN: It's an extraordinary country, partly because it is many countries in one. The small Anglophone community that had joined the French mandate in 1962 was sullen and upset that they had in fact been hived off of Nigeria and attached to Cameroon. Although the constitution stated that this was a bilingual republic and a federated state, it had in fact under Paul Biya become a unitary state and very much in the Francophone mode. So there was a constant sense of quiet alienation among the Anglophones in the western part of Cameroon, and we had to be very careful that we did not, because of our linguistic relationship, appear to the government to be favoring the Anglophone part. I was very strongly insistent that people that be sent out from Washington to be on our staff were very comfortable in French, and that worked pretty well. We were very concerned about corruption in Cameroon. It was big-time. President Biya had, I think, disappointed the expectations of a vast number of people in Cameroon, especially in the western and business-oriented communities. They had thought that, after the regime of Hito at the beginning of the era of independence, Paul Biya, who came out of a seminary environment and was regarded as sort of a model of rectitude, would put Cameroon with all of its natural resources on a fast track direction towards economic development. That did not happen, and this was a sad development in a country so well endowed as Cameroon. People were not desperately poor - I don't mean to say that - but the population was small, relatively small, very much able to be accommodated to the resource base, and the country simply was distracted by corruption. Rather than broadbased development we had grandiose projects, a couple big roads, palaces here and there, villas in the countryside. It was much more distressing in some respects than Mauritania or the Comoros where the resource base was so limited. But the Cameroonians that we got to know were elegant, worldly wise, spent a lot of time traveling around the world, and obviously in their own context lived the good life. We had an overly large AID program there, I thought, which we finally were able to contract a bit. By chance the AID director was the same Ronald Levin who had run so autonomous an agenda in Mali some years before. He was a brilliant guy but we were into projects that were way beyond what was appropriate for our mission there.

We had an excellent Peace Corps program, one of the very best Peace Corps programs I've ever seen, and we had a large number of American missionaries, especially Protestant missionaries, who were engaged in Cameroon, most of them, I thought, on the social development side. Some of them, in addition, were considerable scholars. In Yaounde the missionaries were running a joint program to capture as many of Cameroon's 260 languages as possible by translating the Bible before these exotic languages faded away into those languages, I suppose as an academic exercise in addition to God's will. It was really quite fascinating.

*Q: I would think, with this overwhelming fog of corruption, you would not be in a position of encouraging investment there.*

BRYNN: We were favored by almost weekly visits by American corporations, because the landscape looked so promising for investment! Everything from oil offshore to rubber and banana plantations. Unfortunately we had to be fairly discouraging. I think the one area that we ran a successful investment initiative had to do with Dole, the pineapple people, who did establish some banana plantations along the coast. Other than that, although there was on paper what looked like extraordinary promise for American investment, not much materialized.

*Q: What was the government like?*

BRYNN: Our task on any given day, to see if we could find out what on any given day was the relationship between the French and the Cameroonians. Cameroon was a hot-ticket item for the French. They had enormous economic interests there and were running a closed shop they did not want the United States to be too deeply involved, and frankly they were quite successful in this. A lot of Cameroonian ministers and French bigwigs were running back and forth between Yaounde and Paris.

*Q: This was a Mitterrand government.*

BRYNN: That's correct.

*Q: He was sort of Mr. Africa in the government with a real taint of corruption, diamonds, and also political support. Money was going into the socialist regime, wasn't it?*

BRYNN: That's correct, and Paul Biya was a very active - probably still is - supplier of financial assistance to certain circles in France. Cameroon was a focal point for French attention. You had Centre Afrique, Central African Republic, to the east, which was always a pot boiler. You had Chad bordering on northern Cameroon, always in semi-chaos. In almost any direction there were adventures going on, and, of course, the Nigerians were never quite sure that the French were not again interested in a Biafra type of situation along the western frontier. I don't think we ever penetrated that veil. We thought we had from time to time some spectacular insights into the relationship between France and Cameroon, but I think at the end of the day we picked up some morsels and that's about all.

*Q: How about dealing with the French embassy? Did they sort of keep you off to one side?*

BRYNN: No. In fact, I think one of the most successful points of contact that I had was with my counterpart at the French embassy. Their DCM and his wife and my wife and I became quite close personal friends. Michel van der Porter, came from French Flanders right up on the Belgian border. They were bridge enthusiasts, as we were more in those days than these days, and he was very forthcoming in giving me a signal if something was coming down the road which might pose a problem for the American community or safety measures or reports of insurgency in parts of the north. He never touched on the direct central relationship between Cameroon and Paris, but for things that were of concern to our community he was very good.

*Q: Speaking of the French connection, was Mitterrand's son down there a lot or not? He has run into a lot of trouble recently because of his dealings with Africa.*

BRYNN: He was there at least a couple of times, perhaps more frequently.

*Q: How about our embassy in Paris? Were they interested in this French connection?*

BRYNN: Not particularly, no. I don't recall that that we were pressed too actively. Our embassy's interest from the Paris perspective vis-à-vis Cameroon was nothing compared to the interest in Burkina Faso when I was there later on.

*Q: Were the Toyota wars going on in Chad at that time between Libya and...?*

BRYNN: Yes, they were. I made a number of trips to the north. In fact, I made a number of trips to N'Djamena, partly because I enjoyed the north and partly because we were trying to get a sense of what was happening in the part of Chad that was outside the confrontation with the Libyans. Chad Utile, the southern part, was coming into focus because American oil corporations were beginning to realize that there were significant oil reserves in southern Chad, and this would require pipeline development. I got to know a lot about Chad.

*Q: What was the American community like in Cameroon?*

BRYNN: Large and fractious and multifaceted. Cameroon is a country that attracted a different type of Americans than one found in Burkina Faso or Mauritania. A lot of Americans came to Cameroon thinking that it was sort of like an American state with all the amenities and it would be a fairly soft life. They were quite terribly disappointed when they got to Cameroon to find that life could be tough with long periods without electricity, trouble with infectious diseases and very serious problems with malaria. Life was tougher in Cameroon than a lot of Americans had expected, and I think that this hit the morale button for Americans pretty severely. A lot of missionaries found that it was too tough for them, and I think a number of official Americans, especially in the AID community, felt the same way.

*Q: Did you have a problem having this - I don't know how to put this - distant ambassador, aloof a bit, any a disengaged ambassador? It must have made it difficult for you dealing with sort of the American community and others, because there are certain things. People come up and say, "I want to see the ambassador," or this or that.*

BRYNN: Well, it was. In defense of Mark, I'll say that on a personal basis he was polite and anything except dictatorial. He just wasn't there. 'Disengaged' is the right word, not 'aloof'; 'disengaged' is probably exactly the right word to put it. I found sort of in a country team situation, when you got all the AID people together and what not, out of all the people in our official community, if you're looking at your personal rank schedule, I was number seven on the totem pole, and there were people in the AID mission that found it at the beginning somewhat difficult to have somebody who was really junior to them in rank and length of experience to be their boss. Well, I was the boss, because there was no other boss there to be. I had a real tangle with a couple of them, but for the most part I think things went along pretty well. I was never satisfied that morale was as good in Cameroon as it was at other embassies where I was able to play a role.

*Q: With AID what were they doing? If they have all this rank, was it just because somebody was building an empire?*

BRYNN: Yes, I think so. Of course, I'm sure there will be other people who are in this who will talk about Ron Levin. He certainly cast an extraordinary shadow across the African landscape and elsewhere as well. He ran some good programs. We had a good agricultural training program in Cameroon. But we sent extraordinary numbers of Cameroons to the United States and to land grant schools, and many of them remained in the U.S. We advertised that we were helping Cameroon reform their financial structure so there would be greater accountability. There was no will on the part of the Cameroonians to have any of these things succeed, and my arguments with Ron were that we were in effect abetting the corruption posture of the Cameroonian government by offering large levels of assistance that would be vulnerable to misappropriation.

*Q: What about the French? They have a very active aid program. This must have been messing up their rice bowl a bit.*

BRYNN: Well, we messed it up less than we might have, because the French were fully aware and probably complicit in knowing that Paul Biya and the ministers were not going to take too seriously the American efforts to reform the government or bring a sense of accountability. The one area that I think the French were most concerned about us was our AID profile in the Anglophone part, where we had a natural advantage because we had many Cameroonians from the area west of Douala went to the United States to school and did bring back some accounting and agricultural practices that were really advanced. That part of Cameroon wanted to stay out of the clutches of Paul Biya and his circle of corrupt friends. I think we ran some effective programs over there, and the French were moderately concerned that we might encourage separatist tendencies.

*Q: Were the Libyans messing around there?*

BRYNN: I don't recall that that was much of a factor, probably because Cameroon had established ties with Israel and the Israelis ran a security system for President Biya and the country. Libyans were well monitored.



*Q: Were you getting any reflections from the Department of State about your disengaged ambassador?*

BRYNN: Yes, there was some concern, not so much that we had an underperforming ambassador but concern that too much energy had to be devoted to him at the expense of other initiatives. I think that that's one reason that when he indicated that he wanted to leave in very short order that the Department really mobilized itself and got him out.

