EL SALVADOR

COUNTRY READER
TABLE OF CONTENTS

John A. Bushnell	1977-1982	Deputy Assistant Secretary, ARA, Washington, DC
Nena Vreeland	1979-1983	Evaluation Office, USAID, Washington, DC
Robert E. White	1980-1981	Ambassador, El Salvador
Jon David Glassman	1981	Deputy Chief of Political Section, Mexico City, Mexico
Frederic L. Chapin	1981	Chargé d'Affaires, San Salvador
G. Philip Hughes	1981-1985	Deputy Foreign Policy Advisor to Vice President George Bush, The White House, Washington, DC
Ward Barmon	1983-1985	Economic/Commercial Counselor San Salvador
James F. Mack	1983-1986	Political Counselor, San Salvador
David R. Adams	1984-1986	Officer for El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica, USAID, Washington, DC
Jacob Gillespie	1986-1988	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, San Salvador
Paul Trivelli	1987-1989	Economic/Commercial Officer, San Salvador
Melvin R. Chatman	1987-1994	Training Officer, USAID, San Salvador
William Jeffras Dieterich	1989-1992	Deputy Chief of Mission, San Salvador
Alan H. Flanigan	1993-1996	Ambassador, El Salvador
John Helm	1996-1999	General Services Officer, San Salvador
Melissa Sanderson	2000-2001	Deputy Political Counselor, San Salvador

GERALD A. DREW
Temporary Duty
San Salvador (1937)

Gerald A. Drew was born in San Francisco, California in 1903 .He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley. He toured in Para, Jordan, Bolivia, and Haiti. The following are excerpts from correspondence and journal entries.

DREW: Safe & sound in Salvador, or around Central America with the Rover Boys. Uneventful hop over, though the pilot made me nervous by twitching and wiggling about himself. Have moved in on the Corrigans—they say for all six weeks, but it doesn't seem possible or fair to them. They are four, and large numbers of family and guests are on the way. Shall try to find a furnished house, and failing that, move into a boarding house. The last week or two in Tegoose were rather strenuous—quite a few late nights. If no party, Cramp and I would manage to talk far into the night. The worst part of it was the noise. Church bells and bugles would start about five, & little but dozing between bombs etc. from then on. The present reading finds our hero pretty done in. No signs of the strenuous life here yet, so may get caught up soon.

They are the most hospitable people I have known. Dr. C. & Bob--just out of Stanford—were at the airfield to bring me into the Legation. [Dr. Frank Corrigan, the U.S. minister in Salvador, was a medical doctor who served later as ambassador to Colombia and maybe elsewhere, also as an official of the World Health Organization. His son Bob, later nicknamed "Killer" Corrigan by Jerry (for being a "lady killer") went into the Foreign Service and led us on a whirlwind tour of St. Peter's in Rome when we were on our way through there in 1948 or '49.]

***

I am staying at the Legation with the Corrigans—the most delightful people you can imagine. Talk of the free and untrammeled life—never a dull moment. We talk until 3 or 4 every morning. The house now holds the Doctor (Amer. Minister), Mrs. C., one large and two smallish sons, with a daughter and 3 school friends on their way, & plans to entertain Minister DesPortes. They believe in the more the merrier. I have been trying to move out, but am not allowed.

***

Here it is a Friday night and I am starting so early for the Sunday mail. We are preparing for the 4th of July receptions, which will take up most of tomorrow, and at night the colony is having a dance at a local American boarding house. Now is my chance, as family & guests are out or in bed. Seems to be the first really free evening I have had since I arrived. Dr. & Marta are at a local production of Hamlet, which didn't interest me at all. Two of the Jeans are out somewhere and the balance retired.

Monday morn I am going down to Cutuco by rail on the Gulf of Fonseca for some fishing and to see the country. Return probably Wednesday. I may be on my way by Saturday the 10th—a week's head start—though it's not really definite yet. I really haven't much heart for any trips. Am only anxious to get started homeward.

Got a spell of work on tonight. For one thing I figured up what it will cost the government for our move and it looks like about $1500. Seems a lot but the freight and furniture alone will be about $900. I still hope to collect the equivalent of what it would have cost if you & babes had gone to Washington from San Jose, though... families aren't supposed to precede their husbands & fathers. If I do it will about cover the cost of our fares across the continent.

We shall have to start soon to be scrooges & count our shekels. On that subject, how about breaking down and telling me what all doctors and hospitals are going to come to. That is, whenever you feel like devoting your thoughts to such unpleasant topics…. On that subject, do you think Nell is losing out up at the River? Do you think it would be well for me to send her a check for $50 or more to cover whatever extras may turn up, as they have a way of doing at summer resorts? Let me know what to do. I don't want her to be out of pocket & she must be footing bills unless you or your family have furnished funds.

While it has been very nice—and inexpensive—living here with the Corrigans, I feel that in some ways I would have been freer to get around & make more contacts & see more if I had been out on my own. I have really learned most of my sketchy impressions of the country from Doc C. Very useful and all that, and I have enjoyed our long talks & the contact with him, but I feel I have learned less here than any other country.

In all the confusion yesterday (Saturday) I didn't get back to this & now Sunday is upon us & the prexy & cabinet arrive any minute. A large party last night. Didn't quite get into the swing of it—felt the weight of my four little girls on my shoulders. The Corrigans left early and put me in charge, as it were... At breakfast a cable arrives—I was really afraid to open it, but as it was from John saying you were fine—"why rush." I told him I was planning to step up my departure & apparently it doesn't suit him. He is definitely going to meet me in Mexico with Gretchen & I believe the Momma.

***

Monday I went down to the Gulf of Fonseca on a fishing trip. At the last minute Dr. C. didn't go. One Wilson, manager of the Rep. here—friend of Chittenden—gave the party. It was a nine-hour trip & a pretty hot one, but we had comfortable quarters and good food at the end of it—Cutuco, a small port consisting principally of a dock. Tuesday we spent on a launch in the gulf. I took a hand at the poles but am not a very enthusiastic fisherman. Got back yesterday afternoon. Had one night on a canvas cot & the other in a hammock. As you can imagine, the "iron man" was a bit done in. I plan no more trips now as I shall be having plenty of that by the time I reach S.F. Am shipping trunks and excess baggage by a Grace boat and traveling as light as possible. Shall address them to 200 Pacheco [his parents' fine house in the Forest Hills section of San Francisco] & then do the necessary when I find where I am to rest the head.

MURAT WILLIAMS
Deputy Chief of Mission

San Salvador (1947-1949)

Ambassador Williams was born and raised in Virginia and was educated at the University of Virginia and Oxford University. After serving in the US Navy in World War II, he joined the State Department, serving in Washington, D.C., where he worked with the Refugee Relief Program, and abroad. His foreign posts include San Salvador, Bucharest, Salonika, Bern and Tel Aviv. Mr. Williams served as U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador from 1961 to 1964. Ambassador Williams was interviewed by Melvin Spector in 1990. He died in 1994.

Q: So you went to El Salvador as the deputy chief of mission.

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: With that title?

WILLIAMS: We didn't use that title then. It was just understood that you would take over...

Q: That you would be the chargé when the ambassador was out of the country.

WILLIAMS: Yes. El Salvador in those days was a quiet, beautiful country. The wealthy land owners, 14 families, were extremely hospitable and sort of spoiled foreign diplomatic visits, but...

Q: What year was this?

WILLIAMS: 1947 when we went there. My wife and I were married in 1946. She had had experience in OSS and knew a great deal about life and diplomacy. We didn't have any hard jobs. One had to be aware of any shaky government. There had been revolts, coups d'etat in Central America since the beginning. There was, in fact, one revolt in December 1948 when a group of military officers overthrew President Castaneda-Castro. It so happened that Albert Nufer, a fine experienced Foreign Service officer, was out of the country. I was the Chargé d'Affaires.

Q: You got your baptism by fire.

WILLIAMS: Yes. My baptism by fire when there was the coup which overthrew Castaneda-Castro. Ambassador Nufer was out of the country so I was in charge. Fortunately he came back in four or five days, but during those days my main duty was to observe what was going on. There was nothing that we could do or needed to do. There was no reason for us to interfere, although I must say that during the coup I went to the President's house to see what was happening to him and found myself with the Nuncio and various other chiefs of mission in El Salvador watching the President when he was being asked to surrender. He finally agreed to resign and the junta of three army officers and two civilians took control of the government.

Q: What was the purpose of the rebellion? Why did they rebel?

WILLIAMS: They were just eager to take power themselves. Castaneda-Castro had not been too efficient – he had not run the country particularly well. There was no principal complaint, no issue. But there were several very intelligent and clever people in the junta. We got on very well with them. One of them was a lawyer named, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, who today, 1990, 43 years later, is the Chairman of the UN's Commission on Human Rights and has just made a report on the lack of human rights in Iran. I read about it in the New York Times.

One of the things about El Salvador that I should mention is that they had many people who distinguished themselves on the world scene. In fact, at that time there was one Salvadoran who was a member of the World Court.

Nufer came back and we developed good relations. We recognized the new junta and things went on very smoothly as far as El Salvador was concerned. Meanwhile, I had put in my request for Russian studies. I wanted to study Russian and be assigned to the Soviet Union. A few months later, in June of 1949, I got word from the Department that I wasn't going to be sent to Russia but I would have the next best thing which would be to be sent to Romania.

Q: What was the relationship between the junta, more specifically the military, and the 14 wealthy families of El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: That is an excellent question because one of the members of the 14 families met my wife just as the shooting began and said to her "Don't worry this is our man, these are our people who are taking over." Well, they didn't have to exert much control. Castaneda-Castro had been on pretty good terms with the 14 families. He just wasn't as efficient as he might have been. There was a lot of waste. I think his family was involved in certain charges of graft and corruption which the 14 families didn't like. But there was no real, serious issue. Castro was sent to jail, I might say, on charges of corruption. I saw him many years later, about 15 years later, by chance and he said to me "It is good to see you again. People thought I was dumb didn't they. I wasn't so dumb. I made a little money, I went to jail, but I came out with my fortune." He said, "I came out with my *dinerito*." He was a very happy man. His two sons-in-law had also gone to jail, but came out. It was a sort of O. Henry type revolution.

Q: I take it he wasn't in jail very long.

WILLIAMS: No, none of them were in jail very long. In those days El Salvador, like some of the other Central American countries, were not serious in that sense. Politics was just about as humorous as O. Henry describes it in his Cabbages and Kings. I always tell people who go to Central America that they should start by reading O. Henry. His short stories about politicians and soldiers, and admirals even, lives in Honduras and El Salvador.

Q: I didn't know that O. Henry had written about those.

WILLIAMS: Well, one of the best stories I ever read about El Salvador was called The Fourth in Salvador by O. Henry, and describes a group of expatriate Americans who accidentally get involved in a revolution.

Q: I must read that.

WILLIAMS: The Fourth in Salvador is in Roads of Destiny. Most of the O. Henry's short stories about Central America are in his other book Cabbages and Kings. But I found that there are very few of my associates who have seen those books. I love them.

Q: How did you look at the role of the embassy vis-a-vis other elements in the country, other than the government? Vis-a-vis the local or international press.

WILLIAMS: At that time the embassy had excellent relations with the 14 families, but we didn't have as close relations to the intellectuals of the country as we later developed--I returned to El Salvador 15 years later. We got on very happily with all branches of society. University students were rather calm in those days, nothing like they were later on.

Q: These university students, many of them were children of the 14 families, were they not?

WILLIAMS: Only the children of the 14 families went to college in the United States – Stanford or Southern Cal. Some went to Harvard and then to Oxford. They came back and some of them did good for their country.

As I was saying I wanted to go to the Soviet Union but instead I was sent to Bucharest.

Q: Were you given any training, language training, before you left?

WILLIAMS: No, it didn't seem to be necessary to have special training. My assignment was to be in the political section of the legation, but it so happened that the person who was to go as the Deputy Chief of Mission, Ed Gullion, couldn't get a visa.

ANGIER BIDDLE DUKE
Ambassador
El Salvador (1952-1953)

Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke was born in New York, New York in 1915. His Foreign Service career included positions in El Salvador, Washington, DC, Spain, Denmark, Argentina, and an ambassadorship to Morocco. Ambassador Duke was interviewed in 1989 by John McKesson.

Q: *We might perhaps at this point move on to your period as Ambassador to El Salvador; could you describe the political and economic conditions in the country when you arrived?*

DUKE: I had already had the experience of working at top levels in two large and active posts "and I hit the ground running." The president of Salvador at that time was General Osorio who was the undisputed leader of the military, which maintained an uneasy but working alliance with the so- called oligarchy, the land-owning, coffee-growing class. This kept the country on, let us

say, a politically peaceful and economically productive course but one that was stratified dangerously in terms of class structure. There was very little opportunity for social mobility or economic flexibility. Therefore our Point Four program was important. It was oriented towards widening credit for small business and to purchase family plots for farmers and coffee growers. And I think we were beginning to be successful. Salvador had a one crop economy, coffee; and they began to expand from the export of raw bulk to process coffee and to the building of a decaffeinated coffee plant and the packaging of coffee products. I think that if that AID policy had been continued and if it had been combined with social reform, I think Salvador would have developed more peacefully, social progress could have been instituted and the events of 1980-81 could have been avoided or at least moderated.

Q: *What do you attribute the fact that the social reforms were not implemented?*

DUKE: It was a wretched structuring of society, the alliance between the landowners and the army. Higher education fell into the hands of the University of El Salvador which in time became radicalized and the students' Marxist ideas became infectious. The increasingly detached policy of the Catholic Church and liberation theology also began to take hold and I think that the growing political agitation and mounting interest in social change and Marxist promises did build on the evident injustices of society. In those eight years after Harry Truman I believe that the seeds of discontent were successfully sown making inevitable the reform and revolutionary movement that started in 1980.

Q: *How would you assess President Osorio as a man and as a leader?*

DUKE: Osorio was not a charismatic leader; he was a shrewd, smart career army officer who knew how to get along. He was an amiable man, and although not a brilliant leader, he conveyed a sense that sound change was desirable and eventually inevitable. Progress was being made during his presidency.

Q: *Was there any possibility for you to be in touch with any opposition elements?*

DUKE: The opposition was not particularly in evidence. While there may have been conspiratorial opposition, I really cannot recall any overt surfacing. There were liberal elements in the country. You may recall that this was the time Arbenz was coming into the fore and becoming a leader in Guatemala. The social democratic ideas of Arbenz were spilling across the borders and inciting hopes for change in the rest of Central America. Salvador was not immune to that, and there were some particularly bright and intelligent leaders on the moderate left, some of whom occupied cabinet positions under Osorio, who tried to accommodate to this movement.

Q: *Did you feel that US policy during the years you were there was basically sound or would you have felt that changes would have been preferable?*

DUKE: I thought that our AID program was pushing the country along and that the country was evolving and there were changes taking place. But when the administration changed, John Foster Dulles obviously had much more interest in the East-West relationship than he did in Latin America. I don't think our policy was changed; it simply fell into total neglect and the AID

programs dried up. This made inevitable some policy change and that change took the form of maintaining the status quo in Latin America while the administration settled in to structuring the policies of the Cold War.

Q: *Were there any other significant events and developments during your tenure as Ambassador that you feel noteworthy and could comment on?*

DUKE: The most noteworthy was when President Osorio met with President Arbenz at the Salvadoran border. He took me along with him for that meeting, and the President of Guatemala was accompanied by the US Ambassador accredited to him, Ambassador Schoenfeld. Nothing particularly important transpired; I think that Osorio wanted to come to an understanding with his colleague across the border and work out a relationship that would be acceptable to the United States, Arbenz was deposed not long after I left El Salvador.

EUGENE F. KARST
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
San Salvador (1955-1960)

Eugene F. Karst joined the Office of War Information in 1942. He then joined the State Department in 1946 and worked in both the Far East Wireless File and the European Regional File. He served in many posts through the USIS in the Philippines, Argentina, El Salvador, Brazil and Paraguay. He was interviewed by himself in 1999.

KARST: My next assignment was to El Salvador, where I became public affairs officer. My first job there was to record the Salvadoran symphony orchestra presentation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony so that it could be re-broadcast on Voice of America programs, thus complimenting El Salvador's appreciation of classical music. We had excellent relations with the newspapers in El Salvador, who used a lot of USIS materials. This was some years before there were serious social problems that broke out into bloody revolt.

The second-largest city in El Salvador is Santa Ana, center of the coffee-growing area. Santa Ana, California, was in the citrus-growing area of its state, and it occurred to me these two cities would be suitable for a sister-sister relationship in the People-to-People project being fostered by the Eisenhower Administration. So, after home leave in the U.S., I stopped in the California city, got acquainted with the chairman of the local group.

A few weeks later, Ed Armstrong, a Santa Ana, California lawyer, and enthusiast as well as chairman, wrote to me, saying he wanted to bring his wife and a movie camera, to visit the Salvadoran city, to spend a couple of weeks. So, we got down to specifics. I visited the mayor of Santa Ana, El Salvador, as well as the governor of the province to see how much they were interested in the project.

About a week later, I was invited back for a meeting of civic leaders. I found that they had set up a big program for the Armstrong visit. They were to meet with civic groups, clubs of lawyers, accountants, and labor unions. They were to visit schools, hospitals, and coffee fincas. There were luncheons, dances, dinners, and social visits all set up. And when the time came, everything went smoothly. I had a cocktail party for about 100 Salvadoran dignitaries the night of their arrival. When the Armstrongs went to Santa Ana the next day, they were met at the city limits and presented with the key to the city, then escorted to the Cathedral where the Bishop offered a Te Deum ceremony for the movement. And during the week a parade featuring the two Santa Anas marched through the city. Newspapers and radio carried great quantities of news about the Armstrong visit.

Finally, the President of El Salvador requested the Armstrongs to visit him at the Presidential Palace. The warm reception for the Armstrongs resulted in numerous personal contacts between official and non-official Americans with their Salvadoran counterparts, fostering a tremendous amount of mutual understanding.

Some months later, the mayor of Santa Ana, El Salvador and his wife, were invited to Santa Ana, California with several gatherings similar to those in the coffee growing area. Their visit was climaxed when the visiting mayor and his wife took part in the famed Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena.

PETER M. CODY
Project Officer, USAID
San Salvador (1957-1959)

Peter M. Cody was born in France in 1925. He received his bachelor's degree in 1947 from Yale University and received his master's from Yale in 1948. From 1943-1946 he served in the US Navy. His career with AID included positions in Mexico, El Salvador, Washington, Laos, Paraguay, Ecuador, Philippines, and Lebanon. Mr. Cody was interviewed in November 1991 by Melbourne Spector.

CODY: The health *servicio*, as a department of the Health Ministry, decided they could go it on their own, and about a third of our technicians were in the health field. This meant that our staff technical requirements were reduced by about a third, if I recall. So at that point it was decided to cut back on the overhead staff. So I was sent to El Salvador, where they needed a program officer.

I enjoyed El Salvador. The program wasn't as interesting. We had *servicios*. We had a fairly large agricultural *servicio*. In fact, most of our U.S. employees were in the U.S. agricultural *servicio*, either direct hires of AID or from the Department of Agriculture on loan to AID. We had a health *servicio* and we had a small education program which wasn't really a *servicio*. I'm not really sure if it had been a *servicio*, but it was quite small when I was there and never really went anyplace.

These technical programs were all located outside of the AID mission offices, so the AID mission really only had the director, the program officer, the executive officer and the controller, two persons, because you had the person in the position and his assistant, and this was the USAID headquarters staff. There was a public administration advisor, but he didn't come until later, so I acted in that function. For a while I was the acting public safety advisor (doing the admin chores, not pounding a beat). But when he came, he moved over to the police department. So it was physically a smaller organization where we worked and we had a small office. We eventually had a US training officer who worked under me, but only at the very end of my stay. Until then I performed this function.

Q: *And your technicians actually were located with the appropriate ministries.*

CODY: Yes. Even when the public administration advisor arrived, he moved to the Ministry of Finance. All the were located in the ministry, so we just had the administrative staff at the headquarters.

One of the disappointing things about El Salvador was we had a very mediocre mission director, unlike Ross Moore and the man who replaced him, Vance Rogers, in Mexico. Harry Miller was a retired colonel and bitter about the fact that he was not a retired brigadier general. He was given his job in Salvador (and maybe his colonelcy as well) because his wife was a relative of Mamie Eisenhower, or at least so the rumor went. The fact that she was a relative I know because she said so. He had the experience that should have made him a better director. He had been in Paraguay and Ecuador four years each, and in one he was the head of the Military Assistance Group, and the other was the military attaché. So he had been in a technical assistance program, albeit military technical assistance, for four years in one Latin American country, and he had been the military attaché in another, and still didn't speak very good Spanish. It wasn't that he was a bad person; he was just of limited capability and comprehension of his role. Therefore, he didn't have any real conception of the job to be done. The program didn't really change when he was there because he lacked understanding of the development process.. We didn't have any real innovations during his tenure nor did he want any.

Again, I did start a small project with the Central Bank to revise their index of industrial production. My assistant, whom I still see when I am in El Salvador, Luis Mendez Novoa, and I put together an index of industrial production, which was the initial basis for the current index.

It was a nice place to be. One thing I will say about El Salvador, it can be a difficult place to work, but it's easier to make friends, long-lasting friendships, and be invited into people's homes, in El Salvador than in most any country in which I've been stationed. In Mexico, for example, people have social events outside of the home, or did at the time I lived there. Very few Mexicans invited people including other Mexicans who were not family, to their homes. They invited them to restaurants. But in El Salvador, they'd invite you to their homes. This is the mid-’50s we're talking about, and I still have friends that I've kept up with since that time.

I did some things, there that were personally interesting for me, such as going white-water rafting on a river there which you can't reach now because of the war, and climbing some

mountains, but the program was sort of not all it could have been because it didn't have the right direction.

Q: *Then the program didn't have much effect on what was going on economically in the country?*

CODY: The big activity was agricultural *servicio*, and they were doing experimental work. I went back to El Salvador in the early ‘80s and have been off and on in El Salvador through the ‘80s and early ‘90s, and I can't say I saw too much attributable to our program in the ‘50s. One new institution we were working with then was the agricultural college. We had three technicians in this new school. That organization is still going. How much we had to do with it, I'm not sure, but it's certainly much bigger and more important than it was. It was just getting going when we started, so that may have been an offshoot of our efforts. We had a couple of technicians in the school of medicine at the university, but the university had such problems brought on by the war, ideological differences, it's probably pretty hard to judge what impact there was there. Health, education, public administration, it was pretty hard to see the remnants, but we weren't doing that much anyway. One or two people for a couple of years. I'm not sure what you can expect much, particularly given the problems they've had in Salvador since. But I didn't see that there were many farmers growing corn and beans with any more efficiency, coming back, than there were when I went there. I remember we had a corn breeder and various other things on the staff of the *servicio*, and the *servicio* has long since gone. I don't know when it disappeared. When I went back in the ‘80s, it had been away for a while. It probably went out in the ‘60s.

MURAT WILLIAMS
Ambassador
El Salvador (1961-1964)

Ambassador Williams was born and raised in Virginia and was educated at the University of Virginia and Oxford University. After serving in the US Navy in World War II, he joined the State Department, serving in Washington, D.C., where he worked with the Refugee Relief Program, and abroad. His foreign posts include San Salvador, Bucharest, Salonika, Bern and Tel Aviv. Mr. Williams served as U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador from 1961 to 1964. Ambassador Williams was interviewed by Melvin Spector in 1990. He died in 1994.

WILLIAMS: I was really disappointed that my time in Israel was cut short. In late December, 1960 the ambassador called me into his office and said he had a telegram saying that there had been a revolution in El Salvador and President Eisenhower wanted to sent me there as ambassador. Would I accept? Of course I accepted. But it meant breaking off almost an education – being in Israel.

When I got to Washington after that, Senator Fulbright was mainly interested not in my going to El Salvador, but in my staying such a short time in Israel. He said, "If you had stayed longer in Israel, you would know about that atomic program they are carrying on. If you fellows would

stay where you were for a while you would know what was going on." Some people thought he was insulting me, but I didn't mind it very much. I was, myself, sorry that I hadn't been longer in Israel. I don't know if there is anything else you would like me to comment on about Israel.

Q: I would like you to comment, maybe at the end of this interview, your feelings about career or non-career persons being appointed as chiefs of mission. So your time with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wasn't too bad a time?

WILLIAMS: No. There was some eagerness to get me to El Salvador, and as a result I think I was put on the program for confirmation hearings ahead of George Ball. Tom Mann was in a hurry for me to go to El Salvador. When I said I didn't want to go until I was properly confirmed and until I had said goodbye to President Kennedy. I think I was the first ambassador to be sent abroad by President Kennedy – Adlai Stevenson had gone to New York a few days before. You were probably running personnel things at that time.

Q: No, at that time I was in the foreign aid agency. In fact I had the office of Central America and Caribbean and Mexican Affairs.

WILLIAMS: The hearings of that day were mainly George Ball and me. It seems ridiculous to spend as much time on my hearings and George Ball, but I think Mr. Fulbright had made up his mind that he was going to establish the point that Foreign Service officers should not be moved so quickly from one post to another. I happened to be the first one to come along which gave him the opportunity to do that.

Q: Did you get a chance to talk with the President before you went to El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I did. I made my call and the President said, "Ambassador I am glad that you are going to El Salvador. That is our number one problem." By "that," I think he meant Latin America or Central America. We talked a little about that and personal things – I had known him and his sister quite well when we were in England before the war and I was at Oxford University.

Q: Which sister?

WILLIAMS: Kathleen. I had only met Jack one day when I had gone to the embassy to meet his sister and she introduced me to him. Kathleen was killed in an airplane accident.

Q: She is the one who married the Lord... ?

WILLIAMS: Hartington, I think was his name. William John Robert Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington. She would come up to the Oxford University for the dances with me one time. The Kennedys have been very nice to me but I had barely met the President.

When I said goodbye to Secretary Rusk, I had a very interesting conversation. He said, "I haven't got anything that I want to bother you with now, but we are going to want you to do what you can to help any of those people who are working for the integration of Central America – Central American institutions." I was struck by that and thought it was very important. Just a few years

ago I had occasion to refer to it and when I did so I wrote to Mr. Rusk in Athens, Georgia, where he was retired, and said that I remembered that part of our conversation and didn't think there was any memorandum in the files about it and I wanted to be reassured that that was what he had said to me. And he wrote back a nice letter saying that yes, it was what was on his mind then.

Q: In fact since I was involved in Central American affairs in 1959, 60, 61, that was the push for integration. Len Saccio and I pushed on the Central American Bank

WILLIAMS: Oh, great. And the common market?

Q: Yes. Tom Mann was pushing for integration at that point and so was Mr. Dillon as well.

WILLIAMS: I have always been glad that Mr. Rusk said that to me. I have referred to it a number of times since. I am only sorry that there is nothing much left of Central American integration except INCAE, the school for management education.

As far as Central American integration is concern, I feel great disappointment that other things failed. The common market has become very weak. When Mr. Kennedy came as President to Central America, I had an opportunity to introduce to him one of the leading Central American businessmen, statesman, Francisco De Sola. When I introduced him, the President asked De Sola what Central America needed more than anything else. De Sola replied that what we really needed was a school like Harvard Business School where men could be trained as executives to compete in the world. Within three weeks of that conversation, the first professors from Harvard came to Central America to study the problem. In 1964, such a school had been established. George Lodge, I remember, came down from the Harvard Business School and spent a lot of time in Central America. Today that school which has campuses in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica, is the only real institution of Central America that has managed to survive.

But more than that it has become terribly important and has a big influence not only in the Central American and Caribbean area, but even beyond. I have seen recent figures something like 2,000 MBAs have been issued and many thousands of people have gone to the school's short courses on various subjects. Even in the unhappy days of Daniel Ortega, most of the Nicaraguan cabinet had graduated from INCAE. Almost every country has its alumni in important positions either in government or private affairs. When the Central American presidents wanted to meet together, the only place they had where they could get on common ground during recent troubles three or four years ago, was at the campus of INCAE in Costa Rica.

Well, that's the good side of things, the bad...

Q: Before we leave INCAE, do you have any knowledge why they located it in Nicaragua rather than in one of the other Central American countries?

WILLIAMS: Originally it was located in Nicaragua, I suppose because of its central position, I really don't know. At that time Somoza was still in power and he was eager to have it there.

Q: Probably we considered it the most stable country too.

WILLIAMS: Yes, that is possible.

Q: We ought to recall, Mr. Ambassador, that this wasn't the Somoza that later became the Somoza who was ousted.

WILLIAMS: No, this was the old honcho.

***

Q: Today is February 6, 1991. I believe, Mr. Ambassador, we had just begun talking about your assignment to El Salvador. What did you feel was your main objectives to accomplish when you were in El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: When I spoke to Dean Rusk to say goodbye to him he didn't outline any particular objectives except to do what I could to help all those who were working for the integration of Central America--the old idea of the Central American Union.

But aside from that there were other goals which I felt were necessary for us to face. Particularly the goal of economic development in Central America. Central America had been left out it seemed of most of the progress of the world, but the people of Central America were beginning to realize that there were things that they could do. This attitude grew mainly among the young people – the students. It was not necessarily shared by the wealthy families – the 14 families as they were sometimes called, or the Catorce or the Oligarchy. Those people were quite satisfied with the country as it was. They were making money out of the export of coffee and sugar and they were able to make it by taking advantage of the low wages of their labor. Labor was plentiful and wages were low.

But among the students, the intellectuals and among some farsighted Salvadoran businessmen there was a feeling that there was a great possibility ahead for development. It was marked in El Salvador especially by the inauguration of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) which happened to take place a few months before I arrived. It reflected the interest of the Eisenhower Administration in solving some of the deep rooted problems of Central America, particularly the problems of economic developments, the problem of social injustice, etc. Eisenhower, himself, had been impressed by the need to do something about this because of Nixon's experiences. When Nixon was Vice President he was badly treated in Lima and was nearly killed by a demonstration in Caracas. President Eisenhower had asked his brother, Milton, to go into Latin America and see what was going on and tell him what should be done. And as you know, Milton Eisenhower did recommend that we pay more attention to Latin America and do something to help eliminate the social injustices and the backwardness there. The idea of reform of this sort had taken root in El Salvador and I considered it my goal to help promote, in any way that was appropriate, institutions of economic development and try to help those who wanted to enliven the atmosphere the way the progressive people had been doing in Israel, the country I had just left. And as I think I mentioned earlier, when I left Israel, Golda Meir, the great Foreign Minister at that time, said that El Salvador was a great place for me to go because you can really do

something there. It was a great opportunity and the goals were economic development, elimination of social injustice and integration of the countries of Central America.

When I got there I found that our embassy had been pretty well scared by the threat of communism which was something that the wealthy families had promoted. They had told people in our embassy how communistic some of the Salvadoran student leaders were. In fact, members of our embassy were alleged to have helped to overthrow the reform government established by Fabio Castillo and his friends in the autumn of 1960, just a few weeks before Eisenhower proposed to appoint me ambassador to El Salvador. That coup came soon after Ambassador Thorsten Kalijarvi had recommended to Washington that we not recognize the junta over which Fabio Castillo presided. Fabio Castillo himself has testified before Congress that the Chargé d'Affaires of our embassy came to see him soon after the coup and had been accompanied by a member of one of the wealthy families, who said to our Chargé as they were talking to Castillo, "You see the way this man talks? He is a communist and you ought to be careful of him." And, of course, our Chargé duly reported all that and the State Department had decided on Mr. Kalijarvi's recommendation that we should not recognize that particular junta.

That junta actually was overthrown in January of 1961 just a few days before I had arrived to take my job as ambassador. When it was overthrown there were loud accusations against our embassy, and particularly our military mission, which said they had been involved in the overthrow.

There is a funny little story, I don't know how true it is, but at this time there were grounds to suspect that the military mission might be involved because the newspapers published pictures of the officers at Fort Zapote , the Head of the Salvadoran Military Command, as if they were taking part in the revolution. This always worried me a little bit, but I asked the Chief of Mission what had happened and he said, "We didn't have anything to do with the overthrow of the government. When he heard the shooting and knew that there was something going on, he went down to Fort Zapote and stood around trying to find out what was going to happen. The newspaper people came in and took pictures of him as if he was directing it."

In any event, the Fabio Castillo government was overthrown just at the time that I arrived to take up my duties as ambassador. The Fabio Castillo government was considered to be unfriendly to the wealthy families and they were very glad to see it go. The new government which took over was dominated by one Colonel Julio Rivera. He turned out to be quite a reformist himself. It was almost inevitable that someone should come along who was interested in reform because reforms was a crying need for the country. Colonel Rivera's junta which called itself directorio was very enthusiastic about taking measures to improve the economic conditions in the country. I was able to present my credentials to them and to work fairly closely with them in their plans. They needed money for infrastructure, but they also needed money for economic development, for manufacturing, etc. As we began to work with them, we found their enthusiasm was enormous. Rivera had drawn into his government several internationally respected economists, Salvadorans, who had worked in Washington, the World Bank and other organizations. They undertook a number of measures for social improvement which really began to have an effect. They supported, strongly, the Central American common market and the Central American Bank.

They sought loans from the United States for health centers, for schools, for investment in factories, etc.

Our government was rather enthusiastic. General Cutler, I believe, was in charge of one aspect of our foreign aid programs and he was very receptive to Salvadoran requests. Salvadorans sometimes didn't know how to make up the right forms to get their money, but nevertheless, I was able to get General Cutler to send someone to El Salvador who would help them with the forms.

Q: That is important.

WILLIAMS: He chose Robert Nathan on the recommendation of Theodore Moscoso. Robert Nathan, the economist who had done so much in our New Deal, established a mission in El Salvador for management and advising on economic development. This was extremely successful.

Meanwhile, wherever I went in El Salvador, I heard enthusiasm for the new United States government, the Kennedy Administration and some sort of eagerness to hear more about what President Kennedy meant when he made his speeches about helping other countries. I went out one day to an old gold mine in the eastern part of the country near San Miguel. When I arrived I saw workers with banners, plaques all around them welcoming me, but also saying "we need loans, we need jobs, we don't want gifts." That may have been encouraged by some of the officials in the Department of Development in the Salvadoran government. But, nevertheless, the people at the mines accosted me and asked me what I was going to do for them. The whole spirit at that time as far as people generally concerned was expectation or something.

At this time I should say just a word about the social conditions in El Salvador. El Salvador's problems are deeply rooted in centuries old injustice. A very few people own the great majority of the land, of the wealth of the country. They were protecting that position by the military which was well under their control. There had been in 1932 in El Salvador a big uprising which was attributed to the communists, which was called the communist conspiracy to overthrow the country. Well, I don't believe Moscow, itself, was necessarily behind this revolt, but it did not take Moscow to tell the Salvadoran peasants of 1932 that they were hungry. They were hungry and they did rise up and demand a better life. The uprising was a bloody one. It was put down with considerable bloodshed. General Maximiliano H. Martinez commanded the troops that suppressed the rising peasants on that occasion. I have heard something like 30,000 died. That created a very strong fear among the wealthy people of El Salvador that once again there might be an explosion from the unrest of the peasants.

You can face something like that two ways. You could build up your internal police force, the military, to keep the peasants under control, or you could undertake to remove the causes of the unrest. The Kennedy program which eventually became the Alliance for Progress, was concentrated on trying to remove the causes of unrest. To help the people to build up a fairer society. Fortunately, the government which was headed by Colonel Rivera was fully committed to the same sort of approach. In the years I was in El Salvador, Rivera was constantly promoting the development of health centers, schools, highways, communications, but also industry. He had

been persuaded, certainly by his contacts with Robert Nathan, that you can't give the people more pie until you bake a bigger pie. I can remember Bob Nathan making the gesture to him and Rivera repeating the same gesture to me several weeks later.

So Rivera wanted to encourage the development of factories around the country which could offer jobs to people and raise the standard of living and bring into the country the money that was necessary for all forms of social improvement.

I, myself, went once or twice to the United States to see American businessmen and tell them about the opportunities in El Salvador, especially the opportunities in Central America, because common market made it possible for them to see in Central America a market of 17 or 20 million consumers, rather than four or five individual markets of four or five million consumers. This took hold quite well.

One of the best examples of how well the common market worked was the experience of Sears, Roebuck. Sears, Roebuck as soon as there was an opportunity for a common market began to develop in each of the countries in Central America factories that produced products that could be sold throughout the whole region under the banner of Central American products – Productus Centroamericanos.

For example, Sears, Roebuck could make furniture in Honduras, household appliances in Nicaragua, clothing in El Salvador, automobile parts in Guatemala, other things in Costa Rica, and sell them all over Central America. Officials have told me that that was really a great period for them in Central America. They had their money invested in good factories and they established the technical requirements so that the products were good and they relieved Central American countries of the need of putting out scarce hard currency on imports.

Most of the intelligent wealthy applauded this and invested in various of these companies that came in. It was very logical, especially to people like Francisco De Sola, the leader of the Central American businessmen in that day. It was very clear to them that the country needed social reforms and that the social reforms could be paid for by this improvement of the economy.

However, there was a reaction. The reaction was rather strong and often personally directed at me. One day I read in the newspapers that the government of President Rivera had established a minimum wage of a dollar a day. Almost immediately there was a stir among coffee planters. They came to my office protesting. They assumed that I had been the one who was responsible for the minimum wage of a dollar a day. I remember talking to one group and saying, "What do you mean complaining to me? I have nothing to do with it. This was done by Rivera." Well, Central American businessmen didn't always believe that the American Ambassador had not done such a thing, because they were accustomed to countries where American Ambassadors had passed on legislation before it was enacted and frequently had told governments what to do and what not to do. I had absolutely no knowledge of this minimum wage.

One particular group of rather intelligent people said that I shouldn't have done it and should go down and tell the President to withdraw it. I said, "A dollar a day? What would you think of my reporting to Mr. Arthur Goldberg, our Secretary of Labor, that you objected to paying your

laborers a dollar a day. He would think you were objecting to a dollar an hour and would certainly have no sympathy for you." Then they said, "But in our economy that is all that we can do. We can't do that. It will ruin us all." I said, "In Costa Rica they pay the equivalent of 3 or 4 dollars a day." These chaps had the gall to say to me, "Well, Costa Rican labor produces more and naturally it gets paid more." I said, "Well maybe if you paid your people a little more they would produce more."

Anyway it went on and on like that. The government of President Rivera at one time decreed the nationalization of the National Bank. The National Bank up to that time had been a private organization, but the government thought that it would be better for it to be a national organization, a government organization. They complained to me about that. I said, "I know nothing about it."

Q: The people that complained to you, they were who?

WILLIAMS: The ones who complained represented the wealthy families. Mostly coffee and sugar. However, when these complaints were becoming rather bad, I invited members of the American business community to come to the embassy and talk to me about how they felt about it. It was very interesting. These American businessmen divided straight down the middle. Those who were engaged in coffee or were married to families who had coffee, cotton, sugar and bananas, benefited from these extremely low wages. They objected to all the social reform legislature. But the other American businessmen who were there, those who benefited from higher purchasing power from the people, were pleased with all these reforms. The man from Sterling Products said "Of course, I can't sell aspirin to anyone who makes less than a dollar a day." The man who represented Standard Oil said that they don't buy kerosene, oil if they are making as little money as that. They were all in favor of more production. Even the Pan American Airlines representative said that with such low purchasing power we don't sell tickets. So most of the Americans were in favor of developing and improving the standard of living and making it possible for the economy, itself, to support the reforms which were necessary.

However, the very wealthy people never gave up, the ones who were dependent upon coffee and cotton and sugar cane. They never gave up and even sent a delegation to Washington to find out if I was really backed by the State Department. In those days when Ed Martin and Bob Wood were running Latin America, our government was devoted to the Alliance of Progress and such things, I almost laughed at these Salvadorans. I said, "Of course, we are for it. Haven't you read about President Kennedy's support for the Alliance for Progress?"

An interesting thing that happened to me was that 10 or 15 years earlier when I went as Secretary to the embassy to El Salvador, there was not much talk of reform and things were as they had been in ancient times, the wealthy people were very attentive to us – we went to parties at all the plantations. But when the American Ambassador began to support Salvadoran leaders who wanted reforms, he was sort of boycotted. It was fun for me, on the other hand, because I got to know the intellectuals of the county better. People like Alejandro Dagoberto Marroquin, a Salvadoran sociologist who had helped Oscar Lewis write his book on Mexico and the poor people in other parts of the world. We also had at the embassy from time to time, Pedro Geoffroy Rives, a local intellectual and writer who often made fun of the aristocracy of the oligarchy. It

was interesting to have these people around, but they were not accustomed to going to the same parties with members of the oligarchy.

Nevertheless, we did maintain good relations with many of the wealthy families. Some of them had members who wanted to make progress and eliminate the social injustices that had caused so much trouble for so long. I think particularly of Francisco De Sola, who was head of one of the largest commercial and agricultural family companies. He was the one who, when he met President Kennedy, suggested that Central America would benefit from a business school. President Kennedy agreed and almost immediately professors from Harvard came down to help start a business school which actually went into operation in 1965 and is today one of the strongest institutions of Central American cooperation. It is called INCAE, Central American Institute for Education in Management.

There were some young men ...one Henrique Alvarez who was later tortured and murdered by a death squad.

Q: Was he a member of one of the large families?

WILLIAMS: He was a member of the oligarchy, of the large Alvarez family, but he was one who believed that you had to do something to improve the lot of the people.

Unfortunately the common market, which worked so well, began to fade out when the soccer war broke out between El Salvador and Honduras. It happened in 1969 after I left. It was a frontier dispute which never should have happened and was finally settled by the OAS.

When I left El Salvador, I thought it was making so much progress on the road to social reform and a solid economy. I thought it was making so much progress that it would go on forever. I was glad to see that all these changes had taken place largely under the Kennedy Administration with the Alliance for Progress. I have been disappointed to see El Salvador in the condition it is in today.

Q: Tell me what happened to the man who was president, Rivera.

WILLIAMS: Rivera stepped down from the presidency and another military officer was elected president after I had left the country. Rivera came to Washington as Ambassador and later died, I believe a natural death – he was not very old. Unfortunately some of his bright young men like Alvaro Magana and Rafael Glower Valdavieso... I really felt quite convinced that El Salvador would continue on that path. I suppose what I had overlooked was the growth of an opposition which would take any opportunity to obstruct reform in El Salvador and which spent a lot of time and money trying to persuade the American people that there was a growing threat of communism in El Salvador. That was the sort of thing that was easy to persuade Americans of because of the experience of Cuba. But as I look back on the origins of the present fighting, I have to say that I believe we put too much emphasis on the military side for solutions. We should have continued on working to eliminate social injustice. We had such a long record of cooperation with those who were considered responsible for social injustice that we were inevitably looked upon by reformers, students, intellectuals, etc. as a nation which was partly

responsible for their troubles. We did have a CIA station in El Salvador. It was largely inactive. It was very small. We certainly did not encourage the dissents or the guerrillas. The only time that I can remember authorizing the CIA to take any action was in an election when the head of the CIA said he would like to give some help in propaganda techniques to one side. I, to my great regret, said I had no objection to his spending some money on propaganda, on papers, etc. I always regretted afterwards that I had done that, but I don't know if it had any effect. He certainly didn't engage in anything else.

Q: Why do you regret it?

WILLIAMS: I regret it because looking back on it now I think that was interfering too much in their affairs to let our CIA station provide them with papers and propaganda. I don't think it was on a very large scale. The time I was in El Salvador the armed forces were very small. I think that including the treasury police there were probably not more than 6,000, although it may have gotten up to 10,000, uniformed men in the armed forces. I know some people today, 1980s and 90s, have said that we are responsible for anti-subversive organizations in Central American countries, including El Salvador.

But my emphasis when I was there was certainly on reducing the military. In fact, I made a strong effort to reduce the size of our missions. I saw Secretary Rusk at one point, about 1962, and said that our military missions in El Salvador are too big. There are more people in our air mission than there were pilots or planes in the Salvador air force. Mr. Rusk, always busy with something, said I should write him a letter and he would see that something is done. I went back to the embassy and wrote a dispatch describing these military missions and how unnecessarily large they were. I made it as concise as possible and then sent an even more concise note to the Secretary saying that this was what he had asked me to do and that I hoped he would help me get the mission reduced. Nothing happened.

I had an occasion to go to Washington not long afterwards and I saw John Alexis Johnson, who was very high up in the Secretary's office, and I asked him about this. Could they do something about it? He said, 'Oh, no. I turned that over to Jeff Kitchen, he will take care of it." I got a hold of Jeff and he said, "Murat you have annoyed the Pentagon by even suggesting such a thing. We can't do anything about it." I said, "Well, really it is absurd, you have got to do something about it." Well, in the end they arranged to have the Army Commander, Panama, General Andrew O'Meara, from SOUTHCOM (Southern Command) to come to El Salvador to talk about reducing the size of the missions. General O'Meara spent three days there. We talked about the size of the missions and finally he said to me, "I can eliminate two positions." I said, "Only two?" He said, "We have to have full missions." I said, "All right, you are going to eliminate two, when are they leaving?" He said, 'They will leave when they finish their tour of duty. One would be in a year and a half and the other in two years." It made no sense to me to have such strong military missions in El Salvador. The one threat that might justify it would be a Russian threat, if there were a Russian threat. I don't think the Russians were very much interested in El Salvador. The wealthy people were constantly crying that the Russians were coming. They would come to the embassy and tell us that a new group of Russians were seen landing on the coast, or maybe they were Cubans. In any case they were communists and we had to help them. It takes a very

gullible person to believe all that. I certainly wasn't gullible enough to believe the threat was serious.

Meanwhile there was among the students, as often there is in Latin American countries, a movement to bring about these social reforms. The students were impatient. They wanted the elimination of unjust practices, land reform, etc. as soon as possible. They were encouraged by two or three hard-line communists who had lived elsewhere and come back to El Salvador.

At one point a student demonstration was suppressed rather bloodedly by police – I can't remember what year this was. You had the roots of a rebellion at the university after blood was shed. Little by little this spread into the countryside. I am aghast when I think of the dimensions of revolt in El Salvador, which during the 1980s led us to give El Salvador billions of dollars in military aid. It exasperates me to hear about it. I always said when I had the chance that we shouldn't give them military aid. But here we were giving billions of dollars of military aid. Anyway after any possible Russian threat disappeared after the changes that had taken place in the Soviet Union, I continued to feel that had we pursued our purposes under the Alliance for Progress and concentrated on economic development and the elimination of social injustice, that the tragedy of El Salvador as it is known throughout the world today would not have happened.

There is one thing I would like to say a word about during my period in El Salvador and that is the great good fortune I had, and I mean this most sincerely, in having with me such outstanding people as Robert W. Herder, who was our AID chief most of the time. He had a deep understanding of what the problems were and how to go about it. He was there most of the time I was there as ambassador. Leonard Saccio had great political skill and wisdom in economic development as well as ordinary public affairs. He was my Deputy Chief of Mission during most of my time there.

Q: Saccio was not a commissioned Foreign Service officer. He had come from AID. What persuaded you to take him as a DCM rather than to insist on an FSO as your Deputy Chief of Mission?

WILLIAMS: I wanted him because I had had some experience with him in his AID functions and I thought AID was terribly important there. So, Leonard Saccio was an officer of considerable prestige to come to a small country like El Salvador as DCM. I was certainly rewarded in every respect by having him there.

Q: You have spoken of the caliber of your DCM and the AID director, what about the other parts of the diplomatic mission – the political section, the economic section, USIS, etc.?

WILLIAMS: We had a few outstanding people. We also had some of the types that had been sent ahead and been so imbued with the spirit of cooperating with the wealthy families that they perhaps didn't see through the injustices.

Q: Did it show up in any way in their reporting or recommendations to you?

WILLIAMS: I think some of them were more afraid of the commies than I was – more of a feeling that there was a communist problem. On the other hand, I had very sound economic officers like Philip Burnnett, who was already a PhD and a man of considerable experience before he came to the economic section. And David Raynolds, a very eager young economic officer who later wrote a book about El Salvador.

We were very fortunate to have the Robert Nathan mission with us in El Salvador much of the time. We were also fortunate to have Theodore Moscoso in Washington interested in what we were doing. He was head of the Alliance for Progress. He believed in the virtue of economic development intensely because he had seen what it meant to his own Puerto Rico. He believed that anything that could be done in Puerto Rico could be done in El Salvador.

We had many ingenious ideas. We had a competition once among Salvadoran architects for the best low cost housing that might be available. We encouraged the Salvadoran government to hold the competition. I did try very hard to avoid actual interference in their affairs. We might suggest things to a foreign government without telling them to do it. It was their decision as to whether they wanted to do it or not. We were very careful, also, to make sure that our advisors realize the different cultural background and all the other differences when they proposed solutions to problems to the Salvadorans.

Q: Speaking of support from Washington, what was your relations with the Assistant Secretary for Inter American Affairs, Ed Martin?

WILLIAMS: Excellent. Ed Martin understood what we were trying to do. He gave us full support. I think that he appreciated, more than some others, the fact that the American Ambassador had to be a representative to all the people, not just to the rich, wealthy oligarchy. He understood the fact that we might be doing things that the oligarchy might object to. I believe Bob Woodward is the same way. Bob Woodward had been Assistant Secretary.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the White House? Ralph Dungan?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Ralph Dungan encouraged us in what we were doing. Arthur Schlesinger, who was also at the White House, kept in close touch with what we did in El Salvador. He wrote me a letter, which unfortunately I have lost, saying that what we were doing in El Salvador was closer to what President Kennedy wanted in the Alliance for Progress then any other country. We did it without feeling that we had to have the approval of the oligarchy before we encouraged any program. It didn't matter. You were trying to help the people as a whole. Of course the oligarchy, who spent a large part of their time out of the country in Paris, Rome, Miami, didn't like their position being threatened.

Q: They had close ties to the military, I take it.

WILLIAMS: That has become truer and truer as the years pass, I think. The oligarchy depended upon the military to keep order. After the great blood shed, La Matanza, the blood shedder, of 1932, the peasants of the country were sort of cowed for a long time. Then they began to realize what injustice they were suffering. That was when they began to protest being hungry. It is so

obvious that El Salvador could be a successful and prosperous country because the laboring classes are among the hardest working in the world. Their land was fertile. I remember once Mr. Henry Wallace, former Secretary of Agriculture, paid us a very brief visit and told me that he had seen lands in El Salvador grow four crops in a years. They could diversify too. They sometimes undertook to growing flowers and fruit and vegetables for the American markets.

Q: Do you feel that the military advisory assistance group's relationships to the military was a positive or negative force?

WILLIAMS: I don't think they were negative. I just think there were too many of them. I'm sure they had some good influences, but I think we over did it. We shouldn't have relied on them so much to maintain tranquility. We should have counted on eliminating sources of unrest and injustice. We didn't emphasis too much land reform in my time because I found from reading about it in other countries, that unless there is a judicial system to back up a man's title to his property, unless there is education so a man can know what to do with his property, unless there is capital available for buying seeds and technical know-how, land reform usually doesn't work. There have been land reforms in El Salvador in the past, but they usually end with the originally people owning it all again because if the poor peasant can't read or write he doesn't know what a title is and can't protect himself.

The military in recent years have changed their relations to the big landowners somewhat. Instead of protecting the landowners they are beginning to get a bit of their own. The military got more and more land of their own.

Q: They actually got land of their own?

WILLIAMS: Yes. The military began to get land of their own and their own peasants to look after them.

El Salvador represents such a tragedy to me because I can remember Senator Fulbright when he was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, saying, "We have been doing such a good job in El Salvador that we ought to make it an example for other countries as to what can be done."

Q: What do you attribute to why things went wrong down there vis-a-vis the US policy towards that area?

WILLIAMS: US policy was too much influenced by the wealthy families. The wealthy families scared too many US policymakers into believing that there was a real danger of communism there. Two, I think US policymakers took the short term view of believing in oppression rather than in positive economic development, the elimination of social injustice.

Q: Was this congruent with the demise of President Kennedy and the ascendancy of President Johnson and new policies and personnel in the structure in Washington?

WILLIAMS: I feel that very strongly. I think that Kennedy with the support of people like Ralph Dungan and Arthur Schlesinger devoted themselves to a policy that would eliminate injustices.

The successors to Kennedy believed more in using a strong arm, US or local, to maintain order. I just think that couldn't work. It would make us a sort of colonial power trying to govern the little republics of Central America.

I know that President Johnson's Assistant Secretary of State, Tom Mann, told me in 1963, before Kennedy died, that I as ambassador in El Salvador was making a big mistake. I was not working with the wealthy families. "After all," he said, "they have the power." As I look back and think what the policy became and what it meant to be working with the wealthy families, I realized that it was a sure recipe or formula for trouble in that part of the world. If we are going to support local oligarchies in each country – in Honduras, in Guatemala, in El Salvador and Nicaragua – we are just making trouble because those oligarchies don't have the support of their own people and we would find ourselves with the wealthy people on our side but the masses of people against us. And that is not a position for the United States of America to take.

Mr. Johnson's policy of using a strong arm resulted in building up the military missions, which I had been opposed to, and ultimately as the years passed it meant more and more American advisors taking part. From the standpoint of the people of those countries, certainly those people in El Salvador, they look upon us as their enemy.

[If I may say parenthetically this is not unlike a problem we have in the Middle East today. We have the emirs and kings on our side and bought a few other heads of government, but the people are not with us because what we have done is help keep the kings and emirs in office and ignored the people. I shouldn't make too much of a parallel there but parenthetically it is interesting.]

Q: Before we leave El Salvador, Mr. Ambassador, what about the United States Information Service? What role did they play and how effective were they?

WILLIAMS: We had a USIA library which was a good thing. We had a very active USIA officer named Robert Delaney who ran a good standard program. I don't think that we made a great effort to influence the local newspapers, although we provided them with material from time to time.

Q: Did they teach English?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: That was probably popular.

WILLIAMS: Yes, it was popular. I might add one other thing. We had in El Salvador one of the first Peace Corps that went abroad. When the idea of a Peace Corps was first mentioned, we were asked for our comments. I replied enthusiastically that I would like to see a Peace Corps group sent to El Salvador. I noted that I had been in Israel when Israel had something like a Peace Corps, groups of young technicians who they sent abroad to Iran, Ghana and other neighboring countries to help them in their economic and agricultural development. So, a very good Peace Corps came to El Salvador – something like 25 men and women in the first group. They lived in the country and the life of the simple people of the country. Generally speaking, I

think they were widely accepted. They did many nice things – improving water supplies, sanitary, improving agriculture, the breeding of cattle, etc.

Q: These were all positive things?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Occasionally someone would suggest that the Peace Corps were an agency of CIA and I would say that it was ridiculous – we did not get our information from the Peace Corps. We were glad to see individuals from the Peace Corps. My wife and I sometimes stayed with them, sleeping in hammocks, etc.

Q: When you were in El Salvador did scholars come from the United States, not financed by the US government necessarily, to study?

WILLIAMS: Not many.

Q: Not that much interest in Central America. Too bad.

WILLIAMS: I don't like this thing that goes on now that is call low intensity combat. Have you heard or seen that expression?

Q: No, I haven't.

WILLIAMS: It seems that our military supports low intensity combat. I don't quite understand why, but they describe fighting in El Salvador as LIC.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, earlier you talked about Sears, Roebuck and other American companies being a great force in Central America at one time. What happened to that operation?

WILLIAMS: Thank you for bringing that up again. I talked to the vice president of Sears, Roebuck who had been in charge of Central America in those days just a few months ago. He said that it had been one of the great periods of his life, but that it had pretty well petered out. First there was the war between Honduras and El Salvador which blocked the roads and interfered with trade. Then the old problem of Nicaragua discouraged it. The common market still exists, but the enthusiasm has gone out of it, which is very, very sad. I think the Central American Bank is still operating.

Q: Even as we speak, the President of the United States, and we are talking in February, 1991, has announced that there be tri-lateral trade talks with Mexico, United States and Canada, looking towards a free trade zone all the way down to the tip of South America. Perhaps Central American trade might grow within that framework

WILLIAMS: Absolutely. I am disappointed that the President didn't mention Central America – Central America is left for the future. But it is so logical to have free trade between those countries. Japanese investors, among others, were building clients in El Salvador. Lots of American companies came and left. It seemed always so darn logical to develop a program of social improvement and social reform and an economic program to pay for it. It was so easy for

the wealthy families to convince some gullible American politician and gullible American diplomat that if we didn't keep them, the wealthy families, in their favored position so that they could control the country, the Russians would take over.

Q: I think the catch word has always been "stability" at all costs.

WILLIAMS: Yes, stability and security. I remember when in the early days in Central America that the worse thing that could happen to somebody would be to have a revolution in his country when he wasn't there. The next worse thing was to have a revolution. The first time I was in town during a coup d'etat was back in 1948. All it took was the young officers in the barracks to come out and overtake the President's bodyguard and take over.

Q: Was there any sort of civilian, civil service in El Salvador? Were there career public administration people?

WILLIAMS: I don't believe so.

Q: Your only career government people were the military.

WILLIAMS: Yes. I can't remember ever hearing about any kind of civil service.

Q: You were in El Salvador until what year?

WILLIAMS: Until July of 1964.

DAVID RYBAK
Peace Corps Volunteer
San Ildefonso, El Salvador (1963-1966)

Mr. Rybak was born and raised in New York and educated at LeMoyne College. He joined the Peace Corps in 1963 and was assigned to El Salvador. In 1966 he joined AID in Vietnam, serving first in Public Administration and subsequently in the Refugee Program. He returned to Washington in 1973 working in the Disaster Relief Office of AID, later being transferred to Jamaica. Mr. Ryback had a number of senior level assignments in AID headquarters in Washington, including assisting in the creation of the Center for Trade and Investment. Mr. Rybak was interviewed by Frank Pavich in 1998.

RYBAK: The Peace Corps was one of the most marvelous experiences. I worked in the area of rural development. I didn't know what was in store for me but it actually changed my whole life.

Q: What year was this?

RYBAK: 1963. When I joined the Peace Corps, we were sent to Puerto Rico for two weeks. This was the old Peace Corps training. They put you through physical training at one of their camps in Puerto Rico. Mine happened to be Camp Bradley in the Arecibo rainforest. They posed a variety of challenges to the volunteers. You either accepted those challenges or you didn't. Some people actually refused to do them. Notes were taken carefully during that two week training period of which volunteers would be de-selected from the program. It was a very intensive exercise and included everything from Spanish language training with Berlitz teachers to repelling off Dos Bocas Dam.

After Puerto Rico, we went on to Los Cruces, New Mexico, where we studied for three months at the University of Los Cruces about various aspects of rural community development including intensive Spanish language training. It also included field trips to Mexico in order to practice our Spanish. By the same token, we had the selection team scrutinizing us closely and telling us that they would be back after a period of time to make their final selections for the country. After this second deselection, we would then learn which volunteers would travel to El Salvador for two years to help the poor and needy.

Q: What did you learn about development and what did you learn about yourself?

RYBAK: Actually, much of the training was very sophisticated. We would not know how sophisticated at the time because we didn't know what we were going to encounter in the country we were preparing to go to...in this case, El Salvador.

They were showing us how to slaughter animals for example. The sophisticated methods that we use here in the United States were not very applicable when you learned how they do it in a Third World country. They hack the pig over the back of the neck and then string it up or cut its throat. They use their own means of doing this and the thing is that we did not practice what we learned in that training. We were also shown sophisticated water purification and sewage facilities around Las Cruces that were the farthest thing from what we were to encounter living in rural Salvadoran towns and villages.

Q: What was the basic mission of your Peace Corps group?

RYBAK: We were a mixed group of volunteers. The basic mission was rural community development, health, education and home economics training. At that time (1963), the Peace Corps was recruiting volunteers to do anything to improve the lot of poor people in Third World countries. As the Peace Corps grew and matured, volunteers with specific skills were recruited like doctors, engineers, sanitation experts, etc.

Q: What was the actual experience like? Tell us something about what happened when you first got there and how you first got into your job and how it affected you? Some of the things you feel you were able to do.

RYBAK: We arrived at the capital for orientation in San Salvador. After a one week orientation, we were assigned to various villages. I was assigned to a larger town and for two months was part of a U.S. Alliance for Progress (Alianza Para Progresso) Mobile Health Unit composed of a

doctor and two nurses. We would travel each day to a different village. My role was to seek out the local village leaders and learn who the important people were that one could work with in each village on the circuit. Those people who showed leadership capabilities might be the local barber but not the mayor. It could be the village grocer, a successful farmer, or a housewife. And that was basically what I did for two months until I was finally assigned to one village. During this mobile assignment, I somehow picked up a skin disease in my groin that took several weeks to diagnose since the Peace Corps doctor had to have the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia do the final analysis. Then a specially formulated cream was prescribed and sent to San Salvador, where I picked it up. This was my first encounter with disease overseas.

Q: What did you learn from that experience?

RYBAK: What I learned from that experience was that people whom you thought were village leaders weren't necessarily the people who were the local leaders. It was the people who were perhaps in a profession, like a barber or a seamstress or someone else - a teacher - they showed more leadership, drive, and ambition than some of the local elected leaders who one might think were good, strong, reliable leaders. That was an important experience that came from visiting each of several villages over the two month period before being assigned to one of the villages on the circuit.

Q: And you were in El Salvador in a village for two years?

RYBAK: For two years I lived in a tiny village called San Ildefonso in the department of San Vicente. It is located in the central part of El Salvador and at that time was one of the more remote assignments given to a volunteer. The village of San Ildefonso where I was assigned had no running water, no latrines, an old school, and a dilapidated clinic. There was no electricity but a few richer people had generators. Most of the menfolk were campesino farmers who worked rented plots of land using oxen to prepare the land and harvest their crops. San Ildefonso is located off the Pan-American Highway within sight of Chinchontepec or San Vicente Volcano. The village was the site of a Spanish hacienda before it became a village and most likely the Spanish cultivated indigo; this plant is still the most famous of its kind in Central America.

Q: What were a few of the projects that you got involved in?

RYBAK: It was interesting that I was assigned to one of the villages included on the weekly visits of the Mobile Health Unit to which I was working for the first two months after my arrival in El Salvador. I was acquainted with San Ildefonso from the weekly visits I made on that circuit. Peace Corps supervisors were going to put me in a tiny village called Villa Dolores on the other side of a river which would have isolated me in the rainy season since I would have had no way of getting out of that village. So they put me on the nearer side of the river which at least had access to some transportation, one bus that left early in the morning and returned late in the evening depending on the time of year and condition of the road.

One of the first projects was a latrine - actually two latrines. One was at the clinic where I was going to be assigned to work. People were coming in for their consultations with the nurse and once a week with the doctor and had no means of disposing of their waste. The other was at my

house since otherwise I would have no means of disposing of my own personal waste. Primitive conditions of waste removal existed in the village - people defecated and urinated in fields and yards behind their houses. Pigs then did the removal of feces by eating it - the people eventually would eat the pigs!

Q: Was there anyone supervising you?

RYBAK: No. I was the only Volunteer assigned to the village. There was no supervision other than to work with the nurse at the clinic. From time to time, Peace Corps supervisors would visit my village but because I was in such a remote area of the country, the visits were far and few between. Of all the Volunteers in my group, I was living in one of the most isolated areas of El Salvador.

Q: After you had been there for about a year, how did you feel about the Peace Corps, what you were doing, and yourself?

RYBAK: After a year I felt great. After the first month or so I didn't feel very well because I had not really settled in. I was living behind some packing cases in the clinic. Life was harsh and I was feeling sorry for myself because I tended to think of the good life back in the United States - the good food and all the other things associated with the good life. I realized you have to put that behind you and bear with the situation you are confronted with and make the best of it. And everything turned out better once I moved into my own home.

Q: How about the language?

RYBAK: The language wasn't too bad because the people did not speak sophisticated Spanish. This was a small, remote village. People tended to use local expressions which I learned and used. When I would go to the capital, I sounded somewhat like a country hick since I wasn't speaking high level Spanish like educated people. I was in a small village and adapted my Spanish to the people who I was living with in the community.

Q: How about your other Peace Corps comrades? How did they do?

RYBAK: Most of them did fine. A few of them were eliminated; actually they eliminated themselves by quitting. But most of us stayed. I did eventually have a female volunteer who was not happy where she had originally been assigned. She wasn't able to do much where she was and decided to come to San Ildefonso, take a look around, and see whether she liked it or not. As it turned out, she said she loved it. I never understood why she decided to move to my village but her Spanish language was rather poor and maybe she felt I could help her with some of her programs and projects. San Ildefonso was in a rocky location and the village was nicknamed "la olla" because it was in a depression like the bottom of a pot.

Years ago, San Ildefonso was a hacienda and it was located where the village now stands because it had the only source of water. The village grew around the source of water. But Norma liked it and she was a health expert. Once we adjusted to each other, we accomplished a lot together.

One of the great projects was a Mother's Care Project. Norma's Spanish was not very good. Mine was better than hers, but she had the health knowledge. We designed a program to educate mothers and their children in using hygienic techniques. They used to tell me that I was very rich even though I lived in a house similar to the rest of the villagers. The reason the villagers thought I was very rich was because I kept my house clean. I told them all of them could be rich, too. All you had to do was keep your house clean by sweeping it every day. This is something we take for granted in the U.S., but the village people looked at it in a different way.

Q: Do you feel that your presence and your colleagues presence there had an impact on the village in the way that it did things?

RYBAK: Not right away. They realized that we were different. That we were North Americans from the U.S. and we lived differently than they did. As I mentioned before, one of the first projects was a latrine at the clinic and a latrine at my home. I did not go out in the back and defecate like they did in the bush. I tended to keep my house very clean. I found that example went a long way in demonstrating to the people why we did things the way we did them. The villagers' impressions of the U.S. was that everyone was rich. I don't think they realized that we had poverty in the U.S., too. However, one could never equate poverty in the U.S. with poverty in the rural areas of El Salvador at that time (1963-1966) or perhaps even now.

They seemed to like us. I think they used much of what we taught in the mother's class. With that program, in order for a mother to participate, she had to attend weekly sessions that we presented on health and hygiene in the home. The mothers were also responsible for getting the wood, preparing the milk that we brought in from CARITAS, a Catholic voluntary agency, and actually had the mothers prepare and distribute the milk to the youngsters who were of pre-school age. Norma and I also planned and implemented an athletic program working with the teachers of the school. We taught baseball, volleyball, and other games to the school-aged children.

Q: At the conclusion of your Peace Corps tour did your group get together and evaluate the program and come up with lessons learned?

RYBAK: We did. We did that in San Salvador. In fact we took two or three days for the evaluation. We also discussed where people were assigned, how happy they were with their assignments, what they were able to accomplish, what their feelings were after the two years, and whether or not the Peace Corps was what they expected it to be. We did have the evaluation. And this was attended by officials from Washington who also wanted to know about our two year experiences.

Q: Was there anything about development in particular that changed during the two years down in the village?

RYBAK: One of the things was US AID had a rural health program under President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which was very active in El Salvador. We were working very closely with AID people even though they would only occasionally come to the village where I was assigned. They provided us with nothing in terms of products or goods or anything else to make it easier.

We had to find those things on our own or be innovative and devise ways to use local resources on hand in El Salvador.

The AID people visited us to monitor their programs and they used Peace Corps Volunteers to help them monitor their programs and projects. None of them wanted to stay overnight in the village. They wanted to go back to their lavish homes in San Salvador where they had servants and could buy food and goods from the commissary. They would invite some of the Peace Corps people to come to their homes in San Salvador and cook hamburgers for us when we came into town. We literally became the eyes and ears for US AID in the field. And we would report back to them and let them know how their programs were doing in the field.

I can give you a very good example. I was responsible for getting a doctor fired. The doctor was drunk the night before he was to see the sick in the village and he had sex with a young girl. He was unable to show up the next morning for his consultations with the people, many of whom had traveled long distances from surrounding areas to see the doctor. I telephoned San Salvador and reported to the AID person in San Salvador about the doctor's behavior. That doctor disappeared the next week and a new doctor was assigned to the mobile circuit.

Q: This was a local doctor?

RYBAK: This was a Salvadorian doctor, yes, who was part of the mobile health team that traveled on a circuit and visited San Ildefonso once a week.

Q: When did you come back to the US from your Peace Corps training?

RYBAK: I came back to the US in June 1966. I actually extended my tour in the Peace Corps because I had an illness. I had contracted infectious hepatitis. I also had a scare with potential cancer. Fortunately for me it turned out to be negative but did require extensive time at Johns Hopkins Hospital. I therefore extended my tour in the Peace Corps and actually went back to the village after Washington asked the people if they wanted me back. They said, "Definitely." So I extended for three months to make up for my absence in the U.S.

LEONARD J. SACCIO
Deputy Chief of Mission
San Salvador (1963-1966)

Ambassador Leonard J. Saccio began his career in the Foreign Service as deputy general counsel for the Foreign Aid Program in the mid-1950s. He went on to serve in Brazil, San Salvador, and India. Ambassador Saccio was interviewed by Mel Spector in 1990.

Q: *So you became the DCM in Salvador. And the ambassador was who?*

SACCIO: Murat Williams.

Q: *Murat Williams, a career Foreign Service officer.*

SACCIO: He had had a very difficult situation there for two years. We went down in 1963.

Q: *It says '62.*

SACCIO: He was there for two years with the declaration of the Alliance for Progress, which created an absolute panic situation in Salvador. The so-called 14 families--oh, I see what the trouble is here. The appointment date is '62.

Q: *But you went in '63?*

SACCIO: In January of '63. I remember we spent New Year's Day en route, and we drove down.

Q: *Drove the whole way?*

SACCIO: Yes. We were warned about getting through the gap there, but I wasn't going to fly. Not that I was afraid of flying, but we wanted to see the country and we visited my daughter's husband's family living in Arkansas on the way down-- her husband's family, because she was then living in Washington; we left her. We drove all the way down--Mexico and so forth--and the famous gap, which is a very dangerous thing to drive, because it's just a canyon going right through, with little crosses on the roadside where the deceased workmen were buried.