*Q: Did you find within your staff that you had a problem? You were supposed to be loyal to your ambassador, but you've got this problem. Somebody who has the position of ambassador, if they've got a problem or something, okay, the DCM may sub, but at a certain point you want to appeal to the higher authorities. This must have cause problems for you.*

BRYNN: Well, I was fortunate that I really had an extraordinary staff. In fact, key members of the staff in Cameroon have remained among my closest personal friends in the Foreign Service. It is very interesting that, when I was ambassador in Burkina Faso later on, I had three of those people from that staff came to Ouagadougou. I think, outside the AID contingent, that problem about appealing to a higher authority never came up.

*Q: Everybody understood the situation.*

BRYNN: Yes, and in a sense AID took care of its own problem in this area, because Ron Levin was so elevated in his own pretensions that he would not stoop to go to the ambassador.

*Q: I take it that he quickly sized up and realized he was off on his own almost.*

BRYNN: He was very much on his own, and that's an area that in my tenure I can say we just never really got under control.

*Q: Well, you couldn't. In something like that, it takes the weight of the ambassador with so-called Presidential support and all to control somebody, and a DCM can't do that. It's just beyond one.*

BRYNN: Yes, in that area professionally it was difficult, but I must say I had really handsome support from the rest of the community. I remember after one very confrontational meeting with Ron, I recalled Churchill's phrase about Stafford Cripps, I guess, who had his own highfalutin image of himself; I think Churchill said of him, "There but for the grace of God goes God."

*Q: Well, then you left there in '89.*

BRYNN: '89, July of '89.

**TIBOR PETER NAGY, JR.**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**

### Yaoundé (1990-1993)

*Ambassador Nagy was born in Hungary and came to the United States as Political Refugee in 1957, settling in the Washington, D.C. area. After graduating from Texas Tech University, he entered the Foreign Service in 1978. During his career he served in Lusaka, Victoria (Seychelles), Addis Ababa, Lomé, Yaoundé and Lagos, as well as in the State Department in Washington.. From 1996 to 1999 he served as US Ambassador to Guinea-Conakry and to Ethiopia from 1999 to 2002. Ambassador Nagy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.*

NAGY: I did a direct transfer from Lomé to Cameroon. We got on the plane at Lomé one night I think shortly after the, the July 4<sup>th</sup> festivities, stayed around to help that. And I remember Pickering was on the plane with us because he was also transiting, and we got off the plane in Douala and so -- I guess I started Friday in Lomé and finished the Friday at my new posting in Cameroon.

*Q: The capital of Cameroon is?*

NAGY: Yaoundé.

*Q: Ah-huh.*

NAGY: We had a -- we had a small -- it wasn't a consulate office, it was a liaison office in Douala basically to serve some of the interior posts in Africa, which received their -- their shipments through the port of Douala. So we had a principle officer and I think a public affairs officer there and one reporting officer. But yeah, Yaoundé was an interior city and it was a much -- it was a much bigger embassy than what we had had in Togo.

*Q: Now who was the ambassador?*

NAGY: I was coming in as deputy to the very distinguished and honorable Frances Cook.

*Q: Oh-ho. How did that work?*

NAGY: It worked great.

*Q: Because Frances Cook has got a --*

NAGY: Pardon me?

*Q: Frances cook has got a mixed reputation.*

NAGY: Well, she was -- Frances was extremely intelligent, extremely energetic, extremely dynamic, and *extremely* demanding. She had very, very high standards and did not -- absolutely did not suffer incompetence or mediocrity or fools. She had 100 good ideas every day and as her deputy I had to figure out which of those one or two were realistic.

*Q: OK, let's talk about the Cameroons first. You were there from 1990 to when?*

NAGY: I was there from 1990 to 1993 and I served two ambassadors, Frances and Harriet Isom.

*Q: All right. Well, let's talk -- before we move to the embassy operations, what was the situation in the Cameroons when you arrived?*

NAGY: Cameroon of course had been a German colony and then after World War I it was divided between Britain and France. The majority part was taken by France with Western Cameroon remaining Anglophone. They tried a federation first, but then they went to unitary states where the, the Francophones definitely were the dominant force. So the Anglophones felt themselves besieged and wronged. The president of Cameroon had been in government a long time. He had been vice president to Ahidjo, the first president. When the first president died Paul Biya took over as president. And when I arrived there it was a uniparty authoritarian government. During my time there they did open it up to other political parties and I went through an extremely messy election with lots and lots of violence and then a six-month period of "Villes Mortes" (ghost towns), or what the opposition called the "Ghost Town Campaign," where they literally tried to shut down the urban areas of the country. Extremely, extremely tight, tense, and troubled three years.

*Q: OK, well before we get to all that, when you got there -- let's talk a bit about the embassy and what were the American interests in the Cameroons at the time?*

NAGY: American interests were fairly limited. We had a U.S. -- a subsidiary of petroleum companies through Shell called Pecten that was pumping oil offshore from Douala. Aside from that, Cameroon was a fairly large country in Central Africa, strategically placed. Aside from that, it was mainly good governance, democratization, and development.

*Q: Well, now had the Soviets or the Libyans been messing around in the country before?*

NAGY: No, not at all. Cameroon had been very, very closely aligned with France. It was one of their client states. It was also a listening post on Chad because when Chad would go through periodic conniptions we had to go and help evacuate folks out of there to Cameroon.

*Q: OK, well what was the French presence like when you were there?*

NAGY: The French presence was basically very influential on the commercial side and the president, Paul Biya, was very closely tied to the French for his political support. Because the opposition was Anglophones mostly, or lead by the Anglophones, whereas the French were apoplectic over the thought of, you know, English gaining a foothold somewhere else. So one of their reasons for supporting Paul Biya was to keep the Anglophones at bay.

*Q: OK, well you're an Anglophoner.*

NAGY: Yeah.

*Q: First place, did the British play any role there?*

NAGY: Yeah, as a matter fact they did. I mean the active embassies were the French, the British, because it had been -- a part of it had been a former British colony, and then of course we, the Americans. The Western Cameroonians had very close ties to Britain. And so they were there. As a matter fact, I think either shortly before I got there or shortly after I left Prince Charles made a visit to the country.

*Q: Well, now how did we play the game with -- say with the French Embassy and the British Embassy? Was that a problem?*

NAGY: It was a huge problem with the French because the French were quite happy with the autocratic regime. They were quite happy that the regime stole the election in I believe 1991, whereas our ambassador -- Frances Cook -- was extremely, extremely vociferous in supporting the opposition and supporting the forces for liberalization and good governance and local NGOs. We brought in NDI (National Democratic Institute) before the election. I mean Frances Cook came close to being PNGed (persona non grata) out of the country.

*Q: Well, I interviewed her about -- haven't got her to clear her interview yet, but she talks about getting involved with the women's movement.*

NAGY: Oh absolutely, yeah. Yeah, there was a good characterization -- one of the oppositions, they did a caricature cartoon of, of all of the opponents of the regime in a parade. And out in front is Frances Cook --

*Q: Well --*

NAGY: -- leading everybody.

*Q: Yeah. Well, did you find yourself in the almost a traditional role of DCM, of trying as well as you could to telling Frances cool it or not, or what?*

NAGY: Not really because I was, I was kind of whipped or very much in spirit. My -- my biggest role was to try to make things practical and pragmatic and, and to keep the morale up because the staff did feel under pressure. They felt like maybe there were too many demands put on there for time and effort. So it was -- I did have -- I had a large internal challenge when Frances was out of the country. And she was called off at a very critical time to work on a promotion board and I served as chargé then. So to -- also because -- some of the government people refused to speak to her. They would speak to me. Which made it very awkward because of course my loyalty was to my ambassador and, you know, to her program. But at the same time, if a high-ranking government person wants to speak to me I can't very well shut him up. What I did of course always was if I spoke to anybody I would let Frances know who I spoke to and what was said.

*Q: Well, was she you might say aware of the situation and accept it and not thinking that you were trying to usurp something?*

NAGY: Absolutely. Yeah, she was -- she was aware of the situation. At no point was there -- we were always a team, we were always partners. We always presented a unified front. So no, there was absolutely no fracture between us. But the Cameroonian Government -- I mean I remember when, when she left and I was chargé in between Frances and Harriet. You know, I think the government organized a dinner for me like, two days after she left. So.

*Q: Well, so I mean during this, she was there and you were both there during this messy election, you say.*

NAGY: Yes, very, yeah.

*Q: Could you sort of describe it?*

NAGY: Well, basically shortly after I arrived there the president was pressured into allowing opening up the structure to multi-parties. And immediately, all the opposition coalesced around a party out of the Anglophone part of Cameroon led by a, a charismatic, dynamic English-speaker, John Fru Ndi, and basically you had the president and his parties, you had John Fru Ndi, his party was I think the social democratic front. Then you had a smaller opposition party out of the north. Cameroon is not just two parts, it's three parts because there's also northern Islamic part, which although they're Francophone, they are -- they definitely have their own characters as an Islamic -- kind of like Northern Nigeria. And during the election -- I observed the election. It was obvious to anyone who was there that the vote was overwhelmingly for the opposition. But when the official figures were announced the president won by like a .2% or something like. So -- and I saw the voting take place in army bases, for example, and saw the soldiers voting massively for the opposition. So it was patent that the government had stolen the election. And the French maintained support for the government. We were very ambivalent. You know, we were not going to say that the government is illegitimate, but we -- we basically did not say anything and at that point the government considered us very hostile and they came quite close to kicking Ambassador Cook out of the country.

*Q: Well, was there any debate within the embassy or with the desk or with Washington about saying this is an illegitimate election because --*

NAGY: NDI -- NDI published a report because they were --

*Q: NDI is?*

NAGY: National Democratic Institute.

*Q: NDI, ah.*

NAGY: NDI published a report on the elections and basically said that the -- that the outcome was questionable. So they said -- they said very clearly that it was an illegitimate election. And

of course the Cameroonian Government, as so many African governments, they don't distinguish between somebody like NDI and the official U.S. Government.

*Q: Oh yeah.*

NAGY: So basically the embassy was -- the entire embassy was persona non grata for a period of time, especially as violence erupted around the opposition parts of the country and the government tried to restore order. They tried marshal law in places. It was an extremely dangerous situation.

*Q: Well, I mean were you seeing the country on the brink of a civil war?*

NAGY: It didn't quite get to the civil war point, but it got to a major internal insurrection that the government was having all kinds of trouble keeping the lid on. And there were certain problems of the government, which were an open rebellion. But like I said, 80% of the population was Francophone, 20% was Anglophone. So, the Francophone areas were fairly restive, the Anglophone areas were in an open rebellion, and the large urban cities were again a very strong opposition stronghold, so they were extremely tense.

*Q: Well, how did that reflect on the operation of the embassy?*

NAGY: It was very difficult. It was very difficult. It was difficult getting the kids to school, it was difficult making everyday purchases. We did not, however, go to a draw down. We came close to it a couple times, but the trip wires were never crossed. You know, the airports remained open. But there were some very, very scary weeks.

*Q: Well now, did the French have troops there?*

NAGY: No, the French did not. The closest place the French had troops were in Chad and in Gabon. And it would have been a disaster for the French to have brought in troops because then that would have tilted the country toward civil war.

*Q: Well, I mean were you in close consultation with the French over the situation?*

NAGY: I would not say consultation. We were very close consultation with the British, but the French -- we and the French had a -- a very chilly relationship because we saw them as supporting an illegitimate regime and they saw us as interfering in their backyard.

*Q: Well --*

NAGY: At that point for them their primary objective in Africa was stability.

*Q: Well, did the French have any real stake in the Cameroons? I mean, you know, sometimes they're --*

NAGY: Nah, they had fairly large businesses, per se. They had some of the big French trading houses, I think they had some French banks, and you know for them, for the French prestige is quite an important thing as well.

*Q: Were we able to sort of through our USAID operations make any inroads or at least let the Cameroonians know who we were and how we stood on things?*

NAGY: Oh, we were extremely popular, *extremely* popular. I mean Frances could have been elected president with a, you know, 80% vote. So yeah. The word was very much out about who were the champions of democracy. We had opposition, people coming to the embassy all the time, you know, in groups. We had demonstrations in front of the embassy in favor of us, what we were doing. Poor demonstrators got pepper sprayed by the, you know, by the, by the trucks. So yeah, as far as U.S. policy goes with the people at Cameroon we were -- we were up there.

*Q: Did we have a Peace Corps or anything like that?*

NAGY: We did have a Peace Corps. We never -- we did not have to pull them out. We had a fairly large AID program and we had a Peace Corps.

*Q: What was the AID program doing?*

NAGY: They were into helping Cameroon adjust with economic restructuring and also they were working very closely to develop a land-grant type university in Western Cameroon which was still in the French zone but close to the English zone.

*Q: Did the Cameroonians play any kind of role? I mean sometimes these smaller countries, they send their people to other African countries to serve as clerks or merchants or something like that. Sort of what roles did the Cameroons play in the West African complex?*

NAGY: They're -- they're not like Nigerian, you know, where they're ever present throughout other countries. They're much more in for -- I mean Cameroon itself has -- I think next to Chad they have the largest number of indigenous languages of any country. So it's a huge conglomeration of ethnic groups and of geographic areas. Cameroon has the largest mountain in West Africa, Mount Cameroon. It has the second wettest point on earth after Japan. Again, that's a point closest to the Cameroon/Nigeria border on the coast. And yet, the very northern part touches N'Djamena, Chad. So it's a huge variety, pygmies in the east and very poor internal road structure. So it's difficult to communicate between regions of the country. But on the other hand, it's quite developed in African terms. And it was very prosperous. I mean once upon a time, until oil prices crashed I think, Cameroon had the highest per capita consumption of Champagne in the world.

*Q: (laughs) Well, did you get out and travel much?*

NAGY: Yeah, absolutely. I did. I'm a firm believe in getting out of the capital city and traveling. I mean in Guinea I was known as the ambassador who traveled more than all the others put together.

*Q: Well, what about the north and the Muslims? In a way what type of Muslims were they and what sort of role were they playing?*

NAGY: Well, they were Sunni. The first president had been a Muslim president from the north. So during his tenure he focused infrastructure and development assistance to the north. We used to kid around, you know, there wasn't much of the north which was not paved. You had a string of cities in the north, which were quite prosperous. They were trader cities and Northern Cameroon has very close links to the Islamic sultan that's in Nigeria, Northern Nigeria. So again, north was not -- there was no fundamentalist Islam or any calling for Sharia or anything like that. It was fair -- it was peaceful, it was stable.

It was not as restive politically. So after the elections there were really no big problems in the north because the regime came to an understanding with the northern political leaders.

*Q: What about sort of political rights? I mean were there lot of political prisoners and that sort of thing?*

NAGY: Not a lot. There were some -- some political violence and there were a handful of very prominent political prisoners, whether they were under house arrest or in jail, as I said, the Cameroonian Government treated the Anglophone region as occupied territory, kind of like we did with the south after the Civil War.

*Q: Yeah.*

NAGY: And so a lot of the troops who were in Cameroon happened to be Francophones. So there was a huge amount of friction and tension between the local population and the, and the government authorities. I mean they would send prefects to the Anglophone provinces who couldn't even speak English. That did not go over very well. Also, they neglected the west tremendously with the road infrastructure. They did not want to put a road network in the west.

*Q: Well, were there oil companies sniffing around?*

NAGY: The oil companies were offshore. There was oil being pumped, but it was one of those areas where you had diminishing supply, and I'm not even sure if they're producing anymore.

*Q: In a way it was probably a blessing to a country.*

NAGY: Yeah, absolutely. And then the oil to the north was on the Chadian side. So the pipe line goes through Cameroon, but the actual oil deposits are in Chad.

*Q: Well, did any of the surrounding countries have an undue influence?*

NAGY: On the west I would say that Nigeria did. You know, Cameroon and Nigeria had the border disputes over the Bakassi Peninsula. The countries to the south, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea, going a little bit further, Gabon, those countries are in the same ethnic



group as the leadership in Cameroon. So when those guys got together they didn't speak to each other in French; they spoke to each other in I think it's in Nwando or Bulu, or, or, or one of their Central African languages.

*Q: Did you get any high level visits while you were there?*

NAGY: Yeah, we did. We had -- we had a number of CODELS (congressional delegations), including Senator Specter, who was a huge, you know, huge pain, having to deal with him. But he was the guy that wanted to have a squash court available wherever he went.

*Q: Oh, my God.*

NAGY: Yeah.

*Q: (laughs) How did you --*

NAGY: That was after Frances. That was with Harriet Isom.

*Q: How did you manage that or?*

NAGY: Well, one of the hotels had a squash court and, you know, he -- we actually, you know, we made -- but he wanted an air-conditioned squash court. That was his thing. He didn't want a non-air-conditioned -- of all the CODELs I've had, you know, I'd say he was the biggest pain.

*Q: Well, what was he after? Why was he there other than to play squash?*

NAGY: I have no idea and I don't think he did either. I think he and at that time Senator Pressler, the two of them decided to visit some African countries. You know, they went on a string of them. And then Newsweek I think issued a negative article about their visit so then they came back through it and insisted on trying to do something substantive.

*Q: Could you figure out anything from the context?*

NAGY: They -- we had to meet with a foreign minister and talk about the importance of human rights.

*Q: Oh God. Well, so many of these delegations that come through are really very good. I mean --*

NAGY: Oh, absolutely. In Ethiopia I saw that. You know, when I was administrative officer in the mid '80s in Ethiopia we had I think 130 or whatever members of Congress come through. And they were there genuinely to see what they could do to help. But then in some other countries I've had CODELs which were a total waste of time.

*Q: Yeah. Well, when Frances Cook was there, being of such an exacting nature, did you find yourself in the position of trying to soften her influence on, on disgruntled employees and all?*

NAGY: She was -- she was really good in that she, she gave me a, you know, great deal of independence in dealing with the internal staff. And, and for me to ask people to do the things went over I think a little bit better than the way she would ask people to do things.

*Q: Well, when she left about halfway through, was that?*

NAGY: It was almost -- I think I was with Frances almost two years. Then I was chargé for a while and then Harriet came for my last year. And again, Harriet was an absolute delight to work with. Harriet was also very hard charging, but she obviously came with instructions from Washington to soften the criticism of the government and to -- to try to be on more positive terms with them. I mean Frances, when she left she scorched the runways. You know, they were so happy to get her out of the country. So the Cameroonians were -- and I think Harriet was just as concerned about democracy and human rights and she came with a much softer tone so the government immediately embraced her as not being Frances.

*Q: Well, but all is said and done. These two ambassadors, did they get anything done? Human rights wise.*

NAGY: I think that -- well, what they got done was -- I think that the government's actions were definitely moderated towards democracy, multi party elections, than they would have been without the oversight from the United States. Certainly I think human rights violations were reduced because they knew we were watching. And even more importantly, we had instant credibility with almost 100% of the Cameroonian people. You know, they saw the United States as the great world wide champion of democracy and they intensely disliked the French.