We got down to Guatemala and stayed with Jack Bell, who was the ambassador there, and went on to Murat Williams and worked for him. But he had gone through the whole period of the initiation of the Alliance for Progress.

Q: *Murat Williams.*

SACCIO: Which was highly advertised as a land reform operation, and, you know, getting down to the level of distributing the wealth evenly. And the 14 families who owned the coffee plantations and the rice and whatever else they grew, they were afraid that the communists would take over. There was no joke about this.

Q: *To them, this meant communism would take over?*

SACCIO: Oh, no question about it. And, of course, there was an element of leftists, without any question, whether they were Marxists or what have you. The university was just full of it. When I got there, things had calmed down considerably as far as I could see, and we were working with a new president, Julio Rivera. He was a big stocky guy, about six foot, and of Indian extraction. Obviously, there was white blood in him, a mestizo. But he was enormous and big and the smartest, nicest guy you could work with, and he was absolutely in love with Jack Kennedy.

Jack came down and met all the Central American presidents in Costa Rica. He invited them all there and they talked, and they came out with stars in their eyes. And we worked with Rivera,

and the program there was the usual program. Herder was the mission director. He had gone to Salvador.

Q: *Bob Herder, the man who had been with you in Brazil.*

SACCIO: It was something. We just drove down arriving in the evening. We drove around looking for a place to get information. We drove up to a house, knocked on the door, and there was Bob Herder and his wife. They were expecting us, but we hadn't known how to get there.

Q: *And you just happened to...*

SACCIO: Hit the place just luckily. But at any rate, the program was a good one, a decent one, and we were making a heck of a lot of progress in developing industry. At that point, they were working on the plan of a Central American common market, not so much market, but in which the five nations in Central America would work together and allocate various industries or functions or services, one or the other, so they would be working as an economic group, just like the Andean operation in South America, which would have connected Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, and Peru. The whole idea of trying to have it just like Western Europe.

There were no great disturbances. There was constant, at least public, arguments with the leftist students, but they were kept in rein. There was no terrorist activities on either side. They were allowed to speak, and they did. And the high point of this was that the candidate for president to follow Rivera had a debate with the top man of the student organization, and he beat the pants off him on the radio. He was able to actually show how silly this guy was and all the things that he was saying about the economy and what he had done. The justification was that it was a poor country. There's no question about that. This is the whole situation.

Q: *How did Rivera relate to the 14 families?*

SACCIO: He was not related to them.

Q: *No, I didn't mean it in related, but how did he get along with them. What was his relationship with the 14 families?*

SACCIO: Well, the relationship was the law and order factor that he maintained. It wasn't a terrorist or CIA type. It was that there would be law and order, and nobody was going to take any land from anybody. They resolved that fairly quickly. I don't think they ever really got to a point for the simple reason that the nature of the land would not lend itself to that sort of thing. It was rocky and it gone through various ups and downs because it was a one-crop operation.

In the middle of the 19th century, the one crop was indigo, and they were developing it for the dye that the Prussians needed for their uniforms. Now, when the Prussians stopped using and when they invented chemical dyes, they didn't have that resource anymore, and the top people in Salvador were the ones who introduced coffee and made a go of it.

As a people, the Salvadorans are hard workers. They're noted for being the hardest workers and the best workers in the building of the Panama Canal. Many of them went down. And, you know, this business of Asians going to Kuwait and the immigration isn't new, because that went on, as you know, in history all the time. Where the jobs are, people go. Whether you have immigration laws or not, they get there.

But it was sad, because you'd go out to these villages and they weren't starving, but they certainly weren't . . . One of the great things that Churchill and I experienced--

Q: *Churchill, that's Mrs. Saccio.*

SACCIO: We went to a little village where there was a Peace Corps girl 65 years of age. I don't know what her background was, if it was a teacher or something...and she had a little section of a house--very simple, a cot and a water well--and we said, "What do you do here?"

"Well, I work with the town. We're trying to get things going."

I said, "Well, what are we doing?"

"Well, for one thing, we got them a water supply."

"A water supply? You mean they didn't have a water supply?"

"Well, there was a little trickle of a stream coming out of a rock on the main road into this town, and they would go and fill their pails. But," she said, "that's ridiculous, carrying all this, and when water isn't there, you just don't have any water."

So she got the engineers out of a Salvadoran ministry, told them to come up with a design to build a little cubicle dam right there. On one side, showers for men; on the other side, showers for ladies, where to get your water and so forth, and this is kind of problem. It so demonstrated how difficult it is when you don't have--I've been reading the history of the American Indian, and this is the problem. The technology is so little and their natural resources are so minimal, that you really . . . I mean, in Asia, you'll build bridges and you'll have rice and so forth, but a place like Salvador, the biggest project the Salvadorans said he wanted to put into effect was a tree farm up in the northeastern part of the town.

Q: *Who, the president?*

SACCIO: No, no. This was a Salvadoran technician. He said, "This is where they used to grow their indigo, and it's no longer possible. We'll have a tree farm."

I said, "Do you understand what that means? How long? I mean, I don't know anything to speak of, but this is a major long- term operation."

Now, in this same town where we saw this Peace Corps lady, we walked around the town and Churchill mounted a donkey. But we went out in the country on donkeyback, and we did this on the suggestion of our Peace Corps lady. "You think this place is poor, just go up there."

Q: *And you, as the deputy chief of mission, got on a donkey to go up there? [Laughter] That's good.*

SACCIO: The crazy thing I did was when there was a fire with the circus down in Miteroi, across the bay from Rio, we sent down a lot of medicines, and I was stupid enough to get into the helicopter to fly it over. My State Department guys thought I was . . . "Well," I said, "they need this medicine? Of course, they need it. But how do you advertise that we're giving it to them? We'll fly and get our pictures in the papers."

Salvador was really great, and it was being managed well, considering that the army was in control, the country police were in control. But there was no fighting, no bombs, no terrorists, nothing like that. And this candidate that I told you beat the student leader in the debate, he became president and carried on, but what happened after that, I don't know. I mean, really that was the golden age of Salvador, those two and a half years we were there. It was really very good, and it was a decent program, well run.

Unfortunately, that common market idea, well, the whole roadway from the airport to the center of the city was just crowded with people who would come in with little plants, cigarette makers, and things of this kind, which was fine. But before you knew it, they had two refineries in Central America, where they only needed one. It's very difficult.

And these five countries are so different from the other. Guatemala is 60 percent Indian--real Indian, not just mestizos. Costa Rica is European, very little mixture.

Q: *Of course, in Rio, you'd been minister and you had responsibility for the economic. Now in Salvador, you're DCM, so you've got responsibility--or did you--for the political and economic, as well as for the whole operation.*

SACCIO: Oh, yes. I was just the deputy to the ambassador, that's all. I ran it for a good number of times because he was away.

Q: *And you were the chargé when he was gone.*

SACCIO: Yes.

Q: *How did you enjoy that, being the chargé? That was your first.*

SACCIO: Oh, well, fine. We had a good political officer. We had an excellent CIA man, who was a human being, who understood the problems and kept me advised and contacts with the old-time politicians, not the army, but the old-time--Osorio and people of that kind.

You know, the W.R. Grace Company became ITT. It was just absolutely disgraceful in the way they kept the port on the Pacific. The pier was rusty and they were still using the tide as a source of power, and the piers were rotted. And when I saw the representative of the Grace Company, I told him. I said, "Instead of getting out--(which they were doing. They were sick and tired of being in Latin America; they were pulling everything out)--why don't you do something over there that means something?"

Q: *No way.*

SACCIO: No. I don't know how long they had been in Latin America--years and years. It was an old fruit transport company. They were mostly fruit traders and freighters.

Q: *Well now, how did you find the, they say, career Foreign Service officers? Did they accept you as DCM? Did you find any problems dealing with them?*

SACCIO: Oh, there was a problem. Do you remember Roy Kohler?

Q: *Oh, yes.*

SACCIO: I forget on what occasion it was, but I was up in Washington, and they were having a get-together of the Foreign Service officers. And I walked in there and I put out my hand to say hello to Roy, because I had worked with him as the representative of the AID program in the Secretary's staff meeting every week and Roy was a chief political officer. He was top man, I guess, for Europe. He snubbed me.

Q: *Because you weren't an FSO?*

SACCIO: I was already, but he was taking it out on me. The career officers' last defense against political appointees is the assignment of DCMs.

Q: *Oh, by that time you had become an FSO?*

SACCIO: Oh, yes. I said, "What the hell is the matter with this guy?"

RICHARD A. SMITH
Agricultural Attaché, Agriculture Department
San Salvador (1964-1966)

Richard Smith was born in Cuba in 1935. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of New Hampshire and joined the Foreign Service in 1959. He career included positions in Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, and Washington D.C. Mr. Smith was interviewed by Thad Smith in 1989.

Q: The next question I have written down here is, did your earlier overseas in Colombia and El Salvador live up to your expectations? And how did your wife take to living overseas and being a diplomat's wife?

SMITH: Well, I enjoyed it. I loved my overseas assignments. I can't say anything else. I was particularly fortunate in Colombia when I went. It was a time when Colombia was picked by the Kennedy Administration to be the key country in the Alliance for Progress Program in Latin America. So there was quite a large embassy contingent and very highly motivated and qualified people there. And I got to be very friendly with many of my State Department colleagues. And agriculture was a very key sector, and I really got to work, not only on the traditional FAS work of market development and so forth, but I was able to really get into the whole policy side of the embassy work. I worked very closely at times with the DCM, economic officer and that type of thing. It was a very interesting and exciting time. So I enjoyed it enormously.

My wife had never been overseas. We didn't have children at the time, so she took it upon herself to go to an intensive course at the University of the Andes in Bogotá to learn Spanish. She became quite fluent. In fact, they asked her back to teach English. So she really got into the language and culture. Once that happened, she was just fine. She really enjoyed it very much, too. We enjoyed all of our overseas assignments.

Q: In general, I'm wondering what the political environment was like and how that affected your day-to-day work. You mentioned that you were able to take part in some of the policy-related work that was going on in the embassy.

SMITH: Well, as I've said, the whole focus of the mission in Colombia at that time was development. There was a huge AID contingent and my challenge was to keep the U.S. ag export interest up front. But I felt in order to do that, it had to be presented in terms of the overall policy of the mission in order to get country team support. I was very fortunate to have some very good people there who were quite interested in agriculture, particularly the ambassador. So I got involved in a lot of assignments while I was in Colombia.

For example, coffee - I ended up doing most of the coffee work across the board, not just reporting the numbers but actually writing the reports on the impact on development on foreign exchange and the economy. I had the opportunity twice to go with the ambassador to meet with President Lleras just to talk about coffee issues, and I did a lot of reporting on that – that type of thing, which I thought, was rather great for a young guy to be doing those types of things. I got involved in a lot of briefing sessions and things of that sort.

El Salvador was totally different because it was basically a competition post at the time. It was a small country. I also covered Nicaragua. It was even a lot less formal than Colombia. You got to know everybody in the country, all the top officials. In El Salvador, everybody knows everybody else and it was really quite an interesting assignment. And agriculture just about dominated the whole scene at that time. And the ambassador was a guy called Raul Castro, which was a rather interesting name for a U.S. ambassador. He was a former judge out of Arizona who had quite a bit of interest in agriculture, and we got along very well so I just spent enormous amounts of time working with all factions of the embassy.

I guess the point I'm making, I was very fortunate that they were willing to allow me to function as truly the agricultural man rather than just the FAS man. In other words, almost anything that came up with agriculture they would think of me, have me included, most of the times assign it to me and let me coordinate, that type of thing. That made it quite interesting because you got involved in all kinds of things that were a lot broader. So I felt that it was really pretty good training, not only in understanding all of the programs at the Department of Agriculture, but you really got to understand a lot of the other agencies' interests and what they were trying to do with foreign policy, and trade, and economics. I think later that was helpful to me in jobs back here in Washington.

Mexico was a totally different post. Mexico is, in my view, one of the most interesting posts you can have at FAS. I know a lot of people like Europe and they like Japan. But Mexico is a big market, so you have all of the market development aspects. In fact, it is one of our largest importers of agricultural commodities now. It's an enormous competitor. You have all the border issues that are going on daily. In addition, USDA has an enormous non-FAS presence down there, with programs to eradicate screwworm, and to eradicate hoof and mouth disease, all your plant quarantine issues. So it's really, I think, a fascinating place. And I think the potential in a country like Mexico is great. So I just loved Mexico. We really enjoyed that.

My only downside is that they didn't let me stay awhile. I would have liked to stay a lot longer. Kenneth McDaniel retired and David Hume replaced Ray Iones as the administrator. Dave had a vision and that whoever was going to go into job of management had to have had overseas experience. Dave felt that that was essential in order to be able to understand all of the problems that the overseas people had and to be able to adapt the management people to them. And he very persuasively convinced me to come back and take over the job. I probably would have preferred to stay in Mexico. In fact, I probably would have taken a demotion and salary cut to stay there.

But I've got to say that I enormously enjoyed the job after I got into it because I think if there's one way you really want to understand an agency in the U.S. government is to get into management. It's not the most exhilarating job, but it really gets to the heart of U.S. government, how it operates, how it functions, and I think that it's very useful. When I became administrator, that experience probably helped me more than any other experience I had.

Q: Thinking about El Salvador and Colombia in particular and to a lesser extent Mexico, one of the questions that enters everybody's mind today is security. Was that as much of a factor then as it is now?

SMITH: Oh, no. Colombia was always a problem because Colombia had a history of violence. There were certain parts of Colombia that you couldn't travel to. In Bogota itself, personal security, robberies and that type of thing were always the norm. Kidnapings of children were also a real problem. So Bogota was not very pleasant place necessarily, although it was nothing like today. I mean, you never worried about driving around in a car or doing stuff like that. That was not a problem. You just didn't go to certain areas of the country and you took certain precautions in your house and with your children.

The difference between El Salvador and Nicaragua then and today - I like to tell the story - I used to drive by myself in a Jeep station wagon once a month from San Salvador to Managua and never gave it a second thought. Can you imagine trying to do that today?

Q: The survival rate would be low, I would think.

SMITH: There was absolutely no problem. I used to cross Honduras, I used to cross three border points. If I ever had any problem with the car, there was always somebody to help you. I mean, there was just never any thought of personal danger doing something like that at that time. So you can see how dramatically that's changed.

Q: One of the issues that I want to try to bring up at several points in this conversation in the effect that computers and other forms of mechanization have had on the work that is done in FAS. During your time in the '60s when you were out in Colombia and El Salvador, what was the stage and the status of computers in the agency? Did we have any computers at all? And how did we survive without them? It's hard to imagine today running that agency without a computer.

SMITH: Well, you couldn't today. As I said, the role was much reduced and a lot less complicated. When I first came to FAS, we used to have what they call a statistical pool in each division. You basically had, for the most part, women in there. And the first year I was in the department there was no air conditioning. So you can imagine sitting in Washington in August with the heat and humidity, literally going through every single trade publication they could get from whatever countries were important in trade and horticulture products - most of Europe and Asia. The ag attaches would send those things in, normally in foreign language, and these women would sit there and by hand take the data and put it on sheets, cards, and those became the file. And if I wanted to go in and get what were the U.S. exports of 'x' product to Mexico, they would go in and bring out a card and they would write it all down and give you a card with it. And if you wanted to look up the imports, that's how it was done.

By the time I came back from overseas, there was a unit set up at FAS that was your first data systems. And they started with very simple types of computer work. Most of it was on trade data, actually being able to get the trade data, I guess, on tapes and converting it to long sheets and that type of thing. It was difficult to get people to start thinking of moving from the concept of the stat pool, manual operation to this mechanized aid. A lot of people felt threatened. Everybody was convinced that computers were not going to work, but it just slowly started taking hold and I would guess in the middle '70s it just mushroomed all of a sudden.

I had two things happen. The people we hired to bring in were trained in them. They were trained in school and understood how they worked. When I went to college, we didn't have that. But they expected it. All the people who came in wanted to work with the computers and the mechanization and understood how they worked. So it just, all of a sudden, started snowballing and before you knew it we had what we have today. Even to the extent that when I was administrator, we were the lead agency in developing the use of satellites and computers to identify crop conditions and production in key countries like the USSR and China. When I was the assistant administrator for management, we started spending a lot of money on getting the

computer center put up, working with ASCS and had some people like Dick Cannon and others who really took the lead in it and believed in it and really built it up to what it is today.

JAMES L. MORAD
Information Officer, USIS
San Salvador (1965-1968)

James L. Morad was born in California in 1934. He received his BA from the University of Southern California and his MS from Columbia University. His foreign assignments include Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, Fortaleza, San Salvador, Madrid, Brussels and Paris. He was interviewed on June 9, 1994 by Allen C. Hansen.

Q: This was in June of 1965 and you stayed there till June of 1968? This was before the Civil War broke out?

MORAD: El Salvador was a peaceful country that seemed to be on the verge of an economic take off. Remember the Rostow Theory of the...

Q: Stages of Economic Growth.

MORAD: El Salvador at the time seemed to be at the take off stage and a lot of American and Japanese investment was going into the country. A lot of joint ventures emerged. Exxon had just made El Salvador its Central American and Caribbean headquarters as well. So there was a lot of economic activity. AID was heavily involved, primarily in building schools throughout the country. One of my principal jobs as Information Officer was to promote the AID program and make people aware of what AID was doing in El Salvador. One of our most common activities was inaugurating little red school houses in the countryside with the ambassador. My job was to get press and television coverage of those events, which we did. Also, at that time, placement of news articles in the local press was still an important USIS activity. We managed to produce literally hundreds and hundreds of column inches in the local Salvadoran press every month.

Q: You had a very receptive press.

MORAD: We had a very receptive press, and our placement totals were still valued and appreciated in Washington. We used to get a lot of kudos for all this press coverage. One can debate the value of it all today, but at that time, it seemed to be valuable.

Q: Did you have any inkling at that time of what would happen in the future with respect to guerrilla and urban warfare?

MORAD: Throughout my three years in El Salvador, everything was positive. The only exception to that was the university, where there were a lot of Castro sympathizers, including the dean of the university, and occasional student unrest and a lot of student hostility toward the

United States. We had a Student Affairs Grantee at the post, Ernie Uribe, who has gone on to become a Senior Officer. He was the first student affairs grantee and as a Mexican American, he spoke fluent Spanish, so he made a lot of personal inroads on the campus, but things got so bad there that he was no longer allowed to go on the campus itself. That was a fairly restricted situation and didn't really reflect society as a whole. Everybody used to look at the university and say: "That is just the young kids at the university. They will get over it, and some day they will become capitalist just like their parents." So no one really took them all that seriously.

Q: That is the story of Latin America isn't it?

MORAD: That was very common thinking in Latin America at the time and with some justification. Apart from student unrest, the country was booming. It had two democratic elections for president while I was there; both were highly monitored, including by me, and they were, at least at the precinct level, honest elections. Behind the scenes there was more manipulation than we were willing to admit. About 6 months after I left, the situation deteriorated badly. The war with Honduras flared. This was called the "Soccer War," which was actually a misnomer because it began in the aftermath to a Salvadoran/Honduran soccer game during which there were riots. But the war was really unrelated to the game. More accurately it should have been called, "The First Population Explosion War of the 20th Century." It was a war that really took place because pressures had developed on the Salvadoran/Honduran border. Salvador is a densely populated country with a small territory. Honduras has a larger territory, is under populated, and its borders are not policed very much. So, over the years, 20, 30, 40 years--Salvadorans had migrated illegally into Honduras, established themselves there, built farms and raised their children there; but they never officially became Hondurans, in fact they were never officially recognized. Then the government at the time decided to crack down on all these people and started putting pressure on them to return to El Salvador which had never been home to many of them.

Q: The Honduran Government?

MORAD: Yes, the Honduran Government. The military government in Honduras started putting pressure on them to leave, to pack up their bags and return home and that created a conflict with the Salvadoran Government, which was a democratic, civilian government, fundamentally backed by the military. So you really had two military governments in conflict and that is what triggered the war.

Q: How did that war end, finally?

MORAD: It ended being more serious than people realize. There were many bombings; there were planes flying over El Salvador dropping bombs and vice versa for a while. It was very serious! It ended in a negotiated settlement which allowed the Salvadorans to stay in Honduras.

Q: The OAS probably got involved.

MORAD: The OAS was involved, that is right. I don't remember all the details. I was no longer involved, but essentially it was a peaceful settlement that held together, but the conflict itself began the downward spiral of El Salvador.

Q: You were there at a great time.

MORAD: Subsequently, what happened was that Salvador had its own civil war a few years later, and that was a ten year war that became a conflict of international proportions and involved the United States, and became a major political issue in the United States itself. Americans for the most part had never heard of El Salvador while I was there, and then it became a front burner country for many years. But what that civil war proved to me was in a sense prove the dictum that I had once heard to never trust the use of an expert because the expert model at that time was that internal insurrection urban guerrilla warfare rural guerrilla warfare such as you had in Guatemala and Uruguay, for example, was not possible in El Salvador because the country was too small, the population was too dense, and there were no safe havens for the rebels, but the military would hunt them down quickly and obliterate them. Of course that turned out to be not true at all. One spot in El Salvador where there was a basically unpopulated area near the Honduran border is where it became a platform for the guerilla insurrection and they were able to expand from there into adjoining towns and cities until they basically dominated a large part of what was the southwestern half of Salvador and again the military engaged them into the next decade. The experts were definitely wrong in that case as they often are.

***

Q: Bob Amerson knew of you from your work in El Salvador?

MORAD: Yes, Bob as Area Director came to El Salvador a number of times. El Salvador was the host of the Central American Chiefs of State Summit in El Salvador while I was there and Lyndon Johnson came there to attend it when he was president; that attracted a lot of attention to a normally obscure post because the President of the United States was there for four days.

Q: And who was the PAO, going back to El Salvador?

MORAD: We had two. The first one was Jack McDermott, who only had a year to live when I arrived. He had a very advanced case of emphysema. He could hardly breathe or talk at the time I was there. It was a very frustrating experience. It was tragic seeing him deteriorate in front of our eyes, but it was also frustrating because he was so ill. He wouldn't give up the reins and wouldn't allow the operation to go beyond his capability to run it. So, we had some younger officers there like me who were basically energetic and could do very little.

Q: Biting at the bit.

MORAD: Biting at the bit. He also had this irrational hostility toward the Peace Corps, which was very big in El Salvador at the time, and was a major user of our films. Volunteers were working in the countryside and used to borrow our projectors and films to show to their clients. We had a very close relationship with them. But one day Jack decreed that we would no longer

cooperate with Peace Corps volunteers. We could not give them any more materials. Of course it was a totally irrational thing to do. He had this thing in his mind that the Peace Corps should not have been created, that the money that was used to finance the Peace Corps should have been used to finance and expand USIA activities.

Q: Took it out on the poor volunteers.

MORAD: That was a sign of his illness and deterioration, but it was a frustrating experience to work for him. Then he was replaced by Gene Friedmann. This was Gene's first assignment as a Public Affairs Officer.

Q: And he had been a former Junior Officer Trainee.

MORAD: He had been a former Junior Officer Trainee and had worked in television. Gene completely turned the post around. He transformed it into a dynamic operation, and he and I got along very well and worked well together. So what started out as a frustrating experience became during the last two years a very rewarding experience.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about LBJ's visit?

MORAD: LBJ's visit was an incredible circus. He was there, not on an official state visit to El Salvador, but to attend the Central American Chiefs of State Summit. The purpose of the summit was to accelerate economic development and strengthen anti-Castroism and anti-communism. All those issues were important in the 1960s, and it was hoped the summit would strengthen Central American resolve to address them. There was always this fear that Central America was the weak link or that any given country within Central America that went communist would cause a Domino Theory collapse of the other countries because they were always so unstable. The summit had all the paraphernalia of a presidential visit. All pressed into this tiny country, into very compressed space, with few resources. The thing that impressed me most about Lyndon Johnson was that he was commanding figure in person. He was literally larger than life. He was amazing. I was never that sympathetic to him or his administration, personally, although I consider myself a Democrat and a liberal. It was maybe due to an odious comparison between Johnson and, of course, everybody's hero at the time, John F. Kennedy, but I changed my views of him after that. He handled himself in a way "Latinos" respond to, backslapping, personal, and cowboyish. Lady Bird Johnson was very dignified and I think an outstanding first lady. One interesting story was that Johnson wanted to talk to Somoza, who was the dictator of Nicaragua at the time and somehow couldn't seem to buttonhole him. Somebody told him that Somoza was in the men's room, so he made a beeline for it but Somoza's body guards wouldn't allow him to enter without the Boss' permission. For me, personally, the visit was quite tumultuous because in the midst of working 24 hours a day and being involved in everything that a presidential visit entails, my wife had a miscarriage. I was called away to rush to the hospital where she had been taken. That was a week of high excitement as well as personal sadness and difficulty.

A. ELLEN SHIPPY

Peace Corps Volunteer
San Pablo Tacachico (1966-1968)

Ambassador Shippy was born in Colorado and raised in New Mexico. She was educated at the University of New Mexico and the George Washington School of Law. After a tour with the Peace Corps in El Salvador, Ms. Shippy joined the Foreign Service, where she served first in positions dealing with Latin America and later in with those concerning Asian and African affairs. She served as Political Counselor in Bangladesh, Deputy Chief of Mission in Uganda and she served as Ambassador to Malawi from 1998 to 2000. Ambassador Shippy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: And you were in two years or what?

SHIPPY: Yes, two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in El Salvador.

Q: 1966 to 1968. Where did you go for training and how did the training work?

SHIPPY: They were still doing training in the U.S. Now they do it in the country of assignment. We trained in Norman, Oklahoma, at the north campus of the University of Oklahoma. The buildings were barracks left over from WWII. A pretty awful place, but we had a great time. That was when they still had psychiatrists looking at the trainees, and you had to make a list of the trainees you thought would succeed and those you thought would not. That part – judging your peers -- was really pretty bad.

Q: It sounds like somebody was playing games.

SHIPPY: Yes. That was standard at the time. But we also got to do Outward Bound training which Peace Corps later quit doing. That meant we had a drown proofing course in the water. We learned to rappel. We did a three day excursion into the Wichita Mountains and had encounters with buffalo. That was fun. We had a good training program in Oklahoma, and then we went to Mexico for I think three-plus weeks to use our language and get some cultural exposure. We spent some days in Vera Cruz, ten days in Tlaxcala, and a couple of days in Mexico City. That was great fun.

Q: Did you have assignments when you were in these places?

SHIPPY: I don't think so. We didn't have specific tasks. It was more get to know the people of the village, but we weren't supposed to teach them something or build anything.

Q: How did you find your Spanish coming along?

SHIPPY: Good.

Q: How did you find the group of people that you met going into the Peace Corps, a pretty mixed group?

SHIPPY: My fellow trainees?

Q: Yes.

SHIPPY: Oh, it was pretty mixed. Our group was all going to do 4-C work in El Salvador. (4-C is their equivalent of 4-H.) A large part of our group was from the Midwest, and a large part had either home-economics or agriculture experience from college, college majors. I think almost everyone had been in 4-H. We all got along, for the most part, very well. We were a tight group.

Q: Now was El Salvador just something you picked out of a hat? Had you any choice in the matter?

SHIPPY: No, we hadn't. I got the letter saying I was going there, so I looked on the map to see where it was. One thing of interest in our group, we had one guy who was an American Indian from Idaho. I haven't been in touch with him for awhile, but he is apparently now (or was) a member of the tribe's governing council. We had a Japanese-American from Hawaii who couldn't swim. No African Americans and no Hispanic Americans in the group.

Q: Well when you went to El Salvador, where did they put you?

SHIPPY: In a small village of about 2,000 people in the middle of nowhere: San Pablo Tacachico. You had to want to go there because it wasn't on the way to anywhere; it was very hot and humid. All of us were assigned to Agriculture Extension offices, except for one guy who worked with Boy Scouts in San Salvador, the capital city. The single women ended up in offices where there had been only a male Salvadoran Agricultural Extension Agent. The married couples and the single men generally went into larger offices. I had problems with my co-worker. He drank a lot, and was having an affair with the secretary I roomed with when I first went there. I eventually moved out of that situation and started living with the local nurse, which worked out fine. Peace Corps was a great experience; the Salvadorans are wonderful people.

Q: In the town or village, what were they doing there?

SHIPPY: They farmed.

Q: What sort of farming?

SHIPPY: Corn, lots and lots of corn. There was a big sugar factory a distance from the town. I don't think anybody from Tacachico worked on the sugar fields; they farmed small corn patches, a few vegetables, a very small amount of business.

Q: Pretty much barter exchange?

SHIPPY: Yes, the farmers.

Q: What sort of, what was the government like in this time?

SHIPPY: There was a mayor. In fact I ate with the mayor's family. I think pretty much what he said was the way things were.

Q: You didn't have people coming in from the capital and prancing around?

SHIPPY: No. The president of the country at that time was known for going around the country in a Volkswagen beetle and seeing how things were going, but he never came to Tacachico while I was there. I didn't recall that anybody really came to this town. As I said, it was out of the way and poor.

Q: What were you doing?

SHIPPY: I was working with 4-C clubs, so I was working with boys and girls. We would do chickens, and we did vegetables, and we did cooking, and we did a bit of sewing. Then I worked with parents to get them to be supportive of the clubs. I worked in the village itself and in some of the outlying communities, one of which I went to by bus, one of which was close enough to walk to. For the third, when I could manage it, I used the mayor's big white mule. This third place was up a hill that was pretty steep.

Q: I would think that if you have a village which depends on corn, you know, I mean a very low level of agriculture and support, that it would be hard to get kids to work for the 4-C club or something.

SHIPPY: I was generally dealing with kids who went to school, not kids from families who needed the children at home working, although as I recall most kids were going to school. Salvadorans are extremely hard workers, and they really want to get ahead. I think parents saw it as another way of giving their kids some skills that would help.

Q: How did you feel that your teaching, your work in this 4-C club, during the time you were there, how did it work out?

SHIPPY: I think it went pretty well, but I don't think I built any lasting institutions. When I left, another person replaced me, but he didn't finish his two years there, and the government didn't add another person to the office. One person can't do everything, and when things go, the 4-C clubs are the first to go. So I think I helped the people I worked with, and I think I helped their parents.

Q: Were you aware of sort of national, I am talking about El Salvadoran politics intruding?

SHIPPY: No, Tacachico was not in the coffee area. The whole problem of the coffee estates and the migrant workers was not an issue in Tacachico. I think the roots of the problem that eventually erupted into the civil war were there while I was there, but we expected Guatemala to go first if either country was going to go. The Salvadorans would move very quickly from a verbal argument to knives or machetes. The nurse I lived with was always patching up people

with machete wounds, and often from fights not from cutting something and the machete slipped. So there was a tendency towards violence.

Q: Drinking?

SHIPPY: A lot of drinking. Salvador makes great beer.

Q: How did you observe the relationship and the work of men and women? Was it…

SHIPPY: It was then a traditional Latin setup. Women deferred to men. Women were discriminated against socially, culturally and legally. Some women didn't like it, but they were bringing their sons up in exactly the same ways; not much was going to change.

Q: Did you find you had any problem being a woman or being an American?

SHIPPY: No.

Q: You were different.

SHIPPY: I have never found problems. Only in a few instances have I noticed anything at all. My feeling is if you take the attitude that you are where you should be and you are doing what you should be, and you expect to be treated like a Peace Corp Volunteer or like a diplomat, that you are. The rules that normally apply to the women in whatever country are suspended because you are not a woman. You are a diplomat or a Peace Corps Volunteer, but you have to act with self confidence.

Q: Did you run across the embassy or Foreign Service at all when you were there?

SHIPPY: No. Well in those days there was almost a prohibition about dealing with the Embassy or AID. It just wasn't done at all. You had no contact with them. The Ambassador, Bill Bowdler, welcomed us to El Salvador and attended the wedding of two of the Volunteers, but that was about it. The Peace Corps director attended Country Team meetings at the Embassy, but the Volunteers didn't have anything to do with it. (We also couldn't travel to the United States unless approved by the Peace Corps Staff in an emergency situation.) There was an AID demonstration project on corn to convince the farmers to use hybrid seeds and fertilizer to increase their yields. USAID did one of their demonstration plots in Tacachico, so I was involved insofar as I saw the plot and watched them work on it, but that was it. While I was in El Salvador, I was told by other Volunteers about the Foreign Service Exam and how hard it was. I was intrigued by the idea of being in the Foreign Service, but I really took the Exam to see how hard it was, and to see if I could pass it. So I took the Exam as Peace Corps Volunteer.

Q: Did you take it down in Salvador?

SHIPPY: Yes.

Q: How did you find the exam?

SHIPPY: I found it difficult, but I lucked out and I passed it.

Q: I guess your working in a library and reading a lot paid off at that point.

SHIPPY: I think so. The Silver City paper was not great on international news, but I had read Newsweek every week for many years, and I kept reading it while I was in El Salvador. I think that is what got me over the hump.

RICHARD S. WELTON
Agricultural Attaché, FAS
San Salvador (1966-1968)

Upon graduating from the University of Maryland, Mr. Richard S. Welton joined the Foreign Agricultural Service in 1956 and soon assumed posts in Argentina, El Salvador, Spain, and Mexico. Quentin Bates interviewed Mr. Welton in 1996.

WELTON: I mentioned OAS, but of course FAO was established in 1945, and FAO was also heavily involved in technical development assistance. I had an experience with FAO in El Salvador. They sent an agricultural economist from Israel. And since not many Agricultural attachés from other countries were there, he sort of adopted me as his confidant, and would come by to see me frequently. We would visit on developments there. He came in all excited one day, and said that he had found just the product for El Salvador, that was produced in only three countries in the world. And I said, " Mohair? " And he looked at me sort of aghast, and he said, How did you know that? So I had to confess that I was a mohair specialist in FAS in my early years. But I don't believe that they ever did do much with Angora goats. Anyway, he tried.

***

The next post was El Salvador, which was almost an opposite extreme, in that it's a very small country, and we also covered Nicaragua, so I traveled down there. At that time I was going down about once a quarter. I found quarterly visits were about all I needed to do in connection with the reporting schedule. I sometimes felt that some of my best contacts were in Nicaragua, because we would go down for most of the week, in a very concentrated visit. I'd call people for breakfast appointments, so I'd make the rounds and try to make sure I'd see everybody. It was an interesting time. Fortunately it was before a lot of the troubles that broke out in El Salvador and Nicaragua. I could see it coming in Nicaragua, but in El Salvador things seemed to be fairly tightly controlled.

***

I didn't have much experience in the field with PL 480. Argentina, of course, was not a recipient. They were one of the competitors that we were dealing with. However we also covered Paraguay, and the economic chief there -- I think he told you, didn't he, that he would never do

another PL 480 program for less that $20 million. The headaches were just too much to make it worthwhile. The only direct experience I had was in El Salvador. They had one of the first private credit programs, and they were supposed to be the first ones to pay off this particular agreement amount. But the Salvadoran agency that normally made those payments -- they had a budget cut, and somehow became involved in an interagency struggle there to see who would make the payment. It got delayed and delayed, and finally after considerable effort, we got this last payment. But by that time, there was another few dollars of interest involved, and I told the agency I would be happy to pay it, if they really insisted, but that I didn't want to go back to collect those few dollars. I think they agreed to let that pass. Considering what they wrote off in later years for India, which was way up in the billion dollar or more range, it was small potatoes. It would be an interesting study for someone to go back to see how many of those we did collect in full.

JACK R. BINNS
Labor Officer
San Salvador (1967-1971)

Jack R. Binns was born in Oregon in 1933. He received a bachelor's of science from the Naval Academy in 1956 and subsequently served overseas with the U.S. Navy. In 1963, he joined the Foreign Service, serving in Guatemala, La Paz, and San Salvador. Mr. Binns was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: After nine months of international labor training, you went to El Salvador and were there from 1967 to 1971. What was the situation in San Salvador when you arrived?

BINNS: Politically, the military, essentially reform minded, under Julio Rivera, who had just left the Presidency when I arrived, had assumed power. Power had flowed from the traditional oligarchy to the military, which pursued development and other strategies which the oligarchy did not like very much. It tried to dull the cutting edge of the military's reform process, usually with some success. Nevertheless, there was still a feeling of reform progress. The first several legislative elections under President Rivera were by all accounts free and open. The Presidential elections for his succession which brought Fidel Sanchez, another military officer, to the office was probably the most open Presidential election ever held in El Salvador up to that time. The Christian Democratic Party, which was a new party in existence only three or four years, claimed it had won that election, but I am not sure that even it believed it. It was nothing like 1972 when there was blatant and open fraud which everybody could see. So essentially while I was there, it was a very hopeful period.

Q: What were our interests in El Salvador at this time?

BINNS: Economic development was our overriding interest. We didn't have a great deal of investment; it was not a large market, but we felt that El Salvador needed help, needed the inoculation against Castro's subversion. El Salvador was also a country that was marked by sharp economic differences between a small elite and a mass of people at or below the poverty line.

You had cautious movement toward reform, but at the same time, it was a repressive society--less repressive than five years earlier and much less repressive than it had been thirty years previously, but still a repressive society.

Q: One of the accusations against the Foreign Service and the Department that has been with us for a long time is that we tend to deal with the elite group at the top, ignoring the large masses below. How did the Embassy work in a situation such as El Salvador?

BINNS: When I went there, our Ambassador was Raul Castro, a political appointee. He later became our Ambassador to Bolivia and then Governor of Arizona and later became our Ambassador to Argentina. He did quite a good job in El Salvador, less good jobs in Bolivia and Argentina. I felt that in El Salvador we were too close to the ruling party; not too close to the oligarchy because for the most part we didn't have much to do with it. To the extent that the accusation you mentioned might be applied to El Salvador, it is incorrect. But we were close to the ruling political party, which was in some respect influenced by the oligarchy, but only as one of several factors. My job was that of Labor Attaché, which required me to establish contacts with trade unions. I supervised a labor development program which was conducted by the American Institute for Free Labor Development and financed by AID. So I worked for the Embassy in a political position and for AID as a program director. I persuaded the Ambassador that we needed to improve our contacts with the Christian Democrats; I persuaded the Ambassador that we needed to reach out beyond just the trade unions that were affiliated with the regional democratic labor movement and reach out to the Christian Democratic labor movement with which we had no contacts. We had to establish at least lines of communications with a communist affiliated trade union center. So I was out a lot talking to people who had had no previous contact with the Embassy and to whom the Embassy had previously not paid much attention.

The Ambassador did not have the Christian Democrats or the labor leaders over for dinner, but he would certainly include them in larger functions.

Q: Why couldn't the Christian Democrats be invited for dinner?

BINNS: I didn't say they couldn't be invited; I just said that the Ambassador didn't. The two principal leaders of the C.D. Party--Napoleon Duarte and Abraham Rodriguez--were distinguished leaders. But the Ambassador was basically a conservative, even though a Democrat. He felt more comfortable with the upper middle class which was predominantly affiliated with the ruling National Conciliation Party.

Q: Did you have any problems with any parts of the US Government in your role as Labor Officer?

BINNS: In our goals and aims, there was consistency among all agencies--to the extent that I was ever aware of what others were trying to do. On the other hand, there was a real egregious case in which the CIA attempted to enlist a leading labor leader with whom I had worked with very closely. They put him on their payroll; it caused him lots of problems and didn't help us. Prior to that time, he had been very willing to work with us. We gained nothing from the

Agency's efforts except to gain some unvarnished intelligence about what was going on or what his views of the labor movement were. It was a dopey action for which we and the labor leader paid a price. But basically, all agencies were pursuing the same goals.

Q: I think that just points out that putting foreigners on US payrolls does not give you information that you couldn't get in overt manner.

BINNS: There was another probably even more egregious case. CIA had a very good penetration of the Christian Democratic Party. They were paying a senior member of the Party, who I am pretty sure I know who it was. After some time, I was able to build up very good relationships with Duarte, Rodriguez and other senior party leaders, including Fidel Chavez, now the Presidential candidate, but who at that time was a young man who was a good friend. We were getting more information than we needed about what the CD Party thought about issues, their aims and strategies. At one point, Duarte said to me that if we wanted to give them money, it would be welcomed. He said they would take money from anywhere. It was not a plea for recruitment, but just his reflection on the US activities. Senior members of the Party knew that one of their members had been become a CIA agent because he had told them so. They used that channel as a way to get their message to the Embassy. From their point of view, it was a perfectly legitimate approach under the circumstances.

Q: How did the Embassy view the "Great Soccer War"?

BINNS: There were some very interesting side aspects. Basically, the demographic pressure in El Salvador was so great that over a period of approximately twenty years, large numbers of Salvadoran had migrated illegally to Honduras, which had a lot of land, almost free for the taking. It had employment opportunities; it had banana plantations which paid much better than any employment in El Salvador. There were probably between 100,000-200,000 illegal Salvadoran in Honduras. The Hondurans viewed the Salvadoran as taking the best jobs because the Salvadoran have a deserved reputation as being extremely hard workers.

In 1969, for reasons that I still don't clearly understand--partially due to domestic politics, partially conscious effort to divert popular attention from domestic problems toward the presence of the Salvadoran immigrants, partially because of the football (soccer) rivalry in the World Cup preliminaries--tension between Honduras and El Salvador rose after a game in El Salvador which hosted the Hondurans. The Salvadoran stayed up all night screaming in front of the hotel where the Honduras team was playing so that no one could sleep. It was trivia, but shortly after that, riots broke out in Honduras where Salvadoran were dragged out of their homes, beaten, driven off jobs, brutalized. Obviously, the Honduran government sanctioned those mob actions. Literally thousands of Salvadoran immigrated back to El Salvador, including some who had lived in Honduras for as long as twenty years. Many were in bad physical condition because they had been beaten or because they had to walk fifty or hundred miles to the border. It was a very, very bad situations. Tensions were rising dramatically. Both military groups were making noises about the each other's barbarity. Finally, in July 1969, the Salvadoran armed forces launched a military attack on Honduras, driving twenty to thirty kilometers into the country. They repelled the Honduran army's counter-attacks. Then they literally ran out of gas and couldn't move forward. Within 100 hours, the OAS had intervened and a truce was established. Ultimately, the

Salvadoran withdrew. Interestingly enough, in the days preceding the outbreak of the war, we were extremely concerned about the possibility of a Salvadoran incursion into Honduras. There were a lot of reasons why we didn't want that to happen, but suffice it to say, our efforts to avoid the war were unsuccessful.

Our Ambassador at the time in El Salvador was Bill Bowdler, who at every Country Team meeting and in between was asking for the best intelligence available on what the Salvadoran army was doing. He encouraged the members of the MilGroup to circulate among the military, particularly in the outlying areas to see whether there were any signs of mobilization. He wanted daily meetings to bring all the intelligence together. The same injunction was placed on the Defense Attaché and the Political section. The key was the military. During the prewar period of several weeks, our MilGroup people would return and report that saw no sign of any movement whatsoever or any signs of mobilization. They reported that the Salvadoran army was not doing any of the things that one might expect from a military force preparing for action. On the other hand, we had political leaders saying to us that war was likely and that El Salvador would attack Honduras. Our military officers could not corroborate this prediction. CIA could not get any corroboration, because their key liaison contact was a senior military officer who was involved in the mobilization plans. But he was a liaison man; CIA had not penetrated the military.

The most interesting aspect, which we discovered only later, was that the commander of our MilGroup and the chief of our Army MilGroup section, were meeting daily for long periods with the general staff of the Salvadoran armed forces, planning their mobilization and their attack on Honduras. It blew our minds, but it absolutely true. As far as we know, these American military officers were on their own and not under Washington instructions, as far as we were able to ascertain. They were involved in Salvadoran activities without knowledge of the other members of the MilGroup and certainly without the knowledge of the Embassy. One could argue that the other members of the MilGroup might have suspected something or were pretty stupid.

The way we discovered this atrocious negligence of duty was even more extraordinary than the fact itself. When the Salvadoran attacked Honduras, they immediately violated the Security Assistance agreement by using the equipment and munitions that we had provided for something other than self-defense and against a non-Soviet or communist power. We were required by law and by reason to suspend our military assistance program which meant withdrawing all our advisors from all Salvadoran units and breaking all relationships with the Salvadoran military. That was very politically heart-felt in Washington because the whole incursion came as a great surprise. The Embassy, except perhaps some of the MilGroup, recognized that the suspension of assistance was the only right and proper response that could be made. So we stopped all supplies. That mean for example that all Salvadoran planes were immediately grounded for lack of spare parts.

This greatly upset the Salvadoran. They called the Ambassador in and told him that they were very upset. He told them that his hands were tied; they had violated an agreement and our law was quite clear. We didn't have any choice. The Salvadoran President said that to show his government's displeasure he would declare persona-non-grata the MilGroup commander. The chief of the army section and the chief of the air force section. We considered unfortunate, but weren't overly upset since there was not to be a military assistance program for a while anyway.

The Salvadoran gave our military officers a week to pack up and go home. Soon after the President's action, the MilGroup commander came to the Ambassador and said: "Mr. Ambassador, it is very unfair that I being declared p.n.g. It is not fair. Nevertheless, I would like to pay farewell calls on the chiefs of staff of the armed forces, the Minister of Defense and others. But since I can't have anything to do with them, would you grant me an exception?". The Ambassador agreed that it was decent thing to do.

It turned out that the MilGroup commander, who was a colonel and a graduate of West Point, didn't speak a word of Spanish. So he took with him a Puerto Rican officer, a major, as a translator and note-taker. When they returned from the farewell calls, the colonel instructed the major to prepare memoranda of conversation. The major sent the drafts to the colonel, who cut them to bits so that nothing that had transpired was left in memoranda. In fact, the MilGroup commander put in a lot of stuff that had not transpired. The major, who was not too smart, went to his superior, who was the number two in the army section. That officer read the originals and the corrected versions. In the original there was comment made by the colonel to the effect that the problem between the US and El Salvador was the American Ambassador and his failure to perceive and support legitimate Salvadoran aspirations. Furthermore, the Ambassador's unilateral decision to suspend assistance was unwarranted. The colonel was blaming the Ambassador for everything that the US government had done to punish the Salvadoran. All that was in the originals of the memcons. The colonel had of course scratched all of that out and had put in other stuff. The number two in the army section was also a West Pointer couldn't believe what had happened; he took the two documents home, slept on them and at 7:30 the next morning went to the Ambassador's residence with the papers. He said that his commanding officer had done this; that it was unconscionable and that he couldn't support it and thought that the Ambassador should be aware of what had transpired. The colonel was then given twenty-fours to leave. Subsequently, the chief of staff of the Salvadoran armed forces, at a party, approached the Ambassador and said:" One thing about that war with Honduras that always confused us was your strong reaction when in fact you helped us plan the mobilization". He then proceeded to describe the activities of the American military officers, still puzzled why the Americans had helped to plan the invasion and then had cut off military assistance when it happened.

The whole story was unbelievable. Bowdler actually laughed. He had an opportunity when the versions of the memoranda of conversations were brought to him and the subsequent immediate despatch of the MilGroup commander, there had been a lot of cable traffic with Southern Command, whose commanding general wanted to court-martial the colonel. SouthCom took the matter very seriously, but Bowdler, being more decent than I would have been under those circumstances, decided against that on the grounds that a court martial would raise an unnecessary uproar. He recommended that the colonel just be put out to pasture and be permitted to retire in a year or so.

Washington was appalled by the whole incident. It was the most egregious thing I have ever seen. At that time, out bilateral military assistance agreements for the most part required the host country to pay for all the expenses related of the American military--rental allowances, some contributions to the US government for salaries and other expenses. The officers were provided cars by the host government. So many of the MilGroup officers came to view themselves as much, if not more, agents of the host government's military because that was who supported

them--financially and in other ways. They had allegiance to the Embassy, SouthCom and the host government's military establishment. I have seen similar attitudinal problems in Bolivia where a MilGroup commander was removed by Ambassador Doug Henderson, basically for articulating his views on his relationships; he felt that he was responsible to the Ambassador for certain things and to the Bolivians for others. He said that he always had to chose between the two. Henderson said that he admired his frankness, but that under the circumstances, it was best for the officer to leave the country.

Q: Tell us a little about Bill Bowdler, who was a very important figure in our Central America policy development.

BINNS: Bowdler was a lot different from Raul Castro. He did have Christian Democrats, labor people and others to his house for dinner. He was more informal and thoughtful. He was profound. He did act decisively after the MilGroup incident, but he was much less forceful than Douglas Henderson. He was more of an intellectual. He had trouble with US military elsewhere as well. He had an Air Attaché in South Africa who acted contrary to existing US government and Embassy policy and got us into a big flab with the South African government by flying the Embassy airplane over the South African nuclear site, took photographs and then left the camera in the plane, where it was confiscated by the authorities. There was no intelligence that he could have collected that wasn't already available to us. The South Africans knew where he was because they watched him and he violated existing inter-agency procedures on how you get approval for intelligence missions of that sort. It was a royal screw up.

TERRENCE GEORGE LEONHARDY
Deputy Chief of Mission
San Salvador (1968-1972)

Terrence George Leonhardy was born in North Dakota in 1914. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of North Dakota he received his master's degree from Louisiana State University. His career includes positions in Colombia, Denmark, Spain, Mexico, and El Salvador. Mr. Leonhardy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in February 1996.

LEONHARDY: It was early 1968, I went down to El Salvador and I was DCM down there.

Q: *You were there from what? '68 until?*

LEONHARDY: January '68 until March '72.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador at the time?*

LEONHARDY: The Ambassador at the time was Raul Castro who had been a judge - interesting guy - I've been in touch with him recently. He was a juvenile judge in Tucson when I was down on the border, so I knew him casually. He had been a foreign clerk in our consulate in Agua

Prieta, Sonora, during the war. I think he was born in this town of Cananea. The consul there said, "You'll never get anywhere in our Foreign Service or anything." But then Castro immigrated to the States and he got a law degree from the University of Arizona; became a U.S. citizen, of course... So that was his first post, as a political appointee. As I say, we knew each other and we got along fine. He did some pretty good reporting and - he was a little bit biased, I would say. He got a little cross-wise with the so-called Catorce, the wealthier families there one time. But I was only there about two months and his wife was very seldom down there, she had ponies up in Arizona. Anyway, I'd been there about two months and I started hearing noises about Johnson coming down to El Salvador.

Q: *Your friend!*

LEONHARDY: My friend! Anyway, the upshot of it was that they were going to have a meeting (and I think we were helping promoting this) of the five Central American Presidents. There was a question of where this meeting was going to be and where Johnson would come and meet with them. All the other Ambassadors in the area gave about twenty-nine reasons why it shouldn't be in their country, but Castro wanted it in Salvador because it was getting a little hot in the kitchen for him and he wanted to get out and get another post. So he promoted it and it came to fruition.

The first the problem we had was that we had all these other Presidents, four other Presidents coming in with all their entourage and Johnson with his, how would we fit them all into San Salvador? But nobody knew where Johnson was going to stay, whether it'd be in the Residence or the hotel. Oh, the other real problem was where are we going to put all these people? They only had two first-class hotels in town - one was a fairly small one downtown and the one up on the side of a mountain where all the action was going to be and you had all the press plane coming down, of course, and the press all wanted to be where the action was. So I reserved a lot of rooms in the big hotel and the Foreign Office called me within a day and said, "You can't do this; we got all these other people coming in." Oh, the Ambassador came in to me and he said, "Terry, you've handled all these visits before, you're in charge." And another thing, we had to keep this all secret about Johnson coming down there right until the near end. He sent his advance group down, Liz Carpenter and Marty Underwood and we brought in, I think it was, forty-five tons of confidential equipment. All over the Embassy there was these great big huge cables and stuff and you'd pick up a phone and get the ranch or get the White House.

So I was in charge of this visit. I got the military, appointed somebody there, to take care of logistics and transport and all that stuff because I knew they could do it. Then I put the AID people in charge of this, and that, and parceled other jobs to our Foreign Service officers.

Then I put the CIA guy in charge of getting out the crowds. Well, you could write a book on the visit itself. But anyway, Marty Underwood came by my office almost every day, "What are you doing about getting the crowds? Remember the old man's spirits are down, the Viet Nam thing is collapsing..." So I brought him in to see the CIA Station Chief and he said, "Well, this is where we're going to put big signs across - string them clear across the street. We're going to have kids on this corner. He said, "Now, I want kids with homemade signs, no printed stuff, you know." And bands and music, and so forth. Anyway, but he says, "They're holding out one sign they're going to string across the street for suggestions from us." He says, "What would you like on the

sign?" He says, "God, that's nice," he says, "Well, the old man's on a bit of a religious bit." "Now," he says, "Can't you say God bless LBJ in Spanish or something?" Anyway, they found an LBJ school and so Liz Carpenter gets on the phone to the White House and says, "I want you to get hold of Steinway. Got to have a piano for this school." Nobody could play it but anyway. "They owe us something. Get that piano out of Steinway, I want it on the next plane!" and that type of stuff - typical of what went on.

Anyway, when the advance group came in, they came in on the military side of the airport, I'll never forget, it was dark, no lights, and Liz Carpenter gets off the plane with her big straw hat and says, "Where are all the lights?" Mrs. Castro was not there, so my wife had to handle that end of things and she did a very beautiful job on it. One of our joint projects with the Salvadorans under our AID operation - one of the few things that I saw that I thought was worthwhile - was an educational project which we had. The Minister of Education had been in Japan and he wanted to revolutionize their whole educational system, modernize it, and he wanted to put TV sets as teacher's aides in every classroom in Salvador. There were many obstacles to overcome. They have these volcanoes all over the country. We brought tires in from Panama and used helicopters to deliver supplies. We had, I don't know, a lot of people - Americans - working with Salvadorans - working on these courses to put on TV. Johnson came down and pressed the button and that started the whole thing.

Part of the visit included a performance by the Air Force Strings. By coincidence they had an art show at the time which had no connection with the Presidential Visit, but it was in this hotel and after one meeting, Johnson came out and he said, "I want that painting; I want that one." And all of them had already been sold, or most of them and they had signs in Spanish "sold", you know. But nevertheless, off he goes with them.

Then finally he decided about the accommodations - we had to have the Presidential Suite in the hotel waiting for him and the Residence. And they came in to me - the advance group - on the second day and they said, "Does he realize - the Ambassador - does he realize they're going to kick him out? If Johnson comes in, he's got to leave the Residence?" I says, "No." He says, "How do you think he'll take it?" I said, "He'll take it." Anyway, I don't know how many thousands of dollars they put into that Residence in a hurry, lifting shower heads, putting carpets in...

Q: Shower head had to be, I think, eleven feet six inches or something like that. I recall there was special height that...

LEONHARDY: Anyway, they had to do that. It was a real three-day headache. I kept waking up in the middle of the night for weeks afterwards having nightmares about it. Anyway, I think one of the amusing things that happened on that visit was that - oh, there were several amusing things. Somoza from Nicaragua was one of the Presidents who attended. The El Salvadorian hosts had a picnic-barbecue thing out in a National Park just north of the city, where they had a waterfall and a deep canyon - a Secret Service nightmare - trees all over, and the Secret Service didn't want Johnson to go there, of course. But his public relations people did. And Somoza wasn't going to go for security reasons but he ended up going. So they had the big barbecue out there and, I

remember, the head of tourism had an office out there and they had his phone wired some way. He said he picked it up one day and he got the ranch.

But anyway, after the visit was over... The Secret Service only left one household servant in the Residence and he was a half-Salvadoran and half-Chinese. His father had been a janitor in the Embassy some years past and his first name was Ovideo and I think his second two names were Chou Hernandez. Ovideo knew how to mix martinis just the way Johnson liked them, and so forth, and he had keys to everything and he knew where everything was in the Residence so on the way out to the airport after the visit, Johnson turned to our Ambassador and he said, "Before we get on anything else, I want to tell you I want that 'Chink' for the ranch." And the Ambassador says, "Well, he's the heart of our household." He said, "He knows where everything is." And he says, "It shouldn't be of any concern of yours because I'm assigning you as Ambassador to Bolivia." And he says, "I want you up to Washington within ten days and I want you to have the 'Chink' with you."

So we had to go through all the throes of getting Ovideo's visa arranged because there was still some leftover Chinese exclusions in the book and we had to get the White House housekeeper to sign a petition or something, which Immigration took over to her. But anyway, we went through this maneuver and Castro then went up to - he took Ovideo with him; we got the visa all ready. Off they go and he drops him off at the White House and all he had for identification was a Salvadoran passport. So Castro gave him his Ambassadorial card. On the back of it, he wrote something like this, "This is Ovideo Chou Hernandez. He works in the White House" or something like that. And said good-bye and Castro went out to Arizona and he came back with his wife and they were staying in the old Roger Smith Hotel. One day they went down to F Street to do some shopping and they walked by the White House and Ovideo was sitting up in Lady Bird's suite, looking out the window like a lost dog, trying to figure out, looking at everybody going up, "Is there anybody I know?" Finally, he saw the Castro's and he ran out of the room and down the circular staircase and out the front door. He got to the gate just about the time that they got there (that was before they had the security they got now) and so there was a big, burly cop there and he grabbed him by the nape of the neck and he says, "Who are you?" and he fished out this card that Castro... The cop said, "Do you know this guy?" and Castro says, "Yes, he works in there." And he followed them around like a lost sheep. After that, he did go out to the ranch and the last I heard of, he got an immigrant visa, of course, and he had a restaurant out in San Francisco, I think. That's a kind of an amusing story.

Q: *Well, tell me, other than having the Presidential visit, what were the main sort of issues in Salvador during this '68 to '72 period?*

LEONHARDY: One of the major issues was the three day war with Honduras.

Q: *The Soccer War?*

LEONHARDY: Yes, the Soccer War. That was a real tough one for us because our community found itself in a blackout in an uncivilized society. The rumors running around Salvador including the fear that the Hondurans were dropping paratroops up on the nearby volcano ready to capture the city. We had a young vice consul that just arrived from Mexico City. We'd known

him when he was there - red-headed, red mustache and he still had Mexican plates on his car. During the crisis we all had to serve around the clock at the Embassy. Once he came down from the hotel up on the hill to the Embassy, and he was stopped either by this mob scene - mobs that were running around looking for Hondurans - or the police, but anyway, he was stopped and he had his American identification but, you know, they thought he must have come in from Honduras. He had a hard time, I remember.

We had to black out all our windows and put cardboard shades all over our windows in the Embassy on the top floor where we were working. We had to brief the resident Americans, you know. We had two types of Americans living in Salvador. We had what they call "residents" the ones that had been there and married into Salvadoran families and then we had those that were with American businesses down there. The Ambassador at that time was Bill Bodelar. He replaced our friend, Raoul Castro. Bill was very good about keeping the Americans briefed and what occupied me most during that time was briefing them on developments. But it was pathetic in a way to read the newspapers about what was happening, because the papers had the Salvadoran Army already to the Pacific Ocean, you know. As it turns out, they'd only advanced about six kilometers into Honduras; they captured one town.

This one town, there was an American priest, a Franciscan, the missionaries had about six other Franciscans back in the villages and he had all this radio stuff so that he could keep in contact with these people. When they captured this town, it's called Nueva Ocotepeque, they captured him. Of course, a lot of these fleeing villagers that fled the village, they'd leave their sewing machines and radios with him, so that when the Salvadorans captured his place - and they were pretty nasty, these people, they were stealing stuff - when they captured him they figured, "Boy, he's a big spy for the Hondurans. He's got all this radio equipment and everything else." So they brought him back as a prisoner to Salvador and then we got a call from the Foreign Office that they had him and so we got him out right away. I had lunch with him and I still get Christmas cards from him but we got him out - and saw him subsequently in Honduras - got him out to Guatemala and back to the States.

Then the Salvadorans built a great, big arch on the main - like the Arc de Triomphe - on the main street and their military, you know, the big victorious army coming back, and so forth. The OAS (Organization of American States), as you probably know, got into that act, and John Ford, who was a Foreign Service Officer who was with the OAS at that time, was meeting with all these high dignitaries of the OAS that were down there trying to stop this thing and, of course, they got it stopped.

But leading up to the conflict, of course, you could see that something was brewing because you had about three hundred thousand Salvadoran illegals, mostly farm peasants, that were in Honduras. You could even tell flying over, they tell me, where they lived because they had thatched roofs on their houses, compared to the other type of roof that the Hondurans had. Anyway, the Hondurans were very upset about the fact that there were so many Salvadorans in the country, even though they were industrious farming types that were not taking over anybody else's land. It was land that was just vacant. But they were making a big issue of it. The Hondurans threw all these hundred thousand peasants out and the Foreign Minister invited me to go over to the bridge where they were leaving Honduras with a number of other foreign

Ambassadors and we'd asked these people, “What happened?” They said, “Well, the gangs just came in and set fire to our houses...” All they had was what they had on their backs plus a cage full of chickens or something, you know, or a pig. And for Salvador to have to absorb these hundred thousand people when they were already overpopulated was a kind of a real problem.

And then we had the soccer teams playing for the playoffs for the World Cup and they had the first game over in Honduras and, I think, the Hondurans won or something and the Salvadorans claimed they were treated very badly over there and all that stuff. Then the Hondurans came to Salvador and the Salvadorans made an effort to try to have no problems, but anyway, the Hondurans went back with exaggerated stories about their women being raped and all that stuff, you know, and it just started to heat up. Then there were overflights by Hondurans on the border and all kinds of incidents.

Then, I remember, I was told that I couldn't talk to any of the Peace Corps volunteers that were up there, that they were apolitical, but I met them at a Fourth of July picnic and they divulged some of the things that were happening. Of course, there was no defined border between the two countries in a large part of the territory. Anyway, you could see that something was going to happen. Past feelings arose. Out at the airport, the civilian air people had a club and they were all made part of the Salvadoran military, they were reservists. One night when they went over and they decided to avenge everything, the Salvadorans who had been thrown out. But anyway, to avenge all this, they had this air raid that night. None of these planes were equipped to do any of this stuff, but they had some old dud bombs that they got from the military - only maybe one out of twenty would go off - and they flew over towards Tegucigalpa or somewhere and drop - not that far just across the border - they dropped some of these things. Well, anyway, my wife and I were up on the roof of our house the next morning because we got word from our Embassy in Tegucigalpa that their military was coming back with their planes and they had a pretty good air force and they came in and unloaded bombs, a lot of them out by the airport and they knocked out a big refinery and did a pretty effective job.

But anyway, there were some amusing things came out of this little conflict. One was the general, General Madrono, who was the head of the Salvadoran National Guard, was a real tough guy. He lived not too far from the Embassy. He had at least ten radio antennas on his house and he was a very difficult guy to deal with. You never knew what he was thinking or anything else. But he led his National Guard and they were the ones that captured this town in Honduras but on the way up, he stopped at a sugar plantation belonging to a friend of ours and he said he needed his mules. And he said, “I can't. They're the heart of my operation. I can't give up my...” “Oh, yes, but you've got to be patriotic, you know. We got a war going on. What's wrong with you? I want the mules.” So he took the mules. Then the guy says, “We got one mule here that does twice as much work as any other mule, named Jorge; can we keep him?” “Nope, all of them go.” So off he went with the guy's mules all for the sake of the country and they get up into Honduras and they capture this town and then they were using Texaco road maps with no indication where the mountains were or anything and they got up into these mountains and they got surrounded by the Hondurans. Then the war was stopped but they just had their K-rations and that's all, no meat furnished. Anyway, after the thing was over, this guy from the sugar plantation went in to see General Madrono and he said, “By the way, whatever happened to my mules? He said, “We ate 'em.” He said, “Jorge, too?” He said, “Jorge too.” But anyway, it was sort of a tense time.

Q: Did the Embassy play any role in trying mediation or...

LEONHARDY: No, we left that up to the OAS but we were in touch with them all the time and, of course, and our friend, John Ford, who was the American with the OAS delegation. He would come in to send these telegrams up to Washington. Then he'd stay up all night and debrief me. He'd come in in the morning all bleary-eyed and send these telegrams up and he'd have pockets - he'd been a court reporter and he was in the FBI before he got in the Foreign Service - but anyway, he wrote shorthand (as I did one time) and he had all his shorthand notes and, God, the telegrams were long, four or five page telegrams. Then one time he came in and got the telegrams off, but then he woke up in the middle of his nap in the day and he came rushing in the Embassy and he'd found some notes in his pocket that he hadn't communicated, so he had to send another telegram. The funny thing was that the women, mostly from the wealthier section of Salvador, protested the OAS action and the best way they could do that was to protest around the Embassy. They marched around our Embassy for the better part of a day, I remember, all in black, you know. We were indirectly involved, of course, with that OAS representative and we were keeping Washington informed but we weren't in on the actual negotiations.

Q: *In El Salvador, because, of course, this became much more important later on, from what I understand, I've never served there, that you did have a small group of wealthy families who pretty much ran things. Was this...*

LEONHARDY: Well, I think that part is not correct. When we were there they had - the governing party was called the PCN (Partito de Concilacion Nacional), I think it was, which is one of the smaller parties now but it controlled the politics of the country and the major opposition was the Christian Democrats. They had a parliament, “assemblia,” and the Christian Democrats had a pretty good parliamentary representation. They got to the point, when I left there, that they had over one-third of the votes; parliamentary rules required two-thirds votes to pass on foreign aid operations, and so forth; so they were of influence. Then the mayor of the city who later became President, of the Christian Democrats, Napoleon Duarte, “Napo,” was a Christian Democrat. Later they controlled several other cities; so they were a very influential group. As far as the so-called Catorce or the fourteen families as they used to be called, we had a political officer who wrote a very good report on that whole business at one time, pointing out that they really had lost a lot of their influence. True, they did have influence, but they didn't control things as they had in previous years. The other thing that really impressed me when I was in Salvador after having been in Mexico was the honesty of their public servants. You didn't - except for some hanky-panky in the military - you never heard about the Minister of Public Works taking bribes, and so forth, like you did with every other country.

Q: *They're very hard-working people, aren't they?*

LEONHARDY: They are; that's why they were so successful over in Honduras, even the peasants. They're generally very, very hard-working people, industrious people. They had, at the time, it still exists, the Central American Common Market. The Central American Common Market in Salvador was doing very well except that there were a lot of violations of... When

Somoza created a family industry, he wouldn't allow any of competitor's products in from Salvador, for instance, and that type of stuff was going on.

Q: *Somoza being the President of Nicaragua.*

LEONHARDY: Anyway, they had a lot of, for instance, they had a huge, big, shoe factory there but then, of course, we had a lot of American industry down there - a big cigarette factory - and we had three or four other big outfits. I remember that one of the big department stores down there built a new store and put in escalators and all that stuff, you know, all being very much modernized. So from a commercial standpoint, and economic standpoint, Salvador was way ahead of the rest of Central America. I think that came, in a way, from the fact that they were just a little postage stamp of a country and they had to do it. But they modernized, they built a huge, big, new port over on the Pacific and modernized that and the old port was just sort of abandoned.

As I said, their education, they were doing a great job in education. They had six normal schools in the country when I got there and then this new Minister of Education knocked it down to one - a good one. But he was constantly being plagued by the radical-left teachers union. He was a bachelor and he had a penthouse apartment with a sort of a deck outside. He used to go from there to his office by helicopter so he'd avoid these people who were demonstrating. That was one of the first things I saw when I got there. He later became Foreign Minister, later was assassinated by the left.

The political thing was... They had several elections when I was down there. They had an election for the legislature, the "Assemblia," and elections for mayors, and so forth. I went around to the polls with a political officer, an assistant, and so forth, and I thought it was pretty orderly, pretty well-run. But anyway, they finally got to the point where the existing President finished his term. Then Duarte was running for President, as you may recall, against a colonel in the military or something, sort of hand-picked by his predecessor; his name was Molina. They asked me to stay on until the electoral process was finished and that was in the spring of '73, early '73, January, February. Anyway, that election was... They tried to have a sort of U.S. way of presenting the vote over TV. We sat up and watched these returns coming in from the city and the province. It was well-known that the city would vote for the Christian Democrats. It would come out with a pretty big majority but the provinces - and the smaller towns - would probably be held by the government party. Well, the vote coming in - they counted up until midnight - showed that the PDC had a big margin in the city and they were taking quite a bit in the country. So the next morning I went over with the political officer to the head of the electoral commission who was known to be a crook. First thing I told him, I said, "You guys lost this election." He said, "What?" I said, "Yes." Well, they suddenly cut it off at midnight, I remember; when it started looking bad, they cut it off. He says, "Oh, no, no. We're going to win it." I said, "Well." He says, "We still got a lot of votes coming in from the provinces." And I said, "Well, you're not going to be able to make up this huge margins that the PDC got in the city." He says, "Oh, yes," he started fishing around, "Yes, we're going to make it up." Well, they were stealing votes, of course. But that's the only time I ever saw any irregularities.

Well, after the election, of course, there was a rebellion of sorts and even the military were involved, some of them. But it didn't catch and Duarte was put in jail. He was enlisted, sort of,

when the thing looked like it was going to go, the rebellion leaders got him in on it. But he wasn't the leader of it. So I left Salvador about that time, but anyway, he later became, as you know, became President of Salvador but he was a firm anti-communist and that's why the rebel element down there later didn't like him at all, of course, they considered him a traitor.

Q: *Was there a communist Cuban element in Salvador during the time you were there?*

LEONHARDY: Well, there was a communist party. They were outlawed and they didn't participate in the electoral process but Shafee Kandal who was of Lebanese extraction and his brother, and a guy named Quetano Carpio were known commies; they were never imprisoned or anything down there but they were operating. But they didn't have a big following, really.

Q: *I felt we might stop at this point here. You left in when? 197-?*

LEONHARDY: I left in the spring of '72.

Q: *Well, this has been very interesting. Tell me just one thing before we quit. What was your impression of Bill Bowdler because Bowdler was not treated very well by, really, Senator Helms' people, I mean at the time, although it was when the Reagan Administration came in. What was your impression of Bowdler?*

LEONHARDY: Well, I have nothing but the highest respect for Bill, who arrived at post in November 1968. He was a very fine, able officer and he left there about a year before I left, went up to Guatemala, and then he was succeeded in El Salvador by Henry Catto who was a political appointee. But Bill - we still see him once in a while, not very many people that served with him ever - he lives down here in Sharps, Virginia, down on the Rappahannock, in a house that his father-in-law had when he was a preacher in a local church there, I think. We were down there about a year ago to see him and we hope to get down there in the next few weeks.