*Q: How did they get this, understand this?*

NAGY: Well, from the huge publicity that went around with the things that Frances did and the things that Frances said. And Frances also toured all over the country. I mean she was a -- she was a rock star.

*Q: Well, did -- were we carrying sort of the human rights, democracy ball on our -- pretty much on our own in the Cameroons?*

NAGY: I'd say we and the Brits. But of course the Brits were not nearly as big a player as we are, just because, you know, they're a small island nation and we're a huge continental nation, so.

*Q: Well, were we able to use things like leader grants and all to further the cause?*

NAGY: We had a very active public diplomacy program. We -- we tried to help local NGOs. It was -- as a matter fact, the very first time during my career in Africa I heard of an African NGO that was supporting democracy was there. it was a group I think called GERDAS, which came out of Benin. You know Benin was the first African country that kind of did the post-communist world democratic transformation. So we thought it was a great idea to use other African NGOs to kind of spur things in Cameroon. But an awful lot happened during those three years. From my

point of view I saw a total transition from the United States winking at, at authoritarian dictatorships to the United States confronting them head on.

*Q: Was this the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union the reason or different personnel in Washington or what?*

NAGY: Oh no, it was obviously the demise of the Soviet Union. It was only after the demise of the Soviet Union -- I mean it was like the poor -- you know, the scene out of the Humphrey Bogart movie where the cop says, "What? Gambling? Here?"

*Q: Yeah.*

NAGY: That's literally what we were saying about human rights. "What? These people are committing human rights abuses? How can that be?"

But I'm sure, you know, African dictator after African dictator kind of looked in the mirror and said, "What's going on? Why did my best friend, the United States, all of a sudden say that I'm a human rights abuser?"

*Q: Well, did you have any dialogue with the French representation there?*

NAGY: I did. I did. I talked with their DCM and the guy was pretty well an arrogant twit, so I always did my best to have good, good cordiality with my French colleagues but in Cameroon it was extremely difficult because the guy was very eccentric and very arrogant.

*Q: Was there sort of an ex-patriot community there that was at all influential?*

NAGY: No. No. Not really. No. Not at all.

*Q: Well, then in '93 you left.*

**DEREK S. SINGER**  
**Chief of Governance Training and Education, USAID**  
**Yaoundé (1991-1994)**

*Derek Singer was born in New York City. He was raised in New York, France, and South Carolina. He attended New York University and SAIS. He then began work with CARE and was sent to Columbia and Bolivia. He was later recruited by ICA for assignment in Taiwan, Costa Rica, and Congo. He then joined the Peace Corps upon its creating and became the first Peace Corps director in Bolivia. He was then transferred to Indonesia and later Tunisia. He was then rehired by US AID and returned to a post in Zaire followed by another in Ecuador and later in Cameroon and Burundi. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

*Q: What was the situation in Cameroon when you were there?*

SINGER: Interesting country. Cameroon is one of three countries in the world where English and French are the legal, official languages. The Seychelles is one; Cameroon is one; and Canada is the third. So, it turns out that Cameroon used to be two Cameroons. There was a British Cameroon and then there was the larger, French-speaking Cameroon. French Cameroon was always about three times the size of the English-speaking area. When independence came in the early '60's, Cameroonians had a plebiscite and apparently they voted to become one country. I say "apparently" because a number of the English speakers there say, "No, it never happened and they had a bad count when the votes were counted". Most experts believe that indeed there may not have been the necessary number of "yes" voters to merge the two former colonies into one country. But it happened, and the English speakers have never been happy about it.

*Q: Were they essentially of the same ethnic background?*

SINGER: Some were, but many were not. The different tribal groups tended to be in the different linguistic regions, as they once were. So, the fact was they had a doubly difficult time trying to blend. Languages always were and still remain the big problem of Cameroon.

*Q: I was wondering why both places were called Cameroon.*

SINGER: They both were called Cameroon because the British and French took it away from Germany after World War I. The whole place used to be a German colony, one of two in Africa, Tanganyika (in East Africa) as it used to be called, was the other one. Cameroon was Germany's only foothold in West Africa. So, when the British and French took it away after World War I, they split it up between them. Each country took one piece of it and made it their own colony; the French area was bigger. That history always made it tough for the two regions to get back together again. This linguistic split was exacerbated by the tribal difficulties and the old political split between the two colonies. They simply, in large part, don't get along with each other and the English speakers, in particular, have always been a resentful minority and continuously have pushed for autonomy or independence. A higher percentage of them are certainly more articulate and politically active than the francophones in the north. Now, that is kind of the background. We lived, of course, in Yaounde. Yaounde, and the larger commercial center, Douala (which is the port city of Cameroon), are both francophone, both French speaking, although everywhere in the country (supposedly) both languages are legal.

In Cameroon, we got into politics more than perhaps anywhere else, because AID's interest in democracy, governance and human rights really evolved during my tour. There were some real problems: Paul Biya, the President, had been reelected, I guess, twice, and, again, each time the elections took place, there were serious questions raised, both domestically and internationally, about whether these were honest elections. There is a good case to be made that if they had been conducted under the most honest conditions, the President might well not have been reelected, even though he got in, probably fairly, the first time. Be that as it may, Cameroon was a (fairly) benevolent dictatorship; hence, it was a pretty difficult place to work. There is no doubt about it. It reminded me more of Zaire under President Mobutu than anywhere else I was stationed.

Now, as Chief of Governance Training and Education, which was the title of my job there, I did design and manage AID activities in the areas of democratization, governance, human rights, education, participant training, and PVOs - Private Voluntary Organization liaison. Most of my work days were spent trying to work with Cameroonian nongovernmental organizations to strengthen them, especially on the civil society side of democracy and governance activities, as well as bringing in a variety of U.S. consultants to Cameroon to work with a number of Cameroonian and regional Human Rights and Democracy and Governance groups. We held in-country seminars for them, selecting people and sending them overseas for training in the U.S., Europe, and, in one case, to Canada. Generally speaking, we were trying to build up the internal institutional capacities, once again, of these groups . . .

*Q: May I ask, what was AID's strategy at that time in dealing with Governance and Democracy?*

SINGER: Essentially, to finesse the arguments as much as we could with the government directly. We did have some arguments about that. We tried to finesse such issues as political pluralism and the need for a dynamic civil society with an unreceptive government. We also gave money, as you may recall, I have forgotten the name of the program, to the Embassy, basically, so that AID and the Embassy political officers, jointly, could administer grants which more directly benefited local democratic political groups. In other words, we didn't get into the political game directly, but we certainly encouraged broader democratic and participative movements and groups.

*Q: What do you mean by directly political? Supporting any particular party?*

SINGER: Supporting even a political party or a group of political parties or a number of principles, as the case may be, that political parties, themselves, were supporting. The best explanation could well be the way the Germans run their activities in this area. What Germany does is to work in developing countries through its own political parties backed up by the central government. The parliament (Bundestag) actually appropriates money to German political parties, which then set up shop in the developing countries of their choice in areas where Germany has a particular interest. Cameroon was one of these, an ex-German colony. For many years, the Germans have been quite active in Cameroon. Several German political parties offer political training courses and provide advisory and consulting services to their "adopted" local political parties. They actually pick out local political groups and leaders that they like and find compatible with their own philosophy and objectives. We don't do it quite that obviously, but in terms of these political grants that we jointly made with the political officers at the embassies, we were pretty close. What we did was to find respectable national and regional political organizations, particularly those oriented towards "good government" agendas, hopefully as close to League of Women Voters model as we could find. These were groups that were interested in assistance to strengthen their staffing and operations, setting up permanent political election monitoring units, techniques for fund-raising, lobbying and so forth. We would help strengthen them by giving them grants to do that kind of thing, training their people, bringing in consultants to give in-country advice, assistance, seminars, and so forth.

*Q: But this was not directly with the political parties?*

SINGER: Not with them directly, but sometimes with affiliated “good government” groups. We didn't work as the Germans do, directly with the political parties.

*Q: Any tendency on our part to take sides, to give any kind of preference?*

SINGER: In the sense of openness, in the sense of pluralism, in the sense of inclusiveness, we would tend to favor groups that favored such principles. That is exactly what we did.

*Q: What was the government's reaction to our doing this?*

SINGER: Well, we had a number of calls, as a matter of fact. We largely shunted those off to the Embassy to handle because, frankly, the embassy was taking the lead, and it was pushing us in this direction quite vigorously. I guess the hope being that this could influence, perhaps, a number of promising leaders, and there were a number of promising political alternative leaders, to President Biya. Perhaps, they wanted to encourage the opposition parties to come together, in some sort of a coalition, sort of a new umbrella party kind of grouping to challenge Biya's one-man rule system through and his personal political party. As I said, we got more political in this program in Cameroon than I have ever seen us do, and we encouraged other groups to get involved in this area than I have ever seen us do before. And we did not boycott the government in our D/G efforts. We tried especially hard to work with the Parliament, the legislature there. We planned to send a number of people, librarians and other specialists working on documentation, reporting, library storage, and what have you, from their Parliament to the United States with training grants, hoping that they would come back and reform the system and thus strengthen a very weak legislature. I left post before most actually went. I am not sure whether they all actually did, since the decision was made in 1993 to close down the mission (largely because of Biya's undemocratic tendencies and his unrealistic economic policies). We tried to work with the courts as well, in terms of court strengthening. Once again, the plan was to select middle-level staff, career court personnel (rather than political people) and send them for practical training to the U.S. So, there was a good deal of work in the Democracy and Governance field.

*Q: This is unusual for AID. These were the days when we were really getting involved in political interventions. How did you feel about it?*

SINGER: I felt ambivalent. I have used the same word before, but it is appropriate here. As you sort of hinted, up to the early '90's, the AID motto (with some Cold War-generated exceptions) was pretty much “Thou shalt not interfere in internal political affairs of the host country”. This was pretty much the received wisdom everywhere. But the fact of the matter was, I could see it, feel it, and experience it, and participate in the sea changes to that old philosophy that were then occurring. The jury is still out on the feasibility of this change, but I do think the time had certainly come when we should try.

*Q: Did you get any sense of impact or effect?*

SINGER: I got a sense, certainly, of beginning movement in a direction which, I thought if we followed through, could sometimes make a positive difference.

*Q: What is this direction you are talking about?*

SINGER: The direction basically being, I guess, that he who pays the piper does have a right at least, to call some of the tune. We were certainly paying the piper in Cameroon, up to the time the Administrator decided we should close down the mission shortly after I left. But, we were contributing substantially there, through our AID program, to the economic development of the country, and I do firmly believe that political development is fundamentally inseparable from economic. We cannot completely superimpose all our own democratic beliefs, processes and values on our recipients, but nor can we ignore or remain indifferent to whether we share at least the same basic values and beliefs about the role of the individual and the state in countries that we help. The more I realized got involved in this it, the more I became a believer in this.

*Q: Did you understand why we were in Cameroon ? We seemed to have been in and out over the years.*

SINGER: Well, I think there was a good case to be made that, especially, in the public health and family planning field, which was one of the least political, we had created an excellent record of accomplishment. I think it made good sense to try and build on that record and to expand this life-saving work. Public health is never out of date, despite the fact that it is one of the earliest areas that we got involved in in the development business. I think in Cameroon, as it turned out, health and family planning work was just extremely well received and very well reviewed in every evaluation that I saw. I think it would have made much better sense to keep our hand in there, even if political exigencies led the Administrator to close down the mission in Yaounde.

*Q: Any more specifics about the impact of the health, family planning program?*

SINGER: Just in terms of how the family planning people measure success, in terms of the people who accept or are “acceptors” of assistance, distribution of condoms and other birth control methods, the number of women, in particular, who would visit and participate in family planning, those kinds of measurements all seemed to be on the very high side, measured by the evaluations that occurred. The acceptance, in other words, was growing, and had been growing very fast and broadly throughout the country. So, those kinds of things, and in large part, I had friends who would insist the same was true for agriculture as well . . . those kinds of things in the agriculture and health fields perhaps should trump strictly political and economic performance criteria.

*Q: Anything stand out in your mind?*

SINGER: The word just came back to me. It is a rural town in central Cameroon where AID had a long-term involvement with an agricultural university. There, that University seemed to be doing a pretty good job of attracting and turning out agronomists and agriculture engineers, and planners and economists, as well, but especially, agronomists and engineers. I think that was one of our better involvements. We actually built that institution.

*Q: Were we still active in the medical school when we were there, public health program?*

SINGER: Yes, I think we were. The Ministry of Health ran the medical school. I supervised the HPN office for about the first year I was there. They didn't have a separate health office for a time; I don't know why. Later, it split off and became a separate office, when it grew very quickly. But, it was more on population, perhaps, than it was on traditional health, and inoculations. So, our work in that was good. The highlight of my time there, in Cameroon, was probably serving as an election observer for the Embassy. I was sort of borrowed by the Embassy to do this on two occasions; one was a Parliamentary election, and one was a Presidential election.

*Q: What did you do as an election observer?*

SINGER: Well, in one case, I went to an area in the far west of the country, and in the other, to an area far to the east. That was near the Central African Republic border, a very remote place. The latter was for Parliamentary or legislative elections, and the former was for Presidential elections. My job, literally, was going around to the polling places, observing, and then writing up reports on whether the elections were honest, free and fair.

*Q: How do you judge what is free and fair?*

SINGER: I guess, you see whether or not people have an opportunity to vote secretly, whether there is a secret ballot box, you see whether or not there is a voter registration system in place, checking off names, etc. - in other words, that they actually had applied some sort of objective criteria to decide who could vote. You talk to a sampling of people afterwards, and simply ask them "Were you allowed to vote freely and fairly, was any pressure put on you, was there any bribe offered to you?" - those kinds of things. I did that in both my observer assignments. In the far eastern area of the country, I almost got arrested for doing it. It was pretty close. They asked me to come down to the police station and explain what I was doing to the magistrate. Mine was the only strange face around town that particular day, because I was in a very remote kind of a place, indeed. But, there was a lot of electoral activity taking place. A couple of election rallies were being held which I attended, and followed a few small parades around town. Political parties other than the government's were active - something that was a good sign. As I said, the police, in plain clothes, came up to me at one of these places and asked me to go with them. I simply said I wouldn't do it because the election was supposed to be a free, fair, and open process, as advertised by the government, and I was just taking advantage of my presence in this area, freely observing and not doing anything else. I finally talked them out of picking me up. That was one interesting experience, but, serving as electoral observer, in both of these cases, for the Congressional or legislature, as well as Presidential election . . .

*Q: But, having observed these, was this something that was blessed by the government?*

SINGER: No, the government didn't like outside observers at all (particularly NDI, which had already knocked heads with the government over earlier elections.) On the other hand, once again, they weren't about to make a big thing by refusing to allow any foreign election observers, especially those already in country. Most likely, this was because there was already some fear



that AID and, perhaps, other western assistance organizations, were going to be closing down and pulling out of Cameroon. If it was only for that reason, they didn't want to rock the boat.

*Q: So, the mission pretty well closed shortly after you left?*

SINGER: It did, a few months after I left; maybe six months to close everything down, settle everything up, and what have you.

*Q: What was your reaction to that?*

SINGER: Well, it was a double blow for me. My reaction to having to retire at age 65, after I had returned to government service (following a lengthy absence) only 14 years before that - a return to foreign service work which I really loved - well, I thought (and still think) mandatory FS retirement for age is both unnecessary and unfair. At the same time, having a mission also closed down around me, as well, particularly during the last 10 months to a year that I was there, concentrating on those kinds of things, was also very discouraging. Perhaps the worst part was what happens to your local employees. Where do they go? Many of them had worked for years and years for us, and most of them were very loyal, wonderful people. There was nothing you could do to find jobs for them in a country where all jobs are excruciatingly scarce, even for trained and experienced professionals. So, I guess a few of them ended up with other international organizations, other embassies. Some were able to immigrate to the United States. There is a system whereby if you work 15 years, or something like that, I guess, or more, as a local employee for the U.S. government abroad, you have a right to preferential immigration status to the United States, if you get some endorsements, and so forth. I think a few of our FSN's benefitted from that rule.

*Q: What was your understanding of why we closed the mission?*

SINGER: Well, we were closing not only that mission, but others as well. Some people said that it was largely for political reasons, that we wanted to close down the places where, politically speaking, there seemed to be the least amount of receptivity and recognition and compatibility with the kind of political situation we were anxious to work create, and to ameliorate or improve, you know, work towards building up the democratic side. Some people have said that Brian Atwood was not very happy with Cameroon, in particular, since the NDI, which he used to head up, had been given a cold shoulder when they tried to conduct election work there. It was said the NDI people had been repulsed, and that he was particularly angry about that. Other people said that the shut-down was just a part of the general cutback that AID was doing in places where, in relative terms, it didn't seem enough economic progress had been made for the investment we had put in. Politically speaking, in the big picture of course, Cameroon is simply not as important as a Nigeria, a Kenya, or certainly as a South Africa would be considered.

*Q: Were you involved in the process of closing down?*

SINGER: Yes.

*Q: What did you have to do?*

SINGER: Well, we had to notify our many different partner organizations and grantees, of course, that we were leaving, and that their grants would be closed out. We had to see the extent to which any of them were adaptable and flexible enough so that we could actually complete grants earlier than we had planned to do. We had to be very concerned with participant trainees who were in long term training in the United States. We had some institutional grants, for example, to OIC, which is a Philadelphia-based, predominately black group, that works, as you probably know, in African countries on vocational training programs, principally. They had a large training school in Buea, which is part of English speaking southeastern Cameroon. This was under my office. We had to try to work with them. I spent a lot of time on that to try to sort of shut down our inflow of assistance to that as an institution; we were actually giving them a good deal of direct assistance there as an institutional grant, as well as training, consulting help, seminars, and so forth.

*Q: How did OIC work? How well was it doing?*

SINGER: I would give it a mixed review. The worst thing is when you get pretty good, and they did after a number of years; they got pretty good at graduating automobile mechanics and electricians and other skilled artisans, like carpenters, masons, building construction trade people, and plumbers, and so forth and so on. The problem is you get pretty good at that, and you really turn out people who are quite skilled, and even quite motivated at doing their jobs, and then you find you are in a country whose economy is totally in the doldrums. There isn't any work for your grads, especially in the English- speaking part of the country where most wanted to remain. Even if they were willing to move, their chances of finding a job in the French speaking three-quarters of the country were very poor. Why? Because the English speakers just didn't speak French if they could possibly help it, and most of them should not do so even if they were willing. Ironically, in their schools they were taught in English ( a right guaranteed to English-speaking Cameroonians when they merged with the francophones). The people who graduated as skilled crafts and trades people from this vocational school in Buea run under OIC auspices, well, they had a terrible time getting jobs. This situation really hurt the project. In fact, in my experience AID has never been very good at tackling this issue. From Taiwan all the way up through Cameroon, over the years that I worked for AID the agency it has never been very good at tackling this crucial problem of employment. Oh, fine, you give them training or education, or perhaps both, and then what happens? How much assistance can we, should we, are we able to give in terms of placement and finding decent jobs?