ROBERT S. STEVEN
Officer in Charge of El Salvador and Honduras Affairs
Washington, DC (1970-1971)

Mr. Steven was born in Massachusetts and raised there and in Rhode Island. He graduated from Brown University and served in the US Army before entering the Foreign Service in 1957. Mr. Steven became a specialist Latin America, where he served in Mexico, Chile and Argentina. He also served in Burma, Vietnam and Japan and had several senior assignments at the State Department in Washington. Mr. Steven was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You did that from '70 to...?

STEVEN: I went down there in ‘70 and had only an 18-month tour there, until ‘71, July of ‘71, and I had the desk, the combined El Salvador/Honduras desk at the time, which was an older arrangement which had become extremely difficult because that was just after they had their war.

Q: The Soccer War.

STEVEN: The so-called Soccer War. The relationships between the two countries were so bad that when I went for my familiarization visit, I went to El Salvador, then had to go over to Guatemala and from Guatemala over to Honduras because I couldn’t go directly. Dealing with the two embassies, it became a fascinating experience. It’s sad it’s gotten the title and the image of the Soccer War. It was much more serious. There were longstanding questions there. One of the major problems was a demographic one: Salvadorans flooding over into Honduras and taking up land in Honduras and the Hondurans trying to stop that. That was one of the basic causes of war right there. It was a difficult job trying to get anybody in Washington in the Department to take it at all seriously. Everyone had the same reaction: oh, it’s crazy in Central America, banana republics having a war over a soccer game or something. It was like saying as soon as they assassinated the Archduke in Sarajevo in 1914 that that was just a minor thing. It set it off and was a catalyst for a lot of trouble. The interesting experiment there was with AID. The Latin American Bureau has always been used for experiments. Planning and programming and budgeting exercises, other things generally seemed to be tried there, partly, I think, because they feel that if it doesn’t work it won’t be quite as disastrous as it would in Europe or something, and the Bureau has generally had a reputation as being more willing to experiment with things. It experimented with the idea of making the State and AID desk officers sit together and share the jobs. In theory and in my case with the fellow I worked with in practice, we substituted for each other. I did AID work and he did State work, and we signed off on each other’s telegrams. When I was on leave, he ran the desk, and vice versa. It was a very, very interesting experiment, and I found it a very, very good one, because we very closely integrated the work, but mainly for bureaucratic reasons it didn’t continue and eventually it was discontinued a couple of years after I left. It was an idea the Department tried and an interesting one.

Q: Later, particularly when all hell heated up in Nicaragua and you had a full-scale war in El Salvador, this became a huge concentration of American resources, but at the time, I take it...

STEVEN: At the time it was on a sidebar and not particularly important to us.

Q: Had the war stopped by the time you got there?

STEVEN: Yes, there was no fighting. There was no cross-border traffic.

Q: Were we trying to do anything, or was this just their problem?

STEVEN: Ultimately we tried to encourage them to settle things in practical terms.

Q: Hadn’t OAS stepped in or done something?

STEVEN: They had made lots of loud noises to try to stop it. I think myself and what I know of the war, the main reason it stopped when it did is that the Salvadorans, who had by far the larger population, basically felt that they were able to damage Honduras enough to force the Hondurans to back off - not that they were going to invade Honduras or something but basically that they would dominate them. The Hondurans did something very interesting, or had done something very interesting, which is similar to what the Israelis did. The Hondurans recognized that, in those conditions with the bad terrain, air power was going to be an issue, and the Salvadorans had done what most of those countries had, they bought a collection of half a dozen different types of airplanes to shuttle their generals around and a few things like this. The Hondurans concentrated very much upon one fighter they happened to buy, the navy, Corsair, which was a very able aircraft, and there were plenty of them around after World War II, and even at that late period they were buying them. So they had a substantial number of them in their squadron of these Corsair fighters, and their pilots to get the training did what the Israelis did. They were airline pilots largely, who trained as reservists, and when they mobilized and put them into the cockpit, you had very experienced airline pilots flying these planes who knew what they were doing. They spent a lot of money on maintenance and upkeep and armament, so they had a really effective, modern air force. When the Salvadorans tried to fight them, they were massacred literally. The Hondurans went through them like a hot knife through butter. One of the better pictures is of two Salvadoran aircraft finishing a mission and having just barely escaped with their lives and possibly having some damage, landing at that same airfield at the same time from opposite ends of the same runway. Once the Hondurans effectively had complete control of the air, had a few missions over and, I guess, shot up a few airport towers and things, the Salvadorans were quite willing to back off. Interesting.

Q: What were your major concerns or efforts while you were on this desk?

STEVEN: Economic assistance probably was a lot of it. That's why I worked so closely with the AID man. We had economic assistance programs there at the time trying to be helpful. Minor problems I forget. There's always a few, protection and welfare of an American citizen perhaps who'd been arrested or things of that nature. One of the nastier incidents we had was the Salvadoran Vice Consul in San Francisco, as I recall, who was found standing on a sidewalk one evening late firing his revolver at the windows of an apartment building above where his girlfriend lived. The police took a dim view of this and were able to safely disarm him - he was thoroughly drunk - and hauled him off, where he got sober enough to announce his diplomatic status, and I remember having to deal with all that. The sad thing is we had at the moment the Salvadoran Foreign Minister in town on an official visit, and he had intervened because the Salvadoran Vice Consul was the son of a very prominent politician in Salvador. Getting him out of jail, because they had been able to hold him - you can hold somebody if he presents a threat to the public - getting him out and getting him back to Salvador, and the main problem was he demanded his revolver be returned before he left, which they didn't do. It was this type of problem, not big, serious things at that time. It was only later when the Nicaraguans and so on got much more involved when these things happened...

Q: I take it at this point there was no guerilla movement or rebel movement up on the hills?

STEVEN: In Honduras and Salvador there always are, but they weren't significant. There were always elements of *banditos* that I recall in El Salvador. They had some trouble in the countryside, but the feeling was probably, even though it was under a political banner, it was more just the usual *banditos* taking advantage of a situation. There was nothing that serious. There was no threat to the stability of either government at that time, except each other.

Q: At that time I take it there was not a very sizable immigrant community of either country in the United States.

STEVEN: No, the big floods of immigration hadn't started yet. There was some coming in, it was always a concern, but it hadn't reached the horizon of public awareness or become a serious problem at the time.

JAMES C. CASON
Consular Officer
San Salvador, (1970-1972)

Ambassador Cason was born in New Jersey and was raised in US Naval bases in the United States and abroad. He was educated at Dartmouth College and the Johns Hopkins School of International Studies (SAIS). He was also the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship to Uruguay. Entering the Foreign Service in 1970, Mr. Cason served primarily in Latin American countries. In his Washington assignments, he also dealt primarily with Latin American Affairs. His foreign posts include San Salvador, Lisbon, Maracaibo, Montevideo, Milan, Panama City, La Pas, Tegucigalpa, Kingston and Havana. He served as US Ambassador to Paraguay from 2005 to 2008. Ambassador Cason was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: So you went to El Salvador in 1970?

CASON: I went there in about November for two years. I bought a blue Camaro, my first car, and drove with Allen Keiswetter all the way down to San Salvador, through Mexico and into Guatemala, where we saw several bodies along the road, victims of the death squads. It was kind of risky, but we didn't know any better and I drove on down there. Everybody admired my new car. It had a burglar alarm which a thief stole one night in Mexico. So I was getting introduced to the realities of Latin America *(laughs).* When I got to San Salvador and reported to work, there was a storeroom full of passports waiting for me to process. I was the sole vice consular.

Q: Oh, why's that? Well, who was the ambassador then?

CASON: Henry Catto Jr. Jack Binns was DCM. I didn't have much to do with them. I was, you know, in the bowels of the consular section.

Q: Well, what was the situation in El Salvador at that point?

CASON: It was right on the verge of the revolution. In fact, businessman Sol Meza was kidnapped toward the end of my tour. And there was a fighting over electoral matters between the National Guard and elements of the military while I was there. I remember watching from the roof of my house artillery duels over the city. World War II planes, like the type my father flew, were strafing and dropping bombs on barracks near the Embassy. They flew right in front of the embassy, you know, machine guns blazing. It was like, wow. I was a junior officer. Welcome to the realities of the Foreign Service.

Q: Do we have any -- at that point did we have any particular side we were on?

CASON: No. I think it was just a surprise to us. This was military infighting over the elections. But I wasn't a political officer then. I was in the midst of a huge investigation of a massive visa fraud ring, which occupied my attention.

Q: What was the visa fraud ring?

CASON: There was a guy named Rafael Frankeko Meza Sandoval who had a travel agency and a school for maids, where he taught domestics English. He was counterfeiting visas and my signature. He did a pretty good job. However, he messed up when he faked a visa when I was on vacation. US Immigration intercepted the visa, made inquiries and we found out that someone had a forgery ring operating. So we knew we had a problem. I kept really good records and was able to track down that the imposter had been refused a visa by me. I researched, found out she was a student with Meza Sandoval, and after more research concluded he was behind the ring. I got the police to do a raid and they found the visa plates and reams of records. They took everything and gave the documents, thousands of pages, to me. There was no due process or any such thing in El Salvador in those days. So I got all of his records. They brought them to my house. Then I spent about a year going through all his records to find out the magnitude of this massive ring. US lawyers, border patrol people, local police, were involved. It was a massive thing. I wrapped it all up and did a bunch of reports and got my first Meritorious Honor Award in that, my first tour, for uncovering the network and putting Meza behind bars.

Q: OK. So you're unraveling this. Were you getting any pressure from influential people?

CASON: Yes. Local travel agents tried to get me booted out. I felt we had been too liberal in issuing non-immigrant visas and began denying most visas. Salvadorans wanted to go to the US to work, not vacation. It is a small, overcrowded country with few opportunities for the poor. No visas meant no profit for the travel agents. So they tried but failed to PNG-ed me because I was Dr. No. Like many Consular officers, before their first interview they can't imagine denying visas. I thought it would be hard too. I never thought that I could deny a visa. But every day there was a massive line of people sitting in my office in front of me, all lying to try to get the cherished visa and a ticket to a better life. I quickly wised up and said to myself, that's enough; I have to put an end to this. And so I would just say no except in the rare case where it was clear the applicant was prosperous and would not overstay his or her visa. Many times the applicants would cry, make a scene or just not get up and take no for an answer. That slowed down processing and extended the work backlog. So I had a series of stamps made each with a year,

like ’72, ’73, ’74. After I’d deny a visa, and if the applicant dallied protesting my decision, I told them that, for every minute more they refused to leave I would increase by a year the time when they could apply again for a visa. And then I had a little buzzer put in. The Marines would come in and escort them out if they wouldn’t leave. So pretty soon people knew they weren’t going to get a visa from me. And the travel agencies were all up in arms that this guy’s ruining our business. But the lines dropped down tremendously. We no longer had a backlog of applicants. It cost nothing to apply and one could reapply at will with no waiting period. But they knew applying was a waste of their time so they stopped coming. They then started going up on the buses to our southern border, sneaking across.

Q: Well, were you uncovering any visa fraud on the part of Americans or Salvadorian staff?

CASON: No, not there. We had a really great staff. It was the local police facilitating illegal immigration and the tour operators.

Q: But not there.

CASON: No, we had a good team. I was Mr. Vice Counsel. We had another guy who did immigrant visas. The Consul General encouraged me to run with the counterfeiting investigation and I said I’m going to get to the bottom of this thing. I love that kind of challenge, the thrill of the chase and the discovery of the truth and so we broke it up, and Meza got sentenced to 13 years in jail. The whole organization fell apart and I wrote it all up with a wealth of detail and names, and sent it all off to Immigration, which probably did nothing with it. Typical.

Q: Yes, well that’s always the problem. What was life like in Salvador?

CASON: It was a really backward country then. There were very few good paved roads. The city was real small and crowded. Not much to do except to go to the pool and bar at the Sheridan Hotel up on the side of the volcano, near where I lived. I decided that my hobby was going to be climbing all the volcanoes in the country. That’s what I did with a couple of other people in the embassy. We were all physically fit in those days. We climbed all the volcanoes, took pictures and drank a bottle of wine once on top, then came back down and went to the beach looking for girls. We had good food, lot of oysters. Salvadorans are very friendly people. I really enjoyed it. And I met my wife of 38 years there.

Q: Was there a significant Communist Party there?

CASON: No. The military there would have killed any communists. They were conservative, far right and did not tolerate leftists of any ilk. But a clandestine guerrilla movement was quietly organizing, under the radar. They began kidnapping and robbing gun stores. Some 10 families or 12 families comprised the elite that controlled the country. And the same pressures that were causing people to leave caused some of them to join the guerrillas to get their piece of the pie. The insurgency really took off after I left, but it had begun when I was there. Their strongholds were on the slopes of the many volcanoes. I was about the last person to climb those volcanoes for decades.

Q: Was there a banana republic type situation there of United Fruit or anything like that?

CASON: No, not in Salvador because that was Guatemala. Salvador was, you know, really small, it was really cotton, cattle, coffee and sugar and some assembly "maquila" type operations that dominated the economy. It was the local elites that had a real lock on the place. There'd been a revolution I think in the year '32, during the Depression and thousands of people were killed. And the military and the National Guard in particular ran things for years. They and their ARENA party made sure that no leftists hung around--they killed or drove them out.

Q: Did they keep you in the consular section?-

CASON: Yes, for my whole assignment.

Q: None of this nonsense about rotation.

CASON: No rotation. I was pure consular. And I was doing a great job in the sense that I got rid of the huge backlog of visas applicants and cut down dramatically on fraud.

Q: Yes.

CASON: My constant threat was that the travel agencies and their political allies might pressure the Embassy to boot me out for doing my job.

Q: What was the government like?

CASON: It was a non-progressive government. Like in so many places at the time, it represented the elites. The elites put in their people to run the government for them, not the poor majority. Their task was to look out for elite interests, keep power and control. There was no tolerance for other views.

Q: How stood El Salvador, from your perspective, with its neighbors?

CASON: Salvador had poor relations with Honduras because of border disputes. That later led to the so-called Soccer Wars. Hondurans tried to keep the Salvadoran immigrants out. Relations were not bad with Guatemala or Nicaragua. All four governments kept a close eye on Cuban meddling and the threat of Cuban-sponsored insurgencies.

Q: Soccer War and all that.

CASON: Salvador was exporting people all over the place. And of course Hondurans didn't like it because they were coming in and taking up Honduran land. Guatemala didn't have a problem because Salvador didn't really have any Indian problem, like Guatemala. And Salvador is really small and overpopulated so people had to be very entrepreneurial. Many of the richest people were those that had a puesto en el Mercado, or market stalls. Salvadorans had to scramble to survive. They couldn't wait, like in Honduras, for the mangoes to drop from the trees. They had

to get out and work hard, till the fields. They were very ingenious too in committing fraud and finding clever ways to get to the States.

Q: So at that point were there any Salvadorian communities in the US?

CASON: Yes, many clusters in New York, New Jersey, California and Florida. But the destination of choice was Washington, DC, the capital. I knew Washington, of course, having lived here. I kept a notebook of every person that applied to go to Washington, logging the address they gave. We didn't have any computers then. If any applicant wanted to go to DC, I'd look up the address in my notebook and find if some else had used the same apartment. I pulled out the earlier visa applications and kept them on my desk. When the applicant told me where they wanted to go and why, I would ask who and how many people lived at the address. Usually they would answer "My mother or sister lives there." How many beds in the house, I would then ask? They would generally reply, oh, just a couple of beds. Then I would pull out the applications of all the people who'd used that same address and ask if they knew them. I said they all wanted to go to your sister's house. I didn't think there was room for so many people, I would say. You know, the problem is these other 18 people are living there right now. Until they come back there's no room in the inn, so to speak. I then denied the visa. The applicants just couldn't understand how I trapped them. They would go back out and say to the waiting crowd "this guy knows everything about us." I kept a lot of records and was very systematic about how I went about the job. But I couldn't fault them for their imagination and for trying. I thought they were great people.

Q: What was the background of your wife?

CASON: She worked for Chilean Airlines—LAN Chile. Her father was a real big landowner. He had about ten square miles of estancias in San Vicente. He was an older guy, about 80, was a Spaniard, and had worked his way up in life. He was a very good landowner. He had thousands of workers and cows and everything you could think of. Don Manuel Aguiluz was very prosperous. He had eleven children. He tried to get me to quit the Foreign Service and help run his business. I said no, the revolution's coming and you ought to sell your land and invest somewhere and get out of it. He was a stubborn guy, he wouldn't go. He didn't do it and lost everything when the insurgency appeared and occupied the land and later when the government expropriated and paid in worthless bonds. I met my wife through a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) officer female friend at the Embassy, who took me to a party where Carmen was. I was very shy and finally got the nerve to ask her out. She had long hair, had studied in Canada and spoke English very well and was very attractive. As she was working for LAN Chile, which did not fly people from El Salvador to the US, her clients did not need US visas. So there was no conflict of interest in dating her. She started taking me all over the country and I met all kinds of strange people that turned out later to be relatives. But at the time, my social life was a blur of all these people, who I couldn't at the time place genealogically in Carmen's family. I dated her until the end of my tour and one day I gave her a form and said if you fill this out we can get married *(laughs).* She said this isn't very romantic, but --

Q: Oh Yes.

CASON: But I had to do it. I had to ask State for permission to marry a foreigner. I told her I'm going to have to resign because I'm going to marry you --

Q: Yes.

CASON: And the Department will accept my resignation if they don't approve of you for some reason. But they had no objections. We got married in El Salvador and then again in Fairfax at the Truro Episcopal Church and went on our honeymoon later to South Africa.

Q: You said there wasn't much of an Indian population there.

CASON: No, almost none.

Q: Was that just because of the topography or they killed off the Indians or what had happened?

CASON: I don't know the reason, but Salvador was not like Guatemala demographically. It's more like Nicaragua racially, mainly people of Spanish origin with many mestizos. There were no blacks at all. My wife had never seen a black person in her whole life because it was illegal for blacks to immigrate, to live there. It was then and in that sense remains a very racist society.

Q: Well, when you left in '72 was it pretty apparent that all hell was going to break loose?

CASON: Yes. By then the kidnappings were occurring frequently. They found the body of Sol Meza back behind the embassy. He was a big landowner, the first prominent one killed. And it was pretty clear that the revolution was coming. That's why when Carmen's father said he wanted me to stay and work with him, I knew bad times were coming. I told him it's time for you to get out. He didn't do it and in the end he lost everything.

Q: So what did you do after 1972?

CASON: Well, then I was picked to be special assistant to Charlie Meyers, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America. I came up to Washington and became a front office paper shuffler.

HENRY E. CATTO, JR.
Ambassador
El Salvador (1971-1973)

Henry E. Catto, Jr. attended Williams College before being appointed as deputy representative to OAS. He subsequently served as ambassador to El Salvador, Chief of Protocol, and permanent representative to the United Nations in Europe. Catto was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.

Q: *And then you were appointed Ambassador to El Salvador.*

CATTO: Correct.

Q: *How did that come about?*

CATTO: I don't really know. I had let the White House know that I after a couple of years was ready to move along and would like a mission. And in some mysterious way, the methods of which I never found out, one day I got a call that said I was going to be named Ambassador to El Salvador. I'm delighted that it worked out that way.

Q: *Had you sort of indicated that you would prefer a Latin American post?*

CATTO: Oh, yes.

Q: *Understood?*

CATTO: Absolutely.

Q: *How does this work? I mean, whom would you talk to to let it be known?*

CATTO: I talked to Peter Flanagan in the White House. He was an Assistant to the President at the time.

Q: *So he was the contact for this.*

CATTO: Exactly.

Q: *When you went to El Salvador, did you have any agenda in mind of things that you particularly wanted to do?*

CATTO: No. Absolutely not. I had no preconceptions. I had been to the country on a trip that I took when I was in the OAS delegation. I took a tour around, well I guess I went to Salvador and Argentina and Brazil briefly, to get a taste of the Latin political scene when I first went to the OAS. And then I, of course, to my surprise, came back to Salvador as Ambassador two years later.

Q: *Did you get any real instruction as far as what you were supposed to do from the State Department?*

CATTO: No.

Q: *Just go down there and--?*

CATTO: And try not to bother us too much.

Q: *How about how to be an ambassador.*

CATTO: The only thing that was really useful was a compendium of experiences that previous ambassadors had put together, pretty much on their on, entitled This Worked for Me.

Q: *As a matter of fact, behind that book is a little bit of the genesis of this project, because I think this is a major piece of statecraft as far as how to do this. I think it's a very useful book.*

CATTO: Does it still exist?

Q: *It still exists and people talk about it, but I don't think they've republished it.*

CATTO: Really? In all those years.

Q: *But it's a very good book.*

CATTO: Oh it was a terrific book. Very, very helpful because having never served in an embassy abroad before I really didn't know what was expected.

Q: *Even for professionals, it still is very useful as you move up. But then there was no course or major briefing before you went down?*

CATTO: Oh, sure. Yes. You went and called on the Secretary of Commerce and on the Director of the CIA and seems to me there were some briefings at FSI and this and that. But it was all fairly slapdash.

Q: *You felt this was rather pro forma?*

CATTO: Pro forma, it clearly was pro forma. Everybody went through it and it was certainly not in depth.

Q: *When you arrived in El Salvador, could you describe how you found--what the situation in the country was at the time you came. We're talking about when in 1971?*

CATTO: About when in 1971?

Q: *Yes.*

CATTO: October, I think.

Q: *October of 1971. What was sort of the political, economic situation of El Salvador?*

CATTO: Well, the economic situation had deteriorated because of the paralysis of the Central American common market. That had really worked, and worked well, and the five countries were--the trade was flowing among them and it was a huge success. Unhappily the brief was bitter war of 1969 between Honduras and El Salvador--

Q: *This is the soccer war?*

CATTO: The so-called soccer war, which if there were ever a misnomer that was it.

Q: *How did this happen? Why was it called the soccer war?*

CATTO: Well, it was called the soccer war because slowly building tensions over the years between the two countries exploded into violence which led to war between the two at a soccer game between Honduras and Salvador. What it really was was a demographic war, maybe the first for all I know, because so many Salvadorans, given as they are to being very hard workers and given the fact that Salvador was and is hopelessly overpopulated, they seeped over the border into Honduras in vast numbers, taking jobs that the Hondurans, perhaps more languid people, wanted or thought they ought to have themselves. And they resented the presence of this foreign enclave along their borders. And the soccer game was the trigger that led to a brief, bloody war.

Q: *When you arrived, what was the situation between Honduras and El Salvador?*

CATTO: There were no relations. The OAS had been working on bringing about a settlement of the boarder. There had been a long festering border dispute as to exactly where the frontier lay between the two. Relations were bad.

Q: *What was the government like in El Salvador when you were there, when you first arrived? I know there was an important election later.*

CATTO: When we first arrived, the government was--the president was a man named Arturo Armando Molina, who had been a career military officer and was one of a line of presidents that belonged to the established party that had run the country for many, many years. It was passed from one military officer to the other, always the officer because of constitutional reasons would resign and then be elected as a civilian. But it was always an officer. Take it back, Molina was the one that was elected. The president when I got there was Fidel Sanchez. And Molina in a fraudulent election was--

Q: *'72, yes, that's when he came in.*

CATTO: --was elected president.

Q: *What was the role of, was it the oligarchy. I understand there were two major powers, one was the military and one was the, I don't know, the 14 or however many families there were, wealthy families.*

CATTO: There were about 100 wealthy families. Time magazine I think it was decided there were 14 families and the idea stuck with the media. But the relation was changing because in the '30s and '20s and earlier the power of the wealthy was tremendous. But in the '40s and '50s and '60s, as the economy grew, the state became a whole lot more powerful than it ever had been and the balance of power clearly shifted. There was a time at which the wealth of an individual

family might have been a major chunk of the GNP, but that was no longer the case when I got there. The government clearly was powerful. The oligarchy sat in their *fincas* in the country and--

Q: *These are ranches?*

CATTO: Exactly. Mostly coffee plantations. And enjoyed the good life, eyeing nervously the military, who by then as I suggested, they were running the country and the government of the country had a whole lot more power than any individual family and a whole lot more than all of them put together. But the military mostly let them alone so there was an uneasy truce between them. In my judgment anyway, the idea that the military--correction, that the oligarchy ran the country was not correct. It was run by the military.

Q: *Where did the military officers come from?*

CATTO: They came from lower middle class homes. The military was the escalator for a bright and ambitious lower middle class type person to rise to the top of Salvadoran society. Conceivably he might marry into one of the aristocratic families, but much more likely he would ride up the military escalator and begin to enjoy the benefits of privilege.

Q: *What was the role of the companies who would buy the coffee, I don't know, it was United Brands, or United Fruit.*

CATTO: Not a factor. Salvador was not like Honduras or Costa Rica or Nicaragua in that coffee was the main crop. It was not a monopoly situation at all. They were always struggling to sell their coffee in the world markets against Brazil and Colombia and Mexico and some of the other coffee producers.

Q: *So there was no major firm, especially an American firm, that--*

CATTO: American investments as a whole when I got there it seems to me were less than $100 million. It was a very minor--American companies were minor players on the Salvadoran scene.

Q: *Well, how did you find the embassy staff? I'm not talking about did you have enough people, but I mean, as far as their competence and--*

CATTO: Very good, for the most part. Obviously some were more able than others. But generally the country team I thought was good. I made good friends among them, felt that I was supported even though I was an *auslander*, a non-career officer. From the very beginning I got guidance and support that was entirely loyal, as far as I could tell.

And of course one interesting thing was that it was a joy to work in that embassy because it was so beautifully done architecturally, the grounds, everything was pleasing to the eye. I'm sorry to say that the earthquake of, what, almost two years ago now, just destroyed it.

Q: *And then of course the war there has not helped at all.*

CATTO: No, the war has not helped. At one point a rocket was fired into the meeting room at the embassy.

Q: *This was during the--*

CATTO: During the height of the troubles that came along in the '70s and '80s.

Q: *But you found, for example, your DCM was a good team player and--.*

CATTO: Terrific guy named Terry Leonhardy. Went on to become Consul General in Guadalajara and was kidnapped, a case that was famous at the time.

Q: *Yes, I remember that. Well, what were you trying-- what did we want out of El Salvador?*

CATTO: Mostly votes in the U.N., cooperation on the world scene. It was for me a wonderful cautionary tale on the inability of the United States to affect what goes on. You hear people say, well, we ought to be able to get support from our European allies, they ought to go along with us. Hell, I would go call on the Foreign Minister and say, would you please vote for us on U.N. Resolution 242 or whatever it might have been. And they'd say, well, maybe, but maybe not. And often as not they would come down on the not side because they just couldn't have cared less, on most political issues, what Uncle Sam thought. Now when it got down to assistance, both military and developmental, yes indeed they would listen to us. But the assistance and the, quote, friendly relations, had very little to do with the way the Salvadorans would vote in international fora. They went their own way.

And of course we never pushed them vigorously like we are, for example, pushing the Panamanians today. We never really had to lean on them for anything, nothing of grave importance came along. But they were pretty independent.

Q: *What did the Salvadorans want from us?*

CATTO: Money.

Q: *In what form?*

CATTO: Technology transfer. Educational assistance. During the course of my time there they were conducting an interesting nationwide experiment in educational television in which because there were many migrant coffee workers, they installed a nationwide curriculum so that the children of the coffee workers, if they began to do the coffee picking in the eastern part of the country and worked their way west, no matter where a child was for a month or two months or whatever, the curriculum would be the same and all of it was tied to television. It was a source of great pride to them that they had this national set-up which leaned heavily on television to teach the basics of education.

Q: *This seems to be, must have been inspired more by the military? Because I would imagine that the wealthy families would prefer to keep the peasants relatively ignorant and docile.*

CATTO: It was sponsored by the government. And by the bureaucracy. I think you can overplay the role of the military in things like the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economy and other things. The military had its own problems worrying about the Hondurans and so forth. So I would say it was more a matter of the bureaucracy, not the military. And I don't really recall, but to the best of my recollection the oligarchy was proud, like everybody else, of the strides that they had made in education. I don't think there was any conscious attempt to keep the peasants ignorant on their part.

Q: *What sort of aid were we giving to the military at that time?*

CATTO: Not a lot, mostly training. Training in weapons use. The Congress about that time cut off some of the police training, which I thought was extraordinarily unwise just because in some Latin American countries police had been involved in human rights violations. This was upsetting.

Q: *Probably more reflecting Argentina and--*

CATTO: And Uruguay in particular. But, as I say, I think that was an error on the part of Congress because certainly in El Salvador the American police officials that we had there helping with police training were people of very high quality who only wanted to teach them that you don't have to beat people up in order to get cooperation and to enforce the laws.

Q: *So this is sort of an example of having an overall law passed by Congress which really didn't pertain to many other places.*

CATTO: Exactly. Out of ignorance and good intentions really doing harm when they were trying to do good. The law of unintended effect was one of the first laws I learned about.

Q: *Did you get much visitation from Congress in those days? Today there's practically a shuttle plane going back and forth to Central America.*

CATTO: The highest American official that came was the Governor of Mississippi to a trade fair. And he was Governor Waller. He and his wife came down and we had a dinner party for him. We went out to the airport to meet him and he got off the plane, handed me his suitcase, and said, What's the name of this country? or words to that effect. As it turned out, they brought along their daughter. She was not expected but we certainly welcomed her and as we drove into town we went past the embassy building, the office building, of which I was very proud because it was wonderful architecture. And I said, "this is where I work." And the daughter said, "Is that the embassy, Daddy?" And the governor said, "No, honey, that's the capital city." Now that gives you some idea of the sophistication of the governor of Mississippi at the time.

Q: *But you weren't getting congressmen coming down or anything like that?*

CATTO: Oh, God, I never saw a single, solitary congressman. The day that Robert Pierpont of CBS News came through was a source of great rejoicing because we'd never had even a reporter. Actually somebody else, I guess it was somebody from "60 Minutes" came through on something or another. But the press and congress were unknown.

Q: *Which I suppose in a way was a blessing, but at the same time you must have felt somewhat isolated there.*

CATTO: We did. I would have welcomed more contact with the outside world.

Q: *How about the relations with the State Department, the Central American desk and the ARA bureau?*

CATTO: Choppy from time to time. I remember in particular on deputy assistant secretary of state being highly critical of the way the defense attaché behaved in the uprising of March 1972. He had gone to the place where the president was being held by rebels in order to see what was going on. And we were criticized because he had done that, lest it be thought to have been a tacit sign of support of the rebellion that was taking place, which of course it was not. And then also we had been asked, the United States government had been officially asked during the course of this brief bloody rebellion to bring the president-elect, Molina, back from a trip he was taking to Taiwan on an airplane. And we had done so and then had sent a bill to the Salvadoran government for a huge amount of money, it seems to me it was something like $30,000, for the airplane ride. And I had protested that as being unwise. They charged everything, including amortization of the original cost of the contract for the building of the airplane, and all kinds of stuff. And here's this miserable poor little country that could barely get along under the best of circumstances, that we were trying to send money to, and instead here we were presenting them with a bill for a very large sum of money. That was one of my darker days when I had to go to the president and say, ur, eh, sir, here's what you owe the United States government. And he took one look at it and said, gee, can I pay it in installments? I complained vigorously to Washington about that, but we lost. They made it stick.

Q: *The accountants will rule the world.*

CATTO: The accountant mentality took over and overruled the diplomatic mentality in that case.

Q: *Before we move to political events a little later, how did you find--again, in an unclassified way, was the CIA active and were they supportive or something?*

CATTO: Sure. The CIA was active, run by a great, great guy named Red Gremillion from Austin, Texas, who has been somebody that I've kept up with from time to time over the years. Liked him very much. Responsible, decent guy.

Q: *Did they keep you informed? I mean, were you being embarrassed or surprised by things that happened?*

CATTO: Negative. Never, never.

Q: *What about the military there?*

CATTO: Absolutely outstanding. We had one little cause of trouble and worry in that the head of the military training group that was there, a group of seven or eight Air Force and Army officers, a colonel by the name of Bill Willis, who was a marvelous guy, hard worker, really get out in the field with the Salvadoran military. And one day he came into my office sort of pulling at his forelock and said, "there's something I think you better know." I said, "What's that, Bill? He said, "well, yesterday, I was out driving in the rural part of the country, driving myself, and just as I was about to crest a hill a truck going the opposite direction came over that hill in my lane, he was passing at the top of a hill and forced me off the road." He said, "Sir, I sure did get mad at this driver." I said, "I don't blame you, Bill. What did you do?" He said, "Well, sir, I turned around and I followed that truck." "Oh?" He said, "Yes, sir, I followed that truck and I," he said, "I curbed him." "You did what?" "I pulled him over to the curb." "And then what happened." "Well, sir, I got out and I began to explain to him"--now Bill Willis' Spanish was not all that good but it could be vociferous when it needed to be--he said, "I explained to him how dumb it was to pass going over a hill and he almost killed me and I had to throw my car into the ditch." "What happened then?" He said, "Sir, I shot out his tires."

So I expected that we would have a request for this wild-tempered gringo to be thrown out of the country immediately, but we never heard a word about it. Apparently the lesson that he was intending to impart to this hapless, probably illiterate truck driver, was received and accepted.

Q: *Turning to the political situation there, was there any guerrilla activity going on?*

CATTO: Negative. There had been one murder before I arrived. The son of a wealthy family--a very progressive, liberal-minded young businessman, had been kidnaped, ransom demanded, ransom offered--a large amount, I can't remember the amount but it was a lot--but apparently the kidnappers panicked and shot him and killed him, left his body in a bag by the side of the road. That was the first hint that there was serious trouble to come.

Q: *But you didn't see at that time that this was going to turn into a nasty movement? Or did you?*

CATTO: I think it could--yes, it could have been foreseen as something that there would be more of. This just didn't look like an isolated incident, and indeed as time went past it became the way that the Communists used to gain money, was simply kidnaping and the payment of ransom to finance the purchase of arms. Alas it worked. And it cost us many friends and cost the country a lot of decent people. There were a lot of people murdered.

Q: *During this time when you were there?*

CATTO: This happened after I left.

Q: *This happened after you left. Were you sort of letting the State Department know that there was a potential for problems there?*

CATTO: No. I don't remember having said that this is going to turn into a major guerrilla warfare. During my two years in El Salvador there was no kidnapping. There had been the one and nothing followed. But shortly after I left it got quite hot as kidnapping became the tool of preference for the financing of the guerrilla war.

Q: *What was your relationship with the other American ambassadors in other countries? Your predecessor had moved to--*

CATTO: Guatemala.

Q: *Guatemala. What was his name?*

CATTO: Bill Bowdler.

Q: *Bill Bowdler, yes.*

CATTO: He was terrific. We would visit back and forth. I took my whole family up to Guatemala City and with all of the Bowdler family we went on pirogues, went down the Rio Negro, I think it was called, one of the nicest trips I've ever taken. It was terrific.

Q: *So you felt you were a team? Were you swapping information?*

CATTO: Absolutely. And John Jova had been in Honduras and he was my boss at the OAS. He was succeeded by another man I knew whose name is not coming up on my screen right this minute. Hew Ryan, Hewson Ryan. And I also visited Hew. I visited in Nicaragua my colleague there. So yes we kept in touch.

Q: *What was the major change while you were there? I believe there was an election which in a way started some of the unhappiness within the country.*

CATTO: Yes, there was. There was a presidential election in which Jose Napoleon Duarte, the current president of El Salvador, was running. He was at the time the mayor of the capital city of San Salvador and he, a Christian Democrat, was running against Molina, the anointed candidate of the official party, the Partito de Concilacion Nacional (PCN), and on election night by chance Bob Pierpont of CBS was in the country and was staying with us at the residence. And we watched the returns come in for a while--I say watched, listened to them on the radio, really--and all of a sudden there was an announcement that counting had been suspended. This was very, very suspicious and all observers concluded in the following days that indeed Duarte had gotten more votes than Molina but the PCN was not willing to give up power. So they rigged the votes and the official candidate was elected. And this rent the delicate fabric of democracy, which had been building--Duarte, indeed all the big cities were in the hands of the opposition. The opposition had representatives in the Parliament. The democracy was, if not perfect, building until this happened, a clear case of fraud. And this I think contributed in no small part to the disillusionment of people on the left who were then driven to throwing in with the Communist rebels, people like Ungo who had run with Duarte, a leftist politician although not a Communist,

threw in with them making popular front common cause. Seeing what happened to Duarte destroyed faith in democracy, I think, among a lot of people.

Q: *Did this come as a surprise, both the strength of Duarte and also the reaction of PCN?*

CATTO: Yes, I think it was a surprise that he had won. But he had been a very popular mayor of San Salvador. And then he made a mistake, moving along in the political tale, a couple of months after the election a couple of air force officers launched a totally non-ideological rebellion and Duarte at the last minute threw in with them and urged the people to go into the streets and avenge the stolen election. The people did not choose to go to the streets, the rebellion collapsed. I mentioned earlier that although the president, Sanchez, had been kidnapped and put in jail, it eventually failed. Duarte was blamed because he did throw in with them. He took refuge in the Venezuelan embassy; Venezuela at that time was in the hands of Christian Democrats and they were members of the same party, so there was a certain sympathy between Duarte and the Venezuelans. The Salvadoran government went into, in total violation of international law, into the Venezuelan embassy, took Duarte out, beat him up. The diplomatic corp was very much afraid that he was going to be killed. The Brazilian ambassador and the papal nuncio and I went to call on the foreign minister and said, for God's sake, do not murder this man. It would be seen very badly in the world and it would be very bad on the country. The following day the president, Fidel Sanchez, who had been kidnaped and humiliated after a vigorous firefight in which his home was pockmarked as a teenager's skin, by gunshots--he had defended himself in a very lively fashion before he was captured. When we called on the foreign minister he said----problems of the ill-fated rebellion and the arrest of Duarte. President Sanchez had a press conference the next day and the reporter said, "Where is Engineer Duarte?" and Sanchez said, "I do not know." And I thought, uh-oh, he's had it. But it turned out that he had been put on a plane and was on his way to Guatemala and exile.

Q: *When you went with the Brazilian ambassador and the papal nuncio, was this on instructions or did you do this?*

CATTO: I did this. This was not on instructions. There had been in the afternoon following the arrest of Duarte, after the failed coup attempt, a meeting of the diplomatic corp and a committee had been appointed of the three that I mentioned and we went.

Q: *Did you ever have the feeling--*

CATTO: Communications had been difficult.

Q: *Did you have the feeling that if you had to act quickly, the best thing was to do it rather than wait for the action to come from the Department?*

CATTO: Exactly. I did this without the by-your-leave of the Department.

Q: *Again, just moving on. Was there any residue of the Alliance for Progress when you were there, or had this pretty well died out?*

CATTO: It had spent itself. The Nixon Administration was not anxious to give a whole lot of credit to the Kennedy-Johnson years, so the Alliance for Progress was not touted as such, although the aid programs kept on.

CLYDE DONALD TAYLOR
Economic and Commercial Section Chief
San Salvador (1972-1975)

Ambassador Clyde Donald Taylor was born in Columbia in 1937. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in 1959 he received his master's degree in interdisciplinary studies from American University in 1961. His career has included positions in Panama City, Canberra, San Salvador, Teheran, and an ambassadorship to Paraguay. Ambassador Taylor was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in January 1996.

Q: You got out in what, '70?

TAYLOR: Yes, I was prepared to have a bridge assignment to catch the summer cycle, because there weren't jobs available in January of '72, but Ambassador Bowdler moved up from San Salvador to Guatemala and took John Ferch as his Economic Counselor. So there was an opening, and that was an excellent stretch-assignment job. Of course, no country in Central America in the '70s was one that merited a designation of strategic U.S. interest; that came later. But these were countries in which we had active AID missions, there was an effort to try and help develop the Central American common market, and there was plenty of room for growth and activity by an Economic Officer.

Q: You were what, Economic Counselor?

TAYLOR: I was the Economic and Commercial Section Chief.

Q: From when to when?

TAYLOR: That would have been from February '72 until June of '75.

Q: I wonder if you could talk a little about William Bowdler, because he became sort of a target of, you might say, the political right, a decade later or so, maybe less than that. How did he operate in San Salvador, from your perspective?

TAYLOR: Well, he was highly respected in San Salvador, and I think he had a terrific record from his time in Guatemala, as well. Those of us who knew him and followed his career, I think, have a hard time forgiving what happened to him in that massacre that occurred in January of '81.

Q: This was when the Reagan Administration...

TAYLOR: It was on the 21st of January, when a very low-ranking political aide informed Assistant Secretary Bowdler, who was head of ARA at the time, that he need not come to work the next day. Of course, since he was a career officer with job security, he could have stayed, but he had the dignity to retire and went down to his farm in Virginia, where he remains.

In no way would I call Ambassador Bowdler someone who stretched his instructions. His personal lifestyle was very conservative, and I think, a very pragmatic but ethically based Foreign Service officer. It was a classic case of politicizing the Foreign Service, because they...against him and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central America James Cheek, four Ambassadors, and four DCMs in the front line states of Central America, there were ten people that were acted against in that retribution by the Reagan Administration. I think it had deleterious effects on the Foreign Service that probably we're still feeling, because officers then had a choice of either being more zealous in following political instruction, which meant you did not provide objective analysis in options and critiques, or if you felt strongly about an area, you eschewed assignments in that area, which is what I did. I was offered, in later years, the office directorship of Central America, and I had real qualms about some of the things we were going on there, and so I went elsewhere.

Q: Well, I think this is, with both the Reagan Administration and particularly, the man who is still carrying a lot of weight, is Jesse Helms and his staff.

TAYLOR: Well, he was the one that set down the conditions for these officers, you're absolutely right. When I get to it in our discussions, I'll mention it, in 1984 what I ran into on this same thing.

Q: We're moving ahead of the thing, so probably we should go back. Could you talk about El Salvador during the 1972 to 1975 period, both political and economic, as you saw it at that time and our interests therein?

TAYLOR: This was, again, another highly satisfying assignment. The Salvadoran people are a delightful people; I still enjoy them wherever I run into them in Washington. They were called already back then "the Japanese of Central America," which honored their work ethic. Their work ethic flowed from economic necessity. El Salvador was, and is today, the most densely populated country in the hemisphere apart from Haiti. Arable land was somewhere in the 20th percentile; highly, very mountainous land, and the coastal planes used for cotton and sugar. While we were there, you saw a classic example of the detriments of an export agricultural economy; prices went up on both sugar and cotton, and the wealthy landlords moved further into those areas that they could manage international prices, and in one year, the price of beans and corn, the staple food for the people, went up 50%.

Q: Because they were taking away land?

TAYLOR: Because they were taking away land. They just cut the supply. So it didn't take a sophisticated analysis to realize that Salvador in those days was a powder keg. It was a question of time before something would erupt. There had been a major...they called it an Indian campesino revolt in, I think, 1932, with a massacre, but since that period, there had been a series

of governments that basically represented a coalition between the oligarchy and the military that had dominated in that form of authoritarianism that was common throughout Latin America.

We arrived in February, there were elections in March, and those elections were the ones that denied Duarte his win. It was an election that was full of fraud, and Duarte went into exile into Venezuela. The President, Morales, I believe his name was, who was declared the winner, suddenly found himself as a President Elect; he was on a trip, I think to Taiwan or someplace, when there was a barracks revolt. It had no political undertones, it was strictly a barracks revolt over some unhappiness over promotions in the military. We hoped to transport the President Elect back, we were quite active in trying to resolve the coup. It collapsed, and we were under marshal law for the next four months, until the inauguration in June; a very difficult time. There were over 400 people killed. Initially, the government tried to shut down even the diplomatic pouch. Constraints under marshal law were extreme. So this was a new experience for us.

On the other hand, from that point on, I would say the experiences were professionally exciting and living there was a delight. It's a lovely climate, two and a half thousand feet, sub-tropics, delightful people; we had a good mix of people as friends, but it was easy to see that the economic pie was going to result in some real difficult strains. The term "agrarian reform" was still considered to be a first step to Communism. I think that perhaps one success in those three years was that agrarian reform became a word that became accepted. Maybe not embraced by the well-to-do, but it was depoliticized to a certain extent, just like the term "cooperative" was in other parts of the world, which was also usually seen as a first step to Socialism.

I did, I think, the first calculations on the feasibility of agrarian reform in El Salvador, working with AID, getting the best data available. In my memory it's a little hazy, but I think in the ballpark I demonstrated that no more than about 20-25% of Salvadoran farmers could be settled on a viable plot of land if all truly arable land was divided. And that's maximizing. Now, a lot of the El Salvador is known as a coffee exporting country. Almost all of the land that coffee is grown on cannot be used for anything else. Steep hillsides, and the coffee bushes are very good in controlling erosion; if you started doing anything else with that land, you'd destroy it. So we're basically dealing with these very modest coastal plains on the littoral, on the Pacific, so we could demonstrate that a radical agrarian reform was not really viable, because a radical one would deny you any export crops except for coffee, and a radical one would still not meet your goal of equity or solving a major political need. You had, therefore, to give more emphasis to economic diversification. And while we were there, Texas Instruments was the first major value-added company to come in, but there were a lot of other Central American firms that had started there in fabrication and started picking up; not just textiles, but ALCOA and groups like that.

So that was the path that could be predicted. But the high birthrate and tight constraints on land argued that time was on the side of a crisis rather than on opportunity for taking care of those who were poor.

Q: Did you share your study with the Salvadorans?

TAYLOR: Yes, we did. We had an extremely good relationship with CONAPLAN, their central planning office. In those days, AID had a good relationship with governments; we had a

particularly strong AID director who had a proper emphasis on policy. By that I mean, and he would get in tensions with our DCM over this, he properly believed that if a government did not have the proper policy, it did not matter how much transfer of technology or of funds, you wouldn't obtain your results. The DCM's view was "Well, that's all well and good, but only if you apply those same policies to neighboring countries, because otherwise, it looks like we're not doing right by the Salvadorans." So that tension existed, and you could see the point on both sides.

But no, we shared those kinds of results, we worked very closely with them. I was a member of the Export Promotion Committee of the country of El Salvador, because AID had as one of its programs export promotion. It was, as I say, a very professionally satisfying experience.

Q: Well, now, going back a bit, we had an election just after you arrived which you considered, I mean you, I'm talking about the embassy, considered laced with fraud and all, and Duarte did not make it. Were we uncomfortable bringing back the President who was elected through fraud to settle the problem, or was that a problem at the time?

TAYLOR: I guess those who made those decisions would say that we were promoting the best of some bad options. Bringing back Duarte was not an option, given the military commitment to thwarting his position. Probably the best course at that period was to support this civilian president, and by assisting in a simple transport act, we probably improved our relationship for working with that person.

It was interesting that there was in that country, which I describe as ruled by a coalition of the wealthy and the military, a group of technocrats that I became very close with. One was the Foreign Minister, an MIT graduate, one was the head and some of the deputies of the Central Planning Office, there was a semi-autonomous agency that took care of the ports, transportation issues, again, headed by a U.S.-trained technocrat. These were people that came out of a merchant well-to-do class, not the landed wealthy class, who, while being wealthy, had within the Salvadoran context a social consciousness. They were concerned about where their country was going. And in the ensuing years, when you got into civil war, they were the ones that stayed there. They may have sent their families out during very heated periods, but they stayed engaged. Several of them paid with their life, but I know some of them are still in El Salvador, and still engaged in public policy.

I became very close with this group. You knew that if you had a dialogue with one of them, the others would know about it, and it was very useful in our work, and I counted these people also socially very enjoyable.

Q: Well, tell me a bit about the relationship of the embassy with the wealthy landowners; what was our policy, the general ambiance and feeling for...

TAYLOR: Well, we didn't do as well as we spoke. We had two different Ambassadors while I was there. The one was really inept.

Q: Who, we had two, one was...

TAYLOR: Henry Cato was an ambassador, and then James Campbell. He was a multimillionaire, made his money, I think, in the oil business, and he really didn't have a sense as to what his job was. Henry Cato had done a stint, I think, for the Protocol Office in State; of course, he went on to be delegate to the OAS, and was Assistant Secretary of DOD for Press Relations.

Q: Ambassador to the U.K., too.

TAYLOR: ...and ambassador to the U.K.; very bright. But he would have in those days thought that he had relations with a cross section of government, but in fact, he did not. People at the residence were from the elite. Fortunately, we had some very good officers who dealt with the labor sector, who dealt with the organized Campesino groups. And our AID people also had a very good network of contacts. Nothing substitutes for what our Ambassador does, but what I'm saying is that we did have contacts with all elements of Church and Labor Union. We had a particularly exciting breakthrough in family planning. As I said, this country had the most dense population, had a very high fertility rate, and yet we had, within the time we were there, we had a family planning program that I'll never forget, we had the President of one of the Campesino groups in a huge public rally announce that he was having a vasectomy. And vasectomies became an extremely successful program, and of course, to have men engaged in family planning...

Q: Oh, absolutely, particularly in the Latin context.

TAYLOR: ...in the Latin context was an amazing breakthrough. So you know, the programs in education, using television to reach the rural areas, significant breakthroughs. I was very pleased to see what AID was doing there; everything from housing, education, health, market programs, and a very active Peace Corps program as well, did a lot of good work in marketing, and low level income generation. So I don't think that we were doing everything wrong. We were no doubt conservative on the political front, not pushing harder at the top, but I wonder in retrospect if it'd have made a whole lot of difference, because the numbers were clearly against us.

Q: What about the equivalent to American food? You know, the American businesses...one always...I'm not a Central Latin American hand, but you know, I mean, one always thinks of United Fruit, and others, the coffee producers and all that, and their influence. I mean, during this time you were there, how did you find...

TAYLOR: Well, this is...I should have mentioned this, because you're covering a fascinating aspect of Salvador. It was exciting from a diplomatic perspective to find that the Salvadoran people did not have a typical Latin American or Central American attitudes toward the United States. And the reason was that they did not have the typical experience with the United States. El Salvador's banana industry, if it ever was one, was destroyed by a blight years ago; you couldn't buy a good banana, you'd get these small finger bananas, so it was not part of the banana economy. They had no extractive industries at all, so there was no history of U.S. firms there, there was no history of U.S. expropriations, no history of insertion of the U.S. Marines, it was not a confrontational history.

At the time we arrived, you did not find, even with an oligarchy, what you would find in a country that was already known as quite democratic down in Costa Rica, a tendency on the part of the wealthy in a period of problems to pick up the phone and call the American Embassy, the American Ambassador, and say, "Help, what are you going to do about it?" That relationship did not exist in El Salvador. It was a very proud and independent country, and its orientation was toward Europe. Its primary export market for its coffee was to Germany. In fact, during our time we got a German political ambassador who was determined that she was going to teach the Salvadoran people to speak German, so there were Goethe Institutes all over the country. It was an amazing thing, having studied Latin America, I found this a startling contrast; every stereotype that one would think about Latin America, its elites and particularly the relationship with the United States. Now, one of the unfortunate things of our relationship in support of resolving a conflict there, was that now that dependency and the very visible hand of the U.S. is forever ingrained in the Salvadoran political mentality; that's one of the down sides of what appears to have been a good outcome.

Q: You left there in '75. Were there stirrings from the jungle, from the mountains? Within five or six years, things really got very nasty.

TAYLOR: It was frightening to see how the devolution occurred, how fast it occurred. Two weeks after we left, the first Salvadoran official I met, who was a little younger than I and President of the tourist institute was kidnapped. He came from a very wealthy commercial family. I think the ransom was $11,000,000, something like that. The family paid it, and they got a cadaver. Two weeks later, the Foreign Minister was kidnapped. The family put up, I believe $13,000,000, and they got a cadaver. So you could see you were dealing with people who didn't even take the usual approach to kidnapping. And so the sense of class conflict, the insecurity factor, arose very quickly, and things went downhill very quickly.

Q: Did you feel that our Station Chief and his operation was sort of keeping a watching brief, or was this something that wasn't much of a factor?

TAYLOR: Well, it was interesting in that period of time that we were having more balance of payments cuts, cutting back on overseas presence, the Political Section had had two people, the Department of Labor had protected the second slot, State wanted to eliminate it, there was a big struggle going on that. The intelligence resources there were starting to be cut back; one officer was about to leave, and it looked even with that that there might be more people in intelligence than there were on the overt political side. But there was still a modest number, and we're talking about a couple of people on either side of the house. I don't frankly recall what kind of estimate was putting in, and I know we had a lot of discussions in the country team of the handling of the scent, the rumors were already beginning that there were sort of vigilante groups training among the oligarchy. That kind of situation was sort of endemic even when we arrived in '72, because there had been a major kidnapping, of the Regelato's son a year or so before; a lot of wealthy people still carried guns in their vehicles, because they just feared not an assassin, they feared banditry.

So I don't recall any dissent in the Embassy from the notion that this was a government with very week moorings, that the social strains were growing. As I mentioned, it was in that period

when the squeeze on the poor was enormous. Their food costs had gone up 50 percent. During the time I was there I continued, and I think expanded, the economic surveys that were done by John Ferch, my predecessor. This meant that I not only looked at reports by the World Bank and IDB, we collected our own economic indicators. And it showed that the disposable income was going down among the poor. I mean, the theoretical guaranteed wage was $1.00 a day, industrial wage was like, I think, $2.50. The typical campesino would spend almost all his week's earnings on beer on the weekend, as in many countries; it was then up to the wife to try and find the means to support the family. There was a cycle of poverty that was aggravated by what we had already identified as the most violent population in Central America. They carried their machetes in their right hand; they were not in a sheath, they were not on the left side of the body. Newspapers, which were inclined to report violence especially in Central America, would only be able to report the most sensational examples of bar brawls and killings on weekends, there was so much mayhem. So the potential for an explosion driven by economic poverty was clearly understood.

Q: Was our intelligence and our political sources focused on the Cubans messing around in the area, or not?

TAYLOR: Yes. The Cubans were very active in Central America. They were active in Nicaragua already; of course, there was a lot of fertile ground; you had authoritarian regimes in most countries. We had the groups that became the official guerilla groups were already organized in our day. I think to sort of sum up, it was interesting to move from El Salvador to Iran. El Salvador was a country where we over predicted the revolution. I mean, this was, the more I think about it, the more I recall it, this was something that we were very consistent in predicting. And yet, it took longer to occur than we thought.

Move over to my next post, to Iran, where the seeds germinated very quickly because of an intense industrialization, and then we under predicted - an interesting contrast.

JOHN A. BUSHNELL
Deputy Assistant Secretary, ARA
Washington, DC (1977-1982)

Mr. Bushnell was born in New York State and educated at Yale University and McMurray College. An Economic Specialist, he served primarily in senior level positions at Latin American posts, including Bogota, Santo Domingo, San Jose and Buenos Aires, dealing primarily with Economic and International Trade issues. An assignment to the Staff of the National Security Council was followed by tours as Deputy Chief of Mission at Buenos Aires, Chargé d'Affaires at Panama City, and subsequently as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Mr. Bushnell was the recipient of several awards for outstanding service. Mr. Bushnell was interviewed by John Harter in 1997

Q: You were particularly concerned with El Salvador during the latter part of the Carter Administration. First, could you outline the historical context of what was happening in El Salvador at that time?

BUSHNELL: Perhaps I can best start the El Salvador story by what is my first recollection of dealing with that country in January or February of 1978. As I was trying to get a better understanding of the various complex situations we were dealing with, I would have meetings with all the people involved, the country officer or officers, the country director, other people that were knowledgeable within the Department and sometimes from CIA and Defense as well. I would explore not only what had happened but what might influence events in a direction we wanted. such as improved individual human rights or a movement to free elections. I remember the frustration of my first meeting on El Salvador. There seemed to be no sign of early improvement of human rights nor any options for us to get such movement going. El Salvador's history is unique in this hemisphere. El Salvador is a small country, and there is no open frontier, unlike Nicaragua where, as I have said, people with ambition could move out to the frontier, establish their own farms, and earn a modest living. In El Salvador most of the good agricultural land was controlled by a small number of families who were largely intermarried, called the 14 Families but actually several hundred adults. These families also owned most large businesses. This oligarchy tended to be extremely far right, and it controlled the army, partly because its own sons and sons-in-law were senior officers, but also in a number of other ways. Perhaps the current history of El Salvador started with a Communist revolt in 1932, which was really a peasant revolt. It seems to be accepted that there was substantial Communist influence, but intellectual influence not a role of Russia.

Q: There was a depression...

BUSHNELL: Yes, although I don't think El Salvador was any more depressed in 1932 than it was in other years. Peasants, who essentially couldn't feed their families -- at least that was the view -- rose up and tried to take over agricultural land particularly in western El Salvador. They were put down very brutally with many killed. Estimates were around 10,000. I don't think anybody knows. The result was to polarize the society so that a great many people were either on the far right, believing an authoritarian structure was necessary to keep the situation under control and to try to make economic progress, or on the extreme left, believing the whole society had to change in some revolutionary way, not necessarily communist. From 1932 to1979 the extremes dominated rural El Salvador and national politics. The right maintained control. In rural areas a local power structure developed. In many places what most resembled a gang of thugs developed, perhaps paid by the large landowners. These local enforcers were loosely organized on a national basis in something called ORDEN. These thugs brutalized any peasant who challenged them or the landowners. Sometimes the thugs were members of the local police, but in many cases they were more a volunteer auxiliary police or military, usually with some link to the military but not on any military organization chart. The main role of ORDEN at the national level appears to have been to keep the various local ORDEN groups from fighting each other - a territorial division. Certainly the national ORDEN organization made no attempt to discipline or direct the autonomous local units. El Salvador had fairly long periods of apparent stability. The general who put down the 1932 revolt ruled until 1944, protecting the selfish interests of the leading families. Then there was a succession of either generals or politicians from the far right

in cahoots with the military and the oligarchy. There was something that passed for elections, certainly not honest, free elections.

Q: I'll bet all these people claimed they were anti-communist.

BUSHNELL: Yes, the national leaders were anti-communist, but that really meant they were against those that might try to take any power or wealth from the oligarchy. At the local level anyone that challenged the system and the local gangs was labeled a communist. Beginning in the1960s but then accelerating with Vatican II, the Catholic Church, which was also strong in some places, began to move definitively away from the oligarchy, although at the beginning you could generally include the Church people as part of the oligarchy structure. In some cases rural priests moved to the opposite extreme and supported revolution. The most constructive sign on the horizon was that in the urban areas the Christian Democrats, with a lot of help from the Christian Democratic Party in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, began to organize the growing middle-class. Their leader was Napoleon Duarte. In the1960s Duarte won an election to be mayor of the capital city of San Salvador with a Christian Democratic local government. The city had never been controlled in as authoritarian and brutal a way as the countryside. Under Duarte local taxes were increased, but the oligarchy seemed prepared to pay the modestly higher taxes to fund public works and education. With economic progress an urban middle class was developing fairly rapidly. They elected Duarte, and he was allowed to run the city whatever his term was. This sort of established him as a politician with a party favoring change that was not perceived by anybody serious as being communist, although he was often called communist by some of the far right.

The Christian Democrats found it almost impossible to make any political inroads in the countryside where most of the people were, because as soon as anyone from the Christian Democrats went out to the countryside, the local gangs or ORDEN would threaten them and, if they began to organize, kill them. Thus the large rural vote continued to be delivered largely to the parties supported by the oligarchy. Nevertheless, Duarte appeared to win a plurality against a divided right in the1972 national election. However, five days later the candidate of the ruling party was proclaimed president. After an attempted coup within the Army, Duarte was arrested, tortured, and exiled. In the 1977 elections a former general was elected president. There were lots of arguments whether the 1977 election was fair, not necessarily that the votes weren't counted fairly, but election tactics used were not fair, especially in rural areas where those that did not vote for the establishment candidates could expect reprisals from the local gangs. The Christian Democrats won seats, as much as 25 or 30 percent, in the national parliament, but not enough to change anything Violence was accelerating. The number of bodies found weekly in San Salvador would go up or down, but every week there were some. In rural areas there was probably much more violence, but it was generally not reported in the press, and we had no way to get comprehensive information. The Church was fairly outspoken in opposition to the government and to the violence.

The economy was doing quite well. In addition to the usual agricultural exports, beginning in the late 1960s, El Salvador had begun taking advantage of the provisions of our tariff code, sections 806.3 and 807, that allow firms to send parts or raw materials from the U.S. for processing in another country and then to bring back the finished product with the content from the U.S.

entering duty-free. A lot of these assembly operations, especially for textiles, were being set up in El Salvador employing thousands at what we would consider very poor wages but what were livable wages in El Salvador, or at least more than what the oligarchy paid rural laborers. The urban economy was developing fairly well with infrastructure being financed by the IDB and World Bank. The rural situation was prosperous for the few landowners. The rest of the people barely squeaked by.

Q: Didn't the coffee workers start agitating for higher wages?

BUSHNELL: There was little organization among coffee workers or any other rural workers. The presence of the ORDEN gangs was usually enough to avoid any concerted action, and even in good times there was a surplus of rural labor. The hopelessness of the rural situation is what drove many peasants to the city and then to the long trek across Mexico to the United States. Over the years we had financed the AFL-CIO to help develop unions. They trained a lot of people and had some success in the urban areas, but they could hardly penetrate the rural areas. Quite a few of the people they trained were killed, and even one American AFL-CIO organizer was killed during my time in ARA. It was clear the central government didn't exert much influence in most rural areas and did not try to make its presence felt. The rural areas were ruled by these local ORDEN gangs, or whatever you want to call them. Maybe gang is not a good word, but local groups dominated in one way or the other by the large landowners or the large businessperson. The national government, police or military, did not interfere. They didn't endorse the gangs and their killing either.

Q: Were the armed forces supporting the plantation owners?

BUSHNELL: The armed forces didn't have to support the large landowners actively; they just did not do anything to interfere with what the ORDEN gangs did unless the gangs got out of control and the landowners asked for help. The armed forces could have controlled at least some of the gangs, but the argument was that it was a domestic matter and the armed forces are for defense against foreign threats. Generally in rural areas the gangs were local people; some gang members may have spent some time in the army or the police. These gang or militia members were virtually the only people who had guns, not necessarily fancy guns. Only as some guerrilla groups began to develop with training and supply from Cuba was there effective opposition to what I have called gangs. Then, of course, the military moved into the rural areas to oppose the guerrillas in alliance with the local gangs. In short El Salvador was a very violent country, a festering situation but one in which there were no good options for the United State. In this first meeting, we went on for hours on what could we do to encourage some change, but we did not identify much of anything.

Q: There was an AID mission presumably.

BUSHNELL: There was a small AID mission. But the human right situation was so bad that we were limiting aid even before the Carter Administration, distancing ourselves and finding it hard to find significant groups that we wanted to work with. We supported the AFL-CIO work with the unions; we supported a few other groups like that, generally urban organizations. I think we had some loan programs to help small and medium size firms, but it wasn't an extensive program.

It certainly was not going to bring about major change for decades. In the area which was the backbone, the bulk of the country, the rural areas, there was virtually no one and no institutions to work with. Anybody we worked with ended up dead. So El Salvador was very frustrating, and it didn't seem to me we were going to change anything by distancing, since distancing didn't mean much. We had very little military assistance, few military people there, not much of an AID program.

Q: What did the CIA do?

BUSHNELL: CIA was closing its station, which wasn't much to close. Agency personnel had been involved in a series of scandals in El Salvador. With no US national interests and no communists in sight even in other embassies the best people were not sent to El Salvador. Those that were there tended to associate with the elite and the military -- the far right. They got caught up in homosexual and other scandals. The Salvador station must have had one of the worst records in the CIA; my CIA colleagues in Washington asked me not to talk about the station or its output while it was closing.

Q: Just who or what were the so-called death squads?

BUSHNELL: Although there was a lot of talk about death squads, I 'm not sure there were actually organized squads devoted to killing selected people. Bodies appeared regularly in certain areas of San Salvador and in rural areas. I think various groups were responsible for these killings. The police were brutal and might well kill a common criminal in the course of interrogation; they would then just dump the body. Many of the elite had private guards who might kill some employee or competitor causing a problem. Teenage groups killed each other. It was almost a sport. In the rural areas most of the killing was done by the ORDEN gangs, the rural militia, which defended the interests of the large landowners and of themselves. Some killings followed a refusal to pay protection money.

Q: And all this was totally unhampered by trials, due process…

BUSHNELL: Murders were generally not even investigated, let alone solved. It was commonly believed the local police were part of the so-called death squads, so of course there was no enforcement from them. Moreover, they had very limited investigation resources or experience. The killing seemed to increase in 1978 and 1979 and spread more into the city, but part of what we saw as an increase may merely have been that the Embassy particularly, and to some extent the press, began reporting such killings in a more organized way. Extortion appears to have increased at this time; some believe Salvadoran gang members from Los Angles who were deported to San Salvador introduced the practice of demanding payments from the middle-class and rich, killing those who refused to pay. Businessmen apparently also resorted to killing more frequently, especially as efforts to organize unions in the city began to be successful. Reportedly it was easy to hire killers. The couple of Americans that were there for the AFL-CIO, for example, were killed in a paid-for execution. These American labor officers were giving a seminar in a luxury hotel, and, when they walked out of the hotel, they were shot down by assassins obviously waiting for them. This was a very violent society.

One of the best insights I had into this miserable situation came by accident. I invited the Army attaché who had just returned from a couple of years in El Salvador for lunch to debrief him more informally than the normal group sessions and to see if I could learn a bit more and get a better feel of this strange place. He related some of his experiences which did not get fully reflected in his reports. The following is the story that made the biggest impression on me and suggested just how hopeless the situation was. The colonel said that his job took great discipline because he was expected to get fairly close to the officers in the Salvadoran military; as an attaché that was his job, but not so close that he was involved in things where he shouldn't be involved. He described one Saturday night when he was out with a group of Salvadoran colonels; they were drinking. They got very drunk, and all of a sudden one of them said, "By golly, I feel like we ought to go kill somebody." Our attaché was amazed, but the others said, "Yeah, let's kill somebody," and they said, "Come on, get in the car. We're going to kill somebody." He said, "Who are you going to kill?" "We don't know. We'll find somebody."

Q: Were they all pumped up with drugs or something?

BUSHNELL: They'd been drinking heavily. He made an excuse and went home; he said a couple of bodies were found the next day consistent with these colonels having carried out their talk. This may not be the pattern one thinks of as a death squad, but it indicates the depth of the problem.

Q: Amnesty International once claimed that some 13,000 individuals were killed at the hands of the death squads, their term, between '79 and '81 and at least 6,000 more fled the country while hundreds of women were routinely raped. These are staggering statistics for such a small country. Do you think they're valid?

BUSHNELL: I don't know what they define as death squads. Probably that number of people killed is about right. By 1980 there began to be some effective organization on the left and some guerrillas groups which also killed both in combat and to facilitate recruitment and supply. So it was hard to tell who killed whom among the local people and militias of the right, the local people of the left, the army, the police, the common criminals, and the businessmen. El Salvador is still today an extremely violent country. The murder rate in San Salvador makes Washington look safe, and it has a democratic government now. I think the problem is in the culture. It's not just population pressure, but that's certainly a factor. The country is small; there's not an open frontier; there's not much economic potential, much chance for advancement. Historically most people who have had big money in El Salvador inherited or stole it; they did not earn it.

A lot of people reportedly fled to the U.S. because of the violence. Of course hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans came to the States; most of them came for better economic opportunities, not because they were driven out by the violence. In many Salvadoran communities in the States the murder rate is also high, reflecting in my view the culture. The immigrants quickly learned to say they fled the violence because that was the story that justified refugee status and a legal right to work. The rural violence was undoubtedly a major factor driving people into the cities. If they could not find jobs, the next step was the trip to Yankee land.

The more I learned about El Salvador the more hopeless the situation seemed, but there was nothing we could do to change the culture of violence and repression. There was no maximum leader like Somoza whose departure might make a difference. In the early part of 1978 Sally Shelton and Mark Schneider went to El Salvador with the idea that they would try to talk the Romero government into making some reforms. They had no effect. There was some sort of confrontation that made President Romero, if anything, even less willing to listen to us and less willing for us to have these programs of building some democratic institutions there. He saw then that the Carter Administration was really on what he called the subversives' side, so he tended to break the dialogue, which never amounted to much anyway. This situation continued through 1978 and the first part of 1979. No one in the United States cared much about El Salvador, except perhaps parts of the Catholic church which had many missionaries there. Remember our primary attention during this period was focused on Nicaragua. Nobody cared if we cut back on aid except a few people in AID who had some vested interest in a project there.

Q: Were there any interactions between El Salvador and Nicaragua, or totally separate situations?

BUSHNELL: We didn't see any particular interaction before the departure of Somoza except that the Salvadoran military provided some supplies to Somoza when he desperately needed them. Only later did we learn that full units of Salvadoran guerrillas had gained considerable battle experience fighting and training with the Sandinistas.

Finally the first crack in the Salvadoran iceberg, and a big one, came in October of 1979, three months after Somoza fell. A group of officers led by lieutenant colonels staged a coup. They claimed they saw what had happened in Nicaragua with the complete destruction of the Guard and the execution or jailing on most officers that were caught. They said El Salvador was on a route which was inevitably leading the same way. Thus they said they had to open up the political and economic situation. Although I don't recall them ever saying it to me – they may have – what they also saw was an enemy emerging nearby in communist Nicaragua that was going to be a base, a supply and training base, for insurgents in El Salvador. In short the recent example of Nicaragua and the nearby support base in Nicaragua made the next revolt in El Salvador look life-threatening to many Salvadorian military. Any earlier beliefs that the U.S. would assure a communist takeover did not happen were erased by the Sandinista takeover. The coup was followed by a major shakeup in the military with the exile, retirement, or reassignment of some 10% of the officer corp.