*Q: Do you think AID should be more active in that or should have been?*

SINGER: If we are going to get into those kinds of fields, yes, otherwise, we are just setting people up in too many cases, not all of them, mind you, I am not condemning the university, nor do I really have a good analysis, say, of the percentage of good and bad. There is enough bad, though, to say, yes, if we are going to get into this training business in any serious way, commit ourselves to it, and try to stake, to some degree, our reputation on our success of that field, I don't think we can escape the responsibility of at least working in the area of job placement.

*Q: Any case where you know that that happened?*

SINGER: No. I can't think of a case where I know that that has happened, except where there are enough significant American-generated activities, in certain cases, in certain countries, where the market is there. In other words, American industry or American business, in some cases, American commerce, has established itself, and yes, sure, they will take such people. We might help play a midwife's role, in terms of placing them, but that is the exception, rather than the rule.

**CHARLES H. TWINING**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea (1995-1998)**

*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 Charles H. Twining in 2004.*

*Q: And then whither?*

TWINING: Secretary Albright persuaded Senator Helms finally to lift this hold on me, Stapleton Roy (Indonesia), John Malott (Malaysia) and others who had been waiting in the wings to go out to posts. After several months on hold, attendance in the Ambassador's course, the government shutdown and a giant snowstorm, in January 1996, I went with my wife and son Steve to Yaounde, Cameroon.

I was accredited to Cameroon and Equatorial New Guinea. We might begin with Cameroon. I had done Cameroon from 1983 to 1985. I found the place changed in many ways in 1996. The people don't change. The people were still great people, and it was good to be back in Cameroon. But it was a changed place. Maybe what really did it was that in 1990 President Biya finally opened the doors to democracy in Cameroon. I reminded him that when he had visited Douala, Cameroon in 1983, just after coming to power, he said he was going to open the doors. It took him a while to do it but it finally happened.

With the movement to political pluralism in 1990, the heavy handed calm of a one-party state began to disappear as people clamored for freedom, organized political parties, and called for free and fair elections. The regime wasn't quite sure how to react.

*Q: The inquisitor just went and looked at the map to make sure where Cameroon was located. I had the African continent in mind, even the west coast.*

TWINING: You were almost there. In any case, it became a difficult time, as people were sometimes excessive in enjoying their right to democratic expression in a country with a regime which until then had been accustomed to operating a one-party state and calling the shots. This

was particularly challenging for our ambassador at the time, Frances Cook. Her successor, Harriet Isom, had a bit easier time, as Cameroonians adjusted to the new situation and started to calm down. That was after a disastrous election in 1992, which the U.S. said wasn't free and fair, however.

As a result of that election, the U.S. reacted by reducing its support to Cameroon. We eliminated the large AID mission. We halted military sales. We did a lot to show our displeasure to Cameroon. I can't believe that is the way to proceed if one wishes to really have an impact on the leadership. We only hurt the ordinary people, those who were benefiting from our support for Heifer Project International or AID funding to improve plant strains, and the like. It's not the president or the prime minister who feel our cuts. Anyway, we went through a tough time.

By the time I got out there, I was determined to keep Cameroon's evolution toward openness moving forward, to seek ways to strengthen this nascent democracy. At the same time, we also had to remember we had other interests in Cameroon, and keep a good balance in the relationship. That included reaching out to government officials, not just to hear what they had to say, but to be able to tell them, "Look, you need to do what is right, and we want to support you as you do that."

*Q: Would you describe the Embassy in Yaounde?*

TWINING: The Embassy was a medium-sized post. First of all, Cameroon was the hub country of former French Central Africa, and much involved, and revolved around, Cameroon, requiring heightened interaction on our parts. Secondly, our Embassies in the sub-region often needed services, e.g., personnel, budget, which were provided out of Embassy Yaounde, making it a regional embassy of sorts. It was no accident that we were on the receiving end of two evacuations from the Central African Republic and one from Congo-Kinshasa while I was in Yaounde. With Cameroon's stability and facilities, it was a natural place to receive evacuees, as the Embassy had done periodically from Chad in the past, as well.

Despite the loss of USAID, the Embassy had nevertheless well developed political, economic/commercial, administrative, and consular sections. A small but active Defense Attaché office was there to serve five countries in the region. The United States Information Service was active, due to Cameroon's numerous universities, press, and NGO's, all involving a large segment of educated people to whom it was important to relate. The Embassy was of sufficient size to require the basing of a detachment of Marines. With the unfortunate closure of ConGen Douala earlier, we found commercial, representational, and consular needs in that, the country's largest commercial center, such that we had to open shortly thereafter an "Embassy office" with an FSO in charge. Frequent visits by all of us in the Embassy relied upon that office for necessary support.

Critical to a post of this size is the Deputy Chief of Mission. The Ambassador is frequently the "outside" person, the one who appears in the press alongside high-level officials, for example. The DCM is the Ambassador's alter ego, replacing him in his absence, of course, but perhaps more importantly serving as the officer in charge of internal management. I was most fortunate to have an excellent DCM in Mark Boulware, a colleague from Ouagadougou who was a French

and Spanish speaker and an experienced administrative officer, exactly what was needed in Yaounde.

All personnel in the Embassy were also accredited to Equatorial Guinea. We had a middle grade, Spanish-speaking officer assigned to Yaounde just to follow events in EG and to make numerous visits to a country quickly becoming important to the U.S. due to the American discovery of oil. Our economic/commercial, security, administrative, and political officers all had to travel there. USIS Yaounde was required to be imaginative in developing programs to include Equatorial Guinea. Needless to say, that was one of those places where the Defense Attaché had to be involved, as well, both in terms of making contacts, arranging for a ship visit, and even supporting training of relatively untrained EG military personnel in areas such as civil-military relationships and human rights. The EG dimension was an important and time consuming part of the work of Embassy Yaounde, both in terms of personnel and resources.

*Q: Would you speak more about the atmosphere you encountered in Cameroon in 1996?*

All of the political problems in the early 1990s also resulted in a lot of the foreigners and foreign investments leaving Cameroon. Cameroon has been a center of foreign investment. It's a relatively rich country. There's lots of cocoa, coffee, timber, mineral resources, and a good educated population. It is a place where you could do business. When I was Consul General in Douala, we had an active American business club, for example, because there was considerable U.S. trade and investment. A lot of that dried up. U.S. banks left. It had become a different sort of scene.

*Q: What other countries were seeking to influence Cameroon?*

TWINING: The U.S., France, and Britain, along with the Dutch, the Germans, were the principal countries trying to weigh in as friends with Cameroon Government authorities and to be friends as well with opposition figures. We sought to encourage investment, rather than discourage investment, encourage strengthening the rule of law, and support human rights and basic freedoms. It was an exciting time as Cameroonians became more accustomed to the democratic process.

One of the things I tried to do was to follow the example of a predecessor from my earlier period in Cameroon, Ambassador Myles Frechette. He went periodically and sat down with the president, and they just chatted. President Biya would call him over to discuss an issue. It was good. I was determined to try to emulate Myles and develop similar ties with the president. I thought it important to try to provide him views that he might not hear from the "yes" men who surrounded him. I enjoyed having regular meetings with the president. It was just the two of us, just as you and I would be sitting here together, sitting alongside one another on the sofa. It wouldn't happen all that often, every two or three months, but it was a fairly rare event among the diplomatic corps. President Biya reminded me how much he had liked Ambassador Frechette from 12, 13 years earlier, particularly his manner of just wanting to talk.

There were some bad human rights problems when I was in Cameroon, as you find in many underdeveloped countries. For example, a number of people in the North West province tried to

demonstrate but were arrested and thrown into jail, without charges. I met with President Biya several times and said, "You have to give these people a trial. Don't just lock them up and leave it there." One of Cameroon's leading journalists, Pius Njawe was jailed on another occasion. He was an opposition journalist, whose paper had the widest readership in Cameroon, which was great. With democracy came freedom of the press, and there were more papers than I could keep up with. But to arrest the leading editor in the country because the government didn't like what he was saying, was hardly supportive of a democratic image.

I would say to the president, "Mr. President, by doing this, you're hurting Cameroon. The government is hurting itself, much more than you're hurting the editor who is locked up." He would say, "Oh, well, we have a system. He has to go on trial. We just can't release someone for nothing." I said, "I really think if you can find a way to do it, you should do it, because you're only hurting yourself." Indeed, three months after I left Cameroon, I received a message out in Hawaii on behalf of the president, saying, "This editor, Mr. Njawe, has been released. Tell Mr. Twining this is a present to him." That was satisfying.