Q: Also, there is more attention being paid to all this by the American press.

BUSHNELL: There was not much press attention to El Salvador in 1979. El Salvador was pretty much unknown to the American press until the assassination of Archbishop Romero in March of 1980. But we in ARA were delighted with this coup. I don't recall that we had any advance word, but it certainly seemed that this group of younger officers wanted to move the country in the direction that we thought would lead to human rights progress and democracy. The Army manifesto of October 15 denounced abuses of power by government officials and proclaimed a commitment to fundamental social reform and a transition to a democratic political system. Moderate civilians were invited to join the military officers in the government.

We picked up contact with the new leaders. At one point Bowdler flew to Texas, which was a convenient half-way meeting place, to talk with some of the military officers. We encouraged them to open up to the democratic political forces. The far left staged violent disturbances and called for the immediate dissolution of the security forces. The right was planning a countercoup. Lacking experience, this group of officers who had broken the iceberg saw their junta gradually disintegrating, unable to control the violence or implement reforms. In January 1980 The Christian Democratic Party, led by Duarte, announced that it would form a new government to implement reforms. An overwhelming majority of the military officers, aware of the danger of civil war a la Nicaragua, accepted the Christian Democratic program including land reform.

The Christian Democrats wanted to change the basic structure of Salvadoran society. They focused on two major things that needed change. First, they wanted to take land away from the 14 Families and distribute it to the workers that made the land productive. Secondly, they wanted to nationalize the banks, because they saw the banks as the other main means through which the oligarchy controlled the economy. They also wanted to nationalize the export of coffee and sugar. Government control of coffee exports, the main crop and export, seemed to me a bad idea because it would become an invitation for corruption and inefficient bureaucracy. The coffee market internationally was a free market and that competitive situation was a major restraint on Salvadoran private exporters. Land and banking reform were necessary to change the power structure and give democracy a chance to survive. The key issue was the speed of change. The political situation argued for very rapid change before the oligarchy could counterattack. But the practical economic situation argued for going slow. Who would manage the new cooperatives taking over the large farms? How would the cooperatives get credit, lease needed machinery, assure the cooperative members put in a fair amount of work? Most of the professional farm managers were part of or associated with the oligarchy. Similar practical considerations applied to the banks. Would the rich be allowed to withdraw their funds? How would politically inspired loans which would not be repaid be avoided? Given the unexpected opening for major change and perhaps a little traumatized because we had not made the opening in Nicaragua work, we tried to help as much as possible while encouraging a staged approach to limit economic disruption.

I would emphasize that these revolutionary changes in El Salvador – the coup, the Duarte government, the land and banking reforms – came about solely through the efforts of Salvadorans. They may have guessed they would get support and assistance from the United States, but unlike Nicaragua where we played a major role in unifying the democratic forces and in the negotiation with Somoza, the Salvadorans did this themselves. We were interested and supportive spectators. Thus we had no basis for criticizing the land or banking reform except to help make it actually work.

The March 1980 land reform decree converted all large estates, more than 1,235 acres, into peasant cooperatives. Later stages were to distribute medium-size properties and provide that landless farmers could claim title to land they were themselves cultivating. By the end of April 1980 over 250 large estates had become producer cooperatives. The fundamental and large peaceful change in El Salvador was emphasized by the army's protection of government technicians and the peasant beneficiaries on these large properties. The AFL-CIO helped us

quickly organize assistance from American unions and cooperatives. But at first Duarte's government was moving very fast without much skill in what it was doing. There was limited ability to manage big farms, and in most cases the coops didn't keep the hired professional managers that the oligarchy had on the farms. However, the reform was modified in practical ways which made it go smoother. For example, the previous owners were allowed to retain their homesteads, i.e. houses in which they sometimes lived, and quite a few acres around them. Subsequent stages of the reform went slowly and soon became bogged down. I liked the land-to-the-tiller program to move leased and sharecropped land to the workers who by definition knew how to produce, but this program required more resources in terms of land surveying, legal work, and other organization than were available. Also much sharecropped land was in more remote areas where ORDEN and/or the guerrillas were disruptive of any such reforms and where violence was increasing. The banking reform was also chaotically managed. But the government took only partial ownership of the banks, and most professionals in the banks were retained and gradually got the banks back on a sound basis.

For El Salvador, where for over 50 years nothing had been changing, these were revolutionary, tremendous changes. This was more constructive change than we were seeing anywhere else in Latin America in terms of addressing what seemed to be the real underlying problems. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the Duarte government and much of the military, violence increased sharply caused by both the right and the left. Of course the oligarchy was unhappy with its loss of land and wealth, but members of those groups such as ORDEN and some of the right-wing political parties were even more unhappy at their loss of power to what they labeled a communist government. They tended to strike out almost at random. In March just after the first land reform decree Archbishop Romero was shot dead while saying mass; he had supported Duarte and reforms. Other priests and missionaries were killed as well as more than 60 Christian Democratic mayors and local officials. Although most of this killing seemed to come from the right and ORDEN, the guerrillas and the left greatly stepped up urban demonstrations which often became violent. In rural areas the left killed not only their ORDEN opponents but also Christian Democrat officials because they saw that success of the Duarte reforms would deny the communists and far left an opportunity to take-over the country.

The devastating economic effect violence can have was brought home to me by an experience even before the October 1979 Salvador coup. In late 1978 and early 1979 the far left targeted some of the unions that, with AFL-CIO help, had gotten a foothold in the Salvadoran assembly plants which produced for export to the U.S. under Sections 806 and 807. These leftish union organizers, who seemed more intent on destroying the 806/807 industries than in helping the workers who had newly found productive jobs with regular paychecks, adopted a very destructive tactic. They would seize the plant and kidnap the plant manager, who was often an American, and hold him until he agreed to gigantic increases in wages and benefits. There was often some violence. I don't recall that any American was ever killed in this process, but it was a pretty violent and dangerous situation, particularly since in most of these plants there were relatively few union workers. The union might have 40 workers in a plant of 400, and the 40 workers, or their leaders and some outside helpers, would promote this extortion. In a couple of cases the other workers threw the leftish leaders out violently. In addition to the actual take-overs and kidnappings such action was threatened in many other plants. This violence changed the economic situation. These assembly plants were the fastest growing source of new employment

in El Salvador, and this violence not only stopped new investment dead but also resulted in many plants removing their American managers and often even picking up and moving the entire plant to another country, leaving hundreds of poor Salvadoran women without jobs.

In the U.S. there is an organization called the Committee for 806.30 and 807, which is a trade group that lobbies to protect and expand these trade provisions. Members are the firms that invest in these assembly plants around the world and some of the retailers that buy from them. This Committee asked me to be the keynote speaker at their fall 1979 meeting in New York in mid-September. At dinner I was seated at the head table with the senior representatives, generally the presidents or chief executive officers, of the 12 to 15 most important and largest members. In the course of the conversation I asked them, if they added up all the employees their companies had worldwide, what it would total. They did a rough adding up, and it came to over half a million people worldwide that they employed. Then I asked them, if they were opening a new operation, where would they go on the basis of what they knew at the time – and it was their business to find out where you could go to do things cheapest and most effectively because that was the key to making money in their business. There was almost a complete consensus that, aside from this violent element, El Salvador was the best place. Salvadorans were hard workers. You could get skilled people, the skills that they needed such as machine operators and repair people. Transportation to and from the States was good. Everything was better in El Salvador than in the Philippines or the Dominican Republic or other places that competed for this investment. But there already had been a few cases of factories being taken over, and this violence punctured the Salvadoran boom. No one wanted to go into that sort of a situation. In fact, it became obvious to me that the reason that they had asked me to speak was that they wanted to get a State Department assessment of whether the Salvador situation was going to get better or worse.

Q: So what did you say?

BUSHNELL: As I recall, I had to say that we did not identify much movement in the Salvadoran situation. However, to give a little light at the end of the tunnel I talked a little about what had happened in Nicaragua and said that the military and others in El Salvador were watching their neighbor closely and they might well conclude that El Salvador needed to make some changes before it was too late. At that point I had no intelligence or anything except common sense to make this point. After the October coup a month later, one of the 806/807 executives called to thank me for saying as much as I could about upcoming developments.

By the middle of 1980 reforms were well underway in El Salvador, but violence continued to increase. Guerrilla activity was growing rapidly, and the Army did not appear to know how to cope with it. Production of coffee and other products from the new cooperatives was substantially less than the farms produced in previous years. The whole economy was slipping, and urban demonstrations continued. It was a shaky but still encouraging situation, at least in comparison with the previous years.

It was this Salvadoran situation that began my long-lasting struggles with Senator Helms. Senator Helms was one of the few people in Congress who paid any attention to what was going on in El Salvador in 1980, and he was ferociously against the land reform, particularly, and the

banking reform too. Not long after the land reform was begun, probably in connection with the assistance budget, I testified before him and tried to explain the need for the land reform.

Q: Was this the first time you interacted with him?

BUSHNELL: No. I testified before Helms when I was at Treasury and for ARA in 1978 and/or1979, but the issues had never been terribly contentious. In some respects I set myself up by taking the position that the land reform and the banking reform were needed to change the explosive trajectory of Salvadoran history and avoid a social explosion that would give the communists just the opening they were seeking. Of course, I also defended the AID programs that we were setting up to make the precipitous reforms work better; the prominent role of the AFL/CIO in these programs was a red flag for Helms. He launched several attacks on me and the program. He argued that it was grossly unfair to take away the land that families had worked hard for generations to develop and that the new cooperatives were destroying the coffee trees and undermining the economy. He said idiots like me in the State Department had no idea of what it took to produce things, and we also could not even identify communists before our nose as proven in Nicaragua. He went on at great length. Finally he said the people of North Carolina could never understand taking land away from the people that owned it; that was just against what America stood for. I was not being as cautious as I might have been, although I don't regret it, but I responded that, if almost all the good land in North Carolina were owned by 14 families, things might look very different to the people of North Carolina. This really set him off. How could I say all the land in North Carolina was owned by 14 families? How dare I suggest that land be taken away from any hard working and under-paid farmer in North Carolina? Of course, that isn't what I said at all. Over the next couple years he would mention that I was the first to favor land reform in El Salvador. I took it as a merit given the way El Salvador has progressed, but that is not the way he meant it.

In December 1979 after the icebreaker coup but before Duarte and land reform, there was a negative development which we knew about, although we did not know how to assess it. The far left in El Salvador consisted of both urban and rural guerrillas and a more traditional urban Communist Party, which often had to operate secretly, and several small Maoist parties. All these groups were against the government, the oligarchy, and the United States, but on many issues they had been quite divided. At times there were even gun fights among the groups. Some people thought the oligarchy employed good tactics to keep the left divided. I don't think the Right had anything to do with it. There was a natural division between the guerrilla street and field fighters and the more intellectual and doctrinaire political Marxists. There were leaders such as Communist Party Secretary General Shafik Handal who were basically communist intellectual professorial types. They were quite different from the rural guerrillas who were like some of the military and just wanted to go out and kill somebody. There seemed to be little cooperation or coordination among these groups. Then in December of 1979 the Cubans, Castro and his Department of the Americas, got the leaders of these far left groups together for a long session in Cuba. Following his pattern with the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, Castro urged and pressed these groups to agree to cooperate and form a common front. It wasn't clear at the time what leverage Castro had. Certainly he could offer training and some supplies. Little did we know at the time how much he was offering. Up to this time I saw the Salvadoran left as being indigenous to El Salvador and not really dependent on Castro or the Soviets. But I had to be

concerned that Castro's success in Nicaragua would encourage him to follow the same pattern in El Salvador and that the Russians, with their build-up of military materiel in Nicaragua, would bank-roll Castro and help supply the Salvadoran guerrillas.

With the advantage of hindsight we see that Castro followed basically the same tactics in Nicaragua and El Salvador, uniting and supplying the far left. The U.S. coincidentally followed completely different tactics. In Nicaragua we played a major mediating role to bring the democratic groups together, and we used distancing to urge Somoza out. In El Salvador we did little to organize a democratic alternative, but one arose. Then until January 1981 we did relatively little to support it. Yet the indigenous reformers in El Salvador beat the Castro-supported far left, while the democratic groups in Nicaragua tried unsuccessfully to change the nature of the Sandinistas. At the end of 1979 and through most of 1980 the intelligence was not very plentiful on the Salvadoran left and on their relations with Cuba and Nicaragua. I recall actually having the embassy inquire with the Salvadoran military to try to find out more about these various leftish groups. The military in El Salvador didn't seem to know much about them either, although they were their everyday enemy.

The security situation deteriorated and violence increased through 1980. The guerrillas began attacking individual military officers. In one case the guerrillas burned an officer's house with him and his family inside. The attacks on uniformed personnel provoked harsh counter-measures by the uniformed services with numerous serious human rights violations. The Treasury Police and the National Guard were the most frequent abusers. Because they operated throughout the country in small units, they were also most subject to guerrilla attack. It was becoming a desperate situation. In discussions various people from Washington and the embassy had with Christian Democrats we learned many Christian Democrats were afraid to go into the government because they would likely be killed. In fact, a substantial number were killed. The seizure of factories continued; the extortion of funds by right and left increased. The economy, affected by the land and banking reforms as well as the increasing violence, went into a free fall despite the fact that we cranked up AID spending. We were building streets, sewers, and such things all over in order to provide employment as well as building needed infrastructure. HA began arguing for human rights sanctions. We did press the military to take a number of constructive human rights steps such as adopting a good military code of conduct and strengthening military justice. The civilian government did not seem to be responsible for human rights violations; members of the government were among the main victims. The military, or more correctly people in the military acting on their own, committed a small part of the violations. The press in the U.S. was giving much more coverage to the human rights abuses under the moderate reformist government than it ever had to the abuses of previous right-wing governments. Some abuses committed by the guerrillas were made to look like government abuses, for example the guerrillas frequently wore military uniforms particularly for urban operations.

Q: You say the assassination of Romero captured press attention?

BUSHNELL: Yes, Romero's cold-bloodied killing was a big issue for the American Catholic Church, and it gave a peg for the press to start running Salvador stories. I don't think there were ever any American reporters stationed in El Salvador, but reporters would go there, and they'd

even visit rural areas and write stories about local killings. A school teacher was trying to teach, and somebody thought she was teaching the wrong thing, so they killed her. That type of human interest stories and anecdotal stories on land reform began to appear. About the middle of 1980 there was a great acceleration in press interest, which I didn't understand at the time. I came to understand it later, but that's another story.

By the middle of 1980 we began to get reports both from Salvadoran intelligence and from our own intelligence that the Nicaraguans were helping the guerrillas in El Salvador. Arms were being smuggled across Honduras from Nicaragua to El Salvador (the countries do not have a land border). Guerrillas were going to Nicaragua for rest and recovery from wounds and, more important, for training. The intelligence reports did not indicate what volume of activity was going on, but by the fall of 1980 we had enough that we sent Jim Cheek, who had replaced Brandon Grove as Central American deputy, to Nicaragua to warn the Sandinistas. Remember, the Nicaragua aid legislation had recently passed and we had this $80,000,000 to help Nicaragua, but we also had the provision that had been inserted by the Congress that aid had to be stopped if the Sandinistas supported terrorists. Clearly these insurgents in El Salvador who captured American factory managers and the guerrillas who killed land reform workers were terrorists.

Jim Cheek met with both the five-person junta that was formally running the country and most of the members of the Sandinista leadership. He made our point very forcefully but in a friendly manner. The Sandinistas knew Jim and knew he had been strongly anti-Somoza for a decade. They claimed that they, as a government, weren't doing anything to support violence in El Salvador but they didn't have absolute control of their territory. Something could happen without their knowing about it. Salvadorans could come to Nicaragua. They did all the time. The Salvadoran came, and, if he was injured and wanted medical treatment, what were they going to do? Things could move through Nicaragua, and they often couldn't stop them. Jim made the point that they should intensify their efforts to stop military supplies; otherwise our aid might have to be stopped. Subsequent evidence indicated that for a while they did stop moving military supplies, which were in fact being moved in much greater volume than we had thought through Nicaragua.

Q: Did the various elements of the US government agree on what was happening here? There was the Pentagon, CIA, State, various elements within State.

BUSHNELL: I don't recall that there was any real disagreement on a major effort to support the Duarte reform government. AID was super, getting a fast disbursing supporting assistance program going and increasing AID staff in El Salvador. The military was slow to increase programs with the newly purged Salvadoran military in part because the assistance and training budgets for Latin America had been cut so much. Many of the moderate Salvadoran military had been through US training over the years. These officers were closer to the US military than the officers they threw out, so our military was happy with these more moderate military. In fact, some people were saying the change in El Salvador showed the success of training at the US Army's School of the Americas. Everyone agreed the country had at least begun to move in the right direction. HA continued to oppose assistance to the military because military officers were still involved in some human rights abuses, although not as many as HA claimed. The CIA continued to be out to lunch. I forget when they decided to reopen a station, but CIA was not

providing useful human intelligence from El Salvador. I would be hard pressed to think of any other situation where US interests were so substantially at stake where intelligence support was as weak as in El Salvador. At inter-agency meetings CIA representatives generally did not provide an assessment, and, when they did, nobody gave it any weight. Everyone remembered that practically until July 1979 CIA had said that Somoza and the National Guard could hold off the Sandinistas and that CIA missed that massive Cuban supply effort.

Q: You say we did have a small military assistance program?

BUSHNELL: Yes, I think we quickly began training and approving some export licenses. However, I don't believe we approved any lethal shipments in 1980, but I don't recall we actually turned any down. Because of our earlier refusal to provide lethal supplies either under the military sales program or even to approve export licenses, all the Central American countries had found alternative suppliers for the sorts of light arms and ammunition they used.

Q: You felt what we were doing was effective?

BUSHNELL: Oh, I don't think the small programs we were gearing up had much effect on the economic situation or on military readiness. The big effect was symbolic. These programs showed that we were no longer distancing, quite the contrary that we approved of the revolutionary changes in social and economic structure that were underway. Under President Romero we were phasing everything down and out. After the October coup and particularly when the Christian Democrats came into the government, we in effect changed direction and began expanding our programs. They were still small, but AID technicians were arriving in country instead of leaving, and in a small place that was noticed. Even statements like my exchange with Senator Helms got a lot of attention in El Salvador. Many did not believe the U.S. would break with the oligarchy, including many members of the oligarchy, who began giving more attention to their public relations efforts in the United States. I don't recall that there was any strong opposition to our policy aside from Helms and a few of his associates. The banking reform impacted one or two US banks, but I encouraged them to cooperate, and their situations worked out with smaller losses than they had expected. HA strongly supported our help with land reform and increasing the AFL-CIO presence. Within the government there was very little disagreement on what we were doing except on tactical issues such as which institutions in the U.S. should be given AID contracts.

Q: But do I gather that you were the principal person involved for ARA through this series of Assistant Secretaries, Todman, Vaky, Bowdler. They all left this one up to you mainly?

BUSHNELL: No, I wouldn't say that. El Salvador was initially like Argentina or Chile where the main policy issues tended to be human rights related in 1978 and 1979, so it was my involvement with the Christopher Committee that led me to have substantial involvement. Certainly the Deputies for Central America, first Sally Shelton, then Brandon Grove, and finally Jim Cheek, were in charge of the day-to-day action. After the October 1979 coup as major changes began to occur Bowdler was very much involved with the military junta and then Duarte coming into the government. El Salvador is where Bowdler had his first ambassadorship in 1968 so he knew that country better than Nicaragua, and much better than I did. Bowdler was the main

policymaker. I had fairly continuous involvement because our main responses were to try to help with their land reform, their banking reform, and the unemployment problem generating a great urban unrest. These things fell under my economic responsibilities, to work with AID and others to bring these things about. I was also trying to get military assistance restarted.

Q: Were senior people in the Department, Habib and Newsom, or anybody on the 7th floor involved?

BUSHNELL: I don't recall any contentious issue that went up to them after Duarte joined the government and before the nuns were killed, although I did seek 7th floor help to get supporting assistance and military training money from other parts of the world. After the reform coup we did frequent night notes on El Salvador which went to the Secretary and Christopher and to the President. The same was true on Nicaragua once the decision was made that we were going to try to cooperate with the Sandinista government. If they backed off from us, that would be their decision, not ours. Once we were working on that basis, it was not necessary for senior people to be very much involved. I think that Helms did write at least once, probably to the Secretary, complaining about the Salvador land reform and our assistance. We would have drafted a reply on the desk, and I probably cleared it to go through H [Congressional Affairs Bureau].

Q: What do you recall of the murder of the four nuns?

BUSHNELL: That's the next main event in the El Salvador story The military/Christian Democrat government was implementing a major land reform which was very contentious and trying to make numerous other reforms. The country was becoming more violent with more people being killed – probably normal for such a revolutionary situation. In December of 1980 after the election of Reagan, three American nuns and one American lay missionary associated with the nuns, were kidnapped as they left the main Salvadoran airport, taken to a deserted area, and raped -- at least some of them were raped. Then all four were murdered.

Q: Was it clear who was responsible?

BUSHNELL: At first it wasn't clear. We had had problems with staffing the embassy in El Salvador throughout this period. By that time Bob White had arrived in El Salvador as ambassador, but the embassy was still small and not well staffed. Everyone was suspicious that some group of the National Guard, ORDEN, the Treasury police, or the military was responsible. But I knew that various guerilla or urban left groups sometimes dressed in military uniforms and committed crimes to try to turn both Salvadoran public opinion, and more important, the outside world against the government. There was, of course, a tremendous uproar in the United States over the murders and demands for action by our government, although no one seemed to specify what action we could take except to help see those responsible were brought to justice. Bowdler led a Presidential mission to El Salvador to investigate. Bill Rogers, a Republican former assistant secretary of ARA, Luigi Einaudi, the director of ARA's policy planning office, and I think somebody from Congress -- I don't remember who, maybe a couple -- were on this mission, which went within a day or two of the tragedy. Ambassador White immediately accused the military of being responsible and demanded the government, which of course was in part the military, investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Q: Didn't he feel there was a CIA angle?

BUSHNELL: I don't recall that he thought the CIA was somehow involved in their being killed. What gets merged and confused here are two things: the event - the killing of the nuns - and what one can call the cover-up which came afterwards. Of course, there were no witnesses except the guilty. The evidence was not very good. They were killed in part at least with bullets from standard Salvadoran military-issue rifles, but these were also the rifles which the insurgents had and lots of other people such as ORDEN had, so the bullets didn't really prove anything. There were tracks of all-terrain vehicles, which the military had, but so did lots of other people in El Salvador. There wasn't any smoking gun that said who did it, but it certainly seemed likely to be some group which was associated with the right and saw the Church and perhaps Americans as an enemy. By that time the Church was perceived as a main enemy of the right. However, interestingly the Church, although Duarte was a Christian Democrat and the Church worldwide often supported the Christian Democrats, tended to be a major critic of the reform government, partly because the government had not identified the killers of Archbishop Romero. The Church was itself divided. There were priests that were with the far right; there were priests that were with the military; there were priests that were with the far left. Bowdler's mission concluded that the evidence from the crime scene and some intelligence that we got fairly shortly afterwards pretty well defined that it was a military group which actually did the crime.

Q: This got quite a bit of attention in the U.S.

BUSHNELL: Of course, four American church people were brutally killed. The feeling that all those responsible ought to be punished was strong.

Q: So what was the US reaction?

BUSHNELL: There were suggestions that we stop what little military training we were providing, but most students had already departed for Christmas vacations at home. We may have canceled a few training places, but there was not much we could do to pressure the Salvadoran military except to demand that the government/military investigate and punish. It soon became clear that the military hierarchy either could not or would not move against those responsible even though they probably had a pretty good idea who they were. No one seriously thought this killing was a coordinated operation ordered or approved by the senior, or any, chain of command. But the Salvadoran military had no tradition and apparently no procedures for investigating serious breaches of the rules of conduct. I kept remembering the colonels who two years before had gotten drunk and decided to kill someone. Of course they were not investigated either. In fact almost no murders were ever solved in El Salvador. Thus confrontational as the military seemed to be in US eyes, they were only acting in the same way they always acted when hundreds of Salvadorans had been killed. Moreover, there were great tensions and divisions in the military which was more a collection of units than a disciplined hierarchical structure. Remember the military was already in turmoil as a result of the 1979 coup; many hard-line senior officers had departed, but many equally hard-line captains and NCOs (non commissioned officers) were still in their units.

Thus the moderate military, however they interfaced with the hard-liners, just didn't have the means or the will to carry out a real investigation or to force this sort of issue, especially as the moderates were already seen as being too close to the United States. My view is that the higher-ups in the military were guilty of not being able to control their subordinates in some respects, but maybe there would been another coup if they pushed too far. Who knows just how that military equation worked? At the local level the officers knew who did it, and they were not going to do anything about it. Eventually the Salvadorians did try these -- I don't remember what it was -- I think five, soldiers. Just in the last few weeks, the last couple completed their jail terms. They got sentenced to 25 years or something, and with some time off for good behavior, they've just been released from jail. Supposedly one or more of them now, for the right compensation, is going to tell his story about what really happened, whether or not one believes it.

NENA VREELAND
Evaluation Office, USAID
Washington, DC (1979-1983)

Ms. Vreeland was born in Pennsylvania and raised primarily abroad, her father being an officer in the US Foreign Service. She was educated at the University of Rochester and the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies. After working with the American University Handbook Program, writing handbooks on foreign countries for the Department of the Army, in 1979 she joined AID. She worked with that Agency developing and evaluating programs until her retirement. Ms. Vreeland was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.

VREELAND: I wouldn't repeat them because they were mostly told to me by others. I did experience one myself which I'm happy to share with you. I went down to El Salvador...

Q: What year was this?

VREELAND: It was in the late 1980s. I went down there to help the mission put together an evaluation plan for their program. The capital had just gone through an earthquake, a bad one. It had been a really tough time, and there was the insurrection or civil war still going on. As it turned out, my work there required my helping the mission recover an effective mode of operation, get the program back on track and then measure its accomplishments. The mission was supporting some export promotion projects and some other projects for which it was very important that an anticipated exchange rate reform be implemented. If it were not, then a sizable chunk of the mission's program would be undermined. The government claimed -- and these were doubtless legitimate claims -- that if this reform were implemented, it would increase domestic prices for certain goods, staples, and they could conceivably have a very serious problem on their hands with a public uproar, possibly riots and so forth, at a difficult and politically tense time. The mission naturally insisted that the government take on the reform, despite the political risk that it would be unpopular. The issue went up between the Mission Director and the Ambassador, and they could not reach agreement. So the issue was sent up to

AID and the State Department in Washington, and the word came back to the mission, "Back off." No question, this was a short-term foreign policy objective, a legitimate one. The host country government was worried. The State Department decided not to push for reforms, not to rock the boat. It was clear, however, what the implications were for the mission's foreign aid program: a big chunk of the program was going to be jeopardized, and that was that. That was an example I personally experienced, but there were other examples of this contradiction all the time. As I said, I had to be very careful about what expectations I could have about actual development results .

Q: How do you build those kinds of factors or did you in AID build those into the evaluation process? Were these political situations ever mentioned or taken account of?

VREELAND: I don't know if those particular projects in El Salvador were ultimately evaluated. I am assuming that if they had been, the evaluators would have at least noted the political factors, because they were so glaring; but perhaps not. There was no requirement to do so.

Q: Are you aware of any evaluations that brought out these political dimensions? You must have read hundreds of them.

VREELAND: Not many did, and that's why I think there was sort of an avoidance of trying to assess the ultimate impact or results of some of the programs. Of course, the effects of political factors varied depending on the country and on the project. But generally I think people backed away from openly discussing the import of some of these factors in a formal evaluation -- there was a tendency to dwell exclusively on the routine implementation or technical issues of which there were often many important ones. So these evaluations left out some important information about experience that might have been helpful. I felt that it would have been better if the agency had been clearer about the actual motives of foreign aid in a given country and specified those, and brought in people from the State Department or Treasury or other interested parties as members of the evaluation teams and made sure that those objectives and motives were also looked at in measuring the effectiveness of foreign aid projects. For example, were we able to effectively sustain a more stable period in El Salvador and what was accomplished during that period that was of political benefit to that country and to our relations with that country? I wouldn't see simply “not rocking the boat” as necessarily a legitimate US objective. I would have preferred it if the United States had said that we had other important purposes that we wanted to accomplish in that country at that time, and we needed a period of calm and continued stability, and then looked at whether we did accomplish those purposes or not. I felt that it would be more useful and certainly more legitimate if the whole range of purposes had been looked at in our evaluations and brought out as part of our experience and lessons learned.

ROBERT E. WHITE
Ambassador
El Salvador (1980-1981)

Ambassador Robert E. White was born on September 21, 1926 in Massachusetts. He received his BA from St. Michaels College in 1952 and his MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1954. After entering the Foreign Service in 1955, Mr. White served in numerous positions in foreign nations including Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Paraguay, and El Salvador. Mr. White was interviewed by Bill Knight on June 10, 1992.

WHITE: Well, my last post was El Salvador. I was only there a year from February of '80 to February of '81. Here was a situation where the United States was looking at El Salvador through the prism of the Cold War and the contribution of the Salvadorans was supposed to be tranquil while we fought the good fight with the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Salvadorans had really suffered enough. The ruling cliques in El Salvador were as blind and as short sighted and as intransigent as any I've come across. So there was a revolution in swing.

Q: *It was already going on?*

WHITE: It was basically just getting started. My honest belief is that had we taken advantage of the changes--the so-called October 1979 change of government--had we been bolder, had we been more true to our principles then the revolution might well have been avoided. But the United States government in its foreign policy had never been accused of being a monolith. The differences between the Pentagon, the CIA, and the State Department were important differences, that were reflected in the embassy when I arrived.

When I went to El Salvador, everyone including the CIA said I would be back in two or three months. They said the end was inevitable, that the revolutionaries were going to take over. I just didn't believe that. Remember, I had served two tours in Central America, and I had been back in Central America when I was in the Peace Corps and as deputy representative to the OAS. I probably knew Central America as well as anyone else in the Service. I always believed that there was a negotiated solution to be had. Indeed, I think the Carter emphasis on human rights, on agricultural reform and other reforms and on negotiations could have avoided most of the killing entirely. And I think that in the short time I had there, we were moving importantly in that direction.

The Reagan administration then came in and reversed those three facets of our policy with the result that, instead of emphasizing human rights, Alexander Haig said that counter-terrorism would replace human rights as a priority in U.S. foreign policy. Instead of an emphasis on reform, President Reagan said that reform would have to wait until after victory. And, instead of negotiation, we installed a policy to prevail on the battlefield. We turned this thing into a war. And I have to tell you that 75,000 tortured and dead people later basically the deal we could have had in 1980 but with the immense suffering that we visited on all these people in that decade.

So I left the Foreign Service over a real issue. The Salvadoran military had consistently tortured and killed people and lied to us about it. And we knew they were lying. We knew who was responsible. We reported to the Department who was responsible for it. Most of the killings

occurred in the period between the election of Ronald Reagan as president and prior to his taking office.

We reported all that was going on. I reported that the military had killed the American church women. The military set up a commission at our insistence to investigate the deaths. The commission proved to be a mechanism to protect the military rather than to investigate. I received a telephone call from the Deputy Assistant Secretary just at the transition time--after the Reagan administration had taken office and after Secretary Haig had been named but before he had been confirmed--saying there was a problem that they were going to have difficulty getting military assistance to El Salvador through the Congress unless we could certify that progress was being made on the investigation into the nuns case. "We've got this problem," said John Bushnell, then Deputy Assistant Secretary. I said, "Well, I can see the Department has a problem, but I have to tell you that I don't have a problem because the problem simply is that I give you the facts...I report to you what has happened."

Well, it turned out that Bushnell really wanted me to say in a telegram that things were getting better. I said, "You know John, I don't really need a job that badly. I cannot say that because they are not getting better, they are getting worse. What's more, unless you take a stand on this, the killing is going to increase. You are going to have case after case after case of torture and murder of everyone who is against the military."

So over that issue, I went out of the Foreign Service. Frankly it was not a bad issue to go out on. It is always possible to stick around, but I felt this was something that was important and so I left.

Q: *Did they yank you?*

WHITE: Secretary Haig called me to Washington and he complimented me on the job I had done--particularly on the reporting. He then said, "We are making some changes, one of the places we are going to make changes is in El Salvador." I said I understood that. So we were sort of winding down the interview and he said, "By the way, I don't want you to speak to the press." And I said, "Mr. Secretary, I have no intention of speaking to the press, but as long as you bring it up you can transfer me but you really can't fire me. You can but you shouldn't. You were kind enough to tell me that I had done an outstanding job. Therefore it seems to me that at the same time you announce my leaving El Salvador, you should announce my new position."

He said, "Well, we really don't have ourselves altogether sufficiently for that." I said, "Well, it seems to me you've got at least sixteen, eighteen, twenty openings. Send me away from Latin America, send me away from human rights considerations," I said, "if you transfer me as Ambassador to Sweden or some place like that, then I can certainly accept that. Nobody elected me to anything. You are the people who are in charge. But if you fire me, what then you are proclaiming to the world is that I deserve to be fired for some reason and am not being given an onward assignment." Secretary Haig said he understood my position, and would see what could be done.

So we had several more conversations at various levels. I'm not sure whether Secretary Haig tried. They claimed he did. They said they were having trouble with Senator Helms who wanted me punished.

I said, "I am not asking the impossible. If you want to make me Consul General in Hong Kong or Consul General in Berlin, something like that, fine. I am not asking you to pay a big price. I want to be reasonable, but I simply insist that I be treated with respect." It soon became clear to me that nothing was going to happen. They wanted me to go into the Inspection Corps. I said I really wouldn't do that and so I went out of the Foreign Service the same way George Kennan went out: Under the provision that if you are not offered a position or assignment of equal rank you are automatically retired.

JON DAVID GLASSMAN
Deputy Chief of Political Section
Mexico City, Mexico (1981)

Mr. Glassman graduated from the University of Southern California and Columbia University. He served in numerous posts including Madrid, Moscow, Havana and Kabul. He was named ambassador to Paraguay in 1991. He was interviewed by Peter Moffat in 1997.

GLASSMAN: Right, I was made the Deputy Chief of the political section in Mexico City. I was responsible for Mexican foreign relations in Mexico. One day, I received a call from Washington from the Office of Assistant Secretary William Bowdler. The Archbishop in El Salvador had been assassinated by some people. It was later thought that right wing elements had killed the Archbishop. The leftist groups had become quite active and since I had been in Cuba and had some good rapport there, Bowdler asked that I go to El Salvador and try to find out what these leftist groups were about. We had no contact with them. I flew down to El Salvador one week after Archbishop Romero was killed, was picked up at the airport, driven in at night by some people in the car with guns leaning out, obviously a tense atmosphere.

Through some of my press contacts from Mexico who were there, I asked to be introduced to the leftist groups. I was first taken to the National University of El Salvador. Within days of my arrival, they were announcing the formation of what they called the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front) which was going to be the political front of the leftist groups. I went in and I didn't want to make myself too particularly conspicuous. When signing in I simply wrote Jon Glassman - America. I went in there and I thought I was being very clever until people came up and started photographing me. I thought that was rather strange. The next day the leftist paper, which was the only one there, published my photograph under the title of "CIA person attends the inauguration of FDR."

Later, as the days passed, we tried to get the word out that we wanted to meet with the leftist people. The leftist groups said they had to consult and subsequently the answer came back a few weeks later. They had a meeting in Mexico among the groups and had decided they would not

meet with me unless the United States government made certain concessions such as breaking relations with the Salvadoran government and other conditions that were obviously unacceptable. One of the groups later offered to meet with me separately under circumstances which I thought were rather dangerous. I wouldn't do it but, notwithstanding that, I remained around El Salvador for a few weeks - about six weeks actually and established some contacts with what they referred to as the "progressive" elements of the Salvador military. The military had made a coup against the previous dictator Romero, and there were some military people there we would consider democratic elements. At this time, however, another coup attempt took place led by far right elements led by Major Roberto D'Aubuisson. Because of my contacts with the more moderate individuals in the military, we were able to mobilize units of armed forces to resist the coup. The coup was put down.

The other thing we did on this first trip was to put together the business groups. The leftists had tried to make inroads into particularly small business operations, trying to establish a so-called united front, using some of the things like small bus lines, small shopkeepers as a means to divide the moderate non-guerrilla groups similar to a tactic they'd used in Nicaragua against Somoza. We organized what we called the Alianza, which was a unit across the business sector oriented against the guerrillas and that pretty much sustained itself so the guerrillas never were able to do what they had done in Nicaragua. Six or so weeks doing that, I went back to Mexico to resume my duties.

Subsequently, in January 1981, the Salvadoran guerrillas launched what they called the "final offensive." Their goal was to overthrow the Salvadoran government before Reagan's inauguration because they sensed that when Reagan came into power the Salvadoran regime would be backed by the U.S. government. So they should try to achieve immediate success. I believe that on January 16, 1981, the reason I recall this, it was the last National Security Council meeting of the Carter administration, Bowdler's people again called me and said they would like me to go back to El Salvador and find out whether any foreign groups were backing this final offensive. At that time U.S. Ambassador Robert White was still there. He had been there during my first trip and I knew him well, a very active person. He, however, had made a critical error at the Carter-Reagan transition. He had done an interview with *Newsweek* in which he had condemned Reagan which wasn't good. I went there, White assembled his country team and asked that they help me. I said, "Look, the first thing I'm going to do, I'm going to go visit each of the military and police elements of Salvador and see what they've come up with, what kind of evidence they have re the external ties of the guerrillas." The CIA station chief said, "Oh, we have very close relations with the General Staff, there's nothing else, nothing to learn." I said, "Oh, I just want to do it." So I began calling on people, the Salvadoran National Guard, the National Police, the Treasury Police, the joint staff, the armed forces and one day I received a telephone call from Pat Lasbury Hall, a consular officer. She said she had just come from National Police headquarters; they just made an arrest of the propaganda commission of the ERP (The Revolutionary Popular Army), which was one of the guerrilla groups. She said, "Go on down there - see what's happening." So I went down to National Police headquarters, went and talked to Colonel Lopez Nuila, who was running the police. He said, "Yes, we got these prisoners." I said, "Did you pick up any papers?" He said, "Oh, yes, we have lots of papers, always a bunch of papers." I said, "Why don't you just give me the papers." So I just took all these documents and I took them back to Mark Dion's house who was Embassy Deputy Chief of

Mission. I started going through the papers. I had seen some reports on captured guerrilla documents in the past and I had read some DIA reports on them. I knew that they used code names to identify places and one of them which I had seen previously was Esmeralda (Emerald). I remembered a DIA report which I had read in Mexico that said perhaps they were talking about an Ecuadorian port called Esmeralda. Maybe this was a place where the guerrillas were bringing in arms but I started reading these documents and I began seeing things which to me were fairly obvious. For instance, the guerrilla documents referred to Lagos - I knew they weren't talking about Nigeria. I knew that Nicaragua has two big lakes - Lagos might be Nicaragua. The Esmeralda thing also began to emerge more and more as a place where a lot of things were going on - movements to and through Esmeralda. The question was what is Esmeralda. I started to read one document, I noticed they had a meeting in Lagos which again, in my judgment was probably Nicaragua with "Comrades from Esmeralda." They had met with one person called capital letter 'C,' then two little letters 'en,' and then capital 'F,' (C en F) then with another person 'M. Br,' and then another person whose name now escapes me. I remembered that, in Cuba, one of Castro's titles was Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro. I thought, perhaps they're referring to the Sandinista inauguration ceremony that had taken place last year and "C en F" referred to Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro. I did a check and asked, what Cubans had attended Sandinista inauguration ceremonies? Castro, of course, was there, but the way they tipped it off and made it clear was that Miguel Brugueras who was the Cuban ambassador in Panama (M.Br.) was also there. So it was clear that Esmeralda was Cuba and, if you'd backtrack it through all the documents, then you'd see how Cuba stood out. There were documents in there, for example, that showed how the Secretary General of the Salvadoran Communist Party, a man named Shafik Handal, had gone to Moscow and how they had sent him on to Viet Nam. Viet Nam then sent their arms to "Esmeralda," which sent them to "Lagos." So what you can see from these documents, later collected at military headquarters, was a clear picture. What had happened was the Cubans had put together the Salvadoran guerrilla groups. Then they had one of the representative groups go to Moscow, the Russians had told them to go to Viet Nam to get help, the Vietnamese had given them help, they had shipped the arms to Cuba which in turn shipped them to Nicaragua, then in turn to El Salvador.

When I figured this out, this was all on a Saturday, I told Mark Dion. He said, "This is very important, we have to go see the Ambassador." We went to Ambassador White's residence, he said, "This is fantastic." He said, "What a Godsend, they're about to remove me as Ambassador for criticism. Now we will send in a cable." We have discovered that the Cubans are supporting this. You've written up this very factual thing, but I'm going to write the summary of this cable to make it more dramatic, emphasizing the guerrillas contacts with Castro, Yasser Arafat, etc." So he writes up the summary, gives it to me, we send it in. It's a big thing because, if I'm not mistaken, this was a day or two after Reagan's inauguration. White was to have been called on the carpet the following Tuesday in Washington for his criticism of Reagan. So he got the cable off and he departed El Salvador. Subsequently, I got a few more documents. Basically we had the goods on the guerrillas and this became a very important moment because it turned out that Haig, who had become the Secretary of State days before, had wanted to dramatize Soviet involvement in overseas aggression. This tends to confirm his thesis. White went to Washington but was fired. He wanted to be named Ambassador to Sweden and they said, "No way, we'll send you as Consul General to Bermuda but you'll never get an Ambassadorship," and he turned sour on the Administration. The reason this is of interest is because he denied knowing

subsequently from where I got the guerrilla documents. He, of course, not only knew but wrote the summary on the cable which went in under his signature. Wayne Smith, who we talked about before, was another person who said he didn't know. But of course, he also knew since a cable had been sent to Washington.

After these cables were sent, I collected the documents, and journeyed back to Mexico. I got a call from Washington, saying, "The Secretary of State wants you to come to Washington and to bring the documents." By this time I'd accumulated about 18 pounds of documents. So I came up to Washington in late January-early February 1981. They'd formed a little working group - INR Phil Wilcox and Luigi Einaudi were there, as were David Simcox and other Foreign Service Officers. They were working up for Haig a Salvadoran White Paper. They wanted to merge information from the documents and previously classified information, and put out an expose. Haig's idea was to spread it internationally to discredit the Soviets and to develop resistance to them. We began assembling the paper but, before it was completed, Haig sent for Larry Eagleburger who was Under Secretary for Political Affairs. "Larry, you go to Europe - meet with the principal Allies, meet with the North Atlantic Council, go to Germany, France, UK at the Ministerial level and tell them what we found and how we have to confront the Soviets in Central America." Since I knew the most about the documents, I was asked to accompany Eagleburger. So Eagleburger and I took off for Europe. This was a pretty heavy thing for me. I was 37 years old and all of a sudden I was having lunch and dinner with the foreign ministers in London, Paris and Bonn. By the time we got to Brussels, however, the basic reaction to the mission was that the Europeans said yes - we don't like the Soviets but the Soviet problem is here, it's in the Middle East, it isn't in Central America.

While we were out there Eagleburger sent a cable to Haig saying that he liked me. Meantime in parallel, I had received an offer to join the Policy Planning Staff at State under my old friend Paul Wolfowitz. And back in Washington the Salvadoran White Paper was being written. The actual people who wrote the White Paper are David Simcox and Luigi Einaudi with inputs from Philip Wilcox. They wrote it in a kind of extravagant language using terms like "this is a textbook case of communist aggression" which infuriated people on the left who thought the Salvadoran rebels were land reformers. We got back from Europe and Haig wanted to hold a press conference to release the White Paper. So they prevailed on me since I knew the most about the documents to go out and be the spokesman. I appeared before the press corps. A number of very complimentary articles were initially written including one on the front page of *The Washington Post* comparing me to "Smiley's People." I was also written up in *Time Magazine* which I thought was great. But this later proved not to be such a happy experience.

Months passed and the Administration geared up its efforts to help the Salvadoran government. We sent down some military trainers and, unknown to us, a counterattack began to shape up. Obviously our expose was a very damaging thing to the Soviets and Cubans. Number one, what had become public was what was supposed to have been a covert operation. The Soviets were taking the heat for it. The Cubans were taking the heat for it and they didn’t like it. Its was causing great problems so certain things began to happen - for instance, the newspaper *Excelsior*, the biggest paper in Mexico, ran a three part series on me for three days in a row by a man named Manuel Buendia, who was on the Cuban payroll (and was later murdered in Mexico for unrelated reasons). Basically, the Cubans had done great research into my past, they talked about

my time in school, they invented a story about my attitudes and this and that, then the bottom line after three days front page story in the biggest newspaper in Mexico was that I was a professor of torture and that I had taught the Salvadorans how to torture to produce the White Paper. This was a total fabrication, of course. I said okay this was an attempt to discredit, but very interesting, it turns out that virtually at the same the story was coming out in Mexico, Philip Agee, a defector from the CIA, then residing under control of East Germany, published a very closed paper which was later published in a book called 'White Paper Whitewash' under Agee's name. This paper attempted to expose contradictions in the White Paper. It was an attempt to divert attention to alleged detailed discrepancies rather than engaging the total picture. When the Agee piece came out, I was totally unaware. I received a call about four or five months after the White Paper in June from a man named Jonathan Kwitny of *The Wall Street Journal*. He wanted to interview me; fine I'd done many other interviews. He said he wanted the interview to be not for attribution or background. When he came in, he asked me a lot of detailed questions which I responded to. The article appeared on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, criticizing the White Paper. He quoted me as saying that we stretched the facts too far. He used my reaction to a particular detail to characterize my attitude to the whole product. Haig saw the *Journal* article and was furious. He wanted me fired as it appeared I had criticized a product I had played a part in producing. I issued a statement that day pointing out that Kwitny had quoted out of context. The Salvadoran White Paper was accurate, notwithstanding the problems we might have with some of its language. The facts were true, the flow of arms had come from Cuba and Nicaragua. Kwitny's story was damaging. The very next day, *The Washington Post* published another huge article written by Karen De Young and Bob Kaiser attacking details and exposing alleged mistakes. It didn't quote me by name but again pointed out allegedly wrong details. Later we discovered that both the Kwitny piece in the *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* piece by Kaiser/De Young not only borrowed extensively from the Agee piece but used very similar language without attribution. This disclosure appeared in some of the right wing press which documented this. The words were almost identical to the Agee piece. Frederick Taylor, who at that time was one of the editors of *The Wall Street Journal*, ran an editorial piece saying, "Yes, Kwitny did have access to the Agee piece; he did do it but he paid for xeroxing." That was the excuse no attribution was necessary because he paid for the xerox copying.

Q: An off the record interview with Mr. Kwitny but you were quoted by Mr. Kwitny.

GLASSMAN: Right, it was a violation of the ground rules. Furthermore, it was inaccurate. It was a total misrepresentation. We put out a public statement the very day by the Department press spokesman pointing that out. When I went up for my ambassadorial confirmation hearings Senator Dodd asked about the White Paper. I said, "Both Castro and others have confirmed that they provided arms to the Salvadorans. It is now a matter of public record."

FREDERIC L. CHAPIN
Chargé d'Affaries
San Salvador (1981)

Ambassador Frederic L. Chapin joined the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included posts In Austria, Nicaragua, Brazil, El Salvador, and ambassadorships to Ethiopia and Guatemala. Ambassador Chapin was interviewed by Ambassador Horace G. Torbert in 1989.

Q: *So then just about at the beginning of the new administration was the time when you were called on to go to El Salvador?*

CHAPIN: Yes, it came about in a very curious way. Prime Minister Seaga from Jamaica came to the United States in the very early days of the Reagan Administration and was received officially here in Washington. There was a reception for him at the State Department to which I was invited in my Defense Department capacity and there I ran into Deputy Secretary Stoessel who asked whether I was enjoying my job at the Defense Department. I told him I was frankly bored because General DeCamp and his associates were doing most of the work. Two days later I received a call saying that Secretary Haig wanted me to go directly to El Salvador to take over in the first days of February of 1981 from Robert White who had been summarily recalled by the Administration for having too liberal views for the incoming Administration. He had held some press conferences but it was the tenor of his reports and views which made him unacceptable even had he maintained those privately. I went to see Secretary Haig immediately and he asked me to get there right away. I persuaded him that I had to wait a few days because Mrs. White was still at the residence and packing out and the only place I could stay for security reasons was at the embassy residence. The Secretary, in the meeting that we had, outlined very extensively my priority tasks in El Salvador and furnished me with a letter which I was to take to the President of the Junta, Jose Napoleon Duarte. These instructions were comprehensive for virtually my entire stay in El Salvador.

Initially the stay was to be only a month and a half, but it was extended to almost four months because of the inevitable delays in confirming the ambassador who had been selected, Deane Hinton. I was always regarded as simply an interim senior officer sent to hold the fort until Deane Hinton could arrive and not needing confirmation, but the Administration was anxious that this be viewed as a high-level assignment and so I was described to the press as Deputy Ambassador, a job which only existed in Saigon, I believe, during part of our war days in Vietnam. The Latin Americans, however, understood the concept of a chargé d'affaires with the rank of ambassador and I was very well received by President Duarte and all the members of the government including the military high command.

Q: *That was an interesting and rather difficult thing to get over in the beginning, the concept, I can certainly see that.*

CHAPIN: Once arrived in El Salvador the press of business was so great that there wasn't any time to worry about the niceties. I was told to re-examine and make recommendations about the size and scope of both the military and economic assistance programs and also a possible program to interdict the fall of arms into El Salvador across the Gulf of Fonseca from Nicaragua and, indirectly by air, either across the Gulf or over Honduran territory. The latter proved to be an almost insoluble problem given the geography and the mountains and mountainless islands in the Gulf of Fonseca so that we had to concentrate primarily on increasing the military assistance

and economic assistance. It proved easier to increase the military assistance program although not to the levels which would be attained in subsequent years.

The fiscal year was already well under way by the early days of February and re-programming of AID programs is extremely difficult as I know from my experience as Executive Secretary at the AID agency. We were able to get half of what we recommended but we kept up the battle until I left on May 26 and Deane Hinton continued to advocate greatly increased military and economic assistance on which he was successful as the years went by.

Q: *What was the timing of the election? At the time you went there Duarte had still not been elected. He was just the head of Junta.*

CHAPIN: As there was a Junta which was composed of two members of the Christian Democratic Party, one independent and one army officer. In fact, the electoral commission was established shortly after I arrived and electoral laws and the whole process had to be started. One of my tasks was to push along that process in which I was successful and early on I received assurances from the military high command that they would endorse free and fair elections as well as international observers from the OAS and other organizations.

Two other priority matters which I had to attend to were the prosecution of the cases against the unknown murderers of the four American church women who were killed in December and the two American land reform experts who were murdered in the Sheraton Hotel dining room in early January of 1981. First of all, we had to find some clues or some evidence which would lead us to the murderers. We suspected and had some indications that the persons who had perpetrated both crimes were part of the military either on active duty or off-duty. It was the off-duty security service members who constituted the so-called Death Squad. And, we rather suspected a death squad in the case of the land reform experts and uniformed, probably National Guard members, in the case of the church women's murder. But there was virtually no evidence available. Fortunately, with regard to the church women's case, we eventually developed a "Deep Throat" source in the Salvadoran army who gave us the names of the six persons of the National Guard who had been on duty at the airport at El Salvador the night that two of the church women arrived from Managua and were met by two other church women who were working in El Salvador. With this specific information, I was eventually able to get the Minister of Defense to arrest the six individuals and confiscate their weapons and take their fingerprints. Once the weapons were in hand and the fingerprint charts available, we sent this evidence to Washington to the FBI laboratories where the weapons were used in ballistic tests to compare the results with spent bullets which had been found at the initial grave site of the four murdered church women. The only fingerprint which was found on the vehicle in which the church women had been traveling proved to be the thumb print of the commander of the detachment of the National Guard at the airport that night and one of the weapons of the other members of the detachment proved by ballistic tests to have been identical with the weapon used in shooting one of the church women.

In the case of the two land reform experts we were equally lucky. One morning the Defense Attaché was having breakfast at the Sheraton Hotel with one of his military contacts when one of the waitresses who had befriended a member of the American Military Assistance group said to

this young soldier that the person having breakfast with the U. S. military attaché was one of the persons who had been present the night the two land reform experts had been murdered in the hotel dining room. The waitress in question was the person who had served the American experts and their Salvadoran contact and had been a witness to part of the whole scenario. The details are rather complex, but with her testimony we were able to make some progress. None of the principals of the case, that is the intellectual decision-makers, were ever convicted. But the two off-duty members of the National Guard who were summoned to the hotel by Lieutenant Lopez Sibrian and who actually carried out the murders were eventually tried and convicted although they were amnestied by general political amnesty shortly after they were jailed in El Salvador. The ultimate results were not satisfactory to the United States, but during my time, during the three and a half months, I was able to advance the land reform case with the invaluable assistance of a former FBI expert hired by the American Institute of Free Labor, AIFL. In the case of the church women, the action of the Minister of Defense represented the first time in Salvadoran history that any member of the armed forces was ever arrested or detained for any human rights violation or any major crime of a non-military nature.

Q: *It must have been an extremely delicate job presenting this evidence to the government. How did you go about that?*

CHAPIN: Well, there were a series of meetings with President Duarte and he was most cooperative. It was he who had instructed the Attorney General to dig up the original burial site and find the ballistic evidence which linked eventually one of the members of the detail at the airport with the crime. It was more complicated to deal with the Vice President of the Junta, Colonel Gutierrez, who was a defender quite naturally of the interests of the armed forces. Colonel Garcia, the Minister of Defense, was a very rational person who took very seriously the evidence of military involvement in both crimes and was most cooperative in making the arrest -- or it was really initially not an arrest but detention of the members of the National Guard detail at the airport. The most delicate problem was getting the Minister of Defense to assume responsibility for the arrest and go public with it. I could have covered myself with a great deal of glory by announcing that the Salvadoran government had arrested the persons responsible for the church women's murder, but I insisted that I would not do so and that the Salvadoran government had to make the announcement itself. When Minister Garcia finally made the announcement, he attributed the information on the basis of which they were detained to international agencies and totally omitted the U. S. role which was perfectly acceptable to me and extremely sensible. But it is not something which has enhanced my public image, but I nevertheless believed it was the right course of action.

Q: *Credit is a great thing to have but it doesn't always win the battle. So were there any other major things that you dealt with while there? You've already done 4-1/2 months' work, I think.*

CHAPIN: Well, there were revisions of the assistance programs, as I mentioned. There was pushing the electoral process forward. There was the advancement of the two American human rights cases. And, there was one other instruction which I had which was to nurture or foster a broader government in El Salvador and I worked very hard at this and had some initial success with the business community and with the trade union federation. But the negotiations between them broke down and the Christian Democrats were not very receptive to additional support

from what might be viewed as the democratic left and the rather moderate to conservative right. Deane Hinton continued those efforts but as we compared notes in subsequent years, neither of us was really successful in broadening the political base of the coalition. This, however, is not an unusual fact as far as Christian Democrats in Latin America are concerned. Frei and the Chilean Christian Democrats only ever solicited the support of another political party on any issue during President Frei's tenure in Chile. On one occasion, and that was to pass a national wage law, the party whose support they sought was the equally autocratic Communist Party of Chile. The Christian Democrats in Latin America are autocrats, they are not really democrats so that there is a lot of puffery which has gone on with regard to the Christian Democratic government of El Salvador and also a lot of excessive euphoria with regard to the Christian Democrat President of Guatemala today, Vinicio Serrano. Serrano was elected in free and fair elections but this does not mean that he does not owe his continuance in office to the full scale support of the military which have always dominated Guatemalan life. Serrano is not a real democrat but a practical politician who is prepared to deal with the facts of life as he finds them.

Q: *Are there any non-Marxist, non-communist, socialist parties in Central America?*

CHAPIN: Well, in Salvador there are some minuscule parties represented by Ruben Zamora who split off from the Christian Democrats and by Ungo who represents the Social Democrats. But those parties are described as being van parties. The critics maintain that all of their members would fit in one Volkswagen van. The recent results of the presidential elections confirm that there are only very small minorities of people in Salvador who support these left-wing parties. One of the efforts that I made was to see that these parties were specifically included in the original elections laws which were developed during the early days that I was in Salvador.

There's one final chapter which has to do with land reform in El Salvador and the United States spent hundreds of millions of dollars attempting to support Phase 1 which had to do with the nationalization of the largest properties in Salvador and their conversion into cooperatives and then a program called Phase 3 which would give properties that were being leased or sharecropped by farmers at the time of the nationalization of the larger properties to the sharecroppers or tenants and the owners of the properties would be compensated. But this was for the small scale tenants and sharecroppers up to 17 acres. The program eventually benefited some 400,000 people in Salvador but was not as extensive as had been originally hoped. The program was developed by American experts who had been active in land reform programs in Taiwan and Japan and was of limited success. Phase 2, however, which was to be the nationalization of intermediate size programs was not carried through. I was a strong advocate for not continuing with Phase 2 because it would disturb the agricultural production of El Salvador and vastly increased the amounts of balance of payment support and other support for the Salvadoran economy which the United States would have to provide. President Duarte himself was very clear on some of the limitations of the land reform program which was strongly advocated by his own party. Clarence Long, the Democratic Congressman from Maryland, came down to Salvador early in 1981 and had a very frank series of exchanges with President Duarte about Phase 1 of the agricultural reform. Congressman Long was very critical of the establishment of these large scale cooperatives and advocated that the land rather be distributed to individual peasants. Duarte, on the other hand, pointed out that if the Salvadoran government were to do so, the peasants would simply plant subsistence crops, corn and beans, and would

eradicate the coffee bushes, would stop planting cotton and sugar, and the country would have not only no cash crops but very few exports so that the effort was made to improve the lot of the peasants through the creation of cooperatives. Administratively, however, the persons appointed to run these cooperatives proved to be largely failures and many of the cooperatives had to be abandoned progressively or were destroyed in the process of military operations.

As I mentioned earlier, we poured and continue to pour as far as I know still are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars of economic assistance to attempt to make the agricultural program, largely the land reform program, work. Fortunately, Phase 2 was never really implemented and some of the most serious consequences for the economy thus were avoided. I'm very happy that I was among those who strongly advocated the formal notification to the Salvadoran government that the United States government could not support financially the implementation of Phase 2.

G. PHILIP HUGHES
Deputy Foreign Policy Advisor to Vice President George Bush, The White House Washington, DC (1981-1985)

Ambassador Hughes was born and raised in Ohio and educated at the University of Dayton, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Harvard University. His career with the US Government included service at the senior level with the Congressional Budget Office, the Departments of State and Commerce, and the White House, where he served two tours with the National Security Council. In 1990 he was named US Ambassador to Barbados, where he served until 1993. Ambassador Hughes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

HUGHES: Let me just mention one other trip that I would like to mention, then I'll go back to your question. That trip was the Vice President's trip to Central America in 1983 as I recall in which the central mission was the trip to El Salvador. The central mission was to lay down the law to commandants of the Salvadorian military that death squad activity had to stop or we wouldn't be able to sustain aid to the Salvadorans and the whole effort would collapse. He went and made that case to the Salvadorian military commanders and there were subsequently important changes in command, important reform, death squad activities substantially did stop. We were able to not only continue assistance to Salvador but began a lethal aid program to the Contras partly as a result of that.

***

HUGHES: From 1981 until toward the end of 1985 I was with the Vice President as his deputy foreign policy advisor. In the fall of 1985 until the spring of 1986, a rather short period, I went to the National Security Council staff as director for Latin America Affairs. Then from there I went to the State Department as deputy assistant secretary for Political Military Affairs, technology transfer and arms export control.

Q: Let's talk about the NSC and Latin American affairs. Where stood the Central American problem at that particular time?

HUGHES: We had been, as an administration, engaged for five years in a very contentious policy of opposing what we saw as the advance of communism by proxy battles I guess in several Central American countries. What were we trying to do? We were trying first of all to directly aid the Salvadoran government in its battle to keep the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, the FMLN, from toppling the government through revolutionary armed struggle in the countryside and installing what we presumed to be a Marxist government of some sort. At the same time we were trying to work with that government to both democratize with free open elections, get beyond interim governments and to an elected government. By the time we are talking, 1985, Jose Napoleon Duarte had been elected as the president of El Salvador. Also we pressed to curb human rights abuses in El Salvador which I mentioned previously in connection with the Vice Presidential visit in as I recall 1983.

WARD BARMON
Economic/Commercial Counselor
San Salvador (1983-1985)

Ward Barmon was born in Huntington, Long Island in 1943. He graduated with a double major in American and Chinese history from Yale University and then studied at the University of Madrid for a year before coming into the Foreign Service in 1967. In 1992 he served as Director of the Narcotics Affairs section in Bogota, Colombia. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to Belize, Taiwan, Thailand, El Salvador, and Honduras.

BARMON: 1983. Then I went to El Salvador.

Q: You were in El Salvador from?

BARMON: 1983-1985.

Q: It was a rather hot time.

BARMON: Yes, it was a very hot time.

Q: Could you explain what the situation was in El Salvador?

BARMON: The civil insurgency was not quite as active as it had been several years earlier when the two nuns and layworkers were killed. However it was quite active at the end of 1983, just about the time I arrived. The FMLN bombed the major dam and major railroad bridge over the largest river in the country, and did destroy that bridge. They attacked and destroyed a major army garrison up in the north. That killed a lot of people. So, those two incidents happened a short while after I arrived, just prior to Christmas.

Q: What was your job?

BARMON: Economic/commercial counselor.

Q: You had two of our top professionals there. Did that make any difference?

BARMON: Yes. Pickering was an outstanding ambassador. I did not work directly for Deane Hinton, who had left before I arrived. Pickering did an outstanding job working with the interim president and later with President Duarte to bring about a resolution of the conflict. This was both in the interest of El Salvador and us.

Q: This was almost THE focus of the new Reagan Administration.

BARMON: That, and Nicaragua.

Q: I would have thought that this would have made it very difficult area in which to cooperate. American ideology was as much part of the equation as much as getting a practical solution.

BARMON: Absolutely. It complicated matters a great deal. Especially for somebody trying to do a normal embassy job. I was trying to do a normal economic/commercial job. It was impossible to do a normal commercial job because of the violence.

Q: What was your impression of Pickering's relations with the governments that were there during the time?

BARMON: I think he had very good relations. I think he treated Duarte very respectfully. The man survived a great deal of torture at some point before he went to Venezuela in exile. Then he came back and risked his life to run for President, and won against a very nasty opposition. We gave him a great deal of support. The embassy was accused of supporting Duarte against the ARENA people (the far right). It was true. We did. We made no bones about it. We are not supposed to take sides. Actually, we did. It was clear to everybody that we were taking sides. We became targets of the far right as well as the far left. Duarte was accused by the far right of being a communist, but he was not. The most you could say that he was a populist or a socialist, but he was certainly not a communist. So, we supported him as the best hope for El Salvadoran democracy.

Q: What about on the commercial side, was there anything economically going on?

BARMON: Very little after a couple of very prominent Japanese businessmen were assassinated. Most of the foreign businessmen left. There were very few American businessmen. There was a small American Chamber of Commerce. There was a large active El Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce. I did a lot of work with both. Most of the American operations had either shut down, or were being run by Salvadorans. Visits by American businessmen had almost died out.

Q: Did you find yourself inundated by high level visitors from Washington coming with more of a political agenda than anything else?

BARMON: About once a week.

Q: (Laughter) That must have been fun.

BARMON: Everybody in the embassy became involved. This was because it was not that large of an embassy. We all had to help out. So, we took turns being control officers, just helping the ambassador and the others take care of these people. There were congressional staffers visiting all the time.

Q: Were they coming with a fixed idea and coming in with it and leaving with it?

BARMON: Only about 95% of the time.

Q: Oh, I see.

BARMON: Most of them hostile to what we were trying to do.

Q: What were they after?

BARMON: Media attention. They liked to be critical, some of them extremely vocal. Some of them were out and out proponents of the insurgent cause. They were very critical of local army and police force treatment of human rights. So, it was a very difficult time.

Q: What would you do? Would you find yourself being hissed off the stage from what you were trying to do?

BARMON: We did briefings. On average, we had one once a week. Maybe I am exaggerating slightly. There was only a major congressional member/staffer every two weeks. We always had a country team brief. The ambassador would spend hours. That, I believe, was Tom Pickering's strongest point. He, regardless of the ideological bent of the Congressmen, would devote hours and hours to talking and explaining things to them. This was to try to persuade, and let the person form an objective opinion. One of his favorite antagonists (if you want to use that word) who used to come down about every six months was Steve Solarz. I really do believe by the end of the two years that Pickering worked on him the man at least moderated his views to a certain extent. I give a lot of credit to Tom Pickering.

Q: Solarz would approach the subject, in a way, intellectually. Not completely, I mean he would try to talk to as many people as he could...

BARMON: We were convinced that when he came down for the first time that he already had his mind made up that our policy was all wrong. I remember one incident when I went along on a site visit with him. My wife, who was human rights officer in the Political Section, was the control officer because it was a Catholic refugee camp in San Salvador itself. We went to the

camp and Solarz did not speak Spanish, so my wife served as interpreter. He wanted to speak to the camp leaders. Then he wanted to speak to random camp residents to get the "true scoop." Well, it was very funny. The camp leaders knew he was coming. They would all give him the same "spiel." They knew exactly what to say. The only men were the old and the crippled, and all the young men had been killed off and tortured. The women had all been raped. Then, by some chance, there was a young man, so we grabbed him. Solarz said, "I would like to speak to him." Apparently, this young man had not been properly indoctrinated. When he started speaking, he admitted that he was here on "R&R." His battle station was up in the mountain to the north. He was here on rest and relaxation, a few days off from the FMLN. He started to go on like this, and he was shut up very quickly. There were not supposed to be any active combatants in this refugee center. So, Solarz got a bit of a different impression. This was sheer accident that young man happened to be there at the time. He soon realized he was saying the wrong things and was hustled off.

Q: He was a member of the insurgents. So, the refugee camp was not benign.

BARMON: But, that is what Solarz was led to believe. That is what he was convinced of. That was not the case, but how do you prove it? This opened up his eyes a little bit.

Q: What was your impression at the time of what we were doing there. Were you on board about what we were trying to do?

BARMON: Largely. But I thought some of what we were trying to do on the aid side was ridiculous. The land reform movement, particularly the "land-to-the-tiller" program, was a farce, I thought. Here we were supporting the government in forcing the big landowners to divide up their property if they held in excess of so many hectares. Many of them had thousands of hectares, growing cotton, coffee, etc. We were forcing them to divide up this land, and some being compensated by the state. They were dividing up these plantations, which supposedly kept the landless worker in poverty. However dividing up these huge estates into non-productive communes almost destroyed the economy and country. That was supposed to make Salvador more democratic. Some of us had some serious doubts about this. Land reform in Taiwan was very successful because the government really did pay the landowner. They gave them actual cash, money they could use to buy or start industries. Many of the farmers in Taiwan became huge businessmen over the years. As far as I know this has not happened in El Salvador. That part of our program was pretty much a disaster. I also think it was tricky to try and work with some of the security forces. The national police were better. A couple of the other police forces were pretty bad. They were horrible in terms of human rights abusers, despite our efforts. It was a touch and go situation. If we had not been there, I think the guerrillas would have had an excellent chance of winning.

Q: You left in?

BARMON: 1985.

Q: What about El Salvador from your perspective?

BARMON: It turned out well, as the insurgents finally came to the peace table with President Alfredo "Freddie" Christiani, who was our neighbor. No one else in the embassy knew him personally. My wife and I only knew him slightly socially - that he seemed extremely honest, low key, and friendly, but politically moderate despite coming from one of the famous "14 families." He turned out to be quite a good president. He really promoted the peace process and the UN intervention. I think things turned out as well as they could have. There is still a lot of unhappiness. At least El Salvador has a chance today. It was a very difficult process. There is still a lot of violence. It has been a tremendously violent country for a long time. You do not solve that quickly.

Q: Did you have the impression that the CIA had its hands in this stuff?

BARMON: Sure, but I did not know specifically what they were doing. I did not anything about what was going on at the Air Base. I had no knowledge of that at the time I was in El Salvador.

Q: One has the impression that the CIA, William Casey and Reagan Administration were a power unto themselves.

BARMON: Not under Tom Pickering. Under weaker ambassadors, probably. Not under Hinton and Pickering. Those two guys were tough. Both were backed by the Department as much as possible.

Q: When you left there in 1985, were you optimistic, pessimistic, reserved?

BARMON: Well, it was still very much up in the air. There was a major guerrilla attack in 1989. It still could have gone either way. But, the Salvadoran people, on both sides are very tough. Having gotten to know a number of Salvadorans, I know they do not give up easily. I was fairly optimistic.

Q: Today is the 3rd of August, 1998. Ward, you wanted to add something?

BARMON: About the end of our tour in El Salvador. Our daughters were there when the Marine Guards were killed. It was a very traumatic experience for everyone, obviously. Our daughters were about nine and 11. We had come back to the U.S. that week to look for a house to buy. We left our daughters in the care of our maids. We thought that they would be fine. After we were up there a few days, we heard on the radio that the Marines had been killed, along with a couple of computer specialists from Wang who were sitting out in an open-air restaurant in the Zona Rosa (Pink Zone). So, this was a very difficult period. Fortunately a good Salvadoran friend of ours went over to reassure this kids. They heard the shooting. It was very traumatic. We came back sent the kids home early to stay with their grandparents in Florida. As it turned out, we got back to the States and started our respective jobs in Washington. About a month later, I saw a cable reporting on a sweep that had just been made of some guerrilla safehouses in San Salvador. I read it with a great deal of dismay. I called my wife and we met in the cafeteria. I showed her the cable and she burst into tears. The cable recounted picking up a young man at one of the safehouses. This happened because president Duarte's daughter had been kidnapped. So, they immediately raided all of the safehouses in San Salvador. This young man who was picked up

turned out to have been our driver. We had hired him to drive our children in the afternoons after school and on weekends. Most of the time, a maid went along. But, this young man, who was a member of the FMLN, as it turned out, was tortured and confessed that he had been ordered to infiltrate himself into the embassy community with the hope of eventually becoming a regular driver. We liked him so much that we did try and get him a job as a regular driver. Fortunately, there was no position open. He was finally allowed to go to Canada. It was quite a story to read about. This guy, who had open access to our house, keys to our house, could have let the "bad guys" in at any time. He could have kidnapped our children, but apparently his job was just to gather information. He always had a notebook with him. He would jot things down, like addresses, names, and license plate numbers. Fortunately, nothing happened while we were there. It was quite dismaying reading about this later. It was a little too close to home!

JAMES F. MACK
Political Counselor
San Salvador (1983-1986)

Mr. Mack was born in Connecticut and raised in New York State. After graduating from Cornell University, he joined the Peace Corps and served in Honduras. In 1966 he joined the State Department and was sent to Vietnam in the CORDS program. Mr. Mack's other overseas service was primarily in Latin American where he served as Political Officer and Deputy Chief of Mission at a number of posts before being named US Ambassador to Guyana. Ambassador Mack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy March 20th, 2004.

Q: After being the hard nose labor negotiator where did you go?

MACK: Well, in 1983 I was asked for the second time whether I would be willing to serve in El Salvador as political counselor. The first time I was asked, San Salvador was a non-accompanied post and I had then three little kids at ages four, three and one. As interested as I was in the job from the professional point of view, I was not going to volunteer for a job that would separate me from my family.

The person who had asked me to go was Ted Briggs, then Deputy Assistant Secretary in ARA. Nineteen months later came back to me to tell me that San Salvador was being reopened for families, and asked if I would take the job. Under those circumstances I could not say no. So in April 1983 my wife and I became the first family with kids allowed to live in El Salvador. Our arrival at the Embassy turned out to be quite an emotional experience for all of us. When we walked through the door the local FSN staff was so excited to see an American family with kids that they broke out in applause. They had interpreted our presence as being positive sign for the outlook of the country. In fact, as I soon realized, the situation in the country was still deteriorating.

Q: My God!

MACK: The Embassy had been without families for eighteen months. Of course, in that atmosphere, a kind of macho kind of culture had developed in the Embassy. Everybody was single, divorced or separated. Work hard, party hard. I had seen it in Vietnam. Over time more and more families came back which changed things.

Q: You were in El Salvador from when to when?

MACK: '83 to '86.

Q: What was your job?

MACK: I was Political Counselor.

Q: Who was the Ambassador at the time?

MACK: Well Dean Hinton was the Ambassador when I arrived in April 1983. He left post three months. Tom Pickering arrived in the summer of 1986.

Q: What was the situation in El Salvador when you got there in '83?

MACK: When I got there in April the situation on the ground was terrible and getting worse. I remember having a kind of heart to heart talk one weekend with an Agency Officer who had been there a while and whose opinion that I respected. His view was that if things continued the way that they were, with the government losing a battalion every month to the guerrillas, the insurgency would win a military victory some time in 1984. This is a true story.

Q: Was it that the guerillas were that effective, or was it that the army was so ineffective?

MACK: Probably a combination of both. The Army as it was then constituted just could not deal with the guerillas. The guerrillas were much more nimble. They used hit and run tactics very, very well. They carefully chose their ground, where to fight, where to attack. The Army was kind of a parade Army and they just couldn't deal with guerrillas.

Q: As political counselor, what did you find was happening with the populace?

MACK: Well for one thing, right wing death squads were killing more than 800 people a month. The Left was killing people too but not at that rate. You may recall that under Carter, the Congress of the United States had passed an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act which prohibited the provision of military assistance to governments which were judged to be engaged in patterns of gross violations of the human rights of their population. With respect to El Salvador, that had the practical effect of severely limiting the amount of military assistance we could provide. And it was very, very clear to us that unless the U.S. Government could provide substantial military assistance to El Salvador, like training, equipment and munitions, that the Government could not sustain itself over a period of time. I told you before that, that was the impression of one guy I talked to early in my tour. That became my impression in those first few

months. It was just bad news following bad news. Military setbacks and horrendous human rights violations.

Elements of the Army and their friends felt they could deal with the insurgency by grabbing people in urban areas suspected of supporting the guerrillas and executing them. They couldn't deal with the guerillas in the countryside.

Q: Well, how did Dean Hilton operate in this?

MACK: Dean was a good friend, but left post within about two or three months or so of my arrival. He was a very, very strong leader, impatient with incompetence and those who he perceived were not pulling their weight. He was a very, very astute political observer. Had very few resources to work with because the terrible state of human rights in the country made it impossible for the U.S. to provide much assistance to the Salvadoran government. He was trying to help Alvaro Magana the interim President, who was a basically decent man. But against the background of all these death squad killings and military defeats, he was very limited in what he could do in 1983.

So, what happened was after several months or so at post, it was late summer, about four or five us in our section got together to talk over what we could do about this situation. Our judgment was that the Salvadoran Government was losing the war. Yet given the terrible human rights situation with people in the Salvadoran military linked to death squad activity, the U.S. Congress was not going to provide any assistance. But without it, the war was lost.

We asked ourselves what we could do to change the equation? One of my officers named Felix Vargas had actually written a paper to get the folks in the political section talking. The idea we came up with was for the Administration to send down a very high ranking person, someone with credibility with the Salvadoran military, to read the military the riot act. To tell them "look!. We can help out but only if you do certain things and which included, obviously, getting the death squads under control and reducing the death squad killings dramatically. But we did not think that alone would be enough to justify US assistance and turn things around. The Salvadorans also would have to make major reforms in Army command structure as well and get rid of certain people. We kicked that idea around, polished it up and a month or so after Ambassador Pickering came to post, presented the proposal to him. He thanked us and we didn't hear anything for awhile. I don't know if I should say this on tape?

Q: Put it on tape and then you can always look at it later.

MACK: First of all I have to tell you that I have tremendous respect for Ambassador Pickering. He has been a mentor and a great friend and an awesome person who served his country very well in many, many ways. I worked for him twice. In any event about one month after we had made our proposal, he called me up to his office and he said, "Jim!" You have betrayed me." Those were essentially his words. I was crestfallen because I idolized him. He told me that someone in my section had violated a confidence. Someone had leaked the document that we had given him, or at least the ideas in the document, to the press. It was clear that he had taken our proposal to heart and had planned to turn it into a proposal to send to Washington. I went back

and to tell my troops, all whom had been working like crazy, all of whom were totally loyal to Pickering, what had happened. I felt quite strongly that nobody in our section would leak the contents of this document since that would guarantee that nothing would come of our proposal. To leak it would have undermined its impact and made the Salvadorans much less likely to react in the way we wanted.

Right after that episode we asked for a meeting with Pickering and told him that we had not leaked the document. That was that! He just said, the proposal was over. He essentially led us to believe that the proposal was dead and would not go forward. We were all about ready to submit our resignations because we were so upset at what happened. We felt that if we did not have the confidence of the Ambassador, the section could not operate with the personnel it had on board. Keep in mind ours was a very active political section. We were not just reading newspapers. We were out on the street, all over the country talking to people, taking the human rights message to every actor we had access to. All of us had scarified a lot to take this job. American Embassy San Salvador was not your casual assignment. Ambassador Pickering did not want us to resign but said no more about the incident.

About a month later as he was about to leave on a trip to Washington, he called me in and asked me to ride with him to the airport. En route he handed me a paper and asked me to read it. Basically it was a cable proposing what essentially what we had proposed to him. His gesture was his way of saying "you have regained my confidence."

About a month later, I think it was December, 1983, Vice President George Bush, Sr. came to San Salvador on as head of the high level mission we had proposed earlier to meet with the entire Salvadoran high command, all of the senior colonels and President Magana at the President's residence. I was the notetaker. Bush told them that the US wanted to help El Salvador but could not under current circumstances. Congress would not allow it. He delivered the message on human rights, and without accusing them directly, not scolding them, but as a friend of el Salvador who wanted to help but also wanted them to understand some political realities in the US and some organizational realities in their own armed forces. He said that death squad killings had to end and that the military command structure had to be reformed. Following his visit there was an immediate and precipitous drop in death squad murders from almost 800 a month to almost nothing. In fact, the drop probably started before he got there because the Ambassador had told the Salvadoran high command in advance what message the Vice President was bringing. So the Salvadorans were leaning forward by the time he got there. And the number of death squad killing remained very low for the rest of the time I was in El Salvador. That changes, plus the reforms in the military, together with, I have to add, Ambassador Pickering's very persuasive lobbying of Members of the US Congress during their frequent visits, convinced the Congress to dramatically increase military assistance.

Let me say something about CODELs. In my first 18 months at post we had 80 CODELs, 80. Not 80 Members, but 80 CODELs. The political section was in charge of scheduling CODEL agendas and reporting on their visits. We had a guy who did nothing but organize CODELs. We all shared the task of taking them to meetings with Salvadorans and translating. I would say that a quarter of the Congress came to El Salvador at least during my three years there. I am talking about CODELs as large as 14, which is a huge number to handle. Many came on weekends since

it was so easy to get there from Washington, tough on us but we did have an excellent opportunity to explain our case on what was happening. As an aside I should tell you that we would frequently brief the CODELs an my house, which means we had to feed them and their accompanying staffs. But since only Americans were present for those briefings, that also meant we were not allowed to claim those meals as representational expenses. Once my wife pointed this out to a CODEL and the rule or law was changed.

And the fact was that things began to improve in early 1984. In addition to the improvement in the human rights situation, Napoleon Duarte was elected president in a free election. He was a Notre Dame grad so was quite effective with the members of Congress. The war also began to turn around. There were some preliminary peace talks with the FMLN groups in 1986 in a little town near the Honduran border called La Palma.

Q: Did the Salvadoran military get rid of some poor commanders or people linked to death squads?

MACK: Yes. Some were some people sidelined or sent abroad.

Q: Wasn't an American Navy Seal assassinated when you were there.

MACK: Yes. Lt Schlafenberger. He worked with the MILGROUP in the Embassy. He had a girl friend who studied at the Catholic University. He would pick her up every night after class. A guerrilla sympathizer obviously spotted him told his friends who set up the assassination attempt. He was sitting in an armored car but the a/c was not working so he had opened the window.

Q: Did you have case any case of US Nuns being killed? The Churchwomen's murder was still hanging fire wasn't it?

MACK: Oh yes! In fact, the Churchwomen's case was successfully prosecuted while I was there. The US justice department sent down a Spanish speaking lawyer named Carlos Correa to work a Salvadoran lawyer to build the case. Preparations tool almost two years.

Q: Who were convicted?

MACK: About four or five National Guardsman. Apparently, the wife of one of the Guardsman was an Evangelical Protestant and I guess this guy got religion too. Eventually he decided to cooperate with the prosecution. And through him they were able to get information about the others who were involved in the murder. The trial was in a dusty little town down near the National Airport and the verdict was guilty. That was a big deal, and a big political issue, especially in the US. The family of the murdered churchwoman had tremendous support in the US Congress and they were not going to let this case go. The Congress wasn't either. It was successfully prosecuted. Many believed the higher ups had known who was responsible and were involved in a cover-up. The people who actually committed the murders, apparently on their own, were nailed. There was a lot of excitement, a lot of excitement in the Embassy when the guilty verdict came in. By the way I had a death threat, from the far right apparently. For my last year I had two armed guards with automatic weapons at my house at all times. I don't know if the

threat was serious, but the Embassy security officer took precautions. I always traveled in an armored car.

Q: In a way you were feeling pressure both from the right and from the left, weren't you?

MACK: Right! One thing we were trying to do was – how do I say this – to civilize or democratize the far Right – to bring them completely within the democratic process, to abandon recourse to political violence. Now the Right had a lot of public support. Despite what many people think the far right was quite popular and they could get the vote out. Most of the Salvadoran people were basically quite conservative, at least they were in my time. The proof of that is that following Duarte's presidency, the rightwing party ARENA has proceeded to win every presidential election to this day. Internationally observed Free elections. So, our view was, look! The Right exists, has popular support, so what we need to do is bring them into the legal political process to operate like a loyal opposition. Remember, while I was there, the Christian Democrats under Duarte were in power. Anyway that was our objective to bring the right in to political process and abandon violence. That was our message to these guys. I'm not saying that all the people on the Right were involved in or supported the death squads. But there was some overlap between the democratic right and the violent right, no question about it. I would have been kidding myself if I said it didn't exist. But we wanted to strengthen those on the democratic side of the party, and to democratize the Army, if possible.

Q: Did you have contacts with people on the intellectual left and those who represented a centers positions.

MACK: Yes! Yes! We had some very, very close contacts. Actually we became close friends who were progressive people but no question that they were democrats no question about it.

Q: You mentioned all of these Congressional delegations coming down. There is a certain alignment within our own Congress, with some siding with the Right and some siding with the Left. Were you seeing this in the delegations?

MACK: Absolutely! People of all persuasions. Some people came with their minds made up and left with their minds made up. But, there were others who came with fairly open minds and the Embassy staff worked quite hard to educate them on what really was going on on the ground. And over time the majority came to support the policy because they could see the reforms and the progress.

Q: What was your reading of Napoleon Duarte?

MACK: Duarte was a democrat. As I said, he was a Notre Dame graduate and a very persuasive advocate with the US Congress. About 10 years earlier he had run for president but had the election stolen. He really won, but was not allowed to take office. He was subsequently arrested by the military, physically abused – they broke his cheekbone- and exiled to Costa Rica or Mexico. I can't remember. He came back and was elected President.

He was basically a good and honorable man. Obviously everyone has their weak side and Achilles heel. His showed when one of his daughters was kidnapped by the guerrilla arm of the Orthodox Communist Party. She was taken to the guerrilla base on the slopes of the Guazapa Volcano, which was a notorious area. Negotiations ensued for her release. The guerrillas were demanding the release of hundreds of their people from government jails..

Duarte was distraught during this period. He had a difficult time functioning as President. This was in 1985. Ed Corr had become Ambassador. Ambassador Corr took me to meet with Duarte 30 times during the 44 days Duarte's daughter was held hostage. Duarte was so upset. He was willing to agree to virtually anything to get his daughter freed. He was willing to make some concessions that probably were not in the best interest of the country. In fact, he probably would have been willing to go farther than the final deal in which a large number of guerrillas were released in exchange for his daughter and a number of government mayors who had been kidnapped. For a while, we were worried he would not insist on the release of the mayors. That would have been devastating. In any event, that episode substantially weakened Duarte as president. But he was a decent man.

Q: Going back to something, what was your impression of George Bush Sr. when he came down as Vice President?

MACK: This actually was the second time I had met him. The first time was in Saigon, I think it was 1969, when he was a Congressman from Houston and I was a political officer at the Embassy. He had come to dinner at my house to meet with some Vietnamese congressmen. He is a very engaging person who makes people feel very much at ease in his presence and he is not arrogant. With the Salvadorans his approach was to come at the problem in a positive way, saying, "look we really want to help you but we can't. Please make a change in this so we can help you to win." He was firm but respectful. He did not insult anybody. So I thought the message was very effectively delivered.

Q: From our understanding he was very good in foreign policy.

MACK: Yes, and he also knew how to deal with people. He had a knack for dealing with human beings --relaxing them to make them feel comfortable so that they could engage in dialogue.

Q: Did you find that Senator Helms and particularly his staff were quite strong supporters of the fairly far right?

MACK: Yes. And they often came into the country and did not want to speak to the President. Our normal practice at the Embassy was not to set up any meeting to which we were not invited. So they made their own arrangements in advance and came. They pretty much cut us out. .

Q: Did you have any feel for what they were doing?

MACK: No! I am sure they were whispering support in the ears of those people. Now keep in mind we in the Embassy also had very close contacts with the rightwing party. We spoke with

these people all the time. However, when Senator Helms' people came down, they went straight to their local contacts without any Embassy involvement.

Q: Was this a sort of in a way a feel good operation for the Helms crew in that we were already talking to the people they were seeing?

MACK: That's a very good question. I can't answer that.

Q: While you were there did events in Nicaragua impact on El Salvador as far as you could see?

MACK: Well yes! I mean supplies were coming in from the Sandinistas for the guerrillas in El Salvador. Some came right up the Pan American Highway hidden in trucks. Other stuff came directly across the Gulf of Fonseca in speed boats from Nicaragua to El Salvador.

While I was in El Salvador, I actually traveled to Nicaragua with my wife on vacation. I wanted to see how the other side operated. Ambassador Bergold was then US ambassador to Nicaragua and his wife and mine were friends, I think from language training years before and they invited us down. So we got to see a whole other world. Traveled around the country. Went to a big Sandinista rally. I never felt threatened. I guess they assumed I was just another *internationalista* who supported the Sandinistas.

But it was clear that the revolution was not going well. The people had nothing to buy. Supermarkets were bare; maybe a few Romanian Sardines or something in the market but that was about it. Everything was rationed, all food was rationed. I remember going to a market which actually the U.S. had built several years before the Sandinistas had come to power. It was a beautiful marketplace but there was virtually nothing sale. Then somebody in the market told me what the deal was so I went up to a guy and I asked him if he had any beans for sale. There was nothing visible on his stand. Then the guy looks around to see if the secret police were there and said how much you want? I said a kilo, a kilo of beans. He reaches under his counter and pulls the beans he did not have displayed and I paid the black market price to see how it was. You know. But clearly the people were hurting. The small time entrepreneurial class, the market people, were suffering greatly. These were not rich people. There were just market people. I could not even buy a *guayabera* (a kind of shirt for which the Nicaraguans are famous). I asked why and was told they did not have thread.

Q: They were famous for making beautiful guayaberas.

MACK: Right! Right! They did not have any supplies for making anything. For example, the price of gasoline in pesos at the at the hugely inflated official dollar exchange rate was very expensive, but the black market rate we were able to fill up the whole tank of the embassy van driving me around for a couple of bucks. Anyway dollars were in short supply.

Q: You mentioned term" internacionalists". These were a lot of the same kids who sang protest songs from the United States..

MACK: There were a lot of people streaming into Nicaragua to support the revolution, yes.

Q: I guess they just were not welcome in El Salvador?

MACK: There were not a lot of them, and they were not particularly welcomed by the government, but some were there. One woman who was there is now in jail now in Peru, convicted for helping a Peruvian terrorist group, the MRTA. Her name is Lori Berenson. I understand that before she moved on to Peru, she actually worked as personal secretary for one of the guerrilla leaders during the peace talks with the Salvadoran government at the end of the war. Apparently, she never said anything, so nobody had a clue she was an American, but she was a note taker and evidently spoke Spanish well.

I also remember that occasionally college kids would come down to El Salvador. Some were real idealists. They would have some local contact slip them into guerrilla territory. I remember one young woman, I think from Oberlin College, who spent a month or so with them. And all the while we were being hounded by certain members of congress to find this poor "disappeared" young woman, with the implication that she had been a victim of right wing or military violence. Then she resurfaced. I think she may have been picked up by the government soldiers during a skirmish with the guerrillas, and this angelic looking little twenty-one year old girl comes out of the countryside having been with the guerrillas for four weeks.

Then there was the case of an American priest whose name I cannot recall, but who was quite far to the left. He had disappeared. Since he was on the left, it was feared he had been murdered by the far right. We were bombarded by Congress in this case to find him, once again with the implication he had been a victim of right wing violence. A month or two later he magically reappeared. When told of all the concern about his wellbeing and where he had been, his answer was that he had been "on a walk with the people." That was his answer. So, yes, they were there.

Q: Had the Contra Movement been developed when you were there?

MACK: Yes.

Q: Did that seem to have any effect or not?

MACK: Well apparently some things were moved to Nicaragua through El Salvador, although I did not have privy to that.

Q: Did you run across Ollie North in any of his shenanigans?

MACK: Yes. He came to El Salvador several times.

Q: Did he work with the Embassy or basically bypass the Embassy?

MACK: He came down in his official capacity as a staffer for the National Security Council to see how the war in El Salvador was going. We briefed him several times. .

Q: Was the political section making any efforts to meet with the Left, the guerrillas?

MACK: The guerrillas no; the left yes. Late in l986 just before I left a few members of the FDR, an progressive group with links to the insurgency but was not violent, were allowed by President Duarte to come back. And so we felt it important to have a conversation with them. I had breakfast with a medical doctor named Hector Silva, who had been in exile for years and who after the war was elected mayor of San Salvador on the FMLN ticket. I was able to contact him through because a friend knew his sister. We spoke for one hour and a half to two hours. At the end of it, I concluded that this guy was a democrat, not a communist. He ended up being the Mayor of San Salvador. Years after the war, when the FMLN was competing in the political area, Silva challenged Shafik Handal, who was a notorious hard line orthodox Communist, for the FMLN presidential nomination. Handal wanted the nomination for himself so he had Silva expelled from the FMLN. Otherwise, Silva might have ended up as president. Handal lost badly to the ARENA candidate, by the way.

Anyway, it was clear from my breakfast conversation with Silva that we could work with him. And that is how things turned out.

Q: Was Fidel Castro was his group there or not? Were we seeing Castro agents within the guerrilla movement or not?

MACK: I am sure they were there. We know Cuba provided specialized training for guerrillas. We also knew that guerrilla leaders would slip off to Cuba from time to time. My guess is that they traveled to Nicaragua somehow and from there to Cuba for R&R Cuba and to meet with Castro. In addition, there were leftists from all over the Americas fighting with the guerrillas. There was a lot of revolutionary solidarity.

Q: What about working with the CIA there? Was this a place where the CIA was dominant, would you say, how did it work?

MACK: Actually I had very good relationship with the Agency. We shared a lot of thoughts and information with each other.

Q: Sometimes, some post ends up, -- I was in South Korea at one point where the CIA was basically running things.

MACK: I wouldn't say that about EL Salvador. We both had our spheres of influence and obvious different ways of operating. They were in intel gathering and helping the Salvadorans with intelligence planning and training and special ops and that sort of thing. So, obviously we were not involved in that.

Q: We were not tripping over each other.

MACK: No, not at all, but we did compare notes on the political and military situation.

DAVID R. ADAMS
Officer for El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica, USIAD
Washington, DC (1984-1986)

Mr. Adams was born in Washington, DC and raised in Virginia and abroad. He was educated at John Carroll, William and Mary and George Washington Universities. Mr. Adams joined USAID in 1973 in Washington, DC. He served in Washington and abroad, dealing primarily with matters concerning Latin American countries and Kosovo. His foreign assignments include Bangladesh, Guatemala and Haiti, where he served as USAID Mission Director. Mr. Adams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: What was the situation in El Salvador and all that you were particularly concerned with?

ADAMS: Well El Salvador was the focus country among the focus region because of the civil war that was in full swing. Other countries were affected of course to one extent or another and had their own internal issues along the same lines. But Salvador was the ground zero and USAID was pumping in a lot of money for both balance of payments assistance as well as project related assistance for infrastructure development or repair. Things were being blown up and, it reminds me of a mini Iraq you might say. We were rebuilding roads and electrical infrastructure and buildings of different sorts. Then also there was a major health initiative that I was involved in in trying to shore up the rural health system which was under a lot of stress because of the war, and doctors didn't want to work out in the countryside, that sort of thing. Education, the same things with the schools, trying to keep the school system going despite the violence and dislocation, refugees or rather internally displaced persons. So those were a number of the things that were being heavily funded by USAID in El Salvador particularly.

Q: How did you find working in Salvador? What were your greatest projects, I mean what ones do you sort of look back with and say worked? Could you talk about how they worked?

ADAMS: Well let's see, I worked on health, infrastructure, family planning. It seemed like a bit of an oxymoron with people being killed. They still had a relatively high birth rate. But in any case, not that that was something I would hold up as a paragon of development virtue if you will. In El Salvador, I think the public services restoration project was one where I was told I was helpful because the folks who were running the show in country were so busy traveling, going out to the hinterland and doing what they did negotiating with various authorities to be sure that money was going to be used in a certain way. So I fulfilled more of a writer-editor role, in that coming out of Washington I was particularly aware of the documentation requirements, justification requirements. I fulfilled an in-house need because a number of folks who would do the packaging, the writing, editing didn't have the time, and because I knew relatively well, typically better than they did about what needed to be presented back to Washington to justify funding, e.g., to Congress. I was writing Congressional notifications, for example, as well as what we used to call project identification documents, PIDS, Project proposals, or sections thereof. And I was told that was quite helpful because they didn't have the time to take it on.

Q: How did you find the response of the Salvadoran officials and the people that you were working with?

ADAMS: You know I was impressed. Having had met a cross section and worked with a cross section of folks in other Central American countries in addition to El Salvador, mainly Honduras and Costa Rica in particular. I was favorably impressed with the Salvadorans, particularly in the context of the stress they were under because of the war and economic dislocation. I was impressed with their willingness to collaborate, pull their own weight shall we say. That is to not rely, as I have seen happen in other countries, unfortunately where USAID had been involved, not rely on the foreigner, to fulfill functions that locals should be doing. So they were true counterparts in the sense of their work ethic. They were also very congenial, gregarious, very hospitable to us. That has sort of been borne out by the way by where El Salvador is today. Despite the fact that they have had some major national disasters, earthquakes and I think one of the Hurricanes hit them. That the country is thriving in many ways economically. They still have their issues, but they are still doing very well. I attribute this primarily to their industriousness of the Salvadoran people.

Q: I would say this is borne out by the Salvadorans who are here in the Washington area. Take a look, they are hard working people. It is an impressive contribution to America. Did you find yourself at all in cross purposes with sort of the military, either the Salvadoran military or maybe some of the CIA type operations?

ADAMS: You know I can't say that I discerned a situation, which I have seen in other countries with Haiti by the way. Where USAID certainly on the surface was working at cross purposes or vice versa with the military or CIA. I think there was a concerted effort to help the Salvadoran government and its people, aside from those who were involved in the insurgency of course, to have a more or less a functioning democracy, a market economy within the confines of the emergency situation they were in. So now one could look at the extremes of the Salvadoran military, the D'Aubuisson faction for example, extreme right wing, and say that yes in a sense we might have been working at cross purposes with them, but they were influential in they weren't terribly fond of democracy or democratic institutions and getting the job done in the war and lining their own pockets, was sort of their perspective. I think for example on the other hand, Napoleon Duarte was the president for at least some of the time when I was involved with the country, and he impressed me as again, I didn't know him personally, so you never can tell. He impressed me as being a very upright individual and wanted to do what was best for his country and taking the risks by virtue of the job he had taken on.

Q: Of the Salvadorians you were working with, was there a sense of optimism is the right word, but a sense of things were moving in the right way or were they looking over their shoulder or not?

ADAMS: I think there was a lot of trepidation on the part of officials with whom I worked, and had contact with on an intermittent basis about what the future held for them, concerns that the U.S. might not stay the course for example and that a Sandinista type situation might occur where, as appeared to be the case in Nicaragua they might say, the left might take over. Then of course there were terrible incidents like the murder of Archbishop Romero and people thought if

that can happen, anything can happen. So they were caught between the right and the left, the bulk of the population and the people with whom we worked. Although there were I have to say there were a number of those folks with whom we were interactive that either secretly or openly were sympathetic to the right.

Q: Did you feel under any particular threat yourself or not?

ADAMS: You know I didn't really feel threatened until after I left El Salvador. On one of my trips it was driven home to me how dangerous a situation was for me personally among others because I was sitting not just in the same bar but at the same set of tables at an open air restaurant in what was known as the Zona Rosa, which was a night club area, in the late afternoon about two days before several U.S. soldiers and USAID contractors were murdered in that area. In broad daylight in the afternoon. Probably some of the same people I was sharing a drink with a few days before, two or three days before in that restaurant. So I realized that but for the grace of God I would have been there for that happy hour too a couple of days later.

JACOB GILLESPIE
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
San Salvador (1986-1988)

Mr. Gillespie was born in Illinois and raised in Illinois and Maryland. Joining the Foreign Service of the United States Information Agency (USIA), he served several assignments at USIA Headquarters in Washington, DC in which he dealt with various aspects of USIA's operations in the U.S. and abroad. His foreign assignments include Accra, Bujumbura, Leopoldville, Montevideo, the Hague, San Salvador and Madrid. Mr. Gillespie was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.

Q: Alright. Would you describe the situation when you went out?

GILLESPIE: Okay. I was there from1986, from June until late 1988. There was a major guerilla war going on. There were two guerilla wars going on in Central America at the time. The group known as the Contras were fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. In El Salvador there had been a really serious guerilla war since late '79 or'80 that had been going on. There had been horrible violence.

The Embassy was fortified as much as it could be. It was in town but it was fortified. We had grenade screens up. It had been hit. I learned later that my office on a Saturday had had an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) go right through it before I got there.

Q: That's rocket-propelled grenade.

GILLESPIE: That's right. But in any case there was a small staff. I had an Information Officer; a position for a Cultural Affairs Officer in addition to my own job. There was an American

administrative secretary and there were the makings of the full panoply of a small USIA post there. We had a film section, we had a radio man, we had a good little press assistant, we had two cultural affairs assistants, one who handled the Fulbright program mainly and the other one handled all the other kinds of exchanges and other kinds of programs; both of them were wonderful. There was a bi-national institute that we had broken relations with because they had some people on the board who we really did not approve of as they may have been involved with death squads. The death squads had been evil.

Q: The death squads are on the right.

GILLESPIE: The death squads were on the right. Their most infamous act had been to assassinate the archbishop of San Salvador, Archbishop Romero in 1981. The guerillas were everywhere. The left controlled the National University in San Salvador and I was told by the security officer and backed up by the Ambassador when I got there, you're not going to go there. We just don't deal with them. You can deal with the other university, which was the Jesuit University of Central America which was a much better university but also was quite far to the left.

Q: This tended to be a pattern in Latin America where national university was taken over kind of by the Marxist left and all whereas the real education was done by the Catholic Church.

GILLESPIE: Yes.

On the other hand I did get to know the people at the UCA, the Jesuit university. There were two American Jesuits and a number of them had studied at one time or another in the United States. It was an excellent school. They were interesting people but they disagreed with our policy strongly. On the other hand, although I believe we had some good intelligence that showed they did have some contacts with the guerilla leadership they didn't actively support them. The government in El Salvador had been elected in maybe moderately free elections because the right wing lost and the Christian Democrats were elected for the first time. And the government was headed by Jose Napoleon Duarte, another American-educated engineer. He went to Notre Dame. When I got there I think the feeling that was that about half of the government officials were pretty good, that the level of corruption was acceptable. I don't know what that ever meant. I never had any great sense of corruption myself although strangely enough there was one minister I did deal with regularly, Fito Rey Prendes, the Minister of Information and Culture. Fito, I'm pretty sure had his hand in every till he could get them into. And he was a great character. His father had been a vaudeville clown and he grew up traveling around. And so he was fun.

Duarte was, I thought, an extremely brave man. The U.S. Government had decided to support him and to put some money behind him; however, the Congress never supported this strongly. The Congress made rules here that we would not put military there. We had a military assistance program with a unit that could not have more than 80 boots on the ground at any time. I guess that's 160 boots, two for each of them, but that was on any day. Ambassador Ed Corr started every staff meeting by looking over at the head of the Mil Group and asking how many they had at that time. And the closest it ever came was that there was one getting on a plane right now and

we have 80 when he's up. But it was tight. They were down as low as 70, low as 65 or 70; it never went above.

The Embassy otherwise, had a large USAID mission that did good work in difficult situations and some fascinating things. One of them was the team that was responsible for keeping electrical power running as a sign that the government worked. The FMLN may blow up power lines or a station but they kept power going. The way they did this was with pre-located, all around the country, power poles. They would take crews in on helicopters. When the guerillas blew up a couple power poles they'd take a crew in on a helicopter with a military crew flying with them to protect them and they'd go in and they'd get the power back up. They did this 24/7. For over half of the country, certainly, they kept power going regularly. The other half maybe not as regularly but as much as they could. One-third of the country was largely in control of the guerillas.

Embassy people could travel in roughly one-half of San Salvador. The rest was off-limits. My first week there I told my driver and bodyguard I wanted to go to the cathedral. These were two very brave young guys and I thought they would. They said come on. And the bodyguard said I'll look, you stay in the car. And he got out, he walked around. He said well okay and I got out. I said if you can walk around I can walk around. He said no, no. The Embassy was still uptight. Six months before I got there in what was known as the Zona Rosa, which was in a very upper class neighborhood, it was restaurants and bars, very nice ones. Five off-duty Marine guards were sitting and having a beer. Guerillas drove by and just let them have it, killed them all. In an Embassy that was already a little uptight, this really shut them down and I arrived in that.

Because we had the war going on, there were as many as 50 or 60 foreign journalists, mostly American, some European. There were a couple from Mexico and I think at one time we had a bureau set up by an Argentine, one of the Argentine papers. This was the last of the days that American media had foreign bureaus. There was a CBS office and NBC and ABC flew in from Mexico or Miami. We had all representatives from the major papers, the wire services. Ambassador Corr let me know very early that that was my responsibility to take care of them and not let the Embassy get in trouble. The journalists were good people, doing a tough job. They had had colleagues killed. There were some very good journalists there. Doug Farah, whose op-eds still appear; James LeMoyne who wrote for the New York Times, a wonderful guy, a fine journalist, who left The Times to become the UN negotiator in Colombia. But it was a difficult job. Things were difficult. Embassy-press relations could be tough.

I got there in June; my wife came out at Labor Day for an extended visit and said that she thought that she would come for good the first of the year and maybe come for Christmas and then come back the first of the year to stay. I was starting to feel comfortable that we could do some things here. I watched the exchange programs; they were pretty well run. I was having a hard time getting a CAO assigned to-

Q: Cultural Affairs Officer.

GILLESPIE: Yes. Two had dropped out on me. But the two FSNS, Foreign Service nationals were terrific, who managed most of the programs there. And the Information Officer had been

Cultural Affairs Officer before so he could help me. After Labor Day I think the embassy was starting to feel better about things. We did, as an embassy, one of those big training sessions where you bring in everybody and they throw one crisis after another-

Q: It's crisis training.

GILLESPIE: Crisis management. We did one of those three-day things, which you know, if nothing else I think Ed Corr was right; he said one of the reasons he wanted to do this, it's probably good for morale to get, you know, get the senior people to work together.

Then, on the Friday before Columbus Day weekend in October 1986, at approximately 12:00 noon, San Salvador was hit by a massive earthquake. It ripped through any number of the city buildings. Because El Salvador is on the chain of Central American faults and volcanoes that run north to south. This hit big and at the end there probably were four or five thousand people who were killed. The Embassy sat right on a fault, literally, or right next to one but not the main one. However, as it turned out, the top three floors of the Embassy were destroyed. It was a four story building and the top three floors were never used again. Donna Oglesby, USIA Deputy Director for Latin America and my Washington boss, was there. She and I were sitting with a temporary TDY Cultural Affairs Officer talking with the FSN who did the Fulbright program in the Cultural Affairs Officer's office when it hit. And I don't know why I knew but I grabbed her and put her in a doorway and I put the other two in another doorway and I jumped in with Donna and I said just stay here. The quake went on for what seemed a very long time. It ended, I got them out and then I spent probably was not more than 15 or 20 minutes but it seemed like forever, making sure that everybody was out. Then with the young man who was my driver, actually, who was a very big, strong young guy, we went to the film and book section. He and I were throwing books and films over because that had all collapsed and there were- we thought there were three people back there, but there were only two. We all got out of the building.

Of course at this time, in 1986, there were no cell phones. We worked with radios which, of course, didn't work half the time. Everyone got out of the embassy safely out into the motor pool area. We had no real injuries, a few scrapes and I think the Labor Attaché messed up a knee but that was it. And it was really a miracle when you saw the buildings around the Embassy that pancaked completely and people were lost.

And after we got everyone out, the Ambassador called a stand up country team meeting. He said for everybody else to take it easy. We're not going anywhere. We all knew right away we couldn't let people go until we knew what the guerillas were doing because there were always guerillas in town and the question was whether they would take advantage of this. And so we had all the security people, the military people, the intelligence people on what communications they still had trying to find out what people knew. The military group leader had one of the six helicopters that we had flown in and it landed on a field next to the Embassy. After some time five of us went up to look and it was awful. The devastation was really bad. However, the residential areas where probably most of our people lived were not devastated, but there was damage.

When we went back the Embassy people were very upset for a number of reasons because they had no idea where families were or what was going on, no way to contact them.

Q: Was your wife in-?

GILLESPIE: My wife was back in Washington then; she had not yet moved.

Strange things, funny things in retrospect happened. The GSO went into the Embassy and turned all the power off and secured things which that I think was quite brave. Kevin Milius was the General Services Officer. He and the security officer then went back and went into the commissary, which was in the Embassy at that time. They came back out with warm soft drinks. There wasn't a lot of bottled water. They had warm soft drinks and cigarettes. Everybody's nervous, they're standing around smoking. It's hot, it's midday in Central America, we're in the motor pool; there's really only one covered place in that motor pool with any shade and that's right next to the gas tanks, the gas pumps. The next thing I know I see everybody over at the gas pumps smoking up their free cigarettes. I asked Donna Oglesby to help take care of our people. She spoke very good Spanish. I said they know you, they like you, get them together, see if there's any trouble. The Ambassador told me to get people away from the gas pumps. I told them the motor pool gas tank's right underneath us. We have no idea what shape it's in. Please don't smoke here. And they'd all leave. And I'd walk back to talk with my staff or the country team for some other reason other and they were all back again. So I spent a good bit of time doing that.

Finally we got out and we went home. Things were all right for staff. We made the kinds of adjustments that you make in this. Some people had houses that were okay, others that had some that weren't. I had to get the Washington boss out of town if I could. But we worked all of that out.

The complicating factor for us, though, had been that two days before, while Donna and I at a conference of Public Affairs Officers in Tegucigalpa, my counterpart there walked in at the beginning of a meeting and put a piece of tickertape down in front of me. It was a big long AP (Associated Press) story. A Contra plane with arms and two Americans had gone down in Nicaragua. It named the two Americans and it said that somebody named Hasenfus was talking-

Q: Yes, Hasenfus became quite a household-

GILLESPIE: Household name. It was something. Hasenfus said that they had flown out of El Salvador. That was a base of operations to do this. Oof. This was a problem, obviously. So, in addition to probably 200 journalists coming into town to cover the earthquake I had maybe another 200 coming in who were there to follow-up on Mr. Hasenfus.

Q: Were you aware of these flights?

GILLESPIE: Not at all. Not at all and this was one of the interesting things because I have never, ever figured out who was. The Ambassador knew; there was an agreement with the government, unwritten but spoken, that they were going to land some planes over there. There were some

people who were housed in town. He knew this and I'm assuming a number of others. That's all I knew at that point. But we talked about it frequently.

Every morning the Ambassador had a big wide country team meeting at his residence where he and the DCM setup their offices. USIS had moved to my house. There were a lot of people. Later on there were specialists from Washington, on all sorts of subjects. I was in a house by myself and we had the advantage, Stu, of a long weekend. We had three days. I got into the Embassy after it was secured and went in to make sure that our offices were secure. Our offices were a mess but there appeared to be no really bad damage, some water but nothing structural. We were able, later on, to move back in after they did a lot of reconstruction. I made the decision right away that USIS would move to my house. It was a big house, Central American style, big garden and there was a large guest house in the back. I put the administrative section and the information section in the back; I had guest bedrooms on one side that opened on- out to the garden that were- that turned into the cultural section. I said the front room is a conference room and I told the staff that there are only two places that are out of bounds -- my bedroom a terrace off my bedroom, but that became my office. We worked that way until maybe March of the next year.

Q: By the way, when you were divvying this up, was there any thought to, I think it was our- an Ambassador's name is- I can't think of right now but who had- when there was a bad earthquake in Nicaragua sealed his residence off and, you know-

GILLESPIE: No one could go there.

Q: What? I mean, that must have been on everybody's mind, wasn't it? I mean, of making sure that nothing like that happened.

GILLESPIE: No, I don't think Ambassador Corr ever thought of that. He and Mrs. Corr opened their home to anyone who needed it. They had some people who needed a place to stay and they stayed there. Until all the hotels were functioning his house and the DCM's became emergency housing. The USAID director, who had a big house, did the same.

But meanwhile, we went through about a month of really crazy stuff. Until Thanksgiving we had journalists coming down. In addition to Hasenfus the other name that came up was Rodriguez, Felix Rodriguez. Ed Corr, who I think was really a terrific Ambassador, knew Latin America probably as well as any ambassador that we had at the time. He'd been Ambassador in Bolivia and Chargé d'Affaires in Peru for a long time. He'd spent almost his entire career in Latin America. He was hurt by this. Not the earthquake; I think everybody gave him high marks on that but he was burned by the Contra business, probably unfairly. I don't know any more than I know and from what I know I would always come out on his side on this.

Years later I spent a day and a half before Patrick Fitzgerald's lawyers; he was the Special Counsel named to look into Iran-Contra. For me it was basically just going. They read press clippings back to me and, this was several years later, asked me to create what I said to whom and when in the first week after the earthquake. It was pretty tough. Corr had always been very

open to the press and insisted that I be too. He met with almost anyone who asked, maybe not right away, but he would meet with them.

Q: You were the PAO so you would often sit in-

GILLESPIE: I was in on most and every one of them was on tape. If I was not available Pen Agnew, the IO (Information Officer), would sit in. - I should be careful here. I said "almost." We'd get people who would request to meet with him and he would ask us. We would tell him what they wanted to talk about. Early on they wanted to talk about to talk about USAID programs, where the money's going, about the Mil Group, how big is it, what's it doing, U.S. relations with Duarte, maybe an arrival briefing from the ambassador. We did a lot of things where the briefing would be on background but he would give them one or two good quotes on the record to use. He was good at this; he liked journalists.

But as good as Corr was, he and I had a talk after the earthquake and with what was known as the "Hasenfus affair" going full steam; we just made a decision that he was too busy to be available to any journalist and we kept it that way. Pendleton Agnew, who was the Information Officer, and I worked out a thing where we would individually talk to journalists, as many of them as we could, every day. The U.S. Government had made the decision, Stu, we didn't want the earthquake to turn out to be disastrous for the Duarte government, which was a key component of our Central American policy. Duarte was what we wanted to see; Duarte-like governments was what we wanted to see in the other Central American countries, freely elected, dedicated to his country and less and less corrupt and more and more competent. So we started these daily briefings, which began maybe Sunday if the earthquake was on Friday. The country team got together on Saturday for some reason, but we met on Sunday, met on Monday and we would meet at 8:00 every morning at the residence. Pen Agnew would drive to one of the large downtown hotels where most of the journalists had worked and many of them stayed when they came to town and everything up to the fifth floor appeared to be okay there. Well, that's where several of the main offices were but many of those who came in also were in a tent city not far from there and so we would work those two places. Pen would go at 8:00; I would go to the morning meeting. The morning meeting could go on for two hours by the time you got reports and arguments. We got briefings from the Geological Survey people on what was happening and what the aftershocks look like and how bad this had been and what it was. I learned more about earthquake geology than I wanted to know.

Q: How many were lost in the earthquake?

GILLESPIE: Maybe as many as four or five thousand. It was big. The damage was a result of where it hit and when it hit. The main place that it struck San Salvador was right down the heart of downtown. It hit at noon and so you had people going to lunch. They still were in buildings and it was bad.

In any case, Pen and I would exchange information; we'd finish up, I would get on my radio and I would talk to Pen and I would ask what are they talking about? And he would say here are the questions I'm getting. And I'd say here's what I know and I would give him answers to all of them that I could and I'd take the others back to get agreed answers before I took off to join him.

After talking to journalists individually or in small groups, Pen and I would head on back to the office. Once telephones were operating we might stay there until lunch. But in the first days one of us would head back to the journalists or to the residence to see what was going one. We corresponded on the radios, which always seemed to be running out of power or going on the fritz. We did that a lot. The number of press just became overwhelming.

Q: Okay. Now let me ask the question that you all were being asked; who the hell was Hasenfus?

GILLESPIE: Eugene Hasenfus.

Q: What were you getting, how could you answer this whole operation?

GILLESPIE: Not much. I couldn't say much of anything about that. I could give them all the answers that I could get on the earthquake and earthquake relief, which was a very serious question. The earthquake was the lead story and the cover story in both "Time" and "Newsweek." That was when those two publications really meant news. But on Hasenfus or Felix Rodriguez, basically I would listen to the questions and take them back to the Ambassador. The press was learning a lot on their own. I was hardly the sole source. I eventually got to where I could talk about it some. Actually, I don't think I ever to got to where I could say a lot. I did answer some questions. Marjorie Miller of "The Los Angeles Times," came with Alan Riding of "The Post" (then, later New York Times) and Alma Guillermoprieto, who was with Newsweek at that time, all three of them came to the Embassy residence one evening when we were meeting and asked to see me. I went outside to talk to them and they said Felix Rodriguez was seen in the Embassy and was seen even in the commissary; does Ambassador Corr know Felix Rodriguez? I told them what he had told me, which was that he did not. That wasn't when that- I may have said I do not- you know, it was before that question got there. The question was something else about Felix Rodriguez and I said he's not- he doesn't work at the Embassy. He has no tie to the Embassy, which was true. However, Felix Rodriguez had been a longtime CIA employee under another name. He had served in Vietnam and done a number of other things.

The gimmick for Oliver North that was great, he thought. An arms deal with Iran would provide money that they could just kept off the books. And they used it then for somebody to give to the Contras so they could buy the weapons they need and pay off this little front airline, freight airline outfit out of Miami that would fly things for them.

Q: To put it in perspective, payment to the Contras and all was forbidden.

GILLESPIE: Absolutely. By Congress there could be no payment to them. And so this was what Ollie thought was beautiful. I'm sorry; Colonel North is not one of my favorite people.

Q: I have to tell you a story I got from a man whose name escapes me right now but around this time was DCM in Honduras and his Ambassador was gone and he got a call from the second city in Honduras-

GILLESPIE: San Pedro Sula.

Q: Yes. And they said your boots are ready. And he had no idea what they were talking about but he said he thought well maybe somebody was sending him a pair of boots or something. He said well just send it by mail. And the man said, you know, all 5,000 of them? And he- I mean, you know, these- there were wheels-

GILLESPIE: Oh, there were all sorts of things going on.

In any case the airport, the military end of the airport in San Salvador, was probably a good location to use because it is miles away from San Salvador and it's not anything that people see really at all. That was a place where they flew larger planes, unloaded equipment; warehoused stuff there and then took them out in a couple of smaller freight planes and dropped them in Nicaragua. They had a crew that was sent, lived in a house in San Salvador, maybe two places. Rodriguez was in charge of that. I don't think I ever laid eyes on the man.

In any case, we went on for about two weeks. The first big thing we had was on the Thursday after the earthquake hit. And, although I have admired him for this, it certainly made life a little crazy for us. Secretary George Shultz loaded an aircraft with senior officials, Inter-American Bank people, ambassadors and representatives from the OAS (Organization of American States) and other- and Western European countries and all sorts of dignitaries and flew to San Salvador. He brought them all up to see what happened with the earthquake and try to get money in there. I thought it was really a terrific idea at the time except they were going to go see Duarte and Duarte said we will take them from the palace, the presidential offices, and he said we'll put them on the buses and we'll drive them and then we'll walk right down the main street for about three blocks. We decided that's what they would do, and when they got to the end that's where they would stop and Duarte and Shultz would have their joint press conference.

Well, the first big battle I had was a physical one. This meant stepping in between Ambassador Edwin Corr, a wonderful guy, and the head of the advance- senior advance security guy. The senior advance security guy said no, no, they're not going to do that. They will not do that; they will not do that. And Corr, who was an all American wrestler at the University of Oklahoma and still would go off and wrestle with the Salvadoran national team once in awhile, was a feisty guy, ex-Marine, and he went right up where this meeting's going on and stood there. I said this will not end well. And Corr was just saying you're going to have to get somebody at a lot higher pay grade than you are to tell me, in the country the President of the United States has assigned me to, what they're going to do and what they're not going to do. And actually he won the battle.

So we went to work in that little section known as USIS to try to set things up. We got the word out to all of the media where they would be; we managed to get two or three interpreters. The State Department press crew was bringing theirs; the resident foreign press didn't need them and I didn't and wasn't going to worry about the others but I was worried about the Salvadoran media a bit. And I said let's get some people who will be right there and will do what they can do for the Salvadoran press. We went out and set up all of the loud speakers and the microphones and had it all done. Well, this was the perfect place to do it. So the next morning, the day of the press conference, Thursday morning, we went out to the site because they were working right there. They had the Fairfax dogs in one building; they had-

Q: You're talking about rescue-

GILLESPIE: Rescue dogs-

Q: Were from Fairfax County.

GILLESPIE: That's right.

Q: Which responds often to-

GILLESPIE: Yes, yes. They're sent out by USAID; the Guatemalan fire department, which is remarkably good, was working in another building there, and the French team was working at a third.

Q: Again they have-

GILLESPIE: They're excellent. Incidentally, of all of them, if you're ever somewhere in that area and a thing happens like this, an earthquake hits, get the Guatemalan fire department. They were in San Salvador the afternoon of the earthquake. They whipped up all of their equipment. They'd just driven- just got in and took off. It's not far but it's still several hours away-

Q: But still.

GILLESPIE: I mean that and everybody said they were terrific.

However this was- the site that became famous as the symbol of the earthquake because in the building the French were working in, which had really gone down, there was a pile of rubble. They were working in the back and because they didn't want to move- You know, you don't move things at that point because you're afraid you'll cause something else to collapse and this is six days later; they were still pulling people out. Not many but a number came out as late as, I think eight or nine days afterwards and lived. But the symbol was this one hand, just an arm sticking out from the bricks.

Well, our young press assistant, who was a terrific guy, went down there early in the morning with the radio guy to start setting things up, and he was there and about 10:30 I went- I was going around checking on everybody to see how things were, what was happening; the press office- our Information Officer, Pen Agnew, was there and I got there and he said this is going to give them a good dose of what it is because it was a little ripe, and he said I think it would be time for you to take Eduardo Torres, who was the assistant, take him back to the embassy and put him in the embassy motor pool where- and let him organize that because that's where Shultz was going to meet with all the staff afterwards. And he said put him there and he can do that. He said Eduardo's a little green; this has not set well at all. It was tough; it was tough.

Shultz came in, had good meetings and they marched down the street. The State Department press was duly accommodated although there were a couple of them who were overly demanding. They said can't you do- why don't you do this, why don't you and I finally had to say do you

realize what we've just had here? I said we don't have any of that stuff. Oh. And Jim Anderson came over- Jim Anderson was the UPI (United Press International) correspondent and the senior correspondent at the State Department for years, and Jim came over and he said you know, probably everyone on this trip has wanted to say something to her like that the whole time. I will not tell you who it was. But anyway, they got through it; it worked. It did from the Embassy's point of view and I think from the point of view of the government and certainly from George Shultz's point of view, what we wanted to do. We impressed the world with how serious the disaster was and how serious the Duarte government was by doing something about it.

Q: Had the guerillas more or less declared an armistice or something?

GILLESPIE: Tacitly. And the reason was, we determined about this same time or maybe even earlier, probably early in the week, the guerillas had been hit even harder than we were in this city. Their communications were hurt; some of the guerillas' headquarters around town were badly hit. So you know, things seemed, you know, at least nothing happened that way. Out in- outside of San Salvador the war went on.

Q: Well now, I would think- When we talk about the press corps, you had, you know, sort of a derogatory term but the people who hung around in Nicaragua, the "Sandalistas," using the play on the word "sandals," these were-

GILLESPIE: We had some of those.

Q: But I mean these were basically people from the cultural left, socialists from France, you know, I mean, in other words sort of quasi-Marxist. I'm not trying to denigrate but I mean they were sort of committed leftists who were trying to play up Nicaragua as being- their government there as being great and also to knock down what we were doing and, you know, a lot of these are very smart young college kids who pin on the credentials- I saw some of these in Vietnam when I was there.

GILLESPIE: Oh yes.

Q: And I would think this would have been an ideal place for them.

GILLESPIE: There were some of those. We referred to them as "backpackers." They would come in, they were stringing, they got somebody to write a letter for them saying yes, he will be serving us as a stringer, frequently it was home town newspapers.

Q: Oh yes, sure.

GILLESPIE: It was individual public radio stations. NPR (National Public Radio) had some people there; NPR was not as good then as it is now. But other than that most of the75 percent of the people we had were legitimate, serious, full-time, on salaried journalists who may or may not have been convinced of one side or another's thing. Most of them were not; most of them were writing news. One of the problems that we had was the news wasn't always good for us. The hostages thing was a mess. There is no question as they looked more and more into some of the

atrocities that had gone on that the Salvadoran military had been involved. This was very difficult for us.

Q: Had the nuns been killed at this point?

GILLESPIE: Oh the nuns were, yes, the nuns were killed earlier, yes, and that was still there. The nuns were killed; there were three Dutch journalists who were killed. I don't know if you recall that, and the Dutch Ambassador for Central America was based in San Jose and he was the Foreign Ministry spokesman the last three years I was in The Netherlands so I talked to him frequently when he'd come to town and he said look, don't expect anything friendly out of The Netherlands on this because that hasn't been resolved well at all. And he said I come in here and go talk to the President and he says he will do something and he can't get anything done. And this was a problem. But that sort of thing was there. In all fairness to USAID it was a very tough thing to try to do, Stu; it was difficult. And they weren't always very successful. And a lot of USAID efforts there were directly or indirectly just budgetary support. El Salvador was broke because of the war. This was difficult. And as you know, trying to defend budgetary support to anyone, especially Congressmen or American journalists is difficult.

And to try to tie it up, there were two other press things that were interesting. The official head of the foreign press club in El Salvador was Doug Farah, who was the UPI correspondent there at that time and a fine journalist. Doug came to me and he said why doesn't Corr have a press conference? We need something. I said there must be ground rules. He said we'll accept ground rules. Lay the ground rules out. And so I said well, would they accept something where he's only going to talk about the post-earthquake relief. And he said well, you know, why not? He said there are a lot of people who would like to get the American Government on record on a lot of this. I said let me see what we can do. Corr and I talked about it and he asked what I thought. I told him that he had to agree with me about the rules. Before you get there I will lay out the ground rules for everyone on the subject. Questions on other subjects will not be taken. He agreed.

And so we went to the Hotel Colon. We had a podium on risers and probably had 200 people. By this time the hotel was functioning again and we were in the main lobby. TV cameras, the whole bit. I laid the ground rules down. I said if they are broken, in other words questions about the Hasenfus business asked, I will interrupt and if it happens several times we'll just stop. And for about 20 minutes it just went fine. It was just what I had hoped for. Good questions, good answers. And I noticed way in the back a small group of the best journalists, maybe James LeMoyne, Alma Guillermoprieto and Alan Riding of the New York Times, maybe Marjorie Miller from the Los Angeles Times. I am no longer certain which of them were there. They weren't asking any questions. This was strange because two of them were resident there and were arguably the two best journalists working in San Salvador. I said maybe they feel they see him enough and they know what's going on. And then suddenly Marjorie raised her hand and asked do you know Felix Fernandez? I started to jump in and say that's not an appropriate question and by the time I got there Corr had said no. If you listen to the tape closely you could hear that he was about to say something else. I mean, he started but I interrupted, which may have been the cause of the problem, because he was about to say "No but, I know him under his real name."

Well, that led to one crisis after another where Corr says he doesn't know that the guy was seen in the Embassy; what he was doing there. And of course, we didn't have any more questions, the press conference went on, went back to the subject that we dealt with all the other things, but they kept coming back. And finally Miller and LeMoyne admitted what had happened. The three of them back there; they'd drawn straws to see who was going to ask the question and Miller and LeMoyne came in together to talk to the Ambassador and he said Jake didn't let me finish. He did his, you know, he let me off the hook but by this time none of this sat well in Washington. It led to a bunch of us spending time with the Special Counsel. I am sure that it burned Ed Corr badly and led to the end of a fine career. Throughout this period and going on up into the next year, I think that everyone in the mission, I thought, was quite open with me and answered any question I had honestly and completely, with one exception who I think didn't and told me a lie. Ed Corr was always straight with me and I am very sorry that this business hurt him.

In any case, as with most things in this world, we weathered that storm. We survived it, El Salvador survived it. The rebuilding took a very long time, of course, and a lot of money, including the chancery.

Q: Which is now, I'm told, in a huge fortress which is sort of ridiculous.

GILLESPIE: Let me tell you the story of this. The DCM, David Dlouhy, was given the task of finding property for a new Embassy. David, an extremely diligent man, worked very hard on this. He'd had people from FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) down and they had looked at things and were about to complete the deal on the new property. This was toward the end of my tour but he took the country team out for look at the property and hear the plans. We all drove out to the site and walked in. It was huge. David said the chancery will go here, over there will be the residence, the DCM's residence will be back here, the Marine house will be over here, there will be an USAID building and a warehouse, and so forth. It was a gated community planned to just absolutely do everything. Donald Trump would have loved it.

I was walking with John Ellerson, then Colonel John Ellerson, now General John Ellerson, who was the head of the Military Group, and the Station Chief who was a very dry wit.

Anyway, the Station Chief looked over at the two of us and said, "You know something? If we lose this war, there's going to be about ten of us here. If we win this war, there will be about ten of us here." And I have thought since how sad it is but it's true; we were living in Henry Kissinger's report, the famous Kissinger Commission about Central America, the Kissinger dream. The whole heart of that was to stick to it, to stay there. The plans seemed much too big.

In fact, however, friends who have served there say it's not very big, bigger than needed maybe, but not too big. It's terrible for public diplomacy because we're far away from everything and it's hard to get to us. El Salvador is better without having Uncle Sam all over the place. And we still have a good sized USAID mission and the law enforcement people have replaced the military. I think there's still a small military group

Duarte lost the next election, the right wing party ARENA won several elections and now the leader of the party that was the major guerilla unit is now the President. El Salvador moves on. People ask what did you all accomplish after that? Well, I don't know. It looks to me like this is as close to success as you can ask.

Q: Yes.

GILLESPIE: In any case, in our time, as we got into 1987, we started to pick up- I got a new house and I moved out of my two room facility but that remained the office. Actually, I said we were- that was an office for almost six, seven months and it worked pretty well. The Embassy slowly moved back into facilities, some in a reconstruction of what remained of the embassy and others in new buildings elsewhere. And we tried to get back to work; we tried to start doing things.

Q: I was wondering, Jake, this might be a good place to stop because it's just noon.

GILLESPIE: Oh, okay, okay.

Q: So we can pick up sort of after the earthquake-

GILLESPIE: And yes, because then we can go through that briefly-

Q: And then I'd like to also ask about elements of Salvadoran society, the military, the media.

GILLESPIE: Yes.

Q: You know, I mean, how you were seeing things, were they- was this one of these places where they have the top ten families- I mean, what were the dynamics-

GILLESPIE: Yes. I should have done some of that before.

Q: Well we'll pick that up in that next time.

Q: Today is the 21st of May, 2010, with Jake Gillespie.

And Jake, where did we leave off?

GILLESPIE: Well we left off with El Salvador and the Embassy trying to come back to normal after the earthquake. "Normal" was a very special term to use with El Salvador in those days because we still had a war going on around us with which we were very definitely concerned and involved. But we were trying to get back to normal.

There were several things that I thought, as I wrap up the rest of my tour there that I ought to mention. One of the first things was part of life, if you were a senior officer at the Embassy, was Congressional Delegations. We had, throughout 1987 and well into 1988 an average almost three CODELs a week, Congressional Delegations. Few of them stayed very long; they rarely stayed

overnight although some of them stayed two and three days. As happens in this kind of case, everyone wants to get his or her ticket punched, that they'd been to Central America, they've done the tour. This was time-consuming; sometimes nerve-wracking because we felt, I think, as a mission, that the success of our mission counted very much on the success of our relations and the administration's relations with Congress. Congress had to continue to support us. They once had not supported us; they were very upset, still, about death squad killings, correctly; they put limitations on us. There were a number of them that were very upset about the lack of progress in terms of USAID projects and really showing success from what USAID was doing. There were those who we battled on the issue of what the military did and how they did it, how well the Salvadoran military was doing, how much they followed their own human rights rules, how much they met congressional and our standards for this. They often were upset about training programs across the board. I'm happy to say that in this one case USIS was probably the one thing they weren't terribly concerned with. It didn't mean that we weren't involved with them a great deal.

One of the mission's toughest critics, but in many ways a very reasonable critic, but a critic nevertheless was Senator Chris Dodd from Connecticut. He was knowledgeable, he had been in El Salvador before; he'd been a Peace Corps volunteer in the area. He spoke Spanish, he knew his way around. He had a rather knowledgeable staff, two of whom in particular were very aggressive and frequently very unpleasant. This is another case where I found my mediating skills called upon to the limit where I stepped in between our aggressive Ambassador, who again was just making the case that he would decide who came to dinner at his wife's table with one of Dodd's staff people, who I think felt left out. He was left out intentionally, I might add. This was the same visit where I got a call from I think David Dlouhy, the DCM, who said we have set up tennis for Senator Dodd tomorrow morning; you're playing him. It was very strange for me. I liked Senator Dodd myself, but as far as most of the country team was concerned, this was a grudge match and was expected to beat him. We split two sets; we played comfortably, we had a good time. But I think, you know, many of my embassy colleagues were extremely disappointed; they had expected me to take someone who frankly was younger than I and maybe a better athlete and run him into the ground, which I could not do. I thought I played pretty well. Congressional people were there all the time. They were there after the earthquake and they- you could always count on them.

We also had other visitors. We had a lot of human rights visitors from the United States. We finally set up something. We had a regular briefing that we did, a good one. It was where everybody in the country team was supposed to have three or four minutes to make their presentation, and we always laughed because the economic counselor started off- we called his briefing "And the earth cooled." He tended to go on a bit. I finally convinced Ambassador Corr that he did not have to do these. It was wearing on him. This came after he, you know, he was terribly upset with Mary Travers and Peter Yarrow of Peter, Mary and Paul, who were there.

Q: What was this about?

GILLESPIE: It was human rights. They were dealing with a group of mothers. There was a small group, not anything approaching what you had in Argentina and later in Chile.

Q: We're talking about the disappearances-

GILLESPIE: That's right.

Q: And the ladies in the square in Buenos Aries.

GILLESPIE: Buenos Aries. And in Chile they did it later as well. Those in Buenos Aries continue. In El Salvador we had become convinced that there might have been three or four possible cases but there were about 25 of mothers who were out there. The Embassy had been unable to find any legitimacy to most of their claims. And unfortunately we said this, and I can't remember who it was, and this started with Peter Yarrow who was the smaller of the-

Q: This is a very well known singing group, Peter, Paul and Mary.

GILLESPIE: That's right. They were among the famous folk revival of the '50s and into the '60s and today

Q: Yes, great songs.

GILLESPIE: Oh, wonderful, famous songs. In fact, by the time they were there their principle period of popularity had long passed but they still had some clout.

Then we had Richard Gere come through.

Q: Who is a movie actor.

GILLESPIE: A movie actor. And I won great points with the American executive secretary and having her assigned to meet him and bring him up to the briefing.

Q: A very handsome personable person.

Q: Could you talk about the Peter, Paul and Mary thing? I mean, just as an example of what were the dynamics with them and the ambassador?

GILLESPIE: The dynamics, we were in a small conference room; we didn't have really big conference room after the earthquake. We were in a small conference room in the Embassy. They came in with one or two other Americans who were representatives of NGOs and I do not remember which Non-Governmental Organizations. But they came in; there were about six people from the mission who were there. In this case, since the Ambassador was there, he had asked two or three other people to give a brief, quick briefing. And, is it Yarrow, maybe? I can't remember which one was tall and which one was short. But in any case-

Q: She had long blonde hair.

GILLESPIE: Yes, she you could pick out. She was a very attractive woman with long blonde hair even well into her late 50s, 60s and 70s, and at this time I think it was probably close to 60.

He was short and glasses and extremely aggressive and basically stopped the briefing and just started to ask all sorts of questions, pointed, and the Ambassador took over and it went on for about a half an hour, much longer than we had planned, of heated exchange, none of which was pleasant. Every so often Mary Travers would come in and make some sort of an ameliorating remark and then they'd go back. And it was very difficult.

In any case, this went on, it probably went almost an hour. This was in a time when, frankly, I think we all considered the mission understaffed in some areas and the calls on the Ambassador and the DCM and a number of others were enormous.

So after this was over, the next morning I asked to see the Ambassador and went in and we talked for about 15 minutes. I gave him a one paragraph memo that said I don't think we achieved anything positive, we didn't really do anything good at all, and then I chatted with him. For one, I said if you think that raising your blood pressure and the rest of ours is good, okay, but I don't think any of us here are suffering from low blood pressure. And I said your time is too valuable. You should probably come in, welcome them, if they are at a level that deserves it, introduce either the chief of Political Section or me or even the DCM if he's going to do it, and then leave, and say they'll be happy to take all of your questions, I hope you have a successful trip while you're here, and leave and get out of there. And that's pretty much what we set up except for high level visitors, which of course included all the Congressional Delegations.

Q: One of the things- All of us who have been in the Foreign Service, you know, have problems with, particularly with certain demanding Congressional Delegations and often more so with their staff.

GILLESPIE: Yes.

Q: But at the same time, when we sit back and contemplate, here we have a chance-

GILLESPIE: Exactly.

Q: -to call to our masters on our own ground to explain the situation and we have an unparalleled- nobody else- I mean lobbyists would kill to have that.

GILLESPIE: We understood this. We spent a lot of time for those who came for longer than a two or three hour period. One of the things to remember is it took an hour after they got off the airplane, or more, and got together to get up to San Salvador. So if they came-

Q: The airport was-

GILLESPIE: The airport was toward the coast; San Salvador is up on the mesa just below the volcanoes. If they were just going to spend one day and we advised against going out on the roads at night down to the airport, although it wasn't too bad. We probably advised people to do that to get them out of their sooner. We certainly advised them because we didn't want our people to have to come back by themselves. So they didn't have much time if they were there for one day. There were always one to three senior officers who spent the greater part of a day with

one of them. At the time of the legislative elections, which came up in the spring of '87, we had a large number of election observers including a big Congressional Delegation and we put one officer to each person. And you're right; these were invaluable and remarkable sorts of things. I got to know, and of course I had an advantage with the Democrats because my wife had worked for Senator Paul Sarbanes. And she was in San Salvador there by then and frequently would meet them at a luncheon or at a social event and that would help some but I met a number of others whom I had never met – members of the House, Republican senators and you're right. It is a great opportunity to make your points. Only a few of them came in thinking they had all of the answers. They're not stupid people and usually if they took the effort to come, even if it was a short trip just to get their ticket punched, they had taken some effort to understand what they were coming in to look at, whether it was the economic stuff or the military or human rights; those were the three major things they came to see. I think of so many posts where the mission was dying to have somebody come.

Q: Yes, nobody- That's probably the way it is there now.

GILLESPIE: I would imagine; I would imagine. When he retires, Chris Dodd said he would go back for vacation because it's a wonderful place to go for a vacation.

Q: Well, let's talk a bit about the milieu in which you were doing-

GILLESPIE: Yes, yes.

Q: I mean, in the first place, the society and the political class, when you were there, what were the-?

GILLESPIE: First the earth cooled. I won't do that.

Q: It's a very long-

GILLESPIE: A long time ago. There had been, basically, since the '30s, a very, very strong class division in El Salvador. First, it's useful to note that there were few Indians, as we think of them, in El Salvador. There were some; you had to go way out into the country. You could see a few Mayan descendants, but not many. It was a country for the most part of mixed Indian and Spanish. There probably were still some pure Europeans. There were some who were more recent emigrants. So that was the racial makeup of the country.

Q: Did you have Lebanese traders and all that?

GILLESPIE: There were Palestinians and Lebanese who were known as Turcos, because when they arrived they arrived at the beginning of the 20th century, they came on Turkish passports. It was a sizeable community and actually, in most cases, almost fair to say was not a community. It had completely intermingled.

Q: It was not necessarily the commercial establishment.

GILLESPIE: No, it was not, although there were a number of them who still were in the commercial field, but it wasn't solely. El Salvador was a plantation economy; basically, they made their money off of coffee. It was wealthy landowners and large plantations. It wasn't very successful because that meant you ended up with an impoverished, relatively impoverished agricultural worker community with little land. There had been efforts, or just talk over the years of land reform. The first big cry for land reform, which became violent, was in the '30s and the land owners and the government wiped the workers out. I mean, literally. It was a terrible- and of course this became the basis of the war that they were still fighting. The political elite, by the 1980s, was landowners based. They worked out an arrangement with the security forces so that the military and landowners controlled the governments. The FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) was formed, along with two or three other organizations that basically went into a guerilla war with the government and took over large sections of the country. It's a small country and by 1986 the FMLN and its supporters controlled as much as half the territory of El Salvador, including the border area with Honduras. In terms of population, not nearly as much, because those were the less populous areas. They controlled it by just making it difficult for anyone to go, which is easy for a guerilla group to do.

Q: Sure.

GILLESPIE: But they did control, consequently, sections where it became easier for them to move weapons in and move people in and out because of the border areas and some of the small fishing ports. And they were pretty successful. The US government was extremely concerned because they were Marxist. Their leadership was young intellectuals. There were not really very many of them at a leadership level who came from the working class; almost all of them were middle class leaders. Intellectuals and a number of others. There were a lot of people who went into exile. Most of the Christian Democrats went into exile until the early '80s. Duarte had come back earlier and set up the Christian Democratic Party to oppose what was known as the ARENA, the right wing party. The right wing party's leader was Fernando D'Aubuisson Riso, who was a terribly charismatic man but I sincerely believe in almost 40 years of service overseas, I don't think I ever met anyone else who I think was really evil, but this man was.

Q: He was at Georgetown, wasn't he?