*Q: That was very nice.*

TWINING: Cameroon was a country where one could usefully maintain a large number of contacts to help influence its evolution. It was important to talk to ministers, to opposition leaders like John Fru Ndi and Bello Bouba Maigari, to maintain a dialogue with the president and with people who played golf with the president, and with the indigenous business community and leaders in civil society. I tried especially to encourage, as did my Western colleagues, the development and strengthening of indigenous, non-government organizations. Women's groups, for example, and journalists organizations, and environmentalists. These are all elements that make up the fabric of democracy. We obtained money here and there to help support groups to do seminars, or women's education, or literacy training, or voter registration. This has lasting impact. Cameroon still has some way to go, it still has corruption, and it still has elections that don't always turn out to be completely great elections. That of 1997 was a mixed bag. It was good in some places, but not in other places. One of my people found ballot boxes full of ballots along a roadside, for instance. Yet, Cameroon has a vitality to it that is genuinely exciting.

One significant commercial development occurred while I was in Cameroon, where it wasn't always easy to encourage investment during the 1990s. Exxon had discovered oil in southeastern Chad. The only way to get that oil out for sale was to build a pipeline that came down through Cameroon to the ocean. Negotiations occurred during my watch to build the multi-million dollar pipeline, 700 kilometers in length, with World Bank support. The pipeline just started functioning some months ago, to the betterment of poor Chad, but also Cameroon, in both of which unique mechanisms were put into place to monitor the disbursement of revenues. Note that Cameroon has been producing oil for some time thanks to an American firm, Pecten, now a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell.

*Q: With these non-governmental organizations, I would think that... I don't know African society very well, but it sounds like it works well within the society. Village groups and other groups are used to coalescing this way, and finding agreement on issues.*

TWINING: I think it is very true. Those groups are used to forming, to do something for a village. Then, too you would have university groups that formed, so why not expand the concept? Get past ethnic boundaries, for example. You are really building a nation in the process. These organizations worked well. It took courage to organize, sometimes. Cameroonians organized a number of human rights NGOs, for example. One was way up in the northern part of Cameroon, in a very strictly Muslim area. I had to admire the courage of the people behind this human rights NGO because they didn't have foreigners up there to protect them. They really were on their own, in an environment that wasn't always as open to freedom of expression as you might wish. You had to say, "My hats off to you people. If you have problems, let us know. We'll try to weigh in with the government." They did sometimes, and we weighed in. It took action on the part of a lot of people to create these NGOs. They almost always had a positive effect, I would say.

*Q: Did you find support from NGO centers in the United States?*

TWINING: It would depend. In some cases, yes. In some cases, you could be instrumental in linking them up with a U.S. NGO. We certainly tried to do that, or they might be linked up with a European NGO, or they might be linked up with NGOs in other African countries, which to me would be very healthy, and the right direction to go. Obviously, if there was a U.S. link, it sometimes resulted in their getting a little money to help their effort. We tried to use our programs through the United States Information Service to send such people on international visitor grants to the U.S., NGO leaders, so they could meet some of their counterparts in the U.S. That was successful.

*Q: How about universities? Were they important? The intellectual class?*

TWINING: Yaounde alone has three major universities, and there are universities elsewhere. Douala, Buea on the side of Mt. Cameroon, Dschang. Cameroon has a university up in the north, in Garoua. Cameroon has a fairly well developed university system. It has never had enough resources to meet the needs. It provides people to fulfill government functions or enter business. You would see a rotation: the head of one of the universities might suddenly be the Minister of Higher Education, or work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or another university professor may become an assistant at the presidency, then return to university life. The system allowed intellectuals to have some input into national affairs, which was beneficial.

*Q: How about at this time, the influence of the French?*

TWINING: The French influence was clearly strong. The French influence is strong in any former colony of France. That's the way it is. The French still gave more aid than anybody else to former possessions. They deserved to have some influence. They had many nationals in Cameroon, working in forestry and elsewhere, or serving as aid workers. French influence was strong, and yet, I don't know whether it was the enlightened envoys the French sent or what; I never had problems with the French. We worked with the French embassy, with the French ambassador. We often worked together, for example on a human rights issue. One of us might

say, “Why don’t I go in and hit this person up today, and you go in and talk to that minister tomorrow?” We often cooperated together. I think it’s the way we should be working.

*Q: Where did Cameroon fit in the African Bureau’s interest?*

TWINING: Cameroon didn’t rank as high as I thought it should. With thirteen million people, it is not a big country, and yet in Central African terms, except for Congo-Kinshasa or Nigeria, it is probably the most important country. Cameroon has something like 174 languages, representing many ethnic groups, a huge mixture of people. Yet, if you are Assistant Secretary of State, or an Undersecretary of State, you focus on places where there are problems; you’re looking at Rwanda, Nigeria, or Sudan. With its relative calm, Cameroon is a place in their minds for an evacuation from elsewhere. “Well, we evacuated to Cameroon,” and evacuees would come into a five-star hotel. It’s a nice place to land, like an R&R center.

Cameroon, I think, was a bit taken for granted. Also, there was this legacy that they hadn’t handled their entry into democracy very well, so are they really a good guy? Yet, wasn’t it nice having Cameroon there when we needed it? As I noted, we received evacuees at least three different times while I was there. You never knew what was going to happen in Chad. Cameroon was kind of a mixed bag, insofar as Washington was concerned. Basically Washington didn’t give Cameroon very much thought. Cameroon fell under the Office of Central African Affairs and was handled by a mid-level desk officer who also covered Equatorial Guinea.

*Q: You mention receiving evacuees. I haven’t heard much about it recently, but I recall back in the bad old days, we were dumping people in Athens or somewhere else. There were a lot of complaints about nobody caring about them or the wives and children were sent to a place, and their husbands stayed on. It’s a different world, of course. Were you able to muster support, and deal with this then?*

TWINING: Evacuees would arrive tired and a little bewildered. Enterprising spouses from our mission did yeoman service in getting other spouses together to help families feel welcome. Your administrative and consular people provided fine support. I must admit that when you are chief of mission and you see your people taking that on, it is very satisfying. Your evacuations are never at 10:00 in the morning; we would sometimes be at the airport at 1:00 or 2:00 during the night, waiting for the plane to come in. When people were willing to give of themselves, I think it really made a nice impression on the evacuees. Then, I was told early on by my administrative officer that, as chief of mission, I had the right to authorize free phone calls. I authorized all the evacuees to call home at U.S. government expense. Now is that truly legal? Is that somewhere in the FAM? I haven’t a clue, but it certainly helped the morale of the evacuees.

*Q: It would just be an embassy cost.*

TWINING: It was. It was very good for their morale. We were able to put them in a five-star hotel, giving them some tender loving care. In fact, the evacuees who came from Kinshasa the day I left Yaounde in August 1998, all arrived on a Cameroon airlines plane. They attended my last big farewell party. You tried to make it as painless for them as possible. For some of them,



they just wanted to rest. They wanted good food and a nice bed to sleep in. Again, we could provide that in Cameroon.

*Q: Did Cameroon play any part in the West African peacekeeping force, or other things of this nature?*

TWINING: To be honest, Cameroon didn't do very much in that regard. When I was in Cambodia, Cameroon did volunteer some police to come and serve under the UN in Cambodia. For reasons I never quite understood, Cameroon didn't volunteer military peacekeeping units, though. Cameroon didn't play major roles in African organizations like the Organization of African Unity, or in regional organizations, even though Central African organizations were mostly headquartered in Cameroon. Cameroon didn't give them the attention or the boost that probably would have been useful.

It's funny; the flights to Paris are full, back and forth. Yet, when it comes to interest in other African countries, and playing the role that they could well play, they don't. For example, in peacekeeping, my God, I certainly encouraged them to do it. They just didn't step up to the plate. It's a pity. They were good about taking refugees. They had refugees from every African country in the region. They were very good at that, and respecting the rights of refugees. Yet, they didn't take that extra step that they could have taken on the inter-African side.

*Q: I take it that for sustenance, the league would head to Paris?*

TWINING: The Francophone Cameroonians were very much tied into French culture, French fashion and French food, and so forth. The Anglophones far less so, of course. Don't forget that modern Cameroon is an amalgamation of former British and French portions and they retain distinctive identities. Cameroon is a member of the Commonwealth.

*Q: They had a good soccer team not too long ago.*

TWINING: They've had good soccer teams for a very long time, not always well managed unfortunately, but an excellent soccer team, the Indomitable Lions. That was always one of the benefits of being in Cameroon, seeing very good soccer.

*Q: Coming from this hub of the universe, what did you do then, Charlie?*

TWINING: As I said, I was also accredited to Equatorial Guinea.

*Q: Oh, yes. Let's talk about that.*

TWINING: Equatorial Guinea. I mentioned that when I was in Douala, we had to support our small embassy in Malabo. Our people had gone through a terrible time under the first president, Macias. Then, by the time I went back to Cameroon in 1996, we had closed our little embassy in Malabo, unfortunately, in 1994, for budgetary reasons, like ConGen Douala. In 1995, an American firm struck oil. I arrived in early 1996, and found people didn't want to talk about Cameroon, they wanted to talk about Equatorial Guinea. We had Americans over in Equatorial

Guinea who thought they should have protection by the embassy, consular services. The EG government of President Obiang was not quite sure of how to deal with oil. The unexpected fortune required it to open up to the world. It provided it with resources to do something, either to put in one's pockets or spend for a good cause. Thus, suddenly the U.S. focus was on Equatorial Guinea. Here we had just closed our embassy, which was a dumb, dumb thing.