GILLESPIE: D'Aubuisson, no. He was very smart. He was very vicious. He was directly responsible for the murder of Archbishop Romero and of setting up the initial death squads along with a number of other landowners and major business people. Fredy Cristiani, who succeeded him as head of ARENA and was elected President after Duarte, went to Georgetown.

Q: What were the death squads?

GILLESPIE: The death squads were small, paramilitary groups, made up of former military and police. They killed political leaders, kidnapped others, and terrorized El Salvador in the 1970s and 80s. We had a question later on as to really how many people the death squads killed and I have no idea, but it probably was less than the most extreme estimates that I have read, which were in the thousands. It probably was in the hundreds. Of course, that's all you have to do in the right political milieu. Terror operates by fear.

Q: Sure.

GILLESPIE: And you install the fear and then it only takes a telephone call to get someone to pack their bags and move to Miami or to Mexico City or to Panama.

In any case, in 1985, to everyone's, frankly, I think great surprise, Duarte won the election. They had enough people to take a majority in the parliament; they set up the government and by the time I arrived in '86 they were functioning fairly well. ARENA had the landowners and the upper classes. There were a few landowners who supported the Christian Democrats. The Minister of Finance had been the Deputy Minister of Finance in the previous government. He was talented and I think, apolitical. ARENA reorganized. They realized that the first thing they had to do was get D'Aubuisson out of the lead. International pressure was such that the world would never accept D'Aubuisson as the leader of their political party. And they put Cristiani, in charge. D'Aubuisson became vice president of the party. I think he thought Cristiani would be a good front man. Cristiani was rich, smooth and acceptable. D'Aubuisson did not speak English well. But Fredy Cristiani did. He was well known and well accepted in the Embassy. We liked Fredy, but we had some doubts about his ability to lead ARENA. I think he surprised us – pleasantly. That's where we were at that time and they were trying to put their party back together.

What had happened to El Salvador was that the middle class and lower middle class had taken over to run it politically but the economy remained controlled by the right wing. The Christian Democrats had made known that they thought land reform was necessary and they tried it in some places. They tried it with large estancias that had basically been abandoned because of the fighting, and they took them over, divided them up or tried to set up co-ops and work that way. They got a lot of assistance from the Venezuelan Christian Democrats who came down and put some money into it. I think a lot of that money was awash through from the European Christian Democratic movement. The German Christian Democrat's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung was active through them.

Q: Sort of a Socialist-

GILLESPIE: No, no, that's Ebert; Ebert was the Socialist .El Salvador politically was still an iffy issue and an iffy place to be involved if you were a Western European.

Q: What about the French, you know? The French, particularly French intellectual left, always made a lot of noise about Central-

GILLESPIE: Yes they did and they were- But- And you had, you know, we saw some of that but not much, not nearly as much as I would have expected. We saw a good bit more from the Dutch.

Q: Your friends.

GILLESPIE: My friends. And you know, I always made a point when the journalists came through on this to speak to them and brief them in Dutch and I tried to make some points but I don't think I did. The Europeans weren't really terribly involved.

Q: Scandinavians?

GILLESPIE: Oh, maybe once in awhile but not much, not much. You had the Venezuelans and Mexicans.

Q: What were the Mexicans after?

GILLESPIE: Well I don't know. I think that if the Mexicans think we are the Goliath to the north, the Salvadorans tend to think the Mexicans are the Goliath to the north and so they never had a great deal of influence.

The political wing of the left, which was the Frente Democrático Revolucionario, was based in Mexico City and in Panama; there were two leaders. And we spent a great deal of time the last year that I was there trying to convince those two leaders – Ungo and Zamora -- to live in El Salvador and be based there. They had made little noises that they were ready to move back. We talked to the government. Duarte was perfectly willing to have this happen, but ARENA was not at all. Ungo, the principle leader, was an anathema among the right. In any case, they did move back. They had lived there about four months when Ambassador Corr asked me if I thought we should invite them to the Fourth of July party, and I said why not. I said we can do nothing else. We invite a whole lot of minor figures from the major parties. I said look, you will have ARENA people walk out. Not all of them, but maybe a lot. And many of them won't talk to the FDR people. But I said we should make a point that this is the way to go. We did invite them. I think it was very well received, all in all, and quite successful, Stuart. We had one or two of the old line ARENA people who walked out. Fredy Cristiani did not. He stayed and in fact he did not speak with the two leaders, but a couple of the ARENA people did. As somebody said, this is a small country; we all are related by intermarriage or some way. You know, or they went to school with them and so they're going to talk to one another. It turned out that my principle contact in the government was the Deputy Minister of Information and Culture and later the Minister. He said I went to school with Zamora, we went to university together; I've known him since we were-

Q: Little kids.

GILLESPIE: Yes. I think this was a major step along the way to the reconciliation which started and was successful after I left.

Q: Did you start doing something that- Say in South Africa we did of, you know, having dinner parties where we brought people together from different things.

GILLESPIE: We usually did. There were times when we just wanted to talk to one or the other but we tried to get them together as much as possible. I had met this couple; he was a businessman. I also played golf with him once in awhile. Nice guy; he had gone to the University of Texas, married an American woman. He'd lived in the States for a number of years, had his

family business and was quite successful. There was an American AFL-CIO representative working through their international arm, helping the non-Marxist labor unions build up the strength. I invited them both to a party. It was a pleasant party, everybody got along, but I talked to Felipe later. He said, you know, he's a nice guy but he's never going to be successful because no one will ever let any of them in. And I said isn't it beneficial to have him organize a democratic union rather than one that's tied to the FMLN? And he said the moment my workers tell me they want to organize I shut the plant down. That's the sort of attitudes that were there that were. I don't know how we could break through them. There was a group of moderate, but still very conservative but politically moderate, more moderate, less extreme businessmen who had organized together and were trying to do some things. We could pull them together with others. We tried to get the whole community together but there were animosities there that had existed for decades.

In any case, we did succeed in some ways. There were things that still were remarkable, I think, and one was the types of things that we still managed to do as an institution; USIS, with those programs you asked about the other day, about what happens in the division between the culture vultures and the information. Well, here we were in something where basically I was a press officer and an advisor to the Ambassador. Those were the things that I did, mostly. But, starting when Pen Agnew was CAO before I arrived, we developed an Exchange Program that worked. One of the things in crisis in a place like that is you do get money and we were sending International Visitors off regularly, a lot of them; there was a new program under the academic exchange system that was set up. We had a small Fulbright program; it was ongoing and pretty good. USIA provided a great deal of money and the emphasis had to be on students who were not yet in university and who were not wealthy, poor. We had to make that effort. The new Cultural Affairs Officer, Gene Santoro, and the academic exchanges' assistant, Jorge Piche, really developed a terrific program. Students went to the States for a year of English to make sure they could function in a university and then they sent them to small state teachers colleges around the country. It was a wonderful program.

The other thing that was strange was ongoing cultural presentations, either that came from the United States or that we arranged and were in the area and we picked them up. Every year a young conductor from Northern Virginia whose name was Richard Williams and I think he may have been conducting the Fairfax Symphony, he later conducted the Norfolk Symphony, he came down and he spent three weeks with the Salvadoran National Orchestra. The Salvadoran National Orchestra had kept going through all nation's troubles. The National Theater where they performed was downtown in the old section of town. One day when they were rehearsing, gunfire broke out all around. The theater doors were open and he paused. He said he didn't know whether to throw himself on the floor or what. And he paused and he looked and he turned to the concert master and he said should we take a break? The concert master said you only have so much time here. Rehearse. And no one moved. The orchestra played. They played concerts regularly. They were the best concert orchestra in El Salvador, let's put it that way. And they, you know, they made an effort. They were wonderful people.

Pendleton Agnew, who was the Information Officer when I first got there, had worked in an earlier post in Guatemala and he got a call from the BNC that Phil Wilson from the New England

Conservatory of Music, who Pen had met in Guatemala two years before was coming back to tour Central American BNCs.

Q: BNC?

GILLESPIE: Bi-National Commissions. They are a variety of things; most of them were built around English teaching but they have cultural programs. In some cases they are a direct cultural wing of the Embassy; in other cases they're more separate. We had separated from the one in El Salvador because the board members were tied up with some things we didn't care for. But Phil Wilson was going to come back with a jazz quartet, would we be interested? When Pen came to me, I said can we do it? It was early in my tour and I wasn't sure. He said that we could. They put on a concert and one master class. Wilson had two students and another faculty member from the New England Conservatory. Wilson still plays and teaches, but he had been one of the leaders for a number of years in Woody Herman's orchestra and had played for Stan Kenton. He is a great musician and it was wonderful.

About six months later the cultural presentations people said how would you like to have Wayne Toups and his Zydecajun Quartet, Cajun music, and I thought, oh my, how will we do this? Well, we pulled that off. The President's wife and her organization co-sponsored an outdoor concert that was great fun and packed. We had a concert party at my house. We had three Salvadoran bands, we had Wayne Toups and the staff had gone out of their way with the guest list. We had the most diverse group of invitations you can imagine. Everyone from two of the soccer stars to Miss Teen Salvador to President and Mrs. Duarte. And it also coincided with Susan's and my 25th anniversary. And it was delightful, as was the whole tour.

Around Thanksgiving USIA offered us another cultural presentation – a great jazz musician, Don Cherry and a fantastic quartet. We offered them to the university, the Jesuit university and there was a concert there, and then we had a big open air concert in an entirely different place in the heart of town. A great success.

So we were pulling this kind of thing off. We restarted our American Fulbright program and we had three people come and spend a year while I was there, a playwright- theater director and a printmaker, and both were quite successful. The third was Mike Jerald, an English teaching specialist from the Experiment in International Living who came with his family. He was terrific and has returned to El Salvador several times. Mike and Judie Jerald have since become close friends.

The types of visitors changed. We had a large delegation, 20-30 women, who came from the Women's National Democratic Club, led by Dorothy Dillon, who was a former senior official at USIA. She had proposed a lot of the schedule and she asked me what else to include. She said I want this and this and this. Well, she wanted Duarte. I said difficult but we'll see what we can do. Since she had several major Democratic Party fundraisers there and actually a rather talented group of women we managed to get a meeting with the President. She wanted to meet with the ARENA Party leaders and we set up their principal briefing with a wonderful historian who became the peace negotiator when Salvador settled the war and they ended the violence. And he was the one who, when asked, toward the end of a briefing with a Congressman, if there was a

good history of El Salvador? He said there's a wonderful one volume history, "One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Gabriel Garcia Márquez

Q: Ah, "100 Years-

GILLESPIE: "Cien años de Soledad." And the people he told didn't really get it. But you know he said this has been a strange place.

In any case, things were coming back. There still was violence, there still was war, but things were starting to change.

Q: And reconstruction, of course.

GILLESPIE: And some reconstruction. We also had people coming down to ask questions about Iran-Contra because that had expanded from that initial blowup. There was Congressional testimony going on and, in fact, the Salvadoran hook became a much smaller one, although it was one that weighed on us for a long time, years afterwards.

In any case, as we got to the end of my tour, in late '88, the Salvadorans were gearing up for another election. We spent a great deal of our time watching this. The Christian Democrats were having a hard time organizing around a candidate. Presidents could not succeed themselves and they didn't have a natural candidate. They had two men who wanted it; they eventually nominated the lesser of the two, frankly. Sometime in the fall the election was held, we had large numbers of election observers again. It was a pretty good election, all in all. The FDR opposition did not run. We tried to talk them into running a candidate but they would not. They made the decision that they'd still stay out. But they were more visible in San Salvador, the political wing, not the military. Cristiani, the ARENA candidate, was elected and the changes started. Ambassador Corr left. What was terrible was six months after we left the guerilla armies made what turned out to be their last big push and tried to get into San Salvador. They came down the hills, in the spring of '89. They came down from the hills, down the volcanoes. They had been on two of the volcanoes we knew, and used one of them as a major camp. They came through the barrancas, the gullies, into the city. It was major attack; they almost took San Salvador. The military reacted eventually and drove them out. While doing this, an army unit went into the University of Central America and killed the rector and four other Jesuit professors and officials at the university in what was, you know, it was just a horrible act of violence. And that set El Salvador back again.

Later on negotiations began and eventually El Salvador calmed down and started reconciliation.

Q: Well, one thing you haven't mentioned, before we move on, what about the influence of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Cubans?

GILLESPIE: I think we made the case politically in the United States that the Sandinistas and through them the Cubans had a great influence. Some of the guerilla leaders had been trained in Cuba; there's no question that some arms came through Nicaragua. I'm not sure other than that. No one ever talked about Nicaraguans being captured or Cuban-

Q: Advisors-

GILLESPIE: I don't recall advisors being spotted or even spotted at all. This-

Q: It was pretty much a homegrown thing.

GILLESPIE: It was, I think it was very much homegrown. The Sandinistas, at this time, remember, had their hands full. I mean, the Contras were making some gains.

I did have some good friends, a wonderful- two wonderful Salvadoran journalists, one the editor of the only decent paper and the only thing approaching a decent paper and the other his top journalist and arguable the best editor in town and when- they were rather outspoken, both of them. The other two papers were both right wing, one trying to be respectable and just making money; it was loaded with ads. The other didn't even have any pretense of that; the editor/publisher/owner lived in Miami because he was afraid, he'd been threatened once by, he said the left wing death squads and I don't doubt it. And he just- he wrote 75 percent of the paper from Miami and never set foot in San Salvador. He did come once or maybe twice; once I met him. He was, you know, a young guy, he wasn't terribly interesting. But they weren't any good. The government television station was poor; the private television stations were interesting, working on entertainment. One of them was run, for the most part, by the Venezuelans sent down, the Christian Democrats.

There were two cable systems in Sans Salvador, neither one could really make much money but the advantages of them was that they were all pirating shows off of satellites and you would get all sorts of things. But the one that I subscribed to was recommended as the better system, was owned by Duarte's brother-in-law, who was a nice guy. He was a businessman, and we played golf on this little nine hole course together now and again and he was much better than I was but I saw him frequently, we'd laugh and talk. He once told me this story of he went in and he tried to go to Ted Turner to cut a deal. He told them I'd like to subscribe to these things, your baseball games and get this and get CNN. And they gave him a price. And he said that's silly. That's more than I make gross all year here, I can't do that. And so he said well the heck with it; he'd just pirate the shows. He said the reason I make anything at all is that I do this.

One day, it was one of the year the Redskins were really good, they won the Super Bowl, but it was coming toward the end of the season and they had a big game. I went home on Sunday afternoon and I sat down ready to sit and watch the game, and I turned it on and instead they had some other game entirely. As a matter of fact they ran them on two different channels and they had two games, both different. And I said this can't be. And I picked up the phone and I called him, just kidding, saying what are you doing, what's the matter? And he said oh really? He said we're supposed to have the Redskins; just a second. He said don't worry. I think there were some people over at the house, you know, guys, we were going to watch it together. So we sat there and suddenly the screen went to snow for about three minutes and then it flipped up and here came the Redskins game. I figured this was the best cable system I've ever had. You don't like it you call the owner and you get it changed.

El Salvador, lot of bad things still happened after I left. I mean, we had a sense that things were going to get good but- and they eventually did.

Q: Well maybe as a- before we wrap up this, the El Salvador, on the Ollie North thing, how much- you did mention that you got called in; did you find yourself at all involved other than this-?

GILLESPIE: I don't think so. We talked about it in the mission. By this time I was in Madrid and I got a call one day from a lawyer in the General Counsel's office, actually it was the Deputy General Counsel who was a career guy, who had been there for a long time. He said Jake, we have a letter of request here for you to do this, and he said they wanted to know where you were and I have a copy of it and they want you to appear. And so I kind of said you know, what does this mean? And he said I don't know; I can find out. I said do I need legal- I said will you provide legal help? And he said no, we can't. Do I need a lawyer? He said let me find out. And he called back the next day and he said they're only interested in you as a witness and they're aware now you're in Madrid; they don't need you to fly back, but they are interested in when will you next be here. And at that time my mother had died, my father was in the middle states of Alzheimer's and I was coming back. There were also reasons for me to come back for consultations. And I said I can be back there within six months. I said, you know, I will let him sway. He said that's going to be fine.

So I flew to Washington, went in and I sat down and as I said the first time, they spent a long time setting the stage with me, what did I do, who was- did I know so-and so-, did I know so-and-so, and then they went through press clippings from back here. They opened- they had a file with my name on it-

Q: And you're showing about an inch thick.

GILLESPIE: Well it's not- no, let's make it a half inch.

Q: Okay.

GILLESPIE: But it was press clippings. It was press clippings and it went on, and you said this. And did the ambassador say that? And I said you know, I can check on some things but I can't check on everything. I can refresh my memory. I have some things. What I did not have, of course, I did not have the tapes of every interview the Ambassador did. Those belonged to the post. But when he did interviews I also made notes. They weren't very good. I mean, they were basically notes that would help me look at things or listen to things on the tape if I had to go back; one word, two words, and a notebook this size and-

Q: Just a small little one.

GILLESPIE: Yes. It was- And we went through this. I think the appointment was 2:30 or 3:00; we went to about 4:30 or 5:00 and I said well that's- and they said no, why don't you come back tomorrow morning? He was actually was nicer than that. It was a young lawyer with an FBI agent with him. And even that afternoon as we got into the questions the FBI agent was bored.

You could see he was and he saw that I didn't have any information but he wanted me back the next morning. And I said yes but that's it. I said at that point I fly out of here tomorrow afternoon and I go to Boston to see my father. We had moved him from the Missouri up to be close to my sister.

The following day in the last hour he went back to individuals in the mission and asked a lot of questions. Other than yes, I knew them and maybe he did, or did you know what the head of the military group did. I said I have no idea what the head of the military group did except when he was in my office or we were in the same place together. I mean, it was this kind of thing. And at that point they said thank you very much, if we need anything else you'll hear from us. And I never heard from them again. It was probably about three hours of questions over two days. As far as I was concerned, on my end it was a terrible waste of money. They would not fly me back and they were wise in that sense.

Q: Okay. Well I'm just-

GILLESPIE: Okay. I can quickly do the next year.

Q: What was the next year?

GILLESPIE: The next year I went back to Washington. There was no onward assignment immediately. I went back to Washington and by great fortune I became the Deputy Director of USIA's Press and Publications division. This was the division that basically was USIA's publishing business.

PAUL TRIVELLI
Economic/Commercial Officer
San Salvador (1987-1989)

Ambassador Trivelli was born in New York City and educated at Williams College and the Denver School of International Studies. Entering the Foreign Service in 1978, he was posted to Mexico City, the first of his several assignments to posts in Latin American countries.. His other foreign posts include Quito, Panama City, San Salvador, Monterrey, Managua and Tegucigalpa. At the State Department in Washington, D.C., he also dealt with Latin American Affairs. In 2005 Mr. Trivelli was named United States Ambassador to Nicaragua, where he served until 2008. Ambassador Trivelli was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.

Q: Where'd you go?

TRIVELLI: El Salvador.

Q: Well, now, this was a real change, wasn't it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, a very different situation.

Q: You were in El Salvador from when to when?

TRIVELLI: ’87 to ’89.

Q: And what were you doing?

TRIVELLI: I was the number two in the economic/commercial section.

Q: Okay, ’87, what was the situation there?

TRIVELLI: Well, we were able to go with our family and I think that was a change, I think that we had recently been allowed, to bring in families. Every morning we were picked up at our homes in an armored van, with a follow car filled with National Police with automatic weapons. You could, in the evenings, often hear bombs going off, because the guerillas were trying to blow up electrical towers and other pieces of the infrastructure.

There was some kind of security force on almost every street corner in San Salvador at that time. Salvador had a plethora of security forces. There was the National Guard, there was the regular army, there was the treasury police and others.

So it was a rather dangerous place, although there was not heavy guerilla fighting that much in the city itself, although of course later that happened.

I remember one of the elections. We were in the Sheraton, on the top floor, with some people from Congress, very, very early in the morning and we were having juice and bagels and doughnuts before we went out to monitor the elections and we could actually see Salvadoran Army helicopter gun ships firing on guerilla positions a few hundred yards away. So it was at times rather dicey.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

TRIVELLI: Ed Corr was there when I got there.

Q: In your impression, how did he get along in that situation?

TRIVELLI: I think very well. He had a very good relationship with the Duarte government. It was obviously a tricky situation to be an ambassador there at that time, because there were a lot of questions in the U.S. about our policy and Congress wasn’t always united on what we should be doing in Central America. But I found him to be a very sensible, hard working, smart, decent guy who really did a very good job.

Q: Well, now, you were the number two in the economic section. What were your responsibilities?

TRIVELLI: Actually, that's interesting, because there'd been a fairly major earthquake several months before I got there and so part of the embassy building was destroyed or had been structurally weakened, so the economic section was taken out of the embassy and we actually sat in the AID offices.

There were some town houses that had been built to house embassy families and those became the AID offices, because the AID offices and economic section had been damaged. So we actually sat over in the AID mission and when they moved to another building we moved with them as well.

I think the kind of work that I did was typical of what a section number two would do: I wrote a lot of macro analysis, wrote the economic trends reports every year and those major reports that had to be done.

We also did a surprising amount of business promotion, because even though Salvador was at war, the entrepreneurial class stayed and the economy kept going. So my section, the commercial guys, we actually had a booth in the trade show and we did catalogue shows for different industries at that time. There was actually still a surprising amount of commercial activity.

Q: What would inspire American businessmen to go there?

TRIVELLI: Because there was money to be made. I think Salvador itself has a very vibrant entrepreneurial class. Salvadorans love to own small businesses, they are extremely hard workers and that economy just kept going.

In fact, when I was there, there was still American investment in El Salvador. There was a factory that made surgical gloves, there were all sorts of small operations that went on. We did a surprising amount of that kind of work.

Q: You mentioned that the guerillas were going after electric installations and all. How effective did you find this campaign against the infrastructure, trying to destroy it?

TRIVELLI: It's effective, because it can be very disruptive. On the other hand, the Salvadoran power company got extremely good at repairing things very quickly. They had helicopters and they had these replacement towers ready to go and they could move out very quickly and repair a lot of the damage, very remarkable.

I had the pleasure to actually go out several times on those helicopters, the company would fly us around and we'd look at the things they were able to do and it was really quite remarkable.

Q: In your estimate, what were the guerillas after?

TRIVELLI: They were after power, taking over the government and building it to their liking. I don't think there was any doubt about that.

Q: Did you see this as an indigenous movement, or was this something that was being run out of Nicaragua or Cuba or what?

TRIVELLI: Obviously the guerilla fighter were Salvadorans themselves, but obviously the FMLN could not have been at all effective without assistance from others.

Q: During the time you were there, how was that war going?

TRIVELLI: That's a good question. Again, this is not exactly what I focused on, but when I was there the western part of the country was relatively safe. I could drive there and I used to visit every few months. I would also drive with my family on the highway to go up to Guatemala and spend some time in Guatemala City.

At that time Guatemala City was actually a rather safe and very pleasant place. So to take a break, we would drive to Guatemala.

In the eastern part of the country, pockets of it were essentially guerilla territory. In some of the border areas, near the Honduran border, the guerillas held sway.

But it was not as if the entire nation was controlled by the FMLN. Essentially the army and the National Guard had gotten better and better, they'd fought the guerillas to a standstill and right after I left there was the so-called final offensive, where the FMLN systematically attacked San Salvador, the government was able to beat them back. That was the beginning of the end, in terms of that's when I think both sides realized this thing had been fought to a stalemate, that neither side would achieve a decisive victory, so it was probably time to talk.

Q: How did you find sort of the war fighting part of our embassy? Was it divided between you sort of going about you might say almost your regular duties and other guys were out there in camouflage? What sort of atmosphere was it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, well, the number of U.S. military personnel that could be there was actually limited by Congress. I think it was something like 130 uniformed military trainers in country at any given time.

So the U.S. military presence, although obviously it was there at the embassy and there were advisors out there when you went out to Salvadoran military bases, there would be some U.S. advisors at the bases, but it certainly was not overwhelming. We did have choppers there at Ilopango.

But I got along fine with the military group people, I had friends among them, it was not as if there was a wall between what the civilian side of the embassy was doing and the U.S. military side was doing.

The house right next to my residence was the so-called "helo house," that's where all the helicopter pilots lived when they were running missions out of Ilopango Air Base, so that was

some times a bit rowdy, but in general the civilian-military relationship at the embassy was really quite good.

And I think we all thought we were doing the right thing and it was great to be part of a positive effort. When Eva and I look back on our Foreign Service career, we really treasure out time in El Salvador, because, one, the Salvadoran people are enormously warm and friendly and welcoming and funny and all the kinds of things that you want a people to be.

And secondly, you felt that you were actually working hand in hand with the local government in a cooperative way towards the right ends, towards the right goals, whether it's economic development or whether it's military success.

So those two things made for a really, really exciting tour for us.

Q: Well, did you feel that the efforts of the United States, because, obviously, we had long fingers in that situation, to do something about the problem that's endemic throughout the world, practically, of the divide between the rich and the poor? We had at that time a lot of economic émigrés to the United States from El Salvador. What were we doing about this and how did you feel we were doing whatever it was?

TRIVELLI: Well, Salvador's overarching problem is that it's a very small country with way too many people and it views itself as an agricultural society, or certainly did in the Eighties.

So there simply was not enough land to go around for everybody. At its core that was really the issue.

But I must say, I worked side by side with the AID mission and we had a very robust economic programs, encouraging entrepreneurship and private sector solutions, we had a large agricultural program, we had health and education, they had economic support funds that were actually given in some cases to prop up their ability to import goods like fuel.

So we had a very, very robust program. The U.S. government spent a lot of money on Salvador, but about half of it was on economic development.

And if you look at Salvador now, 15 years later, it's actually a pretty prosperous place. It's been okay, it's had solid economic growth and better socioeconomic indicators over the last 15, 20 years.

So I think the case could be made that not only did we work hard on the security aspects, but really made some inroads on economic development. That said, as you said, one out of every four or one out of every five Salvadorans actually lives outside Salvador and even at the time I was there the amount of remittances sent back by Salvadorans living overseas and sending money back was a significant part of the economy.

Q: I live in Arlington and we have a large number of Central American, mainly Salvadoran and others, living in this area and, boy, they're hard workers and very nice people.

TRIVELLI: Absolutely. In Salvador, the guerillas would periodically call what they called a general strike and tell people not to go to work and if people tried to go to work or get on buses the guerillas would kill them.

And people went to work anyway. They wanted to go to work, they needed to go to work and damn it, they went.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Ollie North and his crew and that sort of subterranean movement on the part of the U.S. government of carrying on a war against Nicaragua and in El Salvador and all?

TRIVELLI: At that time, in El Salvador, I wasn't a part of that and of course North's involvement was more in the contra situation, which was run out of southern Honduras and northern Costa Rica.

So I did not see that at that time in El Salvador. I just didn't really see it. But, again, that's not something I focused on as part of my job.

Q: Well, did you find yourself dealing with congressional staff people and just the general media there, visiting the place?

TRIVELLI: Yes, again, that's not the focus of what I did and people were not particularly interested in the economic/commercial side of the house, but congressional delegations were almost a full time job for the ambassador and DCM. And Vice President Quayle visited while I was there as well.

So I remember very vividly being invited to the ambassador's or DCM's house on a regular basis, where we would do a little buffet lunch and go through the country team briefing for a visiting congressional delegation, etc, etc. Several times a month that would happen.

Q: How did you find relations with the people who lived there? You were there with your family and all. Were you able to sort of mix and mingle?

TRIVELLI: Yes, we made great friends. In fact, my wife still gets emails from our neighbors, the people that lived across the street from us. When we moved into that house, the Salvadoran neighbors all came over to the house to welcome us and they'd say, "And we're going to have you over" and you thought, well, maybe, they're just being polite but within 48 hours they'd come to your door again and say, "Okay, you're coming over to dinner" and drag us to their house for dinner and drinks. Just fantastically hospitable people.

Q: Napoleón Duarte was the president at that time?

TRIVELLI: Yes and then I was there for the election of Cristiani. Most of the time I was there, it was Duarte government.

Q: How did you feel about the government? Was this a government that we were propping up, or that wouldn't make it otherwise, or was this a pretty good government, would you say?

TRIVELLI: I thought it was a good government. I think people forget the history of Salvador. This whole thing started, the Salvadoran wars really started because of a military coup by reformist military officers, who threw out the military dictator, 'cause they knew that unless something was done Salvador was going to go down the tubes.

And then they turned power over to a constituent assembly which wrote a new constitution, which put in a new president and then held subsequent elections and elected Duarte, who was a long time committed Christian Democrat. He actually had been tortured by the military government years prior.

So this was a guy who was committed to reform, committed to democracy, committed to a good relationship with the United States. So I had a lot of respect for that government, I must say.

And I think that's one of the reasons that made it pleasant to work there, because you felt you were working in partnership with people who got it, who really tried to do the right thing for their own nation.

Q: What was your attitude towards the Sandinistas in Nicaragua?

TRIVELLI: Of course I thought about it years later, when I was in Nicaragua. Remember what happened in Managua. They were able to defeat Somoza, he left, they formed a junta, which had civilians on it and non-Sandinistas, a lot of promises about moving towards real democracy and then they slowly consolidated power and turned into a popular socialist regime -- whatever you want to call it, essentially a dictatorship. So I think by that time the Sandinistas had really revealed themselves for what they were.

Q: Did you feel that service in, I guess in those days it was ARA, particularly in Central America, was good or bad for your career? Sometimes one feels one is almost tied to a policy.

TRIVELLI: I thought it was good for my career. I think serving in Central America at that time was almost like service in Iraq and Afghanistan today, you kind of have to do it, somebody's got to do it and if you step forward to do it, because of the danger and so forth, it was the right thing to do.

I think it helped me and I can say it provided me with perhaps two and a half of my most interesting years in the Service.

Q: Things that you're saying reminds me a bit of my time as consul general in Saigon in the late Sixties. I was doing my job and it wasn't particularly policy oriented, but stuff was going on all the time around me.

By the way, how was life, particularly for your wife and family there? You had to make certain adjustments because of the situation.

TRIVELLI: Yes, we occasionally had curfews when things got bad, and they would say, "Hey, you basically can't be out after dark." But of course the Salvadorans responded to that by holding parties they used to call "curfew to curfew," they'd hold parties and keep everyone in their house partying the entire night until dawn.

It was actually kind of ironic. I was sped to the office every day in armored vans and my wife tools around in this little Toyota Corolla station wagon with two small children and went shopping and went to the movies and visited girl friends and did all the sorts of things she had to do.

I think our feeling was and I think the embassy's feeling was that the FMLN really did not want to attack American diplomats and their families. Remember, their war was strategic communications as much as it was a military operation. They essentially had offices in the United States and I think that they did not want to enrage the American people by killing American diplomats. So although we probably could have been targeted by accident or just be in the wrong place at the wrong time, I don't think the FMLN went out to attack civilians.

Now of course they did target the U.S. military. In 1985, guerillas opened fire on a group of unarmed, off duty marine security guards from the embassy dining in a restaurant in the Zona Rosa entertainment district in San Salvador; four marines, as well as nine Salvadoran civilians and one of the guerillas, died in the shoot-out. And then a navy commander was killed at the university. So they saw uniformed military, although it is not clear that any of these victims was wearing uniform when attacked, as legitimate targets.

Q: Did you have any contact with, the term is the "sandalistas," sort of the kids or the left wing fringe from Hollywood or elsewhere, did they come to El Salvador?

TRIVELLI: Yes, they did. I didn't have a lot of contact with them. First of all, they always wanted to travel to guerilla territory, no, which the government did not want people to do and they had actually set up road blocks, so this was always a bone of contention, because the government said, "Hey, we can't protect you if you cross this line.

And these groups would come and they would have a truck full of beach balls and tee shirts and so forth and drive up to guerilla territory and try to donate these items. I remember there were church groups that would try to go into refugee camps and meet guerillas and try to hold services with them. They would do this witness for peace thing, where people would tell their story about atrocities or about the war.

So there was a fair amount of that going on, unfortunately in a very dangerous situation.

Q: Yeah, I heard an account from Tony Quainton, when he was in Nicaragua, getting caught with a bunch of Maryknoll sisters, who said, "Let's pray" and they all clasped hands and all of a sudden Tony found them praying against the President of the United States, which made it a little bit difficult for him.

TRIVELLI: I think people forget how difficult and contentious this was. The murders of the American nuns in Salvador, the murders of the Jesuit priests, massacres, which did happen, on both sides, a very contentious, tragic situation.

MELVIN R. CHATMAN
Training Officer, USAID
San Salvador (1987-1994)

Mr. Chatman was born in Oklahoma and raised in California and Michigan. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he pursued theater interests before serving in the US Army in Korea and Vietnam. In 1970 he joined AID and spent the rest of his career with that agency. His overseas postings include Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh and San Salvador. He also had assignments with AID in Washington and New York City dealing with refugee, rice imports and training issues. Mr. Chatman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

Q: Where did you go?

CHATMAN: I went to El Salvador.

Q: You were in El Salvador from when to when?

CHATMAN: 1987 until 1994.

Q: So another good solid time?

CHATMAN: I spent several long time periods. In most of my countries I spent more than what was the normal tour.

Q: In 1987 when you got to El Salvador what was the situation?

CHATMAN: It was in the middle of a guerrilla war, right in the middle of it. Of course you had security everywhere. You had vehicles with two-inch thick plastic lining the whole vehicle that made them weigh a ton and made them impossible, you could never roll a window down so if the air conditioning went out you were pooh-pooh out of luck.

Q: I know it.

CHATMAN: I will never forget that.

Q: Particularly in a place like El Salvador is not much fun.

CHATMAN: But there were so many other positive things. The Salvadorians are some of the nicest people in the world. That certainly outweighed to a significant degree the problems over there. I was in San Salvador and I had a very nice house, enjoyed life and worked very hard.

Q: You were in El Salvador from '87 to?

CHATMAN: '87-'94.

Q: '87-'94. Your job, what were you doing while you were there?

CHATMAN: I was working in the training office, the office that handled training for the entire time I was there.

Q: When you say training, what are we talking about?

CHATMAN: Projects that had in-country training by USAID and also the participatory training where we sent people back to the States where they received training here. I worked on both of those projects.

Q: Let's talk about in country training first. What sort of things were we working on?

CHATMAN: Probably the greatest most significant contribution that I made to the whole Foreign Service system, the AID aspect, was what I did in El Salvador, because I had under my desk or on my desk, a project probably worth about $26 million which was set aside to train teachers in the ministry of education to become more efficient in their classrooms throughout the country. The training included in country training and training included overseas training. It was an exciting experience because I was able to as you are able to in most emergency situations people don't follow you around and ask you to provide so many reports and details about when you are trying to do, they just want something done. So for several years we had a large pot of money where we were able to do some experimental projects and reach out and do things that we would never have been able to do under normal circumstances.

As a result of that, I completely set up a project that was called, well I completely revised a project that was already set up when I got there, it was called A Central American Peace Scholarship Program. Basically it was money set aside to train students from various USAID funded Latin American countries. We had like I said $27 million to do this and our objective was to improve the training, the ability of the ministry of education, that was soup to nuts, computer systems, buildings, everything you could think of. We constructed probably 3 or 400 schools throughout the entire country. There were all kinds of aspects.

I was involved with the teacher training and liaisoned with the ministry of education. We created a number of projects that just turned out to be 100 percent successful. They were projects that people swore up and down when we started that they would not work, to include the minister of education. We had programs with massive numbers and when I say massive numbers we are talking about probably 60 or 70 teachers in a group were sent to the States for two months for extensive training. When I first started this idea out the minister of education herself told us that

those teachers would do nothing but go to the U.S. and shop. She wasn't against the program and thought that there might be some benefits but the bottom line was that they were going to spend more time shopping than they were anything else. So we started with that on the table as a common but as the highest-level educational person in the country.

What happened was fortunately we had a really outstanding contractor who was contracted to take care of this program. We sat down and I was able to draw from my experience in AID from the previous twenty years or whatever I had and we designed programs where we got the absolute greatest amount of favorable reaction and results that we could have ever dreamed of. Because we knew that if the teachers were, first of all we were convinced that the teachers honestly wanted to do better, that was the bottom line. They were actually concerned about the students.

Based on that we brought them to the States. When they got off the train or plane in the States their program was planned minute, by minute, by minute for the entire two months. We kept them so busy, not for the sake of being busy, but for the fact that we believed that they could have learned, they could make a lot of changes at least on what they learned in the States if they learned it properly and had a lot of practice time before they came back. Because when they came back they had to deal with the no-change society. So part of the project was not only to pass on the information but also to help them understand how they had to deal with the resistance and change once they got back and also how we had to help them deal with the resistance to change. For example, we understood very well that if you take the staff of a principal of school and send all the staff to training you don't send the principal the training isn't going to be effective once the teachers get back because the principal won't let it happen.

So the key thing was that as soon as you had a significant number of students trained from a particular school, the principal had to go. Then the principal took the leadership role of implementing the objectives of this program once its teachers got back. It worked out beautifully to the point where the teachers started to do the training of their colleagues based on the training they had received in the States in El Salvador. They trained the entire country.

Q: There was civil war going on, were the guerrillas trying to disrupt the school system or was that sort of left alone?

CHATMAN: Let me think about that answer. The guerrillas had their own school system. They had not a ministry but a person who was in charge of education for the guerrilla system. I don't think they bothered, well there were areas that they controlled of course the areas where they controlled they bothered the system but I was aware also of areas where they controlled that they allowed the local ministry to have people there and let them teach. I am also aware that in some areas that they probably did interfere with their educational system. There were certain areas where we couldn't go to because of guerrilla activities.

Q: What was your impression of the Salvadorians particularly the teachers you were working with on this?

CHATMAN: Hardworking, honest and really dedicated to doing something to improve the kids. That was what was so encouraging because we knew if we had those kinds of people we could get something done.

Q: I must say that we have a significant Salvadorian population right here in Washington and these certainly are hardworking people.

CHATMAN: They are great people. Their reputation among the Latinos is very, very, probably the hardest working.

Q: They seem to be very polite and hardworking.

CHATMAN: Very hardworking.

Q: Were we trying to put in the equivalent political indoctrination or were we trying to keep this whole project to be as sort of non-political as possible?

CHATMAN: I am not aware of more than a few acts of political situation because we resisted it to the hilt. There were times when it just came down and said, "Look there is somebody that we have to just get trained, it means something to us in some other sector," and we did so without any problem. But I don't remember that as being any overwhelmingly or negative influence, the level of it was so minor that I don't remember it having any effect on our program.

Q: Did you find then subject matter; were we pushing any particular line or anything?

CHATMAN: No, no, I do not remember because we did have a textbook writing part of it. That was set up and decided before I got there so I don't remember whether that was part of the political aspect of it. I'm sure it was because if AID gets involved with something its got politics in it just like everything else so I'm sure democracy is the greatest was somewhere in the theme of the books or hidden in the text.

Q: Were you able to get out much to the schools?

CHATMAN: I went all the time. As a matter of fact, that was probably what my claim to fame was that I was very, very field oriented and really knew what was going on in the school systems. I would just get in a vehicle and just drive for a couple of days and just stop at schools and not tell anybody I was coming. The worst thing you can do is tell somebody you are coming because everybody would have it prepared, organized, all the kids would be there, the books would be in order and everything would be there. I would never tell them I was coming to visit with the exception of where we wanted to talk to the teachers or do something and then you had to tell everybody we were coming.

Q: Well how did you find, I mean, can you tell me I don't know if there is such a thing but what a village school is like?

CHATMAN: A typical school, which is a series of classrooms with key teachers and a principal's office somewhere at the end of it. I mean that is sort of a generalization but that is basically what it was. The big thing with the Salvadorians was that the local community, the mothers or fathers, were usually very much involved with the school system and that was important, very important. Of course, they would have to be because the school would sponsor things and the mothers and fathers would have to cook and do things to help the principal, the principal could never do all that stuff.

Q: How did you see Salvadorian society at that time and was it changing? If a kid got a good education through the school system one, could they go fairly far? And two, did it make a difference in so far as changing their lives?

CHATMAN: I'm sure it made a difference but the politics were there also so to get some of the jobs and some of the things you really had to have some political pull. I don't think that the Salvadorians were at a point where the smartest students got the best jobs. I don't think they were there. There was a lot of politics.

Q: But did you feel that good teaching was making a difference?

CHATMAN: I absolutely felt that good teaching was making a difference. We were at the level the problems were so significant that having a teacher show up in a classroom five days a week was a major accomplishment because some of those teachers were drawing a salary and not showing up in the classroom. That is why I would never tell them when I was coming to the classes, coming to visit the schools, because we wanted to find out where teachers were being paid and not showing up at the schools.

The program made a difference; it really set a fire under everybody. It made a big difference in their attitude. Unfortunately I wish that I was able to have done some measuring before this system got started and then did some measuring four or five years after it was in motion to see what really happened because I can't believe there were not major changes when you had people actually in the classrooms with a curriculum and with the knowledge on how to present that curriculum whether or not there would not be significant changes just as a result of that fact. Before the program there were not those kinds of scenarios in the schools.

Q: Was there a pretty good system of moving from the school system up through the high school up to college and all or not?

CHATMAN: Yeah, but one of the problems was a lot of the high schools covered large areas and transportation became some of the problems. Their big drop out rate was at the high school level and I'm not sure if there were, well I don't think there were a sufficient number of high schools that really covered things as well as they should.

Q: Were there, did you find yourself, you'd been in Vietnam, did you find yourself in danger as far as traveling around?

CHATMAN: I can remember talking with guerrilla leaders, I mean I had this rare opportunity as a civilian to go in and talk with guerrilla leaders during the war. I can remember going with one of the ministry of education people and being the first American to go into a completely guerrilla controlled area, for years it had been controlled by the guerrillas. We were in a truck and as we rolled down the road you know in those areas like that where you don't have reliable transportation everybody just waves down a vehicle, if you have space in the back of the truck people just get in the back of the truck. We had a truck so we were carrying guerrillas with AK-47s up and down this road and they never asked us who we were or what we were doing. I didn't really feel threatened even though there was obviously a problem but I don't think that they would…I went because I don't think they would have bothered me as an American.

Q: How did you find the embassy there? Did they pay much attention to what you were doing?

CHATMAN: Yes but not, I'm not sure at what level they were. I'm sure that anytime you're a political entity and you are in a country living under some really strict conditions that you really worry about what the young kids are being taught but I'm not sure to what degree they followed. I'm sure there is section in the embassy that followed education or something, somebody, some junior officer, but they never really were that…

Q: No that's not really very high on anybodies…

CHATMAN: They were worried about training for some of their key professors and stuff like that in some of the big schools. I think probably the politics came into a lot of people going to seminars and overseas short-term training and that kind of stuff. I'm sure the politics got into that because a lot of the embassy had people that they wanted to make sure they got trained. They also had their own funds to do it; they didn't always go through us.

Q: How did you find the ministry of education?

CHATMAN: Outstanding. I was really, really impressed and thought that the guys that I worked with there were four regions and I worked directly with the regional chief who was my basic counterpart. I thought to a man that they were super outstanding. I spent many; many hours with all of them and still twenty years later are still very, very friendly with them through other people. I don't see them any more.

Q: Where do they come from? Were they part of the, in El Salvador had there been or was there, is there an elite?

CHATMAN: These guys were people who had either grown up in the ministry of education as a profession and earned their positions and a couple of them were political appointees for certain. But I'm not sure how to answer that question.

Q: Were there women in the ministry of education?

CHATMAN: Many, many women, not in the senior leadership positions, our program really helped that. Most of the teachers are women, 99 percent of the teachers are women. 99 percent of

the supervisors are men. The classroom teachers are almost all women at that time; the supervisors were almost all men.

Q: This has probably changed now hasn't it?

CHATMAN: I would imagine that there are a lot more women because that is one of the things that we pushed was to have more women in everything. I would imagine, I just don't know.

Q: Was there an Indian population there or a different I don't know…?

CHATMAN: Indigenous Indian?

Q: Mayan or something like that?

CHATMAN: No, not where we were. As a matter of fact there is very limited Mayan's in El Salvador, there were some Guatemalans among other things, Guatemala is full of them. I'm sure they were somewhere. The minute you say the word you'll find a family somewhere but I don't think there was a significant population.

Q: Did military operations interfere with your work?

CHATMAN: No, no.

Q: How about immigration because during this period there was quite a flood of people from not just El Salvador but elsewhere in Central America going to the United States? Did that…

CHATMAN: I don't remember that having any affect except we were always worried about people coming on the training programs and not coming back. That was a minor, minor problem in terms of what we thought it would be. You know you get a person over here and they've got relatives here already they just don't come back. That happened but very, very seldom.

Q: You did that for about seven years?

CHATMAN: Almost, six, six plus, yes.

Q: That must have been, did you find the Salvadorians was it a nice community?

CHATMAN: I absolutely loved El Salvador. I was totally at home. I had a good relationship with everybody I worked with, I had a good relationship with people I didn't work with and also in most of the countries that I had been in you could really not have much of a relationship with some of the really uneducated lower class people because it would become a problem. In El Salvador it didn't make any difference; Salvadorians were strong at all levels. The Bangladesh, for example, if you became too friendly with a poor person all of a sudden you found 100 other poor people waiting at your door with some kind of excuse or some need of urgent help. That wasn't that way in El Salvador.

Q: When you left there it was in '90…?

CHATMAN: 4.

Q: Had peace come about by that time?

CHATMAN: Peace came back in '90 or'91.

Q: Did that make a difference in what you were doing?

CHATMAN: Oh yeah but it had been…the actual day of peace had been in progress for a year plus so it didn't just all of a sudden happen one day. Peace was being built up and I can remember the day that peace actually started that we were in a training session in the States and what an emotional moment it was for all the Salvadorians, it was just tears, most of them had lost a relative or somebody in the war, they had been dislodged or displaced or whatever you want to call it because of the war and a lot of other things. It was a very emotional event and remember the peace was in phases. The army just didn't put down its weapons, it put down their weapons in phases like everybody from a certain area from September first to September 30 had to turn in their weapons and there was a process that they had to go through, then next group went through it. It was a process of maybe 18 months or something before the war; the actual treaty went into effect.

Q: In your program being basically a benign one were you as these areas opened up were you able to go in there, work on the schools and bring their teachers up to…?

CHATMAN: Yes and that was one of the big, that car ride that I told you about that was one of those periods. We could have not done that when the hard-core fighting was going on. I also became very, very friendly trying to work with their school system with the people that ran their guerrillas school system and did and was successful in that and got in some cases we trained some of their guerrillas in our programs. We were able to make that happen.

Q: How did that work?

CHATMAN: We were able to get X combatants, a lot of them had been wounded, into a special program that we organized and it was a different, I don't think it was anywhere nearly as successful, these guys had a lot of problems. We didn't realize how serious some of the problems were, just living with other people problems. By the time I got, let's see I'm trying to think, the National university we cracked that particular problem and actually got the university, which was a very, very communist oriented university to actually start sending professors and students to our program which was a major breakthrough.

Q: Yeah in Latin America and other places universities tend to be Marxist as soon as they graduate they turn the other way but the faculties, of course, have subscribed to the Marxist philosophy and they'd be a hard nut to crack.

CHATMAN: Yeah but everybody wanted training in the States and what we tried to do was to…of course all of their political motives for sending people to the States but I remember it was a big celebration almost for us on the day that we were actually allowed to go to the National university and talk to the president about training. It was a major day and I lead that effort, I was very, very proud of myself for that particular process, it was a very, very successful effort that got a lot of good publicity for us.

Q: By the time you left were you concerned with the war being over so nobody is going to pay attention and there goes the money and all of that?

CHATMAN: No because the money had increased as a result of trying to support the peace process so I mean that was not the problem. The money problem came later on when it became obviously peaceful that's when you don't get the attention that you had before. Just like when we were in Vietnam, we had almost unlimited funds because everything was on a panic situation and no questions were asked, a lot of inspections weren't done, a lot of money was wasted.

Q: Then by the time you left things were going along very nicely weren't they?

CHATMAN: They were going along very nicely in terms of the peace settlement and the relocation of all these soldiers. Remember, when you do that you end up with thousands of people on both sides not being needed in the military effort any more but still having to live, families to support and things like that. That became a major problem, which is one of the problems it is faced with right now, big gangs and such.

WILLIAM JEFFRAS DIETERICH
Deputy Chief of Mission
San Salvador (1989-1992)

William Jeffras Dietrich was born in Boston in 1936. He received his bachelor's degree from Connecticut Wesleyan University in 1958 and then served in the US Navy. His career included positions in Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Italy, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Mexico. Mr. Dieterich was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Today is the 15th of February 2000. Jeff, in 1989 you are off to El Salvador. You are there from '89 to '92 - what was your job and who was your ambassador at that time?

DIETERICH: I went there as the deputy chief of missions, on loan to the department from USIA. As I was winding up my tour in USIA as area director for Latin America, my old friend Bill Walker, who had been the DAS for Central America, came over for lunch. We had served together in Okinawa in the '60s, when he was a vice consul in the consular unit in Naha and I was the executive officer of the Okinawa relay station of the Voice. We went to lunch and he asked me if I would consider being DCM and I said I would think about it. We talked about

where things were going in El Salvador. I wasn't particularly interested in going to El Salvador and helping to preside over a slogging kind of guerilla war, in which we were major funders, for three more years. Bill and I both felt that some kind of peace agreement, and a peace agreement favored by U.S. policy, was in the offing. It was an interesting illustration of a phenomenon I learned working in public affairs. That is that you need to be very careful of your cover story because it is most likely going to come true. The cover story in the early Reagan administration was, "We're not only there fighting a war against the communists, we are fighting a war in favor of democracy." That wasn't exactly true when it was said. Our major motivation was the evil empire, as anyone could see. Because we kept talking about democracy and the elements that needed to be in place to make democracy work, by the time of the second Reagan administration, and certainly into the Bush administration, democracy had in fact become the policy. The reason you have to be careful of your cover story is that the press, and other political forces, both national and international, will eventually beat you into coming clean on what you said your policy was.

Anyway, Walker and I were both convinced that we were into a pro-democracy policy and also into a "bring the war to an end" kind of policy.

Q: At the period you are having lunch, this is early '89?

DIETERICH: I don't remember exactly, but it was probably was late '88.

Q: So Bush was in?

DIETERICH: We were well beyond the Iran Contra thing, which had put in some elements of change in the Central America policy. There was another cover story there that we had to come clean on.

Q: What were you seeing that looked promising?

DIETERICH: Well, it is a kind of nice story. As Area Director for Latin America, I used to get invited to a lot of seminars. I got invited to one, which I think was sponsored by Florida International University or the University of Miami, but I think it was FIU. The person in charge called me up and said Freddie Cristiani was going to be there. By that time Cristiani, was president-elect of El Salvador. I thought, "This is a wonderful chance to depart from my habit of not going to seminars and get a chance to hear what Cristiani had to say about his plans for El Salvador." I did go and had some very interesting conversations with him. It seemed to me he was also committed to a policy of bringing the war to a negotiated close. That, coming from the president-elect, convinced me that it was a wonderful time to go there. I got back to Bill Walker and told him I would be glad to go, and set the machinery in motion at USIA to arrange for me to be on loan to the department. That wasn't hard to do because it is always hard to find jobs for old area directors.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the Ollie North types had sort of faded from the scene after the Iran Contra thing?

DIETERICH: Some had faded from the scene, some had lost interest, and some had been sort of nudged into rethinking the policy. The mood had changed. You could see from what was happening in Nicaragua that eventually the Sandinistas were not going to be overthrown but they were going to be eroded, which is what really happened. What eroded them was being in power. It is easy to overthrow - it is hard to govern.

Q: Did you have the thought that the Sandinistas in Nicaragua might depart the scene or would they have to get tougher and turn into a Castro-like regime?

DIETERICH: I think the feeling was that they would have to get tougher and turn into a Castro-type regime if they were going to stay in power forever, but they weren't going to do that. A lot of folks in Latin America resent U.S. supervision and intervention and fiddling around, but they don't much like Sandinista-type regimes either. The fact is that there were good reasons to be concerned about Nicaragua. Beyond the nature of the regime itself there were real regional concerns. The Sandinistas were severely out of step with the rest of Central America. Central America is a region that has always enjoyed a certain amount of unity through good times and bad. It is very destabilizing in Central America to have one of those governments out of step and out of sympathy with the rest. I think some of the feeling was too, that eventually Nicaragua was going to evolve back into the Central America system. That doesn't mean that it is all to the good by any means. There are huge things wrong with the way Central America is governed, but at least you have removed an element of instability in the region. The way Nicaragua evolved, with the Sandinistas eventual electoral defeat, would influence the war in El Salvador also.

Q: Before you went out there, what was the reading on the war in El Salvador?

DIETERICH: I think the reading was - nobody is going to win. Bolstering the government would require an expenditure of U.S. funds and a level of commitment in El Salvador that wasn't going to happen. On the other hand, after ten years it became clear to us and to the guerillas that the United States wasn't going to let them win and could afford not to let them win. Preventing them from winning was well within the level of U.S. resources and the level of U.S. commitment to El Salvador. I think one of the reasons the guerillas came to feel that was the length of our commitment and the fact that they had done everything they knew how to do in terms of trying to influence public opinion, and had become good at it. They spent a lot of time raising support in the United States. Perhaps even a majority of their financial support came from the United States, but it still wasn't enough to win because El Salvador appropriations kept passing in the U.S. Congress, not by much, but they kept passing. I think after ten years of that, the guerillas began to see the hopelessness of it. In fact, I remember one of the guerillas telling me this, that after the late '89 offensive, which stretched into January of '90, they came to realize the United States was not going to let them win.

Q: Who was our ambassador to El Salvador when you went out there?

DIETERICH: Bill Walker. He went out before I did. No, I've got the timing wrong on going to El Salvador too. He and I talked about it a year before I actually went to El Salvador and he went out shortly after that and he had been there almost a year before I got there.

Q: But you went there in '89?

DIETERICH: I went there in the late summer of '89.

Q: Was there a feeling in Washington that the Bush administration was going to take a less doctrinaire approach towards Central America?

DIETERICH: Yes. I'm not sure what the doctrine was.

Q: I mean, particularly the early Reagan period. I mean, we are going to beat those evil empire people and we're not going to tolerate any of this. It was not very nuanced.

DIETERICH: No.

Q: Had you been in El Salvador before?

DIETERICH: Yes, I had. In fact a couple of times. As area director I was obligated to visit. Either I had to visit each post every year or my deputy did. We divided them up for the purpose of writing efficiency reports. I made sure that I went to El Salvador twice. The second time I went there, it was a strange visit because I hadn't been officially named yet, the rumor mill had already decided I was the next DCM there. I got a great deal of attention that USIA directors didn't usually get. I had been in the country, and it was certainly high on the list of countries that I had to keep an eye on as area director.

Q: When you got out there in the summer of '89, what was the situation? What were your impressions of the situation on the ground?

DIETERICH: My impression was that the war was kind of at a stalemate where both sides could continue to kill each other but that the lines weren't going to change very much. The guerillas weren't going to be able to expand their area of operation. They weren't going to be able to get into any major cities. They were going to continue to live out in the eastern provinces. They could continue to blow up light poles and engage in sabotage and in small scale offensives. Also, that the army was not willing to suffer the losses necessary to go out and take them on in major operations, and that we weren't really going to encourage the army to take on major operations. It would result in very negative human rights consequences for U.S. policies. When they did that we ended up with massacres on our hands.

Q: Did you feel that you had a regime in El Salvador that was working to gain control of its army?

DIETERICH: Yes, I did. We had already gone through the Duarte government, which was a Christian Democratic Government, that had already begun the process of peace negotiations. The Cristiani government really did represent a return of the right wing to power in El Salvador, but with a different kind of candidate. The difference in that candidate was in itself extremely important, as was the fact that you now had one party that had been in government, a major party,

and had worked toward a peace agreement, followed by the other party which was coming into power also with a commitment to a peace process.

It is important to understand Freddy Cristiani and people like him. To put it in overly simple terms, whatever the number of families was, there had been a wealthy landowning oligarchy that had run El Salvador. What you were seeing with people like Freddie Cristiani were the sons and grandsons of people who had not been exactly a part of that old landowning class. They were instead immigrants who had come to El Salvador from Europe and, to some extent from the Levant, much as they had in Argentina around the turn of the century. They came with reasonable levels of education and financial capital and a different commitment. They knew that land was only one way to make money. You could also do it through commerce and services. They were the people who sold Mercedes and farm equipment and home appliances to the oligarchs. And, as more modern people, they ended up with more money than the oligarchs.

Freddie Cristiani's political generation were the sons and grandsons of these successful immigrants. They were young men of great local privilege but had been educated abroad, mainly in the United States. Freddie Cristiani at Georgetown. They adhered to the conservative values of their fathers in that they believed in free enterprise and the sanctity of ownership and all sorts of other things, and certainly believed in the right of their class to run the country. But they also had fairly modern ideas about democracy, social progress, and fairly modern ideas about the obligation of government to provide opportunities for everybody in the country. Ideas most of them had learned in the United States dictated to Cristiani that a peace agreement had to be found. The war was simply not to be won. It wouldn't be worth the cost of Salvadoran lives to win it.

Q: What about the army, the death squads and that whole thing?

DIETERICH: The army was also beginning to benefit from some different leadership. I'm really not sure why, but the army was evolving. The leadership of the army, at the time I was there, were persons probably in their '40s or early '50s. They had seen ten years of the war and they were young enough so that they had seen the war on the battle lines. I think they were tired of it and I think the very senior officers were tired of going to funerals. They were tired of soldiers getting killed, and I know this doesn't fit the image a lot people have of the Salvadoran Army. I certainly don't deny that the death squads existed, although, in my opinion, were not necessarily institutionalized within the army but were a pernicious combination of wealthy reactionaries and like-minded army cohorts. The army death squad members were acting at the behest of their wealthy patrons. In that sense, they were extra- official. I don't think the leadership of the army felt strong enough to just to kick out these death squaders, nor do I believe they felt particularly motivated to do so.

Q: When you got there, were there any situations festering? I'm thinking of the killing of nuns or other things?

DIETERICH: Oh, there was a huge festering legacy of massacres, El Mozote and the nuns case, and the marines who had been gunned down in the Zona Rosa, and the Hilton Hotel

assassinations. Those last three cases all involved American casualties. There is a small monument in the courtyard outside the embassy to Americans who lost their lives.

There was a legacy of atrocities on both sides. The government could come up with horrible things that had happened to its people. People blown up in buildings. People killed when the guerillas blow up a light pole as they happen to be walking by. People who could have been captured but were shot on the spot. Terrible things happening in villages where the guerillas wanted to enforce some kind of support and participation on the part of villagers.

Q: Will you explain what the nuns case was, and had it been settled?

DIETERICH: It had been settled only superficially. It certainly had not been settled to the satisfaction of the people in the United States. People had been caught and tried.

Q: In the first place, how did Walker use you?

DIETERICH: Walker and I went back a long way, and his description of my role was as an alter ego. I was there to run the embassy, substitute for him when he couldn't be there, to take as much of his burden as I could to allow him to deal with the reality of U.S. policy and to spend as much time as possible in contact with the upper levels of the government and the rest of Salvadoran society.

Q: Before we get into some more of the details, what about the security aspects there at that time?

DIETERICH: Fortress Embassy.

Q: Is this the new embassy?

DIETERICH: No, this was the old one, and it had been bombed and lost part of its central tower, and we had all been crammed into a smaller amount of space, much of which was either one story or underground. There was a wall all the way around it, the ambassador's office had no windows in it. My office had one which was always curtained and shielded. Our offices were terrible. The ambassador's office was probably no bigger than the room we are sitting in.

Q: We are talking about something that is about 25x10 feet.

DIETERICH: These were not luxurious quarters for anybody. But it was pretty secure, it never got hit while I was there.

Q: How about going from hither to yon?

DIETERICH: Big, big security packages. The ambassador had an armored Cadillac, a follow car, a lead car, probably four American security agents with him and another six Salvadorans riding in both of those cars. I always traveled in an armored Suburban with local guards.

Q: How about your family?

DIETERICH: My family was with me. My daughter wasn't, she was in college, but my wife and son were. We lived in a beautiful DCM residence. Housing was quite lovely, but with lots of walls around it and a lot of security precautions, with guards there all the time in control of the gate. The DCM residence probably had four local guards at all times. I hardly ever drove a car the whole time I was there, but you get used to that kind of security after awhile. It also has some advantages, you don't get stuck in traffic jams, with the guards there are always people around to run errands for you. It is a luxurious but dangerous life because you forget some of the realities of how folks have to live, including your subordinates who don't have that protection.

Q: How did things develop?

DIETERICH: I got there in mid-89, the ambassador was there for a day then took off for a vacation, so I was really thrown into it immediately. I sort of felt like I was floundering a little bit but I had good people around who kept me going in the right direction. I remember that after a couple of days we were sent a dipnote (diplomatic note - an official communiqué from one government to another) to hand over to the president and I began to learn something about El Salvador right away. As I mentioned, I had met the president before in Miami.

President Cristiani was at his weekend retreat, which is on a volcanic lake outside San Salvador. The only way I was going to be able to deliver this note within the designated time frame was to go up there and visit him. We made the calls and I loaded into a Suburban again, this time with another car with a full package. Keiko, my wife, went with me, so we went up to call on the Cristianis at their weekend place. It's kind of fun when you make your first call on the president of a sovereign nation, even a small one, and you are greeted by the president and his wife in bathing suits. It was the first time I had ever felt overdressed in my life, and I only had a sport shirt on.

Q: Well, were we pleased with Cristiani as president? I think there was concern at the time because he had come out of a fairly right-wing thing. Did we become comfortable with him?

DIETERICH: Yes, we did become comfortable with him. The concern was because of the party he came out of. Remember, I discovered when I visited him in Miami that he is a very convincing guy, and we believed that he was sincerely interested in finding a way to end this war and he was willing to negotiate to make that happen.

Shortly after the ambassador got back, we went to call on Padre Ellacuria, who was the rector of the Universidad Central Americana (UCA), which was the Jesuit University in El Salvador. He was later assassinated in the early days of the November offensive.

I remember the visit clearly because one of the things we wanted to know was what he thought of Cristiani. His message to us was fascinating. He basically said, "Remember that all the enemies of peace are not necessarily on the right in this country. I have been received by President Cristiani, had talks with him, had much more courteous treatment and interest from him, than I ever had from President Duarte. I believe he is committed to peace." We came out of that meeting feeling that the chances for a negotiated settlement were better than we had thought.

He had influence, and the people he had influence on had influence on the guerillas. A lot of people don't like to hear an American say that, but it is true. Much of the guerilla leadership had been at the UCA, many of them had been influenced by the liberation theology that came out of that university.

That, by the way, was another reason peace was possible. Liberation theology and its attendant dependency theories were rapidly falling out of style during this period.

Q: At the time, did the two sides talk to each other through intermediaries?

DIETERICH: I think at that stage it wasn't really a matter of talking to each other in the sense of negotiating. It was more a matter of sending messages, or sort of basic communication. Dialogue is the issue when you start getting into negotiations. That is when it is important who you talk to.

We had lots of ways of getting our thoughts to the other side without direct talks with the principals involved. We did not have direct conversations with any guerillas at that point but we talked to a lot of people who did. We knew how to use the media also. The guerillas listened to the radio - the Voice of America for example - and watched television. It was not a major problem to deliver messages to guerillas saying the United States says it is interested in peace. Convincing them we were telling the truth was a different and more difficult problem.

It was also difficult to convince the right wing in El Salvador that we were really interested in peace, as was convincing the Salvadoran military. In some ways maybe it was more difficult.

Many Salvadorans worked closely with us through ten years of war. During most of that time the American government was not very interested in peace but had a policy of "let's win this." The reaction you tended to get from them was, "Yeah, yeah, we know why you are saying all this stuff about peace. But come on now, we're among friends, let's talk about what the real thing is." We had to convince them this wasn't just propaganda and window dressing, that we were serious about it.

You can go back quite awhile to the situation at the time of the nuns massacre when Bob White was the ambassador and was absolutely convinced he had been lied to. He was absolutely furious with the government and the Salvadoran military. They had lied to him, but I don't think they really understood how justifiably furious he really was or why. They really didn't believe that we would let a few murders here and there get in the way of winning the war. And I believe there were more than a few Americans - both official and unofficial - who shared that belief and encouraged them in it.

So, we had a double job on our hands. One was to convince the military, and the other was to convince the guerillas that the U.S. was serious about peace negotiations. There was, of course, a similar problem on the far right of the political spectrum, but by that time we had pretty much read D'Aubuisson and his nitwit cronies out of the equation. We didn't talk to them and they thought we were about as bad as the guerillas and the Jesuits.

We had a job to do within the U.S. Mission. It was a very subtle issue, not a matter of loyalty and disloyalty, but is a matter of the human tendency to keep doing the job you have always done. After all we had sent American soldiers out there to train Salvadoran military units. Their job was to train people to fight a war, to do it well, and do it aggressively. At the same time they were to be mindful of human rights and not expose themselves to any more hostile fire than absolutely necessary. Big job.

Now we had to convince them that lt. wasn't exactly like that. We wanted them to be in position, we wanted them to be sharp, we wanted them to keep training. But we also wanted them to start living with the frustration of not being very big offensively. They were usually not going to go out and get the enemy. They were in more of a defensive situation. That is not very comfortable to a lot of soldiers, especially very good ones. So we also had to convince some of our own people that peace negotiations were a serious business and not just something we were saying. It is not only convincing leadership, you have to monitor all the time to make sure that you and the embassy, whether it is in the MIL Group or the AID Mission or whoever it is, are not sending signals that are contrary to policy.

Q: Did you feel that the CIA was on the wagon with you?

DIETERICH: Yes, sort of, but again it's a little bit of the same problem. The tendency to do what you have always done. In the CIA and the military, the guys who understand war and are good at it, if left too much to their own devices tend to keep doing it. That tendency to keep doing what you are good at also occurs in other organizations. It's quite human.

Q: This is really one of the few places that the CIA could be operational with fun, getting out there and doing what a lot of these guys like to do.

DIETERICH: That is true, although one of the things we had going for us was that the war wasn't as much fun as it used to be. It had gone on too long.

But subtlety is difficult. You have to be so damn careful. Instead of going out there and stomping on the commies, you have to nuance everything politically. Our advisors were good soldiers, they didn't want to screw things up, they wanted to follow policy, but it wasn't easy. How do you maintain military morale and the sharpness in training, and the kind of training that keeps people from violating human rights, when peace is in the offing? It is the old "nobody wants to be the last guy to die in this war," so how do you keep the edge without acting, that's the problem.

Q: At that time, the left wing, movie stars, rock people, and writers who tended to go for leftist causes had sort of adopted the Sandinistas and the guerilla movement in El Salvador. Had this died out by the time you got there?

DIETERICH: Yes, the political activists in the United States on the left were still very active but the glitterati had lost interest by that time. The offensive and the Jesuit case sort of rekindled their interest but we did not have that kind of visitors. Bianca Jagger didn't come and I don't remember any Hollywood movie stars coming down there during my time. We certainly still had the professionals in the church groups who would still bring delegations of church people down.

It is important to remember that the Salvadoran guerillas were the second largest recipient of American aid in El Salvador; the Salvadoran government of course was the largest with its U.S. government funding.

Q Where did the aid to the guerillas come from?

DIETERICH: A lot from church groups. My guess is that a major part of it came from church groups. It's hard to count it since they were not particularly anxious to have it counted. I think most of it was donated by people who really felt that if you said, "This is only going for humanitarian stuff, it is not going for military stuff," that that would happen. Of course it is a nonsense proposition. If you give the money to the FMLN (Farabundo Marti Liberacion National), it is really stupid to think they even have the accounting skill, let alone the will, to segregate the funding. Money is money.

I think what happened in U.S. politics is instructive. Those people who hated the U.S. government's Salvador policy because we were supporting a government they didn't approve of, and because we were supporting a war which they didn't approve of either, concluded that since they had failed for a long time to defeat the policy and the aid in Congress, they would countervail with their own contributions to the other side. But countervailing did put them into a morally ambiguous situation because they were funding some of the violence that they so hated. Nevertheless, they would come down in groups, they would come down as individuals, and we would receive them in the embassy.

I have to talk about those visits because it was a conscious part of our strategy. There was a lot of history that said that the embassy had sort of blown it from time to time with a lot of groups that came down and were opposed to U.S. policy. We either wouldn't see them at all, or we would send out a defenseless junior officer to see them, which would often mean that the group felt insulted, and the officers sometimes were neither experienced enough nor well briefed enough to be able to handle it well. Walker and I decided that virtually anybody who came down would be seen by someone at the senior level, we would push it up as senior as we could get it, and we would not waste a whole lot of time trying to figure out "is this group important or is this group not important" because, frankly it was more efficient to see everybody than to try to sort out which group was important and get it wrong. Our perspective, and our sources, either on our own or relying on the department, weren't very good at figuring out who was important in Colorado. So we would see them all and we spent a lot of time at it. I think it was very important just to see these people and to talk them through the policy, and to keep hitting on the fact that we were in favor of peace negotiations, but that peace negotiations meant that neither side was going to win. Americans concerned about El Salvador were going to be faced with choices, just as the U.S. government had been. If you are for peace negotiations, then you have recognized that side you favor is not going to win. We found a distressing number of groups who said they were in favor of peace negotiations but basically they weren't because they wanted their friends to win. Remember, too, there were also groups that came down supporting the government also.

We saw some of the same attitudes congressional staffers. People from Chris Dodd's staff came down. The fact is, they wanted the guerillas - even a particular faction of the FMLN - to win, if not outright to at least gain a powerful position in postwar politics. People from Jesse Helms

staff came down and they wanted the right wingers - both military and civilian - to win.. Both sides would come and talk to us in the embassy, then go out and talk to people outside the embassy and say, "Don't listen to guys in the embassy, they haven't really got it right. What do they know? I'm telling you what it is really like." This means the Helms people would come down and tell the military to "hang tough" because the peace negotiations weren't really going anyplace. Others were telling the guerilla leadership the same thing at times. This made it hard to do peace negotiations, but not impossible.

Q How did you find the reporting aspect of our embassy at that time?

DIETERICH: I had a particular philosophy on reporting, which I think drove the first political counselor I worked with there absolutely nuts. He was one of these guys that wanted to do big think pieces, big major cables that would seek to influence policy, and I felt that in the Salvador situation, and in modern times, what really counted was spot reporting. Getting the facts out, getting them out quickly, in a way trying to truth-squad the press. If the press gets it right don't worry too much about it, just keep the details going. But be alert for those situations where they have gotten it wrong, and if they have gotten it wrong in a way that is going to damage policy, you have to get to the Department quickly. Don't worry about the big think pieces, because nobody is going to read them but the desk officer anyway. Besides, Washington had made up its mind about policy in El Salvador and none of us in the leadership at the embassy had any quarrel with that policy. We basically like it. That frustrates a certain kind of political officer and it pleases others. Some people like digging into spot reporting and keeping two or three fast cables going every day and thinking that is a good job, but other people are driven nuts by that kind of routine. Basically, it was reporting designed to keep us looking alert, and looking like we were paying attention (which we were), and not getting blind-sided by all the other reporting.

Q: How was our liaison with Nicaragua, our embassy there?

DIETERICH: We infoed each other on all our cables, all Central American countries did, but we didn't spend a lot of time talking to the embassy in Nicaragua. A couple of times we had meetings with the country team in Honduras, Ambassador Chris Arcos and three or four of his people came over and sat down with our country team and talked. Remember, that's a longer border. There were a lot of irritating issues with Honduras. I don't remember spending a lot of time worrying about what was going on in Nicaragua at that point.

In February of 1990 Violetta Chamorro was elected president. The Sandinistas had been beaten in a free and fair election. That was important. It influenced the peace negotiations. The Sandinistas were no longer what they had been and the Soviet Union was in decline. That did influence the guerillas. Suddenly they were left with nobody but Fidel Castro, and they weren't dumb guys. They knew Fidel Castro was a pretty weak reed to rely on.

Q: You talked about the November attack of '89. Where were you?

DIETERICH: When it all started, I was at home. We did not have real hard intelligence that anything was coming. It started on November 11th, as bad as I am on dates I can remember what we used to call Armistice Day. The night before that, we had the Marine Ball and much of the

embassy leadership was at a hotel ballroom have a pretty good time. There were lots of Salvadoran guests also.

Of course as usually happens we read reports after the fact and thought that maybe if we evaluated them the right way, maybe we would have guessed something was coming. But the fact is we didn't. I don't think the Salvadorans did either.

The next day, the 11th, nothing in particular had us worried and we had gone home at supper time, as we usually did. I was in my residence and the ambassador was in his, and around 8:30 or 9:00 one hell of a fire fight broke out close my house.

We were used to hearing gunfire every now and then during the night, or hearing a telephone pole get blown up, so when it first started I thought that it was closer than usual but was not very worried. But it just kept going on and on. They had attacked all through the city and the guerillas around my house were trying to get at President Cristiani's house. He didn't happen to be there at the time, fortunately. They really came close to getting into his house, but were finally driven off by a patrol of the Salvadoran army.

It was pretty tough. We had one wounded government soldier take refuge in the kitchen of our house. I went down to the kitchen and found our cook bandaging this guy, who had been shot through the hand. We had fighting during most of the night. We weren't sure of the extent of it until we all got to work the next morning. We all did get in to the embassy the next morning and began to gather intelligence and get the reports. Then we realized that something major had happened. We didn't know how long it would last nor how serious it was going to be.

As you know, it didn't go away very quickly. It got a little bit worse every night. It then became evident to us that this was a major push. It is hard for me to sort out particular events but we sort of settled into a routine which meant that we would all consult each morning with our own security people to figure out when it was safe to go to the embassy. Often we would be late getting there because we would have our own security patrols out and through liaison with the army and everybody else, figuring out whether the routes we would have to take to work would be reasonably safe. So we would all wait for a call and then usually get into the office around 9:00 or 9:30. Then we would get everybody together and try to assess the night before and try to figure out what the military situation was. We found that much of the eastern suburbs of San Salvador were in guerilla hands.

Just about the time we had settled into that routine, the guerillas attacked the Sheraton Hotel which created a very difficult situation for us. We had a group of U.S. Army special forces trainers who had been going through some routine, previously scheduled training exercises with the Salvadoran army and were staying in the Sheraton Hotel. They had all their weapons with them.

The guerillas occupied the hotel. We were told they looking for a special Organization of American States negotiator who had come to town. He was the target, but they went into the wrong tower of the hotel and ended up occupying the side with this group of American green berets barricaded into one end of a corridor, heavily armed and not about to give up. There were

also some American civilians - some AID people and some commercial people - who were in the same tower. So we were faced with a situation of the guerillas occupying the building, a group of armed Americans who were certainly not going to be captured without a fight, and various civilians scattered around in other rooms around the hotel.

Our very aggressive, Spanish- speaking admin counselor, an immigrant from Latin America himself and a can-do kind of guy, managed to get through on a telephone to some of the guerilla leadership. I then got a call on the radio from the ambassador saying, "This guy is trying to talk to the guerillas and I can't get him on the radio. You have to get him and tell him 'don't do that'." So I had this absurd conversation on an open radio saying, "Stop it." He said, "BUT I CAN GET THEM OUT. LET ME DO IT." I had to tell him, "No, you can't do it. As an embassy official, you CANNOT negotiate with these guys. Now let it go." And he did.

So the Sheraton occupation created some exciting moments. We ended up with Delta Force in the country that night.

Q: Would you explain what Delta Force is?

DIETERICH: Delta Force is an elite group of the U.S. army which is trained in hostage rescue. It was all very hush, hush, and secret except President Bush mentioned it the morning after they had left the country. We were never, ever to tell anybody that they were there or had been there, but the President did mention it on radio and television. They flew into the country, I don't remember the size of the force but it was a lot of people, and they had been positioned around the hotel. The commander had been to the embassy and we had a meeting late into the night the night before.

Eventually, we got the people out. The guerillas sort of disappeared after they decided they had gotten into the wrong place and didn't need this fight. They escaped through the back doors and down through a ravine. San Salvador is cut through by a lot of ravines and they make good guerilla routes since they have a lot of vegetation at the bottom and people don't live down there. They quietly slipped away from the hotel, then it became a matter of getting those people out of there and getting our own military people out of there without them shooting anybody on the way out. There had been a big fire fight at the beginning of this thing. It was not a peaceful occupation but a contested occupation. I had awakened the morning of that occupation to the sound of a terrific fire fight.

Q: Did it come as a surprise that they were able to mount such a thing?

DIETERICH: Yes. Not only that they were able, but that they did it. The offensive was their last hurrah. We were afraid for awhile that it might be only their first final offensive, but it proved to be their final. A couple of years later we had a peace agreement. At some point I have to deal with the evacuation of our own dependents. Also the Jesuit murders, I have to deal with that too.

Q: Let's talk about those.

DIETERICH: OK. The offensive started on November 11, 1989. A few days later we awake to the hideous news that there had been a group of people murdered at the Central American University, including Padre Ellacuria and some other priests, their housekeeper, and one child.

We didn't know who did it. Although much of the world was willing to jump to the conclusion that the army had done it, the fact was, nobody really knew. Some of us, including me, entertained the idea that it also could have been the guerillas. Eyewitness accounts identified men in army uniforms, but that on its face did not exclude the guerillas. Remember, we had had conversations with people at the university who indicated they favored the peace alternative. It wasn't entirely beyond my imagination that someone on the left had decided to get rid of these people.

As it turned out, it was the army that did it. However, the army has never accepted the notion that it ordered the murders and that has never been proven. It may or may not have been - I don't know the answer. I'm inclined to think that it was not ordered by the high command of the army but was the act of a particular colonel named Benavides, who thought he had authorization from a more senior level of the army but may not have actually had it. It was a stupid, murderous act that complicated everything and made it more difficult to bring the war to an end. It cost a lot of support in the United States for a negotiated settlement. Remember, our job was to convince people that a negotiated settlement was better than the bloodshed it would take for either side to win. Negotiations mean that some people aren't going to get punished. That's what peace negotiations are about - people on both sides were going to escape punishment. A lot of people understandably hate that and think that crime ought to be punished, that there should be retribution for atrocities. People who like vengeance as a political principle, hate the idea of negotiated settlement. Well, the murder of the Jesuits made negotiations all that much harder.

Q: Were we all over the Salvadoran government on this by now?

DIETERICH: Sure, we were. I headed an embassy task force on the Jesuit case which met daily trying to figure out what we knew and trying to use all our resources to get at what the evidence was going to be. We were under increasing pressure from the local Jesuits, who were convinced we knew things that we didn't know. They were convinced we knew who did it, but wouldn't tell them. The fact was, we didn't know. The Salvadoran government knew things that it wasn't telling us. They began to suspect right away their people were involved in it. It took them sometime to sort it out, and it took more time before we got enough wind of it to go to them and say, "All right, come clean, let us know." When it all came out, it was a very complicated story and I would just as soon not deal with the individuals involved.

Eventually, it came out; I think we found out within a few days what the real story was. A lot of our problem in the Jesuit case was dealing with people who had an institutional stake in not trusting us, or saying they didn't trust us. The whole Jesuit case was a classic example of the moving shoreline that we could never reach. The first things we heard was, "Well, we will never find out. We'll never really see the evidence of who did it. We know who did it, but we'll never find out, we'll never see it." Well, we did, so then it was, "Well, there will never be an indictment." Well, there was. So then it was, "Well, there will never be a trial." Well, there

finally was and it took a huge amount of pressure and intervention on our part to make sure there was a trial.

One of my jobs was with the president of the Salvadoran Supreme Court, who was a difficult guy to deal with. I spent a lot of time jawboning him on how there had to be a trial and what had to happen for transparency, and trying at the same time to learn the Salvadoran legal system and understand that it had to follow the norms of their system also. At any rate, we finally got the trial and then the shoreline jumped again and it was, "Well, there will never be a conviction." Eventually there was a conviction.

One day, toward the end of the trial as it became evident there was going to be a conviction, I remember thinking I was seeing a sea change among the American critics of our Salvador policy. I was waiting around in the lobby outside the courtroom waiting for the trial to begin. All these people I had gotten to know over the years from various church groups and other groups that monitored the Latin American human rights were there, but they were all there talking about Guatemala. I suddenly realized they were losing interest in El Salvador.

Q: In a way they were motivated by causes.

DIETERICH: Yes, the peace agreement was coming; the Jesuit case was going to trial, and they could see there was enough momentum going there. You would never get anybody to say they were satisfied with the results; there was going to be a result that would be hard to present as a triumph over evil. I think they had decided that Salvador was no longer their cause, but Guatemala would be. Salvador was no longer going to provide these great examples of Central American misbehavior and the misguided nature of U.S. policy in encouraging that misbehavior. Guatemala was still there and it was going to get worse.

Q: Of course, many of these people had learned their trade of protesting in the '60s, and essentially the United States is the evil empire in their estimation.

DIETERICH: It was, but there was self-interest involved too. It's not so much individual self-interest, as it is institutional self-interest. These people are people who like to work in the field of foreign affairs, and because they like to work in the field of foreign affairs and because they want to be influential, to satisfy themselves in career terms and also to raise the funds to keep their organizations going, it is really important for them to somehow illustrate that the U.S. government cannot be trusted with U.S. foreign policy. If the U.S. government suddenly got it all right, then there would be less need for these groups who monitor performance and make policy recommendations. But the people who are staffers for these groups have a stake in convincing everybody, and especially their donors, that the U.S. government can't be trusted with U.S. foreign policy.

So, the shoreline moved one more time, there was a verdict, the accused were convicted, and they did go to prison until basically the UN and its truth commission made their final reports on the war and sort of let them out. But they all did some time. Oh, I have to deal with the peace negotiations.

Q: Let's talk about the dependents.

DIETERICH: Again, I don't remember which day but it was a few days after the Sheraton takeover. We woke up to fighting all over the city. A senior member of the embassy had been trapped in his house all night. The guerillas either knew who he was or they had decided they wanted his house for its strategic location. They tried to take his house and he, his wife, and a guest ended up barricaded in the house returning fire. They were rescued at the last minute by the army. One member of the embassy had been captured by the guerillas and was being held. We knew where and we knew his situation. There had been fire fights around a number of houses where embassy people lived.

Earlier on the ambassador had said, "I've got to concentrate on this war and morale in the embassy, and everything we do, so I want you to take responsibility for calling an evacuation when it is necessary."

During periods of combat we would gather at the ambassador's residence and among other things decide whether it was safe to go to the chancery. That morning we realized it was going to be hard to get to the chancery. It was getting worse and worse. I told the ambassador it was time to evacuate dependents and officials who really did not have to be there.

We got our administrative people on the phone told them to begin to arrange for a flight. We were looking for about 24 hours later. We decided to call all dependents into the chancery right away. We told everybody to pack a bag and bring sleeping bags, just in case, and to go to the chancery because we were probably going to stay in the chancery overnight. We figured that when we got the plane in there, we would already be a step up by having everybody camping out in the chancery.

Then we began to wrestle on the phone with the issue of mandatory vs. voluntary departure. Mandatory departure means the ambassador orders all dependents and nonessential embassy people to leave. Voluntary means that evacuation is available but individuals may elect to stay. Mandatory departure achieves the maximum drawdown, but takes away flexibility and can have a pretty bad effect on morale. Voluntary departure is great for flexibility, but risks leaving to many people in a risky place. The paid transportation and per diem allowances are the same in either case.

We had a particular problem - a number of wives in the embassy who, although they were there as dependents, were professionals and didn't have any kids with them. They were saying, "No, we want to stay. In the first place, we can be useful, and secondly we have no kids and we want to stay here with our husbands." The ambassador and I were very sympathetic to that point of view. Washington was urging us to go mandatory on this. We were basically saying, "No, we don't want to go mandatory because we can talk them out, we can reduce, we can get everybody out, but there are some of these people who want to stay and we are sympathetic with them. Besides, we can use them." We finally got away with that and we were able to get everybody out that we really couldn't use, but we didn't do it by making it mandatory. We did it by talking people out. We got people into buses and out to the airport and told them they would all be coming back.

Also, I had had conversations on the phone with the American Republics Bureau at State saying, "Remember Jeff, get people out of there sooner rather than later; remember that politics don't count; the only thing that counts is safety." I know why they were saying that, but anybody who says that politics don't count in a situation like that just isn't paying attention. An evacuation of the American Embassy, handled badly, could have had a devastating effect on the morale of that government and people, and at a time when the people of San Salvador were furious at the guerillas for what they were doing to their city.

The FMLN were suffering a hemorrhage in terms of public support for their cause. People were really angry at them. But if we had had this huge mandatory dramatic evacuation of the U.S. Embassy, it would have been awful. Remember, we had already had UN agencies pulling people out before we did. We did not declare it mandatory, we tried to explain it to the press and the government by saying, "No, you know, it is war but it is getting close to Christmas anyway, and we are sending wives and kids home." It helped a lot that it was Christmas time, that the evacuation was not mandatory and that we had told people they would be coming back.

Eventually, we would have a hard time getting them back because even though the offensive wound down and ended about mid-January, the department had some understandable reluctance to have people go back. They just spent a whole lot of money to get all these people out; the offensive was over but there was no peace agreement yet. So the tendency was to not let the people go back. At the embassy, the ambassador, a lot of other people, and I felt very strongly that it was essential to get people back because this was an embassy that was going to have to support the peace negotiations. So the symbolism of having our families there was very important, and embassies without dependents attract "cowboys", the people you don't want there during peace negotiations. The personnel system will never be clever enough to protect you against that.

Q: I served 18 months in Saigon.

DIETERICH: So you know. That is precisely what we did not want.

Q: You might explain what you mean by "cowboys."

DIETERICH: I mean persons, people, who are more comfortable in a wartime, high-security situation. I don't want to sound disrespectful to those people, because I don't feel that way.

Q: They seem to be hard-drinking, womanizing, kind of like living by themselves and living a garrison life. It gives a frame of mind that is not conducive to a diplomatic mission.

DIETERICH: Certainly not, and not in the kind of period we were going into. Eventually, we just jawboned and jawboned and about six weeks later our families all came back.

Let's see - what else do I have to talk about? ARA (Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, at that time, I guess it's called WHA now), urged the ambassador and me to take a break. We had been under a lot of strain, so Walker took a little bit of time over Christmas. When he came back I

went back to the states for a couple of weeks. I went through a period of consultations in the department, talked to a few visitors. It was a tough time to be out of there, because the morning I arrived in Washington there was a big mortar attack on San Salvador and I felt terrible. There is a funny feeling when you leave and things are still going on. You feel guilty for not being there, but once I got out of Washington and took some vacation and went up to Ohio where my wife and son were, I felt a little more relaxed about it. It must have been the middle of January when I got back to San Salvador.

In terms of feelings - go back to the evacuation, I remember a great sense of relief when my wife and son left because that was one less responsibility, and it was getting increasingly difficult to go back and forth between residence and office. Since I had taken a sleeping bag with me when we brought everybody into the office, I ended up staying in my office for the rest of the week. It was four or five days before I finally went home. I decided to go home and see if my dog and cat were still with us.

Q: It would be 1990 by this time.

DIETERICH: It would have been January 1990. The offensive ended. As those things often do, it just sort of petered out but it was evident that the FMLN was withdrawing their people from the city and the feelers for negotiations began to trickle in. Various factions of the FMLN began to talk to people who talked to us.

I'm going to studiously avoid which faction was doing which, there were a lot of differences. Some of them were on board earlier than others, and it was important to play those differences. But I can't remember the sets of initials anymore. Except, there is one reason why the factionalism was important. Each faction had its own set of supporters in the United States which only added to the silliness of the whole thing.

The peace negotiations went on for almost a year. The peace agreement was finally concluded on the last day of 1990. Eleven months after the final offensive had ended (they had done a great deal of damage to the country and the city), they finally got a peace agreement. It's a very complicated thing to talk about. Day-to-day we were working on it - feelers here, feelers there - and trying to defuse the Jesuit case.

Q: Why were we there? Why wasn't this between the Salvadoran government and the guerillas? What was our role?

DIETERICH: Our role was to convince the Salvadoran government and, more particularly, the Salvadoran military, that negotiations were possible and could be done. Also to convince the guerillas that we really were in favor of peace negotiations. On the guerilla side, there was an understandable suspicion that the Americans were only talking about negotiations but were going to screw them in the end, as usual.

Remember, Central Americans are Americans too, and suspicion of metropolitan outsiders is deep in the character of New World people. It's like North Americans saying, "The United States

has never lost a war nor won a treaty." Well, the fact is, the United States has lost wars and has done pretty well on treaties. We're pretty good negotiators actually.

Central Americans and Latin Americans have a lot of those same frontier attitudes, except the people they think will really take you to the cleaners in a negotiation are not necessarily those slick Europeans, but rather are those sharp Yankee traders from up north. There is a lot of history that says those "sharp Yankee traders" have time and again taken them to the cleaners.

In Salvador, this sort of rude fear of negotiations that the Americans were in on was contradictory. On the one hand, if the Americans were in, they would turn it to their advantage and you would lose, but on the other hand, if the Americans were not in the negotiations wouldn't be worth much. On the far right, we were also mistrusted for some other reasons. The logic went something like this: "The Americans are a bunch of turncoats who used us because we were good anti-Communists for years and now that they have lost interest, they are going to betray us. Once again we'll have been screwed by our so-called friends."

If you delve into the Latin American right wing, you can find two real hatreds based on that sense of betrayal. They hate the United States because the United States betrayed them when it counted on them to protect their interests and property against the left. We did it time and again. And they hate the church. Liberation theology in the Catholic Church in Latin American created a wellspring of hatred on the far right. "These people that we had counted on for generations to protect our interests have betrayed us. Their job was to protect the status pro, that was what they had always done in Latin America since the time of the conquest and in the '60s they betrayed us; they became traitors; they joined the communists against us." I know that sounds crazy, but that is the way they think.

Q: Were the Cubans a factor in this at all?

DIETERICH: Oh, I think with lip service and minor kind of supplies and services, but Cuba is too poor and the Soviets had lost interest by then. I don't believe the Cubans were a factor. I don't think the Cubans have enough surplus to contribute anything to anybody. If you're a guerilla-type, you can go there and visit if you want a safe haven. If you can get to Havana you can be safe. They were not a factor.

The real factor was the increasing isolation that the guerillas sensed with the decline of the Soviet Union. The bloom was off the ideological rose. The smart ones among the guerillas could see that. I guess they thought, "Wait a minute, we are alone. This is all done. The days of Che Guevara are long gone. The tide of revolution in Latin America is gone. Latin America is changing and we are sitting here playing a dumb old game that isn't going to get us any place." I guess I knew that negotiations were coming when we began to get feelers about scholarships to the United States. "What are the chances that, if there is a peace agreement, some of our folks could get fellowships to go study for an MBA? We have to learn this world of free enterprise that everybody is talking about." I'm not kidding, we did get those feelers.

Q: Were you able to give a positive response?

DIETERICH: We were able to give a positive "maybe," and I felt pretty good with that. I didn't have to get a Fulbright for everybody. There would be people who would be willing to fund that sort of thing.

Q: The world is changing and you are getting these international or private groups that go out and negotiate, like the Jimmy Carter Institute. Were any of these people beginning to come in on this?

DIETERICH: Not so much those people on the Salvador negotiations. The UN was the Godfather of the negotiating process. They gave it a certain legitimacy and security. I remember the Carter Center people were interested. Bob Pastor was there. He is an old Latin America hand. The NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) activists on the periphery were the more specific Latin American groups, like the Washington Office on Latin America and the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

Q: OAS [Organization of American States]?

DIETERICH: I think the UN sort of co-opted what would have been an OAS role.

Q: That is not an OAS thing particularly.

DIETERICH: Not at that time. In a way you are talking about what we've lumped under the generic term of NGOs (Non-governmental Organizations). They were very important in the more general Salvadoran equation. We were talking to them all the time.

I haven't talked about congressional delegations. A lot of congressional delegations came to El Salvador. Maybe that is a subject I need to get into. We had two kinds of congressional delegations; the ones that were there to look at the general conduct of the war; and the ones that came to look at the Jesuit case and the conduct of the embassy regarding the case. Whatever I say about congressional delegations, I'd like to preface by saying that I didn't see any delegations that came for tourism and didn't work. I hear about those at other posts, but we didn't get any. Maybe it's just that El Salvador was not a great vacation spot at that time.

They often came on holidays, which annoyed our over stretched staff no end. When you've had people working 60-hour weeks and then you tell them you don't get a weekend either, it is kind of tough on them. On the other hand, if I were a congressman and going to get on a plane and leave the office, you better believe I'd do it on a holiday weekend. I need to mention one Congressman who was extremely helpful to us in very smart ways. That was Congressman Joe Moakley.

Q: Who is he?

DIETERICH: Congressman Joe Moakley of Massachusetts. A Democrat, with close ties to the Catholic church, a man of good liberal conscience, who nevertheless believed the war could come to a negotiated end. The kind of man who knows that you don't get negotiations going by declaring one side of the equation - the Salvadoran military - to be a bunch of beasts. He knew

that was a nonstarter, and did a lot of things just to help us help the negotiations get along, and took a lot of heat off us.

We were under pressure from people to solve the Jesuit case, no matter what, and as we had people among the Jesuits in El Salvador saying we were keeping things from them, they had their allies in the United States who were accusing us of the same thing. You had people, Catholics and Protestants, who remembered the nuns case and all sorts of things, who couldn't resist the opportunity to beat up once again on the Salvadoran government or on the American Embassy for crimes, both real and imagined. We got beaten up a lot we did not hold back information. We told people what we knew, when we knew it. I've gotten off the subject again.

Q: As the negotiations went on?

DIETERICH: Sure. The other thing we had to do was very interesting. As negotiations began to look more and more inevitable we began to find out that people didn't know how to negotiate, so we took on an interesting and peculiar role. We began to train the Salvadoran government and military to negotiate. We held sessions at my residence. I don't know why they were always in the DCM residence. I guess it just seemed to make sense somehow. Probably a less visible place than the ambassador's residence. Joe Sullivan, then the DAS for Central America, and Pete Romero, the Central America office director, often came down from Washington to join the sessions. We got together the senior people in the government and military who were going to be the negotiators. We sort of "gamed" it through with them, and talked to them about how to organize their negotiation team.

In the United States we have a lot of experience with negotiations, but in smaller countries like El Salvador they don't have experience with big governmental organizations. Negotiations are two businessmen talking to each other, or a businessman talking to some of his employees, or talking to a straw boss who really provides his employees, and that is about it.

We felt that the FMLN would come to the table pretty well prepared to negotiate because they had their advisors too. We felt we had to spend enough time with the government to bolster their confidence in their own negotiating ability, and to make sure they didn't get taken to the cleaners either. It was also a mechanism to get the military and civilian members of the government to work together. They didn't talk to each other very well, either.

On the government's side, it wasn't hard to convince them it was time for negotiations. They were ready to follow Freddie Cristiani's lead on this. His cabinet people were loyal to him. It took more convincing to get the military confident enough to sit down with these civilians and begin to negotiate. There is a tendency on the part of a lot of Americans, and on the part of people who sort of don't like the military, to think of the military as very monolithic. People who don't have much experience with the military, are fond of humor about military people always blindly, and stupidly, following orders. They believe, naively, that if the General says so, everybody will do it. Chain of command discipline may be more prevalent in military organizations than among civilians, but the fact is the senior leadership of the Salvadoran army could not simply order army participation in the peace negotiations. They had to convince their people to go along with them, and we had to help do it.

If there was any favorable fallout from the Jesuit case it was that it further discredited some of the reactionary senior officers in the Salvadoran military. That left it to people in the military we knew pretty well. We didn't know some of those recalcitrant right-wingers very well anymore. They had separated themselves from us.

We were convinced the chief of staff of the Salvadoran army favored negotiations. That was General Rene Emilio Ponce. Another officer - General Mauricio "Chato" Vargas - a member of the major opposition party, Fidel Chavez Mena's Christian Democrats, and a few other people in the military, were also convinced that negotiations were a possibility and that the war needed to end. At any rate, we got these sessions together where we would sit them all together and we would sort of play the FMLN.

In the first session we spent some time on how to organize negotiations. We found the only people capable of doing the staff work for negotiations - preparing position papers that were really thought through and vetted throughout the organization - were the military. The foreign minister just didn't enough staff, nor the right staff, to do that kind of job. The military had enough of a general staff concept to make them capable of preparing position papers. So by default it was the military, basically under the leadership of General Vargas, who really took on the task of doing the staff work for the negotiations.

We had a number of these sessions and I think they did help. In the first place they helped solidify both the military and civilian units into a team charged with the negotiations. Secondly, they developed the government's confidence in going into negotiations. Again, these are New World folks who go into negotiation situations thinking they are going to get screwed by the other side. At some point (it's almost four o'clock) I have to talk about the role of the U.S. Mil group, because it is a story in itself.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? Do you want to make a summary of where we were?

DIETERICH: I'm beginning to talk about the peace negotiations themselves, and our preparations for those negotiations. An important part of that story is how the U.S. MIL group related to the Salvadoran military during this period.

Q: Something else, not on this, but in the generic thing, I would like in our next session to talk about Salvadoran migration to the United States. Okay, we'll pick this up then at that point.

***

This is the 5th of February 2000. Jeff, why don't we talk about the role of the U.S. MIL group as these negotiations are going on?

DIETERICH: The MIL group, I felt, was going to be a problem as we began to ease out of combat into negotiations. I need to go back a bit. When I arrived in El Salvador it was a period of transition in U.S. policy from one of military support for the Salvadoran government, the

prevention of a guerilla victory, into one of encouraging peace negotiations and getting a settlement as soon as possible. We have to have sympathy for the MIL group.

Q: You had better explain what a MIL group is, as opposed to attaches.

DIETERICH: The attaches are part of the traditional military representation at embassies. They maintain liaison with the military forces to handle joint issues on a diplomatic level. They are our prime contacts with the military as a force in local society, and they also fulfill an overt intelligence function. Their job is to report back to Washington on the affairs of the military, just as political sections report on the government's political life and USIS reports on the press and public opinion.

MIL groups, however, are set up with a specific mission of administering military aid programs, both in terms of financial and material aid, and in terms of advising, if that's in the package the United States contemplates for that country.

The MIL group in El Salvador, for obvious reasons, was very big. It had been limited by an agreement between the Reagan administration and Congress to 55 military advisors, but this certainly did not mean the MIL group only constituted 55 advisors and a boss. It had a whole lot of other people - I don't remember the numbers now - who were in support functions. In other words, the persons who ran the supply system for the military advisors and the command structure for the military advisors, and the people who ran the military aid portions and the military sales portions of the program - A big important group - were in addition to the advisors. The advisors were the people who actually trained and advised the Salvadoran military on a unit by unit basis in the field.

As I said, going in there, I felt there would be a problem of transitioning these people from a combat mode into a peace negotiation mode. That was going to be a complicated thing. I think you have to have sympathy for the advisors - these are combat soldiers who were out there to train the Salvadoran military in what they needed to know to more effectively pursue the war. One hoped they also trained them in how to decently pursue the war. Sometimes they did but not always. I felt the job for us - by us I mean the front office of the embassy - would be to get them actually into the peace negotiations. In a sense there were two alternatives. One, you could simply say, "We are now in a peace negotiation period, and you folks are pretty much out of business, so just stay there and don't do anything until we need you." Or the other was to involve them in the process.

That second alternative was, of course, the best. In the first place, we were in a negotiation situation while the war was still on, so the need for them to continue training the Salvadorans toward more effectiveness was still there. On the other hand, you had to cut down on the level of aggressiveness to a point where it didn't impinge on the peace process. That is a very subtle thing and a very subtle system to try to run with 55 persons who are at remote locations and have only sporadic contact with their own headquarters.

We were fortunate when we got into the period when negotiations really began to get serious, to get a new MIL group commander - a full colonel named Mark Hamilton.

The ambassador and I saw a lot of possibilities in Hamilton. He understood the peace process and why it was important. He understood that war had run its course and there was not much more to be gained by either side. The tactics the ambassador and I used were those of saying, "Okay, Mark, and okay, you people who work for him, you are not out of the process now. You are very much in the process. The military is a part of the negotiation and you are part of the negotiation." I think that was the key. It's not a very American way to do things. In our history we either do diplomacy or we do war, and when we are in a war the State department shuts down in the theater of the war and the military runs it. Anyway, we tried for a more sophisticated approach. To make a long story short, as we got down to the "end game" in the peace process, the Col. Hamilton and the MIL group began to play a key role in the negotiations.

More importantly, the effective senior level of the Salvadoran military, led by Colonel Ponce, really became partisans of the peace process. They became negotiators, they took risks. The peace negotiations were not popular among the Salvadoran military. Many of them still had the feeling they could win and felt that their honor was bound up in winning. It took a lot of leadership for people like Ponce and Vargas to begin to turn this thing around and to in effect start to convince the people, to get them to say, "There is honor in bringing peace to this country. That's our job now." Mark Hamilton had a lot to do with influencing these people toward that goal.

After the November '89 offensive the peace negotiations became much more inevitable. At that point the guerillas were convinced they could not win at any cost they were willing to pay. The military were convinced they could not wipe out the guerillas at a cost they were willing to pay. Some of the senior people were getting pretty sick of going to funerals and the commitment of the Salvadoran government, led by President Cristiani, became even stronger after the offensive finally ended. This had to stop - El Salvador had to find a new way to do things.

It's too long ago for me to go into details on negotiations, but a lot of it had to do with "how does El Salvador absorb all these people who had made their living fighting a war" on both sides? That required a very sympathetic understanding of that problem. There were too many people in the United States that said, "Oh, they were just soldiers anyway, and they shouldn't have been soldiers in the first place, so if they are miserable now they are getting what is coming to them." That is not a way to achieve peace; it is also inhumane. A lot of peace negotiations have had to do with finding ways to assure demobilized people on both sides that they would be able to make a living. That kind of transaction requires good leadership on both sides.

To sort of symbolize how important the MIL group became in those negotiations I have to go to the end of it all. In December the negotiations moved to the United Nations in New York. Big delegations from both sides went up. Tom Pickering was at the UN at that point and he was an ex-U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, but, nevertheless, things were not going well.

I have to go back. I have to flash back to another story. Sometime, I guess probably in the late summer of '90, Ambassador Walker decided we needed to make some symbolic gesture, and I don't like the word gesture because I am talking something more important than a gesture, but we had to find a symbolic way of signaling to the guerillas our support of the peace process and

a peace agreement which would insure a decent well-being for them. He decided to visit the FMLN at their headquarters.

He got agreement from Washington to go. It was not easy, because such a visit was seen as very risky by some and by others as something you never should do until after a peace agreement or at least at a much later stage in the process. But the department and the White House wisely decided this was the time to use such a visit to jump-start the negotiations.

So, Bill Walker made his trip to visit the guerillas. I would have given a lot to go along, but DCMs stay home under those circumstances. He did take Mark Hamilton with him. Mark did good work, both in terms of his liaison with the Salvador military and by developing ties with military leaders during that visit on the guerilla side. He was the classic big, tall, physically fit, gringo colonel that everybody thinks soldiers are supposed to look like. He was very articulate and a good talker and he brought it off. He was very helpful in convincing military people on both the government and guerilla side that a peace agreement was inevitable and that the United States would be supportive of people involved in the process.

The visit was a big success. It allowed us, especially Ambassador Walker, to establish contacts on both sides of the negotiations.

Now we can go back to December. These very difficult negotiations had moved to New York with the show being run by Tom Pickering, who was himself an ex-ambassador to El Salvador. At one point during the negotiations, getting close to Christmas time, we got a call from Pickering saying, "I've got problems with the military folks on both sides of this thing. I need Mark Hamilton up here." Mark was up in his office and I got him downstairs and we went to talk to the ambassador and told Mark he had to go to New York. Mark's reaction was the usual, "Yes sir, I'm ready to go." I think we had a plane ready to go in about a half an hour, and Mark was out of the door and on the way to the airport. It was only later, when Walker and I were talking, we realized that Mark had taken off for New York in December wearing khaki trousers and a short sleeve sport shirt. I don't really know the details of the role he played in New York. He described it as spending a lot of time talking to people when asked to do so.

On New Years Eve of 1991, we got an agreement. I was at a big New Years Eve party with a lot of prominent Salvadorans and the news came through during the party that a peace agreement had been achieved.

This is probably the time to look at an assessment of ten years of U.S. policy. It had started as a policy designed to prevent a Marxist takeover in yet another Latin American country. As I mentioned before, our cover story took over and the policy morphed into a search for a democratic solution for El Salvador. After ten years we finally had a formula, by no means perfect, but one that might work.

The people who had fought on the rebel side were guaranteed a place in the political life of the country. The country, out of the crucible of war, had in a sense reorganized itself in ways that would make it unlike everything that had gone before. There was a different political setup - not perfect, not capable of solving the country's economic problems but a system that involved a

great deal more participation by the citizens of that country in their own political life. The differences between the political El Salvador at the end of that war and at the beginning were marked. El Salvador was changed. People are still poor, and people still treat each other badly every now and then but, believe me, it is not the same country it was before.

The policy experience for the United States was also interesting. If you look at it and compare El Salvador and Nicaragua, there is a total difference in way the U.S. policy was pursued in the two countries. The Nicaragua policy, especially in its *Contra* manifestation, was one that tried for quick solutions by trying to manufacture things in the Nicaraguan political situation that really could not be supported without the Americans. It required a great deal of covert action and support of inappropriate allies over which we didn't have much control. There was a lot wrong with it, mainly because it relied too heavily on covert activities and tried for a quick transformation that, at best, would have been superficial. In the end, Nicaragua solved its own problems through its own elections.

The Salvador policy was very expensive, but it was essentially a public policy. Everybody knew we were giving military aid to El Salvador. Everybody knew how much it was. It was debated at least once a year, and sometimes twice, in the U.S. Congress. And it barely, but consistently, received the support it needed. In the end, it worked better. I don't want to say there weren't any covert activities in El Salvador; there were some, but they were mainly in the category of intelligence gathering and not in political manipulation and dumb dirty tricks. Where I come down is that public policy, acknowledged policy, and public commitment over the long term, works. Clandestine, quick fix, James Bond-type solutions really don't work. Even when they appear to work, they backfire on you. We got away with it in Guatemala in the fifties and then we paid the price for years and years after.

The Guatemala *coup* was the second worst thing we had to cope with in Latin America in terms of bad policy. The first one was holding on to the Panama Canal too long. As things began to wind down in El Salvador, the target country of those people in absolute disagreement with U.S. policy in Latin America then became Guatemala. I think Salvador/Nicaragua contrast shows where U.S. policy worked well and where it doesn't work well.

Q: What was the estimate you and Ambassador Walker were getting about the El Salvador leadership? You get the leadership where people have learned to live by the gun.

DIETERICH: It is very much a leadership phenomena.

I think you have to understand that the attraction of war, and particularly in Latin America. Think of the alternatives available to an 18 year old from the countryside or the urban underclass. If he sees his alternative is selling chewing gum on the streets of San Salvador or washing car windows, or petty theft or working the fields, he may well conclude that joining the guerillas or the army is a good choice. The guerillas seems kind of fun for a young person. He gets to go on a permanent camping trip. He gets to play with guns. He gets to do a lot of things that are fun and, in some ways, life in the guerilla camps was probably healthier. It was a better life for young people than living on the streets of the city.

Or if his choice was the army rather then the guerillas at least he had security and a minimal living and he got to play with guns. In both cases, with the army or the guerillas, there was a sense of identity, of belonging and a channel for youthful idealism. I am not ignoring the fact that in both cases he stood a pretty good chance of getting killed. I guess kids really do think they are immortal.

Also take the case of a lower middle class kid with some education, but little else going for him. He may well see a commission in the army as his ticket into the upper middle class. The pay isn't very good, but the opportunities for a little, or a lot, extra on the side are there for everyone to see. In much of Latin America, the military is a path to upward mobility and there aren't very many others. And the guerillas too had their appeal for the educated poor.

When you start saying to these people who have been soldiers for all their adult lives, "There is a better civilian life ahead for you that can come out of a peace agreement," you are facing a hell of a problem. In the first place, they have no precedent for it. And secondly, the message is coming from people they instinctively don't trust - civilian politicians and the American embassy.

It took a lot of commitment and a lot of leadership on the part of the Salvadoran government, the Salvadoran military, and us to convince people that there was a possibility that things could be okay. I don't think we ever convinced many of the military people on either side that things would be great, but they were probably getting pretty tired themselves of risking their lives and even more tired of seeing their friends blown away and going to funerals. I think both the army and the guerillas were getting tired of the alienation from their own society that was setting in. The stories of massacres, the human rights violations, did alienate the people from the military of both sides. You have to remember, the guerillas also indulged in their human rights violations and did things like shooting down unarmed American helicopter crewmen and all sorts of other things. There were a lot of victims on both sides.

I think you have to give Bill Walker a lot of credit for having managed his relationship with the senior level of the Salvadoran government with great skill. You also have to recognize that President Cristiani came into the process with a commitment to peace, and did not waver from that vision. He was building on a base laid down by Duarte who also had a vision not only of peace, but of transformation in the politics of El Salvador. I think Cristiani was the better politician and the better leader of the two. Duarte really didn't fulfill the kind of promise that he held out for a while. I think Cristiani succeeded even better than we thought he would. His accomplishment was a leadership accomplishment. He came out of a party that was trusted by his social class, but not trusted by the rest of the country, a party with an unfortunate heritage, which he transformed.

Q: He also had the American press, which was important in this effort. They were highly skeptical because of where he was coming from.

DIETERICH: We were, too. I mentioned that I had to actually meet him before I was convinced there was substance behind him. What you are always afraid of is that a new Salvadoran leader would say good things about the peace process because he thought that was what the Americans

wanted to hear, but he wasn't really going to do it. I think a lot of hard-liners in Cristiani's ARENA party were comforted by the thought that he was just kidding about peace.

You have to give credit to people on both sides of the war for having gotten aboard the peace process, and in doing so, admitted a lot of the things they had done in the past were wrong. You had to give that kind of credit to General Ponce and some others. There is a certain irony in the Truth Commission process that was part of the peace agreement. The leaders in place got burned. They got burned because, in the interest of the peace process, they talked about their own past and talked about past mistakes. That happened to some of the guerilla leaders, too. A lot of the people who had done many worse things just kept silent because they could since they weren't leaders anymore.

Q: Was there concern on Walker's and your part that, knowing the way the American government works, once a problem is supposedly solved, interest, finance, support - the whole thing goes away and we are off worrying about something else. Were we making promises in this peace process that might atrophy it over time because of lack of American interest?

DIETERICH: We knew that was a risk. In 1994, I happened to meet with a subsequent Salvadoran president in Mexico, and he certainly felt the United States had not provided the aid it should have and that had been promised. We are not so dumb that we just pulled out. We did keep up aid levels and we did support the peace process. A lot of what I did after the peace agreement - Bill Walker left shortly after things were signed and I was *charge d'affaires* for about five months, from January through June - a lot of it did have to do with getting a lot of people in contact so we could fulfill those promises. Getting entrepreneurs to sit down with guerilla leadership and talk about employment, jobs, education, scholarships, and getting all sorts of counterpart groups to meet with each other. As is often the case, the American embassy is a good venue for that sort of thing. People tend to accept our invitations and tend to show up. One of the things that surprised me was the extent to which military to military relations went off very quickly and easily. There is something about soldiers that makes them like the idea of getting together with their ex-adversaries and talking shop. That happened quickly and became very cordial.

The two groups that were most difficult continued to be the church leadership, who I think still felt that somehow total justice had not been achieved in the Jesuit case and a kind of think tank type group called CONACIT that kept refusing to meet with anybody from the FMLM no matter what. The church - or at least the local Jesuits - remained somewhat hostile to the settlement. Both those groups had their followers in the United States, which made it difficult. The CONACIT people often had support from ultraconservative Americans who had been saying all along, "You don't have to go along with this peace process, you people can win." The church received constant support, also from people in the United States, who felt the other side should have won. A lot of American liberal opinion didn't like the peace process very well because they thought their friends should have won. A sense of justice meant that the guerillas should get to run things now and the people who had supported the government should be on the outs.

Peacemaking has to do with compromise, and there were too many so-called friends of peace in the Salvadoran equation who really weren't for peace at all. They were friends of peace only based on their side winning, and that wasn't going to happen.

I've gotten off the track again - your question was? Oh yes, I remember. It was about the U.S. policy commitment. We worked hard on making the connections and using what aid we had to get people jobs and to demobilize the military forces on both sides decently. It certainly hasn't worked to perfection. El Salvador still has too many unemployed ex-combatants, and has had a major problem with crime because there are too many people who were used to making their living with guns. They continue to do so. If you learned the trade on the army side by extorting support from villagers by intimidating them, or if you had earned your living on the guerilla side by doing pretty much the same thing, it wasn't too hard for some to transition into kidnapping, blackmail and theft. However, I remain convinced the country was transformed into something better than what it was before.

Q: We're talking in Arlington, Virginia, right now in the year 2000, and within five miles of us is a very large workforce of immigrants from El Salvador. This is a new phenomena and concentrated in this area. Spanish seems to be the language in most work sites. A lot of people who look like Central American Indians are out there in hard hats. During the time you were there, could you talk about legal-illegal migration flow in both ways. How did this affect you; how did you see it?

DIETERICH: I probably have to go back to the demographics of El Salvador. El Salvador is an intensely overpopulated country, and that is uncharacteristic of the rest of Latin America with the exception of Haiti. So there would have been a major flow of immigration, legal and illegal, to the United States whether there had been a war in El Salvador or not. But surely the war changed the equation a lot. It increased the number of people who wanted or needed to leave and it gave people who wanted to come anyway a pretty good case to be made that they were escaping extreme danger and persecution. And because of that, understandably enough, a lot of those people have figured out a way to stay. I don't mean to be callous - there were many people who were genuine refugees from the war, but there were also many who came for essentially economic reasons. When you consider the terrible poverty of El Salvador, I personally find both motives equally justified. The law however makes distinctions.

It was a hard issue for the Salvadoran government to deal with. On the one level you deal with a certain level of national pride and you don't like the idea that your people are leaving. On the other hand, local economic pressure is relieved and the emigrants send back lots of dollars.

The problem for the Salvadoran government is that emigrants also represented a major source of foreign exchange. Salvador did reasonably well as a coffee exporter, but they probably earned more foreign exchange through remittances than they ever did through coffee of any other export. The prospect of those people being sent back, especially in large numbers over a short period of time, was absolutely terrifying to the Salvadoran government. And absolutely terrifying to any American official who had anything to do with the development of the economy of that country. It would have been a disaster. The remittances would stop and somebody would have to pick up the burden of trying to reintegrate these people back into Salvadoran society.

In the longer term I think it is economically damaging to the country. El Salvador, like a lot of Latin American countries, probably has all the lawyers it needs, and probably has all the engineers, and probably all the doctors it needs, but what it doesn't have is all the nurses it needs, or all the electricians it needs, or all the plumbers it needs, or all the airplane mechanics it needs. Those people are hard to find. The problem of emigration to the United States for many developing countries is that it filters off the best of the folks who will become your nurses and technicians and mechanics. They are the ones with the energy and guts, and maybe even the tiny amounts of capital that need to be accumulated to make the move, so it is filtering off their best and most useful workers. Thoughtful people in Latin American countries and El Salvador understand that.

That's as good a policy dilemma as the U.S. government can be confronted with. In a way it's kind of a lose-lose proposition for us, and when we have a lose-lose situation, and when we have immigration that is motivated by the fact that we have economic need in this country of these people, we end up trying to do both things at once.

Q: Were you under pressure to say that a particular person was actually certified as a political refugee, did that get into your operation?

DIETERICH: I'm probably going to show I didn't pay as much attention to the consular section as I should have. Yes, I think we had to make that decision, but when you have conditions of war prevailing all over the place, it becomes kind of hard not to make that decision. If we had been very tough on those kinds of decisions, we would have come under all sorts of pressure from various groups in the United States. They would have taken us to the cleaners.

Q: As the peace process went, did you foresee and worry about all these refugees coming back - which was the last thing you needed - you had to absorb all the military on both sides and you didn't need a bunch of villagers coming back who were sending solid remittances in.

DIETERICH: Yes, that was a worry, both for us and the Salvadoran government. You had things like the amnesty provision that really were designed to keep that from happening. The United States government took a number of administrative actions, and some legislative ones too, that basically said, "No, that won't happen to you and certainly not all at once. We've got to follow our laws and some of these people are no longer going to be qualified as refugees and will have to come back, but we will do it gradually."

Q: This was something you were working on. What about the upper class, were they getting the hell out - the doctors, dentists?

DIETERICH: The Salvadoran rich always hedged their bets by keeping funds in Europe or the United States and having property other places. The upper class in El Salvador were the kind of people who are very at home in Miami if they need to be. A large number of them study in the United States. I don't want to give the impression that the upper class abandoned El Salvador during the war, because they pretty much stayed there. There were some people who fell into particular danger, either from guerillas or their own politicians, or from the right wing, who did

go and live in the United States. There were some who came back during the negotiations and peace process.

The Salvadoran upper class has had it good enough in El Salvador that they are fairly motivated to come back, and part of the peace process was assuring them that their lives would not be disrupted.

Land reform had already been done - was already a fact of life and people had gotten used to the fact that they had lost big haciendas. They had also gotten used to the idea that having a big, inefficient hacienda wasn't the way to prosper in the world anyway. You had to turn your resources toward industry, commerce or services, or you had to learn to do modern agriculture. Again, education was really important, because the U.S. education of the sons of the early twentieth century landowning class was exactly the window that opened on better ways of making a living. I give credit to that new generation of young U.S.-educated Salvadorans. They had a different vision of how the country could progress and maybe this explains a lot of their politics.

It was a vision that was acceptable to their parents. They are not persons who rebelled against their families and all their traditions, but had modified everything in ways that were acceptable and made sense to them. Ultimately, this is the way most human beings treat their forefathers. You do things that are sort of what they had in mind, but not really.

The immigration issue was a big part of the peace process and had to be solved, and within the possibilities of our laws the United States government got it pretty much right by avoiding any kind of precipitous repatriation of Salvadorans. I tend to believe now there never will be a precipitous repatriation of Salvadorans. Basically, they are here, and in my estimate in the long-term will be good for us. That, of course is too bad for El Salvador, because they could use a lot of those people. From Salvador's point, they should get back all the energetic, ambitious Salvadorans that are here and send us some of the ones they still have.

Q: During the time you were there, did you see church delegations - particularly Catholic Church delegations - were they coming in all the time?

DIETERICH: Both Catholic and Protestant. I've talked about the policy of the embassy and how delegations got received. Whatever the delegation, they were received by the embassy and we spent a lot of time with them. Church delegations, both Catholic and Protestant, were a staple.

Q: How about during the peace process, was there a different tenor to them?

DIETERICH: A lot of the church people really bothered me during that period, because there were too many of them who wanted the side they favored to win. They would say, and believe, they were for peace, but the formula they saw for peace was one that could only have been achieved through a guerilla victory. So a lot of them were a little sour on the peace process because they saw it as a "selling out" of values they felt were very important.

I guess some of them thought the Salvadoran economy ought to be reorganized along lines that would take most of the wealth away from the folks that had it and give it to other people. They didn't seem to quite understand that the Salvadoran rich, and the not-so-rich, would fight to keep what they had, just as people would do in this country. Wanting your side to win, no matter how noble the motives, was not the way to achieve peace in El Salvador.

A lot of people, especially outsiders, expressed their desires with the formula "peace with justice." In the long term, it's a good slogan. The two words belong together; you probably cannot have one without the other. But in the shorter term**,** achieving peace with justice required compromise on justice. And a higher level of justice would have meant compromising on peace. In war-weary El Salvador peace was the priority. Salvadorans and, for that matter, most Americans who cared about the country more than political abstractions, wanted the killing to stop.

Whether they like to admit it or not, church people and American and European liberals provided a whole lot of military aid to the Salvadoran guerillas. I think many of them sincerely believed that aid was only going for humanitarian purposes. But since they filtered their aid through the major guerilla organizations, it defies all human logic to say that it didn't go for military purposes. The guerilla leadership would had to have been saintly, and they certainly weren't, to avoid the temptation of using it to support their military operations. They would also have needed sophisticated and expensive cost-accounting systems.

The fact is a lot of people had an investment in the guerilla side and had been deliberately trying to countervail U.S. aid. Having failed to influence congress to cut the aid off, they decided to countervail.

There was also a great deal of naiveté on both sides, if naive means you are unacquainted with how things really work. One of the statements that used to drive me nuts was when somebody would come and tell me some horrible thing that had happened (sometimes true we would find out) and then they would say, "This must be true because a poor person told me." I have never understood that logic. Surely they don't believe poor people can't shade the truth like everybody else does when it is in their interest. They should understand that the downtrodden of the world are really good at verbal manipulation of people who don't know very much about their situation. It is often the only defense they have against exploiters.

I think maybe the idea was sort of "these people have been so badly mistreated that at least we owe them the courtesy of believing them." The people of El Salvador are owed great courtesy, but that is no way to do politics, nor organize a society. That kind of attitude and that kind of reporting made sometimes made it difficult for the embassy to sort out what really had happened. And bad facts will trump compromise every time.

Q: By the time you left, how was the guerilla leadership? Were they in town and working? I'm talking about the top echelon now.

DIETERICH: They were there for the negotiations which happened in various places, usually not in San Salvador. They were certainly in town right after the peace agreement. I remember a

number of occasions when Ambassador Walker and Phil Chicola, the political counselor, and I as well a couple of other people from the embassy, would sit down for quiet face to face sessions with members of the guerilla leadership, even before the peace agreement. We would sit and talk and reminisce about old times, and talk about the future and try to bolster their interest in the process.

Q: How did you feel you were supported, in the last year of the peace process, by the Bureau? You had a pretty hard-line bureau at one point because of domestic politics but things changed.

DIETERICH: We were well supported by the bureau. There was no question of Bernie Aronson's commitment to the peace process, nor his understanding of it and how it would work. When we had disagreements with them, they were tactical disagreements. After all, they weren't talking to the same people in Washington that we were talking to locally. They had to respond to pressure groups in Washington, too. Bernie Aronson is the one who had to deal with Helm's staff on one hand, and Chris Dodd's staff on the other. He had to deal with the Jesuits at Georgetown, who had a legitimate concern about the Jesuit case. I don't fault the bureau at all in this.

Q: After the Ollie North business, there was a disengagement of the NSC (National Security Council) from being as much of an active participant in this as it began to wind down. Did you see any of this?

DIETERICH: Yes, I think so, but I wasn't in a very good position to see that. I think the NSC had reverted to its traditional mode of being a not very good coordinator instead of trying to be its own agency. I wouldn't want to leave the impression that the Ollie North scandal kick-started the peace process - peace in El Salvador as a U.S. policy. That had its origins long before the Ollie North got caught, bit its implementation was complicated by the fact that we were trying to run much of the logistics for Nicaragua out of El Salvador.

Q: During this latter part we are talking about, what was happening in Nicaragua?

DIETERICH: Well, we were into the period of the elections. The Contra adventure was over and they were scattered in various places. They were still there as a political force but not much of a military force anymore. The elections in Nicaragua were held in late '91, and guess what. Violeta Chamorro won. That tells you something about democracy and the power of the press. She was an important person because of what happened to her husband - he was important because he was a journalist. Of course the defeat of the Sandinistas electorally in Nicaragua was one more element telling the Salvadoran rebels that it was time to sue for peace.

Q: Towards the end, did you feel the Cubans were a factor?

DIETERICH: I don't think the Cubans have ever been the factor in Latin America that we thought they were. No, they weren't a factor. The Latin Americans know if a leftist gets into trouble he can go live in Cuba. It is a place of refuge. Cuba has probably had more influence on Mexico that it ever had on any Central American country.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss before we move on?

DIETERICH: Let me go back to immigration policy. There was one really sad thing where U.S. policy did not jibe very well with Salvadoran policy. There was a case when the Salvadorans intercepted a ship at sea and took off 30 or 40 Chinese that were headed for the United States and incarcerated them in El Salvador.

Q: You were saying something about Cristiani's chief of staff.

DIETERICH: Cristiani's chief of staff said, "Here are these Chinese, would you please take them because they were headed for your country anyway." I said we would have to talk to Washington about it. I don't think we ever did take them. We kept telling the Salvadorans that it was their problem. An annoyed Arturo Tona would come to me and say, "Look, we're getting tired of feeding these people, this is really terrible. Next time we are just going to let them go." To tell you the truth, I don't know what finally happened to the Chinese.

Q: In '92 you left. Whither?

DIETERICH: To Mexico. I had been negotiating on this, and the department had discussed another DCM job with me. I finally decided, after a lot of thought, maybe I would just as soon go back to USIA because I had also been offered the PAO job in Mexico. The DCM assignments involved were Argentina and Brazil, both countries I had served in, and I decided I would like to go to a country I hadn't served in. I could see the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) thing coming. I decided Mexico might be an interesting country to be in, and it was one of the biggest USIS posts. I thought with the coming integration of USIA into the State Department it was time to be back there. Frankly, in those days, running a USIS post offered you a lot more independence than being a DCM again.

My family, always an important consideration, my wife especially, was very enthusiastic about going to Mexico. She had been in Mexico City a couple of times and had liked it a lot. Certain family considerations, aging parents and our involvement up on Lake Erie, where we had our summer place, also made the idea of being close to the United States very attractive.

We left El Salvador in June because my wife needed some surgery. She had gone through routine physicals, the doctor in Salvador had discovered a tumor and recommended that we get back to the States quickly. I probably would have left in July anyway, but I ended up leaving in late May or early June. It was scary. It was not something we had ever had to face before, and it turned out to be a fairly routine. You are never really confident until you get back to doctors in the States, so I left Salvador a little earlier than I had intended.

I was kind of sad, because it had been fun being charge for five months (Bill Walker had left in Late January or early February) and I had liked it a lot. There was a wonderful farewell party in the new embassy residence. That's another story I never got into - the building of a new embassy.

Q: Why don't you talk about it?

DIETERICH: Oh, that's a big story, a big embassy. It was interesting in how we worked. But just let me finish up on the farewell.

It was very touching because there were people there who represented everybody we had dealt with. The guerilla leadership was there. Certainly during the first part of my tour at least, I never expected the guerilla leadership would turn up at my farewell party. Important military people were there, plus the government was well represented. It was a nice farewell and I think it was a way for Salvadorans, at five or six months into the peace process, to recognize the role the United States had played.

Q: The thing that keeps coming through to me as I do these interviews, is how important the role of the United States is. If we aren't the engine in certain areas, acting as a facilitator, nothing will happen. With all our blunders the world would probably be a hell of a lot more chaotic than it is today without American participation and a certain amount of leadership.

DIETERICH: I think so. As president of the USIA Alumni Association, I had to write a letter to the White House on Sunday and I used the phrase "the world often requests, and always expects, American leadership."

The mechanism of an embassy is particularly useful. There is still considerable and broad respect for the traditions of diplomacy. Even if we have policies that are not particularly neutral at times, the embassy often represents neutral ground where you can get people together. If you have people so hardened that they won't accept an invitation to the American embassy, don't worry too much about it - they probably aren't going to negotiate anyway.

Oh, back to the new embassy in El Salvador. We probably took a snapshot somewhere around the mid-'80s on what would be needed for an Inman-standard embassy.

Q: You better explain who Bob Inman was.

DIETERICH: I hope I've got that right. Robert Inman was - I don't remember what he was.

Q: He was a brilliant military man, who was head of the National Security Agency for sometime. At one point he was nominated to be secretary of defense. A brilliant sort of engineer type.

DIETERICH: He had done a study of what would be necessary for embassy security. If there was ever a place where you had to think about building a secure embassy it was El Salvador.

There was a shooting war of very serious dimensions going on at the time the Department did its initial surveys. In essence, they took a snapshot of the situation that prevailed at that time, and planned to build what we needed. This involved a huge campus-like setting on the edge of San Salvador. The location itself eventually became a mini-problem because someone discovered that, technically, it wasn't in the capital city, and the U.S. embassy, according to the U.S.-El Salvador treaty establishing diplomatic relations, was supposed to be located in the capital city. But in good Central American fashion somebody said, "Oh, to hell with it, don't worry about it."

We ended up with this huge campus-like setting. The embassy and its out buildings ended up looking like some well-funded Bible college. The huge lot had two big super-reinforced towers going up six or seven floors each and various outbuildings - marine barracks and various other things - and all sorts of fences around it. It was a fairly generous facility for things as they stood in ‘83 and ‘84 when they took the snapshot. It wasn’t completed until early ‘92. By that time we had a peace agreement, and it was already evident that it was a lot bigger than it needed to be. It also included an ambassador’s residence; so you had the two towers, the two chancery buildings, one being AID and the other being everybody else, plus the ambassador’s residence pretty close by, close enough so that people began to worry about folks working in the embassy being able to look into the ambassador’s back yard.

At any rate, it was a whole lot of work for the embassy. We were supervising a major construction project as everything else was going on: dealing with contractors, getting them into and out of the country, which was a major concern when we had to evacuate people during the offensive. A lot of the work had to be done by American contractors. It was done to a super standard. As somebody said, “It will never fall down during an earthquake - it might capsize, but it won’t fall down.” It was bombproof, with lots of separation from the street.

When we finally got it built, it was evident that it was too big. It certainly was going to be too big if American policy was to be successful at all in El Salvador. Even with hindsight, you can look back and ask how we could have turned it off. In any construction project there is a point of no return where you may has well go ahead and finish it, and that had long passed before we got a peace agreement, so the only big mistake in the construction is the two towers are so close together that you couldn’t sell off one of them without violating the standards for separation from other facilities. I guess what it really shows, and something to think about as we deal with Admiral Crowe’s and other admirals’ recommendations on embassy security, is that it isn’t quite as simple as simply setting standards and then adhering to them. Construction of buildings has to be guided by political considerations, like everything else we do.

It is really a nice facility and very nice offices. On last day on the job in Salvador we dedicated the new building. I guess we had one later on when the VIPs came down, but we had our own because it was the day the last elements of the embassy were moving in. I made a little speech, the marines were there with flags, and a couple of other people made speeches. The day before, all my household effects had been packed-out and I went in there as charge, plopped myself down in this sort of very luxurious and essentially empty ambassador’s office and sat there for about half an hour, thought about El Salvador and everything else. Then I figured I didn’t have a hell of a lot more to do there, so I decided to go home and pack my suitcase and I left the next morning.

ALAN H. FLANIGAN
Ambassador
El Salvador (1993-1966)

Ambassador Alan Flanigan was born in Indiana in 1938. He graduated from Tufts University in 1960 and served in the U.S. Navy from 1960 to 1966 as a lieutenant. After entering the Foreign Service in 1966, his assignments abroad have included Lima, Izmir, Ankara and Lisbon, with an ambassadorship to El Salvador. Ambassador Flanigan was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1997.

Q: This is May 17. Alan, when we stopped the other day, I think we were just getting ready for your hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee preparatory for your going as Ambassador to the Republic of El Salvador.

FLANIGAN: That's correct. I think I was saying that John Maisto who was going to Nicaragua and I appeared together at the hearing. It was a well attended hearing. There were six or seven Senators there. I think I named them before, and there was quite a bit of interest. It had been more than two years in the case of Nicaragua and a year and a half in the case of El Salvador since our predecessors had left. Central American policy had been a contentious issue and as a result both positions had remained vacant. By this point, however without putting too fine an edge on it, I think people were sick and tired of pursuing old grudges and old wars and wanted to get ambassadors in place because the countries were important to us. We had spent a lot of money, time, and effort over the course of the last decade trying to help both of them. There was a dramatic change taking place in Nicaragua and in El Salvador as well, so the hearing was a very friendly hearing. Most of the questions, in fact about two thirds of the questions were directed at John Maisto who was going to Nicaragua. Some of the questions were directed to me, but they were largely pro forma. People were generally quite happy with the way things had been going in El Salvador, and I think in fact, surprised that they were going so well.

Q: Let me just make sure we have the timing clear. This was the first year of the Clinton administration, and the Democrats still had a majority in the Senate.

FLANIGAN: That's correct. It was four years ago today almost, give or take a couple of days.

Q: July, summer of 1993.

FLANIGAN: That's correct. There wasn't any political quarrel about whether we should have an ambassador. In fact, Senator Helms was at the hearing. I think he had some skepticism about whether it was useful to send an ambassador to Nicaragua at that point. There was some disenchantment on the part of some Republicans with the way things were going in Managua. Nevertheless, concerning El Salvador which was the case at hand, there was no question. The peace accords had been signed at the end of 1991, and went in to effect there early 1992. They had been in effect for a year and a half. Things had progressed much better than most people had anticipated. And, in fact, I think virtually no one would have predicted they would have gone as well as they had. During that time, there had been no violations of the cease fire. All of the demilitarization efforts had gone according to plan. Schedules, of course, sometimes slipped as they always did, but basically things had gone quite well, and so people wanted to get a new ambassador in place quickly. The hearing was friendly. I was reported out by the committee within a couple of days after the hearing and confirmed the following week.

Q: When did you go to post?

FLANIGAN: I went in October.

Q: I don't know if there is anything else we need to say about preparations for going, but why don't you describe further the situation you found when you got there both in the country and in the Embassy. You had a new DCM, or did somebody continue who had been there for awhile?

FLANIGAN: Let me back up a little bit on preparations. U.S. policy towards El Salvador and what we were doing in El Salvador was still somewhat controversial. There were still a lot of skeptics in parts of the United States domestic political community who were not yet persuaded.

Q: On both sides of the political spectrum?

FLANIGAN: On the most part the left side of the political spectrum. They were very skeptical that a right wing government in El Salvador would actually honor the commitments made in the peace accords and would do the things necessary to bring about democratization - the real process of making El Salvador into a democracy. There were good reasons for skepticism. History would not encourage one to be optimistic; nevertheless, as I say, things were going well. But, it was necessary for me to meet all these groups and people who had stakes in what was going to happen in El Salvador. There was still a tremendous amount of interest, and there was a lot of participation by various groups in the United States. Their representatives would travel down and observe and in one way or another try and assist with the process or to assist the people.

Q: These are NGO's, church based, members of Congress?

FLANIGAN: All of the above. Exactly, ranging from staff members to Congressmen to church groups across the religious spectrum really, and all sorts of NGO's involved with the development of democracy, fighting hunger or improving child care. Really wide ranging. I doubt that on a per capita basis there was any other country that received quite the same attention from a wide spectrum of organizations and people in the United States.

Q: What is the population of El Salvador?

FLANIGAN: The population is a little over 5,000,000 resident in El Salvador. There are almost a million resident in the United States, that is recent immigrants, recent being the last 15-20 years.

Q: So you tried to meet with all these parties, in the executive branch also or was it more in this wider community?

FLANIGAN: No, there were no problems within the executive branch. There was general agreement that things were going well, that the policy we embarked on, support of the peace process, was really the way to go. There was, I think, a certain reluctance or perhaps a slowness to recognize by the new administration that for what was occurring in El Salvador was really positive. There had been so much conflict that had spilled over into the domestic political debate

in the 1980's that it is difficult for a lot of people especially in the left wing of the Democratic Party, to accept that the outcome of all of this is really quite positive.

Q: Particularly as you say, with a right wing conservative government in power.

FLANIGAN: That's it. I'll mention later when we get to the elections we had some members of Congress come down and observe the elections. Some were very skeptical that things would go well, and they were surprised and pleased, but not delighted when they did go well. In part because, as one said, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco, the wrong people won.

Q: Yes, and with a lot of history probably assuming that other things were going on that they couldn't see or suspected must be there.

FLANIGAN: Absolutely. There was a belief bordering on a conviction that this couldn't be happening this way. This couldn't be real. I understood it. It was sometimes difficult to understand that there had been such a change in the country. But, since I hadn't had any part in that debate, I hadn't been involved at all. I mean you can argue that either I came ignorant or I came with a clean slate. In any event I think I was able to approach it on a fairly balanced basis.

Q: You didn't have to in a sense defend what had happened previously. Obviously you needed to be aware of it and informed.

FLANIGAN: Absolutely, and you can still generate a great debate in the United States about what did happen and why it happened. What happened is less debatable, but why it happened is still quite debatable in the United States, and that is, why the peace process actually worked in El Salvador. What forced the various factions to the bargaining table, and why did we get involved, what pressures did we bring to bear? Those kinds of things.

Q: Who perhaps is to blame or is responsible. Was it the executive; was it the embassy perhaps; was it the U.S. military; did we have nothing to do with it?

FLANIGAN: I think everybody can claim victory here or take credit. It is interesting. Most do want to take credit. The Clinton administration because of the history is just a little shy about saying:" hey, this is a success, and we need to recognize it and work with it." We did it, but it took some time.

Q: That did happen after a time?

FLANIGAN: Oh sure.

Q: Well, anything else sort of a scene setting, or should we get you to arrive in October '93?

FLANIGAN: No I think that's it. You did ask about a DCM. The person who had been in charge for the last 18 months was there when I arrived, but I had selected another DCM, and the Chargé was in any event, en route to another assignment. That was Peter Romero, and he became ambassador to Ecuador immediately thereafter. We had about two weeks overlap, effectively no

overlap. My new DCM didn't arrive to post until six weeks to two months after I did. That was Gwen Clair, someone I selected. Someone I didn't know, but someone who had a good reputation and had qualities and talents that balanced mine.

Q: I think it would have been a little awkward to continue too long with someone who had been chargé d' affairs for 18 months. That is a long time.

FLANIGAN: I think in this particular situation it would have been. Not because of the personalities involved so much as the situation. The situation was evolving so quickly that I think it was often difficult for people involved say at the beginning of 1992 to recognize the changes that were taking place and how rapidly the whole situation was developing. I liken it to my own experience in Turkey. I spent a year in Turkish language training, five years in Turkey, and a year and a half as Turkish desk officer. By that point, I probably knew as much or more about Turkey than anybody else in the Foreign Service. That is, what was going on in Turkey that day. But, I also had some resistance to recognizing changes that were taking place. In a sense, I sometimes found myself being part of the problem rather than part of the solution. At least I imagined that, and I think that sometimes happens to people.

Q: It is amazing how quickly things can change, sometimes faster than the recognition of trends. In terms of institutions besides the Salvadorian parties and I think we talked a little bit about the United States, who were the main actors when you got there in October of '93? Was the United Nations still...

FLANIGAN: The United Nations was still a major force. ONUSAL it was called, the Spanish acronym for Office of the United Nations in El Salvador, was the largest single major presence. They were beginning to shrink at that point, but they had facilitated the demilitarization, they helped separate the forces, they helped collect the weapons. They were helping get ready for dismantling the old police force, for elections that were going to occur in the next year. Our policy was to cooperate fully with ONUSAL and support their efforts. In the process that led up to the peace accords we had played a role obviously; the United Nations had been the major player. It had facilitated and coordinated all the negotiations. Five countries had actively supported the peace process, the four friends plus one. We were the “plus one”. The four friends were Spain, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela. Their representatives in New York and their representatives in El Salvador met regularly to help facilitate the process. Most of the negotiations were carried out either in Mexico or in New York, and of course, not in El Salvador. Nevertheless, a lot of the support activity especially after the peace process was concluded did take place in El Salvador. So, at least when I got there in late 1993, the four-plus-one was still an active institution that was playing a strong supportive role.

Q: Colombia, Venezuela, Spain and what was the fourth one?

FLANIGAN: Mexico, which was very unusual. Mexico usually did not play a role that could somehow be interpreted as interfering in the internal affairs of another nation, in part because of their resistance to that on the part of anybody else., especially the United States. In this case, they played a very strong role and very positive one.

Q: Did the ambassadors of these four countries plus yourself periodically meet with the UN? Was there a senior UN representative?