As I mentioned earlier, a position was assigned to our embassy to provide an officer to serve as an Equatorial Guinea watcher. This officer, Kent Brokenshire, spoke Spanish and French. He and I would go over frequently, often flying in small Russian airplanes, manned by Russian pilots. You wondered whether they were ever maintained. The U.S. government wasn't supposed to fly in the things, but often it was the only way to get there, so you did it. My DCM would go over. The commercial officer would go over. A USIS person would go over, though at the same time his or her headquarters was saying, "We're in Cameroon, but we're not in EG, so we're not going to do anything there." We had to. By gosh, Equatorial Guinea went very quickly from discovering oil to developing oil fields, to building oil tanks, storage tanks, and places for tankers to pick up oil.

Mobil Oil was the principal player, but there were also a couple of small American oil companies operating. I went over to the inauguration of Mobil Oil's first big oil platform. Someone told me just the other day that our investment in Equatorial Guinea in oil, in this little tiny country of a few hundred thousand people, was probably now up to about five billion dollars. The current project about to start is for a plant to liquefy natural gas.

So, my role would be to go to Equatorial Guinea, sit down with the president and the foreign minister, and others, and urge them to use their oil revenues for the people, for the good of the people. Also, I would talk about opening up the regime. Move away from a one-party state. Allow some winds of freedom to blow. Watch out for human rights. Don't lock up people, wily nily, because they are saying something against you and against the government. I went over fairly often and had good conversations. President Obiang and I would often sit down over dinner in the evening and talk. This was in a country where I didn't speak the language. I didn't speak Spanish.

However, what had changed in Equatorial Guinea between the time I visited there in 1984 or 1985, and going back in 1996, was that it had gone from having Spanish as its only world language, to becoming more French speaking. One could now talk to the president in French. The president isn't well educated at all. He was a military officer when he overthrew and executed his uncle, Macias, the savage first president. President Obiang strived to do better to improve himself. He realized when he was having to talk to the presidents of Gabon, or of most other countries in the area, that he had to speak French, because they didn't speak Spanish. The ruling class in Equatorial Guinea had all learned French. It made my life a lot easier. The opposition people were not quite as fortunate. There often, I would use the Equatorial Guinea watcher to interpret. You wanted to be seen sitting down with the opposition people, to make the point that they had a right to be politically active, just like those in the ruling party have the right to do.

It was interesting to see desperately poor Equatorial Guinea suddenly have wealth. I kept saying, "Mr. President, please use this money for the population." It was sad not to see this being done. Shortly before I left, he said, "We're going to pave some streets in the capital city." I said, "Good, that is a step in the right direction." Remember, Equatorial Guinea is both on an island and on the African mainland. The island is Bioko, and the mainland is called Rio Muni. The president is from the mainland, as is most of the leadership in Equatorial Guinea. It is often said that people on Bioko were in opposition to these people from the mainland. We would say, "Please try to spread it around, not just in the capital city, but on the island, and on the mainland." But that was always a struggle to try to get them to do that, and not just build big houses with the money. It is an ongoing struggle.

*Q: Did we put an embassy back in?*

TWINING: I lobbied hard to reopen in Malabo. We had had an embassy chancery and a residence, two nice buildings into which we poured huge amounts. The EG government kept them both empty for us in the hope that we would return. I said, "Look, here's our chance to go back into our buildings." I couldn't get Washington's attention. In fact, frankly, what got Washington's attention more were the oil companies.

*Q: I was going to say, "Why listen to you?"*

TWINING: Even with the oil companies, it took a while to get Washington's attention. Finally, EG the government, the prime minister said, "I think I'll just take this house that you've abandoned." He took one of our two buildings, on both of which we had stopped paying rent. He is living in it today. The other building just steadily deteriorated. Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering picked up my argument about needing to have somebody there to represent us. In fact, President Obiang told me, "Look, I don't care if you don't put a full embassy in here. I just want somebody I can talk to. I want somebody who can help us out with visas." The oil companies said, "We need people to go to Houston." Well, where were they going to get their visas? Equatorial Guineans had to go to Yaounde, 700 kilometers away, to get their visas. So, we lobbied. Pickering took up the cudgels, trying to get at least a one-person post established. That was probably in 1997.

Finally, we established our one-person post about a year and a half ago. This is July 2004. It took that long. Security people were all concerned. Management people were saying, "Where is the money?" People were asking, "What kind of communication will such a person have?" At least now we have a one-person shop in Malabo, where it is overseen by Embassy Yaounde. It is surprising how much of Embassy Yaounde's time Equatorial Guinea took up.

On my first trip into Equatorial Guinea, as ambassador, I presented my credentials to President Obiang in maybe February or March 1996. I knew no one in Malabo. The one person I met who could help me get around town was the Spanish chargé. He said to me, "Besides presenting your credentials, let me drive you down the road, and show you a little bit of the countryside." I said, "Great, I don't know anybody here. I would love to do it." The oil companies were just getting started, doing exploratory drilling. I accompanied the Spanish chargé outside of town when we encountered a roadblock. All these police stopped us. "Where are you going? What are you

doing?” The chargé said, “We’re just taking a little ride.” We went a little further. He said, “I guess I better turn around.” We came back to Malabo.

I was immediately called in by the foreign minister, “What were you up to with the Spanish? What were you doing?” I said, “I wanted to see the countryside?” “Well, are you sure you and the Spanish aren’t plotting something?” I said, “No, I’m trying to see the countryside.” It made me realize, just like in the closed regime in Cambodia in 1991, we needed to force the door open a little bit in EG. So, on each succeeding trip that I made to Malabo, and to the mainland later, I insisted on getting out and about a bit more. I was able to prove the point. I’m having lunch with someone tomorrow who helped me get into the mainland portion originally, to drive through it. You couldn’t do that previously. It was a matter of opening the door.

*Q: Were they accredited to the United Nations?*

TWINING: Yes, Equatorial Guinea was a member of the UN.

*Q: Did they play any role there?*

TWINING: No. They’re just too small. They recognize they’re too small.

*Q: Well, Charlie, you left there when?*

TWINING: I left Cameroon and said goodbye to Equatorial Guinea in August 1998. A few months before, I led a trade mission, a West African trade mission to Chicago, together with Tibor Nagy, Ambassador to Guinea. Cameroonians made up about half of the trade mission. They are dynamic business people. The other members were from Central and West African countries. While I was on the trade mission in Chicago, in May 1998, the State Department tracked me down. I couldn’t imagine why. I was told to call State immediately. It appeared that Under Secretary of State Pickering was concerned that the State relationship with U.S. Pacific Command, where we had a political advisor wasn’t working out too well. Asia was too important not to have someone who could work closely with the Admiral in charge.

Ambassador Pickering asked the Director General of the Foreign Service to find me and see if I would be willing to leave Cameroon early to go to Honolulu. Whoever called Cameroon to try to find me first, talked to my wife. She said, “Honolulu, of course.” We had reached agreement. What it meant was I cut my tour short in Cameroon by about five months to go to Honolulu. It was nice of Ambassador Pickering to think of me. My wife had worked and lived in Hawaii after graduating from college. She dreamed of going back. It was time. She was always having problems with the malaria medicine that we had to take in Africa. I left Cameroon in August 1998 and went to Honolulu, to serve as the foreign policy advisor for the U.S. Pacific Command.

**THEODORE A. BOYD**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Yaoundé (1997-1999)**

*Theodore A. Boyd was born on October 9, 1941 in Terre Haute, Indiana. He served in the U.S. Army from 1959 to 1964. Throughout his career he has held positions in countries including the Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Iran, Nigeria, Ecuador, Togo, and Cameroon. Mr. Boyd was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on November 29, 2005.*

*Q: The Cameroon's, what was the situation there?*

BOYD: At that time Cameroon had wrested the title of "Most Corrupt Country" from Nigeria. The president, Paul Biya, is now probably the longest serving African head of state. During my tenure there was a major dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over which one had oil rights to offshore reserves. Cameroon is nominally bilingual, there is an English speaking area and a French speaking area. The political situation was calm. The U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon was also accredited to Equatorial Guinea so we did go over to Malabo (capital of Equatorial Guinea).

*Q: What was Equatorial Guinea like?*

BOYD: Equatorial Guinea was in the process of becoming rich because of the major oil finds so it was a pit in the late '90s but as I understand now it's a show place.

*Q: So much of this post-colonial period it was a place to be avoided.*

BOYD: Right. There was an embassy there but that went down the tubes. the oil companies want a presence there rather than having to go to Douala.

*Q: In the Cameroon's was there any political life or?*

BOYD: Yes there was a political life because the universal opinion was that the party in power stole the last presidential election.

*Q: Well how did you find doing your job there?*

BOYD: We were dealing with the media — government controlled and independent. Charlie Twining was the U.S. Ambassador for much of my tour there. He was a friend of Cameroon, having served previously in the country, so it was easy to do the job. They welcomed our cultural programming. There was an English teaching program there. It had started out as a program affiliated with USIS but then some expatriate wives (Americans who had married Cameroonians) who had gotten into it so they took the program over when USIA was looking to make budget cuts. But mostly it was disseminating information about the U.S., do educational and cultural exchanges, and bringing in speakers and performers.

*Q: Were there many students going to the United States?*

BOYD: Yes, but they had several universities in Cameroon and the university situation, is about the same as that in Nigeria. They have nice buildings with very little in them and few books. I

visited some universities and they showed me books that my predecessors had donated that were still in boxes. But at least they had the facilities and they do have people. Then I retired from USIA in 1999 when it was going to be subsumed into the Department of State.

*End of reader*