FLANIGAN: Yes there was, the secretary general's special envoy, who at that time was Augusto Ramirez Ocampo, who was the second one. The first one had been Pakistani, but Ramirez Ocampo, who was Colombian, replaced him about six months before I arrived, as I recall. Ramirez Ocampo had been foreign minister of Colombia and had been mayor of Bogota. He was I think a fairly highly regarded political figure in Colombia - conservative. He would host weekly meetings. He either hosted them, or we rotated them. The system had broken down a little bit, but we got it back on track so we were in fact having rotating weekly meetings of the four-plus-one plus the UN representative. Normally it was just that; there were maybe one or two other people. If someone such as a senior official from New York or from another capital were visiting, he or she might participate as well. Normally the meetings were held to review what was going on and see what, if anything, we as a group or as individual nations might do to push the process forward.

Q: Did the UN actually have some troop that did all these different things, disarming and separating forces and so on?

FLANIGAN: They did in fact have some troops and police forces that they brought in for this. They were from Mexico, Spain, Brazil, Norway, Sweden, Canada.

Q: The UN apparently did a good job, as did other countries in support of the accords, in support of their implementation, but it must have been the most important factor was the Salvadorian people wanted these agreements to work and to be implemented on time and fairly and so on. Is that correct?

FLANIGAN: I think so. During the time I was there, it was often said the Salvadorian experience was one of two major UN successes, Cambodia being the other. I guess Salvador qualifies as the single major success at this point because it is still intact. The fact of the mater is that the Salvadorans on both sides of the political spectrum had come to the conclusion that their problems could not be resolved by violence. There had been a last gasp effort by the FMLN in the fall of 1989 and its associated groups to take San Salvador. They had gone into the city, and they expected and hoped that somehow the city would rise up and support them. They were able to establish a beachhead in the city, which of course, frightened the establishment, if you will. But, they weren't able to do more than that, so it became clear that there was effectively a military and a political standoff and they had to find a way to negotiate a solution. On the government side, the person who deserves the most credit for this was Alfredo Cristiani who was President at the time. It is harder to identify a single person on the FLMN side, because there were four or five major actors. In the end it was a very difficult negotiation. As I indicated earlier, when I was in Havana, we would from time to time go to the Cubans and see if they would weigh in. The fact of the matter is the Cubans had a very consistent position. They said they were supportive of the peace process, and they certainly wanted this to be a negotiated solution; however, they would do nothing to undermine the position of the FLMN in the negotiations. Therefore, they wouldn't do what we wanted them to do which was stop arming them.

Q: Was the FLMN quite present in San Salvador when you go there?

FLANIGAN: Oh yes. By the time I got there the FLMN was practically a political party. It was a political party. I'm sure there were former adherents and participants who were reluctant to identify themselves with it, but not many. All the former *comandantes* had unmasked themselves. Their *noms de guerre were* still being used or not being used or being used in tandem with their real name. It was sometimes confusing because you would sometimes know people by two different names. Some people would call him this and some people would call him that. I think that is still the case. There are two or three that still go by the names they acquired during the war years.

Q: You would have contact with some of the FMLN?

FLANIGAN: Oh, yes. They regularly met with us. I mean not only did the United Nations play this major facilitator role, the American embassy did as well. It was one of those places that was sort of neutral territory. I could host social events, for example, and people from all sides would attend, the foreign minister, the defense minister, the *comandantes* of the various factions. They would all be there. They were not friendly. I would say that, but they would talk. It was almost bizarre sometimes especially for people who had been there during the war years and would come back. They would come to one of these things and see a person like Schafik Handal talking to the minister of defense who was a general. They would find it hard to believe.

Q: They would be willing to do that at your embassy, at the residence, and perhaps at the United Nations, but probably not very many other places.

FLANIGAN: It just wasn't easy for them to do other places. I mean they wouldn't take the initiative to meet with the other side normally, but if put into a position where they had to talk to each other or had the opportunity to talk to each other, they quite often did. I think the Spanish embassy did some of that, and to a certain extent, at least while I was there, the Venezuelan and Colombian and perhaps the Mexican embassy.

Q: Were we seen as providing these good offices or neutral ground partly because at the time we had a Democratic administration?

FLANIGAN: I don't think so. I think it would have worked either way. I think the sense was that we had a tremendous interest in the country. We were providing a lot of assistance. It was clear by our support for the peace process that we were not taking sides so to speak; although, my position there was ambassador to the government. It was clear that I had a similar responsibility and obligation to maintain contact with the opposition, in this case that is what it had become, and that was accepted across the board.

Q: What sort of assistance or assets or other programs did we have besides what you could do and other embassy officers?

FLANIGAN: Well, we had major assistance programs. The precise numbers elude me, but the year I went, for example, our economic assistance program was nearly $200,000,000. It was the

largest program in Latin America. Even when I left in 1996, we still had over $200,000,000 in the pipeline. The program had been reduced dramatically to $30,000,000 a year. Still the program was second to in size in the hemisphere, second to that of Haiti. We were involved in basic education, basic health care, reform of government institutions especially the justice system. Maybe it is an overstatement, but there never had been an effective justice system in the country. For example, when I arrived it was still the case that the supreme court was a totally political institution. It had already been agreed in the peace accords that the supreme court that existed would be disbanded and that a new one would be elected by the new legislature which would be elected. All these things would occur, and I saw my responsibility as trying to make sure that all these things did happen and that they happened in a peaceful, open, and participatory fashion. In March and April of 1994, there were municipal, legislative, and presidential elections. Everybody throughout the country in all of the executive elements of government changed, and all of the legislative elements of government changed, and then once the new national legislature was installed, they elected a new supreme court. Within the first year I was there, there was a total change in the governance of the country.

Q: Before we talk more about the elections and their ramifications, let me ask you a bit more about the U.S. presence on the assistance side. Were we giving at this time, military assistance in some form too?

FLANIGAN: We still had a residual military assistance program. We didn't have any new military assistance going in to the country. I remember during my hearing, I made a specific appeal, having been prompted to do so and having thought it was the right thing to do, for the Foreign Relations Committee to release I think it was something in the range of $2,000,000 they had that they were holding back. It had been appropriated for that fiscal year for military assistance. My argument simply was as the military was downsized, and it was reduced to a quarter of its wartime strength. All of the senior officers were sacked. It was still going to be an important institution in the country. It historically had been, and we needed to maintain contact with and influence with. I did not prevail; the military assistance was not provided. Nevertheless, there was still a substantial amount in the pipeline, so we did have an ongoing program. Also, when I arrived we still had something like 30 military advisor - this is in addition to our Military Aid and Assistance Group. This was the legacy of the war. During the war we had been limited by legislation to having no more than 55 military advisors in the country. By the time I arrived, even though it was a year and a half after, there were still 33 of those. I didn't think it made a lot of sense to have that, so we tried to phase it out as quickly as possible. As I recall it still took nearly a year to get everybody phased out.

Q: Did the United States have elements, units, people as part of the United Nations operation?

FLANIGAN: No, we didn't. The only thing we had in that regard, I mean there were United States citizens on the UN staff, but they were there as United Nations employees. One of the things the peace accords provided for that was a major change in the way El Salvador did business was to disband the old national police force and create a new national police force. The old one had historically been subordinate to the army. It had become totally corrupt. It had been associated during the war years with some of the worst abuses. The judgment was, and I think it was an accurate one, that it couldn't be saved. It had to be destroyed. It was a very delicate

process because you can't leave a country without any public security force. And, although the United Nations could provide some support, it couldn't really provide the number of people required to maintain security in the country. During the course of the three years I was there, the old national police was phased out, and the new national civilian police was trained and phased in. I'm trying to think, sometime during the last year I was there, the last of the national police retired or was fired, and the new national civilian police took over totally.

Q: Did we have police advisors involved in that training and transition?

FLANIGAN: Yes. In fact, I think it was one of the great successes we can take credit for. First of all we had in the embassy, within the mission, an ICITAP program. ICITAP is a Justice Department acronym which stands for International Criminal Investigation Training Assistance Program. We had done it in a few countries. It basically provides training in criminal investigation. This program was a little broader than most and a little deeper. We, I think, played a key role in the creation of the national civilian police. We did everything from helping to design the uniforms - baseball caps instead of military caps - to developing a curriculum and providing instructors. We were not alone in providing instructors nor in developing a curriculum, but I think we were predominant there. The French, the Spaniards, the Mexicans, the Brazilians, the Chileans, the Canadians, the Swedes, and the Norwegians all played a role in helping recreate the new police force. Again it was one of these things that people thought would never really work. I suppose you would have to say the jury is still out because it is still a very new institution. It will take time for it to mature. But, the process has gone better than even the most optimistic might have hoped. Just taking 18-19-20 year olds and giving them five months of training and turning them into policemen which would have the confidence and support of the public is almost beyond expectation, almost beyond hope, but generally it worked. Obviously the selection process was not perfect; sometimes there were people that were duds. It had to be carefully balanced politically. Thirty percent had to be from the FMLN; thirty percent could be from the army or even the old police force under certain circumstances, and then forty percent had to be people with no such associations. The selection process was very hard in part because of some of the restrictions the United Nations had placed on the process and the peace accords themselves had placed on the process. Because records were suspect, it was not permitted, at least for a long time, that police records be searched to see if applicants might have criminal histories. Sometimes this caused some problems. Generally speaking, however, it worked well; the training went well. I recall that when I had visitors come to El Salvador, one of the things I always tried to do was to get them to visit the police training center, which happened to be the largest police academy in the western hemisphere at the time with the number of students involved, and let them see what was happening. It was an eye opener for them all because it was very impressive. A group of young dedicated people taking shape into a police force. I remember taking Senator Leahy there, taking Secretary of State Christopher there. Whenever congressmen would come, I would take them. Very few came any more. Even though there was some residual interest, members of Congress by and large, had stopped coming.

Q: Because they didn't want to travel anywhere or they didn't want to be there, or they had just lost interest?

FLANIGAN: Right. The crisis seemed to be over. Peace had broken out and things seemed to be working all right. Every once in a while, there was something a little messy that caught their attention. I'd get an urgent phone call from a staff member asking what was going on. It was in fact a very fragile situation. Things were very uncertain. When I arrived in October, the election campaign was really just beginning for the March elections. It was not clear yet who the FMLN candidate was going to be although it did seem very likely that we knew. It was certain who was going to be the candidate from the conservative party, ARENA, The Republican National Alliance. Just after I arrived there was a series of incidents that raised, certainly in the United States, but in other places as well, the specter of the resurgence of political violence. They thought "here we go again"! There were, I can't remember precisely, but it was about in late October or early November, there was an assassination of an FMLN political figure who had been a fairly senior official, not one of the top ten or hundred even but at least someone of consequence in their structure. He was assassinated in San Salvador. There was a belief which was a conviction on the part of the FLMN and all of their supporters in the United States that the right wing, the nefarious right wing, the death squads were active again. There was a fear that the peace process was collapsing, that it couldn't work, it wouldn't work. I recall there was great concern in the State Department in the Inter American Bureau. There was no good answer obviously because it certainly was possible that something like that could happen. Then, about two weeks later there was another incident where somebody was killed, another FLMN militant. Then there was a third incident which appeared to be another attempted killing. All of these within the course of about six weeks which raised a lot of alarm and a lot of concern. The first murder was not immediately resolved. It took a couple of years before substantial witnesses came forward and proceeded to identify someone with the killing. It turned out that the suspected gunman was in the United States. We managed to arrest him and send him back. Either he was being tried or they were getting ready to try him, I'm not sure exactly what happened. My guess is he is still in jail awaiting trial. Unfortunately that is the nature of the Salvadoran justice system. When I was there, 80% of the people were in jail awaiting trial as opposed to having been tried. The second incident played out more quickly. It became clear that it was an all too common kind of thing that happens in El Salvador today. Too many people with too many automatic weapons deciding to resolve traffic conflicts instantly by shooting somebody. That incident turned out to be fairly benign from a political perspective. There was another murder, as I say, the third one. It was never fully explained. It wasn't clear if the killing might have had political motivations or not. But these incidents caught everybody's attention from the United Nations to the U.S. Congress to the U.S. State Department. Of course I was thrust right into the forefront of all of this. I remember attending the funeral of the first person murdered. It was a political act, the funeral in a driving rain. One thing I haven't mentioned and I should. I had never been in a country before where the role of the United States was so consequential. I'd had the good fortune of serving in friendly countries. Certainly in Turkey and in Portugal the relationships were important and perhaps the most important relationships those countries had with another country. Cuba was entirely different; although, they were obsessed with us. In El Salvador, because its proximity, the role of the United States is dramatically central, and the role of the United States ambassador at least in the eyes of the Salvadorans is also very central. When I arrived in the country there were packs of journalists waiting for me to make a statement at the airport, so I had drafted one in advance which I read and I didn't take any questions. It was an eye opener to me. When I began to venture out in the next few days, the press was all over me. Television cameras, radio and print journalists shouting questions at me. Any kind of question. Basically what they

seemed to want me to do was to grade the progress of the peace process and describe whether or not I felt the government was doing a good job, whether the FLMN was playing fair and all of those things. Historically we had actually done that quite a bit.

Q: Why don't you keep talking about the central consequential role of the United States ambassador in El Salvador?

FLANIGAN: But one of the things I decided fairly quickly after I got there, was that if this peace process was to succeed, it would succeed because the Salvadorans wanted it to succeed. It couldn't be the Americans doing it. I did not believe the American ambassador could be a high profile public figure passing out grades on performance, especially not on a daily basis. It was very difficult in that regard because it was anticipated that I would play that kind of role, so what I sometimes did with the press was difficult. Not that they were unfriendly. They were very friendly, very cordial, and in fact, sometimes when I know my Spanish was not as good as it should have been and maybe said things poorly, they covered for me. Sometimes on evening television they would "voice over" what I had said, paraphrasing it knowing what I wanted to say. Which was very nice I thought. But, I had not prepared myself; I had not been prepared by my experience in other places to be the public figure that an American ambassador is in a Central American country. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say the American ambassador is one of a handful of the most identifiable and influential public figures in a country like that.

Q: Did people watch whether it is the government or the opposition or whatever watch what the ambassador does and doesn't do. So, your attending this funeral which as you say was a political act on the part of the FMLN. It was also a political act for you to go to show, I'm not sure what you were trying to show, but it seems to me that it was symbolic.

FLANIGAN: I was there to show that first of all we had a certain relationship with these groups. We were concerned about the possible outbreak of violence again, and I was there to show that we were not going to let something like that happen without being visible. Not that we could do something about it necessarily, but there was always a mythology about American power and American presence. There was always the feeling among Salvadorans that we could do anything we wanted to in El Salvador. It is one of the problems that I've often said, when contrasting or comparing my experience in Cuba where I was worst enemy with my experience in El Salvador where I was best friend, that it is sometimes easier to be worst enemy because people don't expect much of you. In El Salvador from all sides of the political spectrum it was expected that I would be able to bring the other side or the other party around. We did have influence with all of them.

But we could not dictate.

Q: But to continue to have that influence and to play that role, you really had to keep reaching out in all directions.

FLANIGAN: That's right. I had to stay in touch with everybody, maintain open communications, make sure that I didn't become identified or the embassy didn't become identified with one group or another, that we were always accessible. It was a very difficult process because I had to

receive people quite often that I didn't particularly want to receive, and I had to call on people I didn't particularly want to call on. I remember the first few weeks I was there, I called on the president of the Supreme Court. The man who was president of the Supreme Court is now active in politics again unfortunately, but he had been identified by the Truth Commission as someone who had deliberately inhibited various efforts to investigate various killings during the bad years of the war. As I indicated earlier, the Supreme Court was an institution that was going to disappear. Nevertheless, he was a head of a branch of government. I made a perfunctory courtesy call which he then used to his benefit to the extent that he could. His photographer, court photographer if you will, took a picture of us together smiling and shaking hands which was played for weeks in various newspapers and magazines and television.

Q: You were giving your blessing.

FLANIGAN: That was the implication that he certainly wanted to convey.

Q: Were you concerned abut your physical security or that of the embassy particularly during this early period when there still was residual violence?

FLANIGAN: We were somewhat concerned about physical security, but there hadn't been any incidents. There was no indication that the embassy was being targeted by anybody. We had become transformed from a partisan in that effort to a facilitator. I think we wee generally perceived as being helpful to all sides. There was always the possibility of a renegade, and we knew that, a renegade on the right or the left, but it would have been the extremes in either case, taking out after us. As ambassador, I was protected, probably over-protected. When I arrived we still had an American security officer riding as part of my security detail. Once again as I indicated earlier, it is sometimes difficult for someone in a place to recognize how quickly things are evolving. When you come in from the outside, you sometimes see a little more clearly. It seemed clear to me , and I think I was right in retrospect that we were much too concerned about that kind of security, so we cut back our security force dramatically over the next year and didn't suffer any consequences. Now, that is not to say that security is not a problem in El Salvador for Americans. It is, because of criminal activity, but not political activity or terrorism. It is a major difference. I don't know if it gives you a lot of comfort necessarily if you end up being shot, but it is different and you have to defend yourself in different ways.

Q: There is a history of before you were in El Salvador of Americans being targeted, of being vulnerable in security. Did any of that old history continue to preoccupy you in any way.

FLANIGAN: Yes it did. In fact, you may over the course of the last two or three years have read snippets in the *Washington Post* about the Zona Rosa massacre which was a terrible incident in the early ‘80s in which a group of the embassy’s marine security guards were assassinated in downtown San Salvador. They were at a sidewalk cafe. I think four were killed. This happened during the war, of course. They were targeted, by our standards certainly improperly, and I think that is absolutely the case. They were after all, marine security guards. Everybody knew they played no role in advising Salvadoran military forces. Their sole function was to provide security to the embassy. They were targeted by one of the smaller and more violent elements of the FMLN. To this day there is a lot of concern about the fact that those people were never brought

to justice, or not fully brought to justice. Some were; some weren't, and in fact there is in the United States at this time, a man who claimed to have been involved in the planning of that assassination who managed to come here on parole in the late ‘80s under disputed circumstances. There was a hearing in the Senate about six weeks ago in which my predecessor, Ambassador Walker, testified. There is a dispute about who actually authorized this individual to come into the United States. He had apparently supplied a lot of valuable information about this group. That being said, he was also apparently responsible for the murder of four marines. The Senate wants to know what the justification was for allowing him to enter the United States.

Q: But while you were there as ambassador, this was not a major issue?

FLANIGAN: It wasn't a major issue; it wasn't a bilateral issue. It was one of those issues that was sort of percolating in Washington. It became an issue while I was there when there was a *60 Minutes* program where an individual on *60 Minutes* claimed that he was involved in the planning of the murders.

Q: The same person?

FLANIGAN: Interestingly, no, not the same person. Another individual who probably was not, and in any event was a U.S. citizen of Salvadoran extraction who had been born in the United States, had gone back to El Salvador, had been involved in the guerrilla activity. It seems that this was braggadocio rather than anything else. Anyway it was the impetus for this investigation that uncovered this other information. There was also late in the war, I believe this occurred in 1988, very late, there was a shoot-down of a U.S. military helicopter in which several people were killed, but two people survived. One was a lieutenant colonel; one was a sergeant. One was I think the copilot, and one was a passenger. They were not based in El Salvador. They had been in San Salvador. They were based in Honduras at the air base there that the Hondurans let us use. They had been in San Salvador on routine military business; they weren't involved in the war activity there at all. Nevertheless, they were flying back, and they were shot down which was a terrible thing, but what really made it a major problem was the two men who survived were take prisoner and summarily executed by the guerrilla faction that seized them. This is an issue that once again has never been fully resolved. Initially the FMLN faction involved admitted that it happened and identified the people who had done it and said it was in violation of standing orders and agreed that they could be tried. Some of them were. Unfortunately in the end what also happened is that they benefitted from amnesty, a general amnesty. We tried for the first two and a half years I was there, we had a massive effort, a quiet but nevertheless determined effort to try to see that these individuals were not included in the general amnesty. We argued that the crime they committed was different from the ones provided for in the general amnesty and they should therefore be tried and imprisoned. Ultimately we failed when the new Supreme Court ruled in their favor.

I did want to mention, I talked about the role of the American ambassador in a Central American country. Because of the history of our relationship and because there hadn't been an ambassador there for 18 months, there was a great interest in getting me there and having me there if you will. Not me in person, you know, but the figure of the American ambassador. It was perhaps best illustrated by the way I was received. I arrived; it was about noon. I earlier said there was a large

contingent of the press at the airport. I gave a statement. My wife and I and our little dog were driven to the residence. I quickly had lunch and changed clothes so I could make a courtesy call on the foreign minister and present him a copy of my credentials. That was about 2:00 P.M. At 4:00 P.M. I presented my credentials of the president at the palace, *Casa Presidencial*, as they call it.

Q: In the rain.

FLANIGAN: In the rain. It was the first time I had been in Central America. It was the first time I had been in El Salvador. It was the first time I had met President Cristiani whom I mentioned earlier, who has received and should receive great credit for having brought the establishment of El Salvador to the point where they were willing to negotiate, and then to negotiate a peace agreement which has been stable. He was a young businessman who had entered politics only about eight or ten years before, during the wartime. He was associated with the political party which was considered extremely conservative and had historically shown a tendency towards violence. His being able to do this is quite remarkable. He, himself is a remarkable person and still under 50, I believe. One of the virtues, one of his great strengths in dealing with us had been he had gone to school at Georgetown, and therefore understood Americans and spoke very good English. That is not always the case in Central America and was a distinct advantage at that time when our relations were so close.

Q: Did you, after presenting your credentials, did you meet with him quite frequently, regularly, speak to him in English?

FLANIGAN: I did speak to him in English because his English was so much better than my Spanish. There were times when he would start off in Spanish, so we would speak Spanish, but generally I spoke to him in English. I met with him fairly regularly. Whenever I felt I needed to see him, he would receive me, and it was a fairly cordial relationship. It is impressionistic, but I might just add for the record, I think by this point in his five year term, he was tired of dealing with the United States. The United States, after all, was very important to him. On the other hand, the United States had put a lot of pressure on him during the negotiations and during the first part of the implementation of the peace process. During the several months before I arrived, about four months before I arrived, he had as a result of the Ad Hoc Peace Commission recommendations, finally agreed to the dismissal of all of the military high command. That had not been an easy process given the history of the military in El Salvador. It was a necessary step, but it could not have been easy. My sense was that he felt we had pushed him too hard on that. He was always friendly; I'm not suggesting he wasn't friendly. He certainly was responsive, and the relationship between him and me and his government was good. I just had the feeling he'd had it up to here with our constant advice.

Q: He hoped the new American ambassador wouldn't come running around to the...

FLANIGAN: That's right. Making demands all the time.

Q: What about...

FLANIGAN: I notice you have written down Truth Commission and Ad Hoc Commission.

Q: Yes, I'd like to talk about those. Is this a good time to talk about that a little bit?

FLANIGAN: Yes it probably is.

Q: Those are two different commissions?

FLANIGAN: Two different commissions. The effect of them was almost the same. They were commissions that were established as part of the peace accords. They had the responsibility for trying to establish if not blame at least responsibility for some of the things that had occurred during the war, some of the most egregiously bad things. This was considered to be part of the healing process. Also part of the deal was that those identified might be dismissed but otherwise not prosecuted for their activities. It was always a very difficult issue for a lot of people that somebody might be identified as having played an egregiously evil role and yet was not prosecuted. What normally happened, however, was they were excluded from the political process for the future. In the end that was probably as effective as anything else because prosecution itself my guess would not have been particularly successful unless it was done outside of the country, and there was no institution who had the standing to do that.

Q: But reconciliation was certainly one of the goals. I'm thinking of the similar in some ways commission in South Africa which was called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

FLANIGAN: That's right, and it is the goal, but there is always a tension within it. I mean there are people that talk about reconciliation but really want retribution, and there are people that are therefore afraid of being identified and are reluctant to come forward and talk about what happened during those years. This was evident in the Truth Commission Report, which I think was by and large successful. For example, some FMLN leaders, *commandante*, effectively refused to detail what they might have participated in during the war. Others were quite frank. The result being that those who were quite frank were penalized and the others weren't. They were penalized by being identified as not being eligible to participate in the political process for "X" years or this, that, or the other thing. In fact, that was one of the recommendations of the Truth Commission that was ignored by consensus by the Salvadorans even though we and others put pressure on them at the time. There were some individuals who by terms of the report should not have been allowed to return to politics as quickly as they did. My sense is that it is probably a good thing that they were allowed to participate despite the report.

Q: Well, in the first six months you were there, much of your focus must have been on the elections in the spring of '94. Cristiani could not be a regular party candidate.

FLANIGAN: He couldn't succeed himself, and the candidate was already known if not selected. It was Armando Calderon Sol who was the second term mayor of San Salvador. He was very different from Cristiani in that he was a political activist, not a businessman. He was from the "political' wing of the party if you will. He had a reputation of being a capable administrator and had been relatively successful as mayor of San Salvador. I say relatively because people say he

was successful, and I suppose he was, but it was a very poor city so it didn't look like what we might think of as a well administered city.

Q: And was obviously full of inefficiencies.

FLANIGAN: That's right. Nevertheless, he was also, like Cristiani, quite young, in his 40's, and therefore I think capable of viewing a new El Salvador, a new Central America. One that wasn't like the traditional one. The opposition became Ruben Zamora who had never been a member of the FMLN per se, but had been active internationally during the war years soliciting support for the FMLN and generally as a spokesman for left of center elements in San Salvador. He kept himself separate from the military struggle and therefore was not fully identified as an FMLN partisan. This is a tricky business because to say he wasn't in the FMLN was totally accurate. On the other hand, he supported the FMLN and worked for it. Nevertheless, when it came to the presidential campaign, there were elements of the FMLN that considered him an outsider and there was always a question of whether they worked as hard for him as they might have. There was a third candidate I should add. The Christian Democratic Party had historically been... There were actually more than three. Three major candidates and about seven in all. The third one, the Christian Democratic Party had been a major force. In fact the Duarte governments in the '80s were Christian Democratic governments. The party had lost a lot of support and I think credibility during Duarte's second administration. Duarte had become ill with cancer and the administration developed a reputation for being terribly corrupt and venal. The party became largely discredited. That led to the political polarization of the country because the collapse of the Christian Democrats created a vacuum in the center of the political spectrum. This left the ARENA on the right and the FMLN on the left. The Christian Democrats were in the middle, but this was not a period where the middle accrued power. You would think that power flows toward the middle. In this instance it flowed toward the ends. Fortunately the ARENA and the FMLN had begun to cut themselves off from the more extreme fringes of their respective parties.

Q: Now in terms of the responsibility for the mechanics of the election, I suppose there was an electoral commission; the UN had a role. Did we play a particular role?

FLANIGAN: We played a very active role. We tried to exercise our role largely through the United Nations. There was an electoral commission, yes. What we did was work through the United Nations ninety percent of the time with our political pressure and our money. We put several million dollars into that election trying to see that people got registered, that it was free, fair, and inclusive. Not easy, because although it is a small country, the way their electoral law was written and the way their elections took place, unfortunately there were a lot of opportunities not for fraud so much but for inefficiencies and difficulties for people to participate. For example in the city of San Salvador, the polls were organized in alphabetical fashion so individuals would have to go all the way across town to vote. So it was a very awkward. We did what we could to make sure that the registration system functioned. I recall right after I arrived, one of the first things I did was fly out to one of the northeastern provinces and actually participate in a registration drive, actually giving a voting registration card to a gentleman. A gentleman who had lived in the United States for 10 years, I believe, and worked a double shift at Blackies House of Beef for nearly all that time. He said he sent back a lot of money as Salvadorans do traditionally, but he had saved enough money to buy a bus and was in business for himself -

happily transporting people to register to vote. It was always very heartening to see this kind of thing happen and sort of amazing, too.

Q: You mentioned before that several elections were actually taking place at various levels from municipality on up. Did these all take place on the same day?

FLANIGAN: Yes they did. They all took place on the same day, the third Sunday of March, and for the municipalities and the legislature, they were definitive. The presidential election required the winning candidate to get an absolute majority of votes cast. The leading candidate, Calderon Sol, got only 49% of the vote so there was a runoff election the following month. Let me just say a few things about the runoff. You asked about who was responsible for the electoral process. The electoral commission had immediate responsibility. The peace accords provided that the United Nations would have oversight responsibility. We sort of fit in only as friends. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that we played a key role in the process. Early in the year, I think it may have been as early as December when the campaign was just beginning, the political counselor at the embassy, Jim Carragher, proposed to me a very useful device, and that was that we regularly have luncheons with the three leading presidential candidates. So I invited them to the residence, the three together, and the political counselor and the deputy chief of mission would sit down on the terrace of the residence and have lunch and discuss how things were going. We had maybe four or five of these during the campaign and a couple between the first round and the runoff.

Q: Which was only a week right?

FLANIGAN: It was a month. These lunches were fascinating because these men were political enemies, but also while they were not exactly friends, they were acquaintances, had been for years. They all knew each other, but they didn't have a venue where they could talk to each other or complain about one another or say what you are saying is just not fair or what you are doing in this particular instance is wrong. You know, they could say those things publicly or make the accusation or complain, but they couldn't in a neutral territory, confront the other. It was very useful. There were times, obviously the person in the catbird seat was the leader of the ARENA Party. He was the mayor of San Salvador; he had more money than anybody else; he was representing the government. He was generally identified as the one who was sort of running things, and was also the front runner. But, when confronted with complaints in the context of these luncheon meetings, he was always without exception, responsive. Yes, we can work that out, he would say. Whether these were things he had been involved in or not it was difficult to know, but generally speaking these were complaints about functionaries or systems that were in place that just simply made things difficult for the other parties. I recall for example, there were discussions about things that were said publicly about the other candidate, or themes that one party or the other was using in the campaign, or the location of ballot boxes, little things. But, little things that had the potential for discrediting the whole process. Everybody worked together. It was inspiring to see these three men working together make sure this process really worked even though only one could win.

Q: It seems to me that forum, that encounter also had dividends after the election because of the dialogue that could take place and the fact that the leading candidate could respond to

suggestions and criticism. I assume that your role besides providing the venue and facilitating the coming together on occasion was to raise issues or concerns, but also to be pretty careful that you were not picking on one or the other all the time?

FLANIGAN: Yes , but that was rarely the case. As a matter of fact because of the make up of the electoral commission which was a totally politicized institution, and the electoral commission was often the scene of some of these struggles, it would be necessary to get either the Christian Democrat or the FMLN candidate to go to his party's representatives on the commission to resolve issues. It wasn't all one side; it wasn't always a matter of putting pressure on the front-running candidate. It was trying to get them all to work together. Yes, we did raise issues. For instance, before these luncheons I would always call up the head of the ONUSAL and say, look, I'm having lunch tomorrow with the three candidates and is there anything in particular you think would be useful for me to raise.

Q: And would tell him afterward how it had gone. Did the UN representative feel that was something he should have been doing or probably he didn't go for it?

FLANIGAN: He was fully engaged and fully involved. I don't think he felt I was invading his turf. We were all very busy and working for the same goal – free and fair elections. I think he was appreciative and he was very supportive. We worked together very well, a good relationship. We would sometimes., I must admit, double up. I would hit here and he would hit there. It was a device that worked from time to time.

Q: Were there any other chiefs of mission or ambassadors who could play anything like this sort of role the United States either from the friends, the other four or the Apostolic Nuncio? I don't know what his role was.

FLANIGAN: On a much lesser scale, yes. I think the Spaniards perhaps. The Venezuelans from time to time would try. The trouble was..... I think my own impression was they became more closely identified with one side or the other than we were. We were able to maintain a certain level of neutrality or at least independence that they had not. On occasion the Nuncio played a role, but it was always circumscribed because there was a deep division within the church n El Salvador. It was highly divided along political lines. The Nuncio himself of course was the ultimate arbiter if you will, but he had to be very careful. It was a tricky business and he did not play much of a role in this process.

Q: Did these encounters, luncheons of yours before the election help solidify your relationship with the new president then after the election?

FLANIGAN: I think so. As a matter of fact I think one of the most effective things I did during the two years I was there after the election was continue to have private luncheons regularly with President Caldron Sol, generally at my residence. These luncheon were always one on one. We were able to speak to each other in great confidence and didn't have to worry about anybody misquoting us or taking umbrage at what we might have said, so it established a pattern which was very useful during the next two years.

Q: Was he American trained as was his predecessor?

FLANIGAN: No he wasn't. As a matter of fact, he had been to the United States a few times because he had been mayor obviously, but he spoke no English.

Q: Did Cristiani go back to his business then?

FLANIGAN: Yes he did.

Q: He really removed himself from politics.

FLANIGAN: Well, it is always difficult in a small country, and there is always the question of whether or not he is interested in coming back again. Certainly there are always people who think he should. It's a fascinating process to watch a new president take over and the old president sit there and try to avoid playing critic. But then their personalities were very different. They are still both active in politics and I really don't want to get into it in details. They are both honorable men. I was quite positively impressed with both of them. Cristiani had as a result of the negotiations established a well-deserved international reputation. Calderon Sol came to power with a reputation for being very political first of all and also perhaps being the captive of the right wing of the party. There were a lot of people that were afraid that if he became President that he would be the means by which the country would begin to backslide, that the final elements of the peace accords would not be implemented. A lot of my instructions from Washington, a lot of my efforts both before and after the election were to make sure that we made it clear the consequences of non-compliance if you will. I was always able to do that with a very soft presentation because I was pushing an open door as it turned out. I don't know what his real preferences or predilections might have been. Who is to say that if left to his own devices he would have reverted to some kind of more conservative, autocratic, institutionally driven system, but he had to succeed as being president of the new El Salvador. He had to go ahead and do what he had committed to do, which he did.

Q: In the time you were there, you mentioned about flying out to one of the provinces to register the bus. Did you spend a lot of time in the countryside? Salvador is not a very large country.

FLANIGAN: No, it is not a very large country, and the answer is initially when I first arrived, I did. First of all, the AID mission still had access to a couple of helicopters, and it was easy to get around quickly. I was able to go out and visit two or three places and be back in the same day. In the first few months I was there, I did a lot of that, and so I got a sense of the country. It is a small country.

Q: Did we have Peace Corps volunteers?

FLANIGAN: We didn't then; we do now. We reintroduced the Peace Corps about a year after I arrived. We had volunteers there before the war but had withdrawn them in the late ‘70s I believe.

***

Q: This is July 17th. I just asked a question at the end of the last tape about how things were while you were there with the rest of Latin America. Did you take much interest in pressing El Salvador with regard to anything going on in Nicaragua or Honduras, or Guatemala, or did you have enough to do with the Salvadorans? Certainly in their own country leading up to elections or implementing the peace accords and so on.

FLANIGAN: Not too much. There wasn't much spillover into the affairs of other nations. Things had really begun to transform themselves in other countries as well. Although the economy in Nicaragua was in bad shape, politically it was doing pretty well. Central America as an entity was cooperating in an unprecedented way. The effort by all the leaders of Central America to meet regularly, to maintain contact, to coordinate their policies was really quite heartening and continues to this day. They need to do it obviously to maintain themselves economically. I think an economically viable Central America needs to create a single market or a least an integrated market, and they are doing that. The political problems in other countries didn't spill over very much. The end of the war in El Salvador enabled the country to begin the process of economic recovery. The progress was dramatic. Now, for seven years it has had an annual growth rate of at least five or six percent. It's managed to keep its inflation in single digits generally but sometimes the low double digits, 10-11-12%. The currency is stable with the dollar.

Q: Was there a lot of American business interest reviving during the period you were there either in terms of trade but particularly investment?

FLANIGAN: There were some assembly operations, but not a lot of investment. Trade, obviously, was of interest to American companies. It is a small market, but it's a U.S. market if you will, something like Port au Prince. The United States has more than forty percent of the import market. Let me back up very quickly to the elections again because it was central to the time I was there and central to the peace process I think. There were a lot of little problems that developed during the campaign. Ultimately nearly all of those were resolved. When the elections occurred there was a tremendous number of foreign observers that came to see the elections. We ourselves had a United States government presidential delegation plus AID-funded delegations from the National Democratic Institute and the Republican Institute. In total we must have had over 100 official observers at the election, and there were over 1000 Americans there observing under the auspices of various non-governmental organizations. There were hundreds of United Nations observers as well. The country was virtually blanketed. When the election came, in order to make sure the official U S observers had a good view of things, we arranged with the U S Southern Command in Panama to have five Black Hawk helicopters come over. They all parked on the parking lot of the 27 acre embassy compound. Early on the morning of the election, we divided up into groups and flew off to the various parts of the country to observe the opening of the polls. We especially went to places where we knew there might be problems. We also sent people out in cars from San Salvador. There were undoubtedly polling sites we didn't see that day with one group or another, but not many. I recall that the administrator of AID, Brian Atwood, was the chief of the U S official delegation. It also included Congressman George Brown of California, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of California, former Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke and several other people that were simply interested in El Salvador. Anyway, it was one of those very moving experiences you don't expect to see in this day and age somehow. We went out and observed people voting, and there was not any violence. There were problems.

Ballot boxes didn't get to the right place at the right time, and the polls were delayed in opening for an hour, and people had to stand in line for five, six, seven hours, but they did. They did stand in line; they did vote. In the end the level of participation was not as high as anybody would have liked. It was in the range of 55-60%. There was no question that anybody that wanted to vote had a pretty good chance to register and vote, that it was in fact what we had all been working for, free, fair, and inclusive. The results that evening were also rewarding because although ARENA had most of the money and organization and was the preponderate political power, FMLN had established itself as a major political element too. Now, in the National Assembly since then there have been some internal divisions in the FMLN which has diluted its power, but it became the major opposition party. For that to happen in the first election and for that to happen in a peaceful fashion was commendable on the part of the Salvadorans and important for us to try to bring it about. I remember when the second round occurred. I remember that within a few days following the first round, there was a move, not initiated by Caldron Sol, to forego a second round. The argument was that it would cost a lot of money and effort. There was no question who was going to win. After all, Calderon Sol got 49% the first round. There were people in the FMLN that were saying the same thing. I quickly made it clear that I did not think that was the right thing to do. I pointed out that what was needed more than efficiency was a process that had credibility. Skipping the second round would undermine the credibility of the process. I wasn't alone in that view, but certainly once I had said it, we were able to kill that little boomlet. Then when the election actually occurred, the day of the election, participation was about the same level, and Calderon Sol won about 67%; Ruben Zamora won about 33%, which wasn't bad for either side. They both came up rather handsomely, and they were both pleased. There was, however, some unhappiness within the FMLN, some elements of it. There was some question about whether or not there would be full acceptance of the process now - the results. I recall some rather heated and emotional comments made on television in the evening by a couple of the FMLN leaders suggesting that they weren't going to accept the results. They asserted that the elections had all been a sham and the results were tainted. There were some people on our own side who were willing to accept that because as I mentioned earlier, I'm not sure it is on here, but Nancy Pelosi in the first round said that it had all been very fair but unfortunately the wrong side had won. So, a lot of people felt that it wasn't really a good election because the FMLN hadn't won. I had a reception that evening for the observers that had come down for the second round, a much smaller group, but still consequential. I remember distinctly that there was some tension building as a result of these televised statements. At about that time I received a telephone call from Ruben Zamora which was very helpful. He told me that he had just called Calderon Sol and conceded. He said he was not happy at losing, but it had been a fair process and he had lost fairly. His concession effectively completed the process and ended all consideration by his supporters of challenging the outcome. So, the next morning I remember Brian Atwood and I (Atwood observed the second round as well) called on both Ruben Zamora and Calderon Sol and congratulated them.

Q: Was there talk of boycotting participating in the legislative body?

FLANIGAN: Not serious talk. I think there was maybe some; it could have gotten out of hand that night had Ruben Zamora not taking the initiative to say look, “I would have preferred to have won but I didn't. This was a fair and free process under the circumstances and I concede and I wish Calderon Sol the very best.”

Q: And then to call you and you could convey this to some of the observers.

FLANIGAN: Exactly. No, it was very useful, and I think once again it was part of the product of those luncheons being held that established relationships of trust and confidence which worked.

Q: This was in the spring of '94. The peace accords were late '91 and started to be implemented in '92, so there was roughly a little over two years between the peace agreements and the election. Was the date of the election established by some previous schedule?

FLANIGAN: It was established by the peace agreements.

Q: There have been other agreements around the world that the United Nations has been involved with. In some cases the elections have come much quicker and maybe some cases even later. Did you feel that two years was about right?

FLANIGAN: Well, what they did was accept the political process that was already in place. I don't think anybody would have claimed the election of Alfredo Cristiani five years earlier was invalid. It was invalid to the FMLN because they boycotted the elections, but at the same time participation was fairly high. It had been a national election, and the FMLN never suggested that he step down. They had negotiated with him in good faith and he with them in good faith. They just sort of accepted the political calendar. The next major thing that happened, of course, was that the new National Assembly, which had participation with the FMLN, elected a new Supreme Court. It was a 15 person Supreme Court, and for the first time in the history of the country it had members that represented all strains of political thought from the rather far left to the rather far right. The unifying element, in my view, was that they were to a person truly dedicated to the creation of a new system of justice that worked in the country. Obviously they had political backgrounds, but they didn't have political axes to grind other than the one; that is they wanted this to work. They went about it very methodically. The new president of the Supreme Court was criticized sometimes for the slowness with which he went about the process of purging the judicial system. (In the Salvadoran system, the Supreme Court controlled all of the court system.) It was a slow process. We all would have liked for it to happen instantly, but we also wanted it to have credibility, and I think they did a fine job under difficult circumstances over the next couple of years. The creation of the Supreme Court, the reform of the criminal justice system, all of this was very complex and very necessary. It was a product of a lot of hard work and in many ways the product of an AID effort in funding and money, money that was well spent. It seems to be working. Obviously it is not over yet. This is a process that is going to take some time.

Q: You mentioned that Secretary of State Warren Christopher had come to visit while you were there, I guess toward the end of your time. Was the purpose of his visit to endorse, bless, applaud all these things that had happened?

FLANIGAN: Well, to a certain extent yes. In this case, El Salvador was selected because it was the Central American country which we wanted to show had done well. Not that others hadn't but it was time to recognize that the process in El Salvador had succeeded rather well.

Q: What else would we talk about? It sounds like a great time that you had there. You got involved in a lot of things and have a lot to be satisfied about.

FLANIGAN: Yes, it was. It was a very rewarding three years.. The Salvadorans got a lot done. We were able to help them do it. As I said, I hadn't really been prepared for the central role that we played. I tried over my three years there to play that role in a restrained fashion and as private a way as possible. I thought it was important that I not be a proconsul. A lot of people expected us to be a proconsul or even wanted us to be a proconsul. In the interest of allowing institutions to develop that would carry El Salvador forward, I thought it was important that the American ambassador withdraw from public participation in the political process. I tried to do that.

Q: Another issue that involves the hemisphere recently these days is narcotics. Was that something you were quite involved with in El Salvador?

FLANIGAN: El Salvador because of the accidents of geography is not a major conduit of the drug trade. As you can see, it only has a Pacific coast. If drug smugglers decide they want to get drugs through Central America to the United States, it doesn't make a lot of sense to go into El Salvador. It just creates another border they have to go across. That is not to say there wasn't a problem at all. Obviously there were efforts to bring drugs in through El Salvador and a couple of cases where major seizures were made by the Salvadoran police with the help of DEA. The Salvadoran police just went through this total reorganization, but one of the blessings of not having an Atlantic coast was El Salvador did not become a focal point for the drug trade during that very vulnerable period. It was much more of a problem in Guatemala, even Nicaragua and Honduras.

Q: Anything else about three years in El Salvador?

FLANIGAN: One of the legacies of the war was a massive official American presence. When I arrived, there were 33 military advisors still. That was true across the board in whatever part of the embassy you'd like to imagine. We had a massive presence. During the time I was there, we reduced the American direct hire presence by more than one third, nearly 40%. We reduced the local employees by about 20% as well. I think that reduction will have to continue. Now during the war we spent, depending on what figures you look at, between $65 and $85 million to build a new embassy complex. I mentioned it was 27 acres. The residence is on the compound. There is the embassy office building. There is an AID building of equal size. I'm not sure I fully approve of the concept of permanent AID mission facilities. The overall effect of the compound is an overwhelming American presence. I think is indicative of the role we played and kind of the role we need to get away from. It will take some time for us to get away from it.

JOHN HELM
General Services Officer
San Salvador (1996-1999)

Mr. Helm was born and raised in Tennessee and educated at Carson Newman College. Entering the Foreign Service in 1973, he served in posts throughout the world, primarily in the field of Administration, including General Services, Communications and Foreign Buildings. His overseas posts include: Banjul, Gambia; Panama City, Panama; Seville, Spain; Quito, Ecuador; Mogadishu, Somalia; Tbilisi, Georgia; Bonn, Germany and San Salvador, El Salvador. His Washington assignments were also in the field of Administration. Mr. Helm was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

HELM: A general services officer gets into all sorts of issues that are not exactly in anybody's job description. I got called one night, probably 6 o'clock, when I was in El Salvador, that a child had drowned in the swimming pool. Come quick. So, I went over to the house and sure enough the child had drowned. Luckily, it was a house that we had identified as requiring a fence around the swimming pool. We put the right fence, and the right kind of latch. But there were six children in the family, the smallest 18 months, the largest high school. The husband was on TDY out of the country and the wife was trying to manage all of these kids, and one of the children had left the gate to the pool open. The little toddler had gone in, followed him, and drowned.

Q: How sad.

HELM: There was a Facilities Manager (Post Safety Officer) who was dealing with the official accident report. My job was to deal with the authorities. The body of this child, it looked like a large doll, a beautiful little girl, was lying on the kitchen counter. The mother was in the living room and the other children had been taken to friends houses. It was horrible. People were coming, trying to console the mother. I had to stay and wait on the medical examiner who took hours to get there. I had to sit down with the medical examiner and go over all the details of what happened. I had to file the official Salvadorian report of death. And then it was decided because it was a death under questionable circumstances, there had to be an autopsy. So I was the one that had to go deal with letting people know. By this point, the Ambassador was there. Ann Patterson, the best ambassador I ever worked under. The Medical Examiner took the body and called me about 3 am. I had to go down to the oldest, very worst part of the city, to the public morgue. I had to make arrangements to pay for the services of the funeral home. It was one of the strangest encounters of my life, going down to this morgue in the middle of the night in the absolute pits of the slums of El Salvador, to claim this body and get it up to the funeral home. That's an example of some of the strange things you get into.

Q: You left Bonn in '96. Where did you go?

HELM: I went to El Salvador, general services officer. An established post. It was just line GSO work.

Q: Was that the post that they turned into - people talked about the fortress that was built there.

HELM: Going back to my FBO days. There were two posts that were being built simultaneously by the same company and the same architect: Somalia, and El Salvador. They were both going to be fortresses. More than fortresses; virtual land ships, self-contained, with enough fuel and

generators, there own water wells and purification systems. They were virtually independent of the infrastructure of the country. I'd gone to Mogadishu during construction and by happenstance went to El Salvador. When it was built, the civil war was on, it was an extremely dangerous place. There were lots and lots of people in the embassy because the U.S. government at that time was virtually running the war. Another agency had two whole floors of the embassy building filled with their people. They, by the time I got there, had drawn down to a total staff of one fellow, at least that they'd admit. I knew who he was. I didn't like the guy. I found him terribly arrogant and obnoxious. Walter, I can say that because I helped ship his body home, so it's not like I'm revealing anything current. He was announced in the sense that he was not a "secret agent."

Walter, one evening went home and was with his girlfriend. They had pizza for dinner and then some time about two in the morning, Walter had a massive heart attack and died. It turned out that the girlfriend was associated with the Salvadoran intelligence service in some way. First I'm trying to deal with the body, and the funeral home - middle of the night stuff again. Then it turns out nobody can find Walter's handgun. I went over and started searching through his apartment trying to find the gun. Can't find the gun. Well it's our household furniture, and I cannot issue this furniture to some other family with a revolver buried in it somewhere. So we took all the furniture out of the apartment, over to the embassy, and ran it through the x-ray machine. No gun. Never found it. Gave up the lease, reissued the furniture. But the funny part of this was that the ambassador called me and said, "We're going to have to do something for Walter, have some sort of a funeral or memorial service." I said, "Well, why don't we just put him on the plane and ship him out of here." "No, we have to have some kind of service because it won't look right if we don't." There were local political considerations. He had a lot of contacts. And so I was put in the position of arranging the funeral for this fellow I really didn't care for, trying to gather up people to come to Walter's funeral and look sufficiently upset about his passing. We got a crowd together, a number of Salvadoran contacts - people who wouldn't sign the visitors' book - came through and paid their last respects to poor old Walter. The mistress took the place of the grieving widow. There was also a grieving widow in the U.S., but we won't mention that. It was sort of a strange thing, but we got through that, packed Walter up and shipped him out.

Q: Here you are a GSO. The war is over, El Salvador is now ranked in interest of the United States around 150th in order of priority, and you've got this white elephant of an embassy. What happened?

HELM: First thing we did was reduce our overhead a bit. We had a 26-acre compound. Two whole buildings. There were other offices in town. The Department of Agriculture had a small office. We brought them into occupy some of the space. There was a regional anti-narcotics office that was looking for a home, and we brought them in. We brought in a regional immigration office. Bit by bit we pretty much filled up the place by picking up some regional offices and closing down some things. But you're wrong about America's interest in El Salvador. You see, you have to remember that the second largest Salvadoran city is Los Angeles, California. Salvadorians can walk here, and did in great numbers. While our intelligence and military interest was going down, our consular and immigration interest was going up. Bit by bit we simply substituted intelligence officers for visa officers. The visa situation down there, the U.S. immigration policies: they were granted a special dispensation during the war for people

who were political refugees to come up here, and they did so by the tens of thousands. In fact, if you took the Salvadorian out of the D.C. metropolitan area, I don't think there's a hotel or restaurant that could survive.

Q: As well as construction site.

HELM: Seventy percent of the people working on my construction job at old State are Latino. I speak Spanish, and I get along with them just fine. Whenever I see them, I say, "I went to the State Department, I speak Spanish, but I have nothing to do with visas."

One time the computer for the consular section, the visa department, burned out. It almost caused another revolution in the country. We had a couple of thousand people camped out on the street around the embassy. There had been some little tiff between Salvador and the U.S. over some little extradition treaty we wanted them to sign, and they didn't especially want to do it. The Salvadoran government decided that the Americans had quit issuing visas because of this extradition treaty. The computer burning out had significant political overtones, to the point that all these people were lined up around the embassy for days. My Gardeners came in and said, "We can't clean the shrubbery. People are going to the bathroom in the shrubbery and it's just too dirty. We don't want to be gardeners there anymore." So I was renting port-a-potties to put on the sidewalk for the visa applicants. We called Washington and said, "Okay, when you put in this new visa system you said you were going have hot spares ready to go. Well, send down the new server, because this one's burned out." People in Washington said, "We don't have any servers ready to go. We have to go and buy one. What kind did you say you had?" I said, "You don't know?" "No, but it's a centrally controlled item and you can't do anything but we don't have one." One of the FSNs was a brilliant young man. He went down to a computer store, bought some parts, came back and fixed the computer. We never did get it fixed from Washington.

Q: I would have thought that this embassy would have been high cost maintenance because of the self-contained type thing. How did you find that?

HELM: Surprising enough, it wasn't, because it was efficiently built. Yes, we had a lot of infrastructure, but it was relatively new, and it worked. It had been taken care of. So, no, our maintenance and utility costs were in line with what you'd expect.

MELISSA SANDERSON
Deputy Political Counselor
San Salvador (2000-2001)

Ms. Sanderson was born and raised in Ohio and educated at Xavier University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1985, she had several tours of duty at the State Department in Washington, DC and served abroad in Guadalajara, Ottawa, Madrid, Warsaw, San Salvador, Moscow and Kinshasa. She was a Polish

speaking officer and a specialist in Technology and Arms Control matters. Ms. Sanderson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: Wither?

SANDERSON: El Salvador, to fight drugs and thugs.

Q: Oh my goodness. How long were you there?

SANDERSON: Only one year. That was my shortest ever assignment.

Q: What were you doing?

SANDERSON: I had the dual title of deputy political counselor and head of the international narcotics and law enforcement division. And it was that second thing that I was principally doing. I was doing so-called drugs and thugs.

Q: What was the situation there, from your point of view?

SANDERSON: We had a considerable problem with El Salvador at that time in terms of being a transit country for drugs headed to the US. They had very porous, albeit small port and they had large and porous land borders. They had tremendous internal corruption. They had an untrained, unprofessional police force. They had a very porous banking system, very easy for money laundering. I had a lot of fun in El Salvador. I mean I was only there, as I say, for a year. But I had a lot of fun, and did some important work. We opened the anti-money laundering center where we were able to significantly cut back on money laundering and I started a program to train the El Salvadoran border police, took them up for instance to Miami and showed them how we do port security and took them to some of the borders in Texas where I could show them how we do border security on the land side. I instituted the first dog-sniffing program for airport and port security, set up the training facilities so they could train more dogs and more handlers, jumped out of airplanes with a flame thrower burning up marijuana fields. I had a blast with that job. I really did.

Q: Was the government pretty well thoroughly corrupted by drugs?

SANDERSON: No. And that was a saving grace because we were looking at the Colombian model. I mean that at that exact same time we were literally fighting to save the country of Colombia. El Salvador was not nearly as far gone but there was significant Colombian influence and penetration. And there was corruption, yes. But the Colombians were largely dominating by fear. The Colombians had the habit of just killing any Salvadorans that got in the way, politicians, military police, whoever. You had to have a lot of courage to be the head of the Salvadoran drug police unit at the time. And fortunately we did. We had very good Salvadorans on the drug police side and on the money laundering side. Men of great courage, and the inspector general of the police and the attorney general of the country were incredibly brave as well. In that sense we had good partners to work with and we had very sharp DEA and US military units. Because of

course I was coordinating with both DEA and our Military guys. And we were -- we were rocking and rolling. We were really going at it.

Q: Well one of the complaints about the DEA, particularly earlier on, was that they acted like policemen on the beat or something. I mean they were not playing the supportive role. They'd often be too active. How did you find it?

SANDERSON: I never had that experience.

Q: I assume this is probably experience in training over a period of time.

SANDERSON: Well, I found the DEA guys, not just in El Salvador but even before that in Mexico, to be very open to cooperation as long as you weren't approaching them as if you were their superior in some way. I mean what they were resisting was having to take orders from the State Department or take orders from the Military, because I mean, they had the lead presidential mandate for fighting drug trafficking. And they wanted that mandate to be recognized and honored. But if you were approaching them in the spirit of saying OK, you know, I have this six-million dollar budget and I have the capacity to provide this, this, and this, which would complement what you're doing, they were very, very open and very, very cooperative and extremely active in El Salvador. Oh, they had a good sourcing network in El Salvador.

Q: Was it basically Colombian stuff coming through El Salvador?

SANDERSON: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Were there drug cartels growing up in El Salvador?

SANDERSON: Yeah, there were five operating when I was there. I mean essentially two of them were broken up by DEA so they were down to three indigenous organizations. And one of those got wiped out in a war with Colombians. So by the time I left there were only two Salvadoran organizations left. But it was -- it was definitely an interesting time.

Q: Well, did you feel under threat yourself.

SANDERSON: No. But then there's enough of the cowgirl in me that I wouldn't necessarily (laughs). I mean I was careful. If I was going out at night I always went with someone else. I made sure to vary my route all the time. I did have a camera installed outside of my house and I would check that before pulling out in the morning. In the evening I would frequently drive by my house to be able to survey the neighborhood before pulling in, et cetera. I mean I took what I considered to be normal precautions. No. I didn't particularly feel threatened.

Q: Well then where'd you go in 2001?

SANDERSON: Actually before we get there, it's important to know that the reason I left in 2001, we had -- that was the time right at the end of 2000 into 2001, we had one of the largest earthquakes ever in Central America. It was 8.3 on the Richter scale in El Salvador. And later,

the National Geographic Center told us that what had happened was that just offshore from El Salvador the whole tectonic plate where it rubbed against the North America continent had sheered off and dropped a foot, which in geological terms was absolutely unprecedented. This was what caused this massive earthquake with aftershocks in the range of six and seven that were ongoing for over six weeks. And we had massive national devastation. Aside from the direct damage caused by the earthquake we had tremendous landslides. Whole mountain slides came down on top of villages that had been built where they probably never should have been. The intercontinental highway was completely severed just outside of San Salvador by a combination of rock and mudslides. And that essentially cut Salvador off from any land communication with anything north, particularly the United States. So all assistance had to be airlifted in. The U.S. Military responded extremely quickly setting up field hospitals and rotating flights, bringing in earth moving equipment, sniffing dogs for survivors, medical teams, et cetera.

I was the deputy on the crisis relief team because I had already all the contacts in the Salvadoran Military and the police and our military, et cetera. So you know, we went into full emergency mode working day and night dispatching, digging, et cetera. It's actually why I'm still phobic about earthquakes today. But it was really an incredible team effort. And the good news story is that Salvador emerged a better and more modern country than it had been before. The San Salvador that I lived in was essentially just like a little pueblo. I mean right downtown you still had dirt streets with sewage running down the middle of them. And after the earthquake, thanks to dedicated US assistance, San Salvador became a beautiful modern city. I mean all the streets were paved -- not with gold, but with regular paving. And you know, sewage was installed, and electricity that worked. The standard of living was greatly increased. So out of that tragedy -- and it was a terrible tragedy -- the country emerged stronger and better. And it was a great success story for the United States and did so, so much to cement a good relationship with a country where our relationship had been so-so because, you know, the government had felt that we had supported the rebels and we weren't trustworthy and of course we had a difficult situation with the drugs, you know. We were of the impression they weren't doing enough to stop it and, you know, they welcomed our assistance but they didn't welcome our criticism. So the earthquake really helped us change that relationship and bring it forward in a very positive way. So I think it's important to mention that.

Q: Well, where were you when the plate dropped a foot?

SANDERSON: I was actually -- it was a Saturday and I was in a hardware store and I distinctly remember that there was a very, very odd sound, almost like an old time sonic boom that I can remember from being a little girl. And almost simultaneously there was a galvanized steel roof on this hardware store and the roof literally started to wave as if it were an ocean wave up and down rippling. And then of course the whole place started to fall in upon itself and everybody stampeded out in the street. And trust me, I think we would have been better off in the building because the entire street was rippling like an ocean wave and cars being tossed everywhere and electric poles were coming down and roofs were falling and buildings were coming over. I honestly did think for a second of just turning around and going back to the building, taking my chances with the chainsaws falling off of the shelves. And then it was totally eerie. Everything just stopped and it was this incredible silence and no movement at all. And I grabbed my driver and jumped in the car, my car fortunately not having been tossed on its head and I said, "Drive

like hell," because I was on one mountain and we had to get down through a valley and up the side of another mountain to get back to my house. And I knew everybody in town was going to try to do the exact same thing, get across to wherever their houses were before the next earthquake hit. And we did. We drove like hell and we made it through the valley and up the other side just before the next earthquake hit. And then I turned my driver loose and I sent my maid away. She had been at my house for a half day on Saturday. I said, "Go home to your families, find out what's happening." My place came through pretty well. I mean, you know, the house itself was structurally sound. I didn't have to evacuate it or anything. But of course the dining room and the kitchen were just a mass of broken glass and a real hazard to even try to get through. But my maid, and I will always love her for this, had kept her head completely, had stuffed my cats into their carriers and had them sitting out in the garden safely. And I was just like -- she was just a wonderful woman, because that what I was worried about, was my cats, that they were in the house and the house would collapse or the glass would cut them ribbons or something. And they were safe in the garden. But that's where I was. I remember it real well (laughs).

Q: Oh boy. How did the embassy -- who was the ambassador?

SANDERSON: Rose Likins.

Q: And I assume it responded well to -

SANDERSON: Yeah, actually we organized very, very quickly and we were very fortunate because the embassy itself had been built -- it was a new embassy and it had been built to anti-earthquake standards. It was built on giant roller balls. And the embassy just sort of shifted, rocked with the quake, but sustained no damage. The USAID (United States Agency for International Development) building, on the other hand, that had not yet been rebuilt had some structural damage, particularly in the elevators and the walls on the outside and wound up having to be evacuated. But the embassy swung into action pretty quickly. In our emergency action plan we had had a earthquake contingency response because of course we knew we were living in earthquake land, and team members knew what they were supposed to do and people got going. It was very impressive. Very impressive.

Q: You left El Salvador and where did you go?

SANDERSON: Russia.

Q: Before moving on to Moscow, we should talk a bit about what was done at the embassy regarding our earthquake relief and rebuilding efforts and all, because I don't think we covered that very much. Today is the 14th of December, 2011 with Mel Sanderson, Melissa Sanderson. And this is about a fourth session. First place Mel, since this is by telephone, where are you? I'm calling from Washington, from Arlington actually. Where are you?

SANDERSON: I'm actually in New Bern, North Carolina right now with my friend Sharon.

Q: Ah, very good. All right. When we left the last time, you were talking about El Salvador. You were there from when to when?

SANDERSON: I was there from -- let me think -- July of 2000 until about October of 2001.

Q: All right. You had this very bad earthquake, I mean probably the biggest one we've had in a long time anywhere, isn't it?

SANDERSON: Oh, absolutely. The whole continental shelf where the plates grind together dropped six inches, which in geological terms is a mammoth event.

Q: All right. Well, you mentioned various things, but I wonder if you could go into some detail of what sort of things that the embassy was doing after the earthquake.

SANDERSON: Sure thing. We set up an emergency response center to coordinate internal embassy activities for the relief, as well as aid coming from the United States and particularly from Washington. So we were fortunate because at the embassy, in addition to a large USAID (United States Agency for International Development) presence, we also had a large U.S. Military presence. And that enabled us to very quickly mobilize particularly U.S. Military disaster relief resources. And we coordinated the arrival of a very large field hospital. It came in the form of a huge air filled tent, quite solid, and military doctors. And we had military staff come down in large numbers to help dig through rubble and coordinate air lifts with the Salvadoran Military. Some of the, the victims that required specialized help we air lifted to the United States to hospitals in Florida. And we had through DEA and other law enforcement agencies great cooperation and good relations with Salvadoran police and search and rescue authorities. And we had firefighting teams come down from the U.S. and we had search and rescue specialists come down from the U.S. We had the Army Corps of Engineers come down because the earthquake was so bad it had caused basically the whole side of the mountain to come down in a huge mudslide and completely destroy the intracoastal highway. So it was impossible for anybody to drive into Salvador from the U.S. side, and likewise was impossible for anyone coming from anywhere further down in Latin America to drive up to the United States because the highway was completely cut for several miles by this mountain slide. And the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came up with big earth moving equipment, which they flew in on the big air transport carriers and began the work of trying to clear a passageway through there so that it would be possible to restore movement. And it actually was a very terrible event in human terms. I mean whole entire villages were either flattened by the quake initially and/or were buried, in some cases in 20, 30, 40 feet of mud because it started raining and then areas that had already been destabilized in the first quake began shifting in the aftershocks, because we were having aftershocks that were around seven in magnitude. And you know, even up to a week after the initial earthquake we had new damage going on because these places had become unstable and then let go. And fortunately, a lot of the villagers in those cases had been evacuated already and had kept the death toll from mounting too severely. But large parts of San Salvador, the capital city, were flattened and it, it was certainly the biggest disaster that El Salvador had ever seen. So we had a full court press. As I said, the U.S. Military was absolutely outstanding. They had terrific police cooperation. U.S. firefighters were down there helping. And of course all the embassy staff were on 24/7 to do anything possible, whether it was going out in the field and

helping, you know, with the rescue efforts directly, or whether it was staffing the emergency resource center and response teams to use our contacts to facilitate cooperation between the incoming U.S. services and the folks on the ground in Salvador. Of course not everybody speaks English. So the embassy's linguistic capabilities were very much stretched to the limit and people really rose to the occasion.

Q: Well, what were your responsibilities?

SANDERSON: Well, because at the time I was the head of the -- you know, what we call drugs and thugs, the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Office. I had excellent contacts on the Salvadoran side with police officials as well as government officials, and I was also Deputy Political Counselor, so I had the two hats and so I had a very broad range of contacts in both of those areas. And on the embassy side I had excellent working relationships with military and with DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency). And so I was, I was the coordinator for incoming Military assistance and making sure that they got put together with the right partners, both within the embassy and within the Salvadoran government. So I was that sort of multi-pronged bridge facilitating the partnerships.

Q: What happened to the embassy itself?

SANDERSON: Actually, everyone was really, really pleased. Because of course the embassy was a newish embassy at the time, it had only been opened a couple of years. And it had been built to earthquake standards. The embassy itself held up extremely well. The USAID building had a few more problems than the embassy building did. We had some structural issues in the USAID building, some foundation cracks and so forth that had to be addressed pretty quickly. So we weren't actually using the USAID building fully during the crisis. But the embassy itself had been built on rollers to that it would rock and roll as the earth moved. And at that time it was like a pretty new technology, and everybody was really pleased at the way it worked because there was very little damage in the embassy building itself.

Q: Did the embassy serve as a refugee point or something for homeless people?

SANDERSON: No, not precisely. But on the embassy grounds near the helipad we had a medical evacuation point set up so that if we had Salvadorans that needed, as I mentioned, evacuation to the United States that was streamlined through the embassy compound.

Q: Did this earthquake stop or encourage any of the -- you still were in the, sort of the aftermath of the war that had been going on there. Did that have any affect on anything that was happening?

SANDERSON: Well, it's certainly true that at that time the political structure was still fairly sharply divided and not fully cooperative on a day-to-day basis. I certainly can say that what we saw during the emergency was -- all of that was laid absolutely aside and everyone pitched in regardless of political affiliation and regardless of questions about who would get credit for what. I think that longer term, yeah, I think it may have helped. I do think it may have helped. I think that some of those sentiments that arose during the crisis days may have carried over and helped

smooth the way for a deeper and longer lasting political transition to a more lasting democratic form of government. I do think that could be the case.

Q: What about the life of El Salvador? The city itself, everything must have stopped, didn't it? Or was there anything going on?

SANDERSON: It was absolutely amazing because there was actually quite a beehive of activity going on as, you know, people began dealing with their own houses and walls that have tumbled down and, you know, looking to secure personal possessions and make sure that their areas were secure. There was actually quite a, quite a beehive of activity. And grocery stores reopened as soon as they could, particularly because people needed bottled water. And we of course were flying in bottled water as part of our relief effort. And some of that, you know, was given to the stores as distribution to the population as well. So there, there actually was quite a bit of activity, obviously nothing like you would characterize normal activity, but there was quite a bit of activity. And one of the benefits to El Salvador as a country is essentially the entire capital city of San Salvador was rebuilt by the United States as a result of this earthquake. When I first went there you still had right in the capital city a lot of places that had dirt roads with, you know, sewage running right down the middle of them. And after the earthquake, San Salvador was recognizably the capital city of the country. I mean the roads were paved, we had nice shopping centers, homes had been rebuilt in a nicer way. The whole heart of the country in that sense was definitely built back better. It was one of the great tributes to American can-do power.

Q: You left -- you left there when after the -- how long after the earthquake?

SANDERSON: Oh my, let me think. The earthquake was in December of -- no, November of 2000. So almost a year later. It was almost a year later when I left.

Q: By that time had economic and political life sort of gone back I won't say to normal, but had adjusted to things?

SANDERSON: Yeah, I mean there was definitely a recognizable rhythm to things. And of course the overarching priority was still dealing with particularly rural populations that had been displaced and left homeless and so forth and there was an ongoing coordinated assistance effort. USAID really stepped up in a huge way on that and the World Food Organization and World Health Organization were also very deeply implicated to make sure that, you know, we didn't wind up with epidemic diseases and so forth. So the government was very much focused on the rebuilding effort, particularly the rural rebuilding effort and security because it was evident, you know, fairly early on that while everyone was, you know, distracted by this terrible human tragedy it was a great opportunity for the bad guys. So you know, there was also a good cooperation on the security front. But yeah, I mean things were definitely getting back to normal. And many Salvadorans actually saw their businesses grow substantially, as we saw with this disaster, because they were able to supply necessary goods. You know, anything in the building trade, cement, wood, roof tiles, plumbing, all of those things really flourished and were sort of the leading edge of what you might say would be economic recovery for the country.

Q: You'd had responsibility for the drug problem. What happened to that?

SANDERSON: You know, most of the ongoing programs were I wouldn't say put on hold, but certainly were not the number one priority at that time. It was quite clear, for instance, that we weren't going to have to worry about the land passage of drugs, because the intracoastal highway was still cut off. So there was actually increased surveillance on either side of us in Nicaragua and Guatemala because the two logical alternatives for the traffic would be either via the sea or air. And if I remember correctly, there was particularly in Guatemala a sharp increase in interdiction efforts at the airport as these guys tried to work around Salvador.

Q: Was there much in the way of sea smuggling or -

SANDERSON: Oh yeah, absolutely. That was the glory days of the so-called "Cigar Boat Smugglers." And for relatively small loads, compared to the cargo smugglers, a trend which was just starting up. So you'd have whole containers that needed to be closely inspected, because they either had a suspicious origin or a suspicious destination or an interesting cargo. Frequently you would find that they had drugs packed in with coffee. So if you had a whole container of coffee, you know, destined for Miami or whatever, that container needed special scrutiny. And we were very active in starting up the port inspection projects in Salvador, both for land ports and seaports, and introducing two cooperative programs using sophisticated scanning equipment for the ports that could really detect very quickly if a cargo should be opened or not. And we also did a really good job in up-linking the transit documents so that it made it much more clear that you were dealing with a legitimate shipper, for instance, you know, from Honduras and because that shipper had already been verified that made it a lot less necessary to inspect the cargo en route. And therefore it made it nicer for the shipper because it caused fewer delays, made it easier for the shipping company because they had a pre-certified shipper and their cargos weren't going to be stopped. It also made it easier for the buyer, because they would get their product faster. So it was around that time that we introduced the precertification program, and that turned out to be very popular as well as highly effective.

Q: Well, then when you left would you say the drug business was back in -- had been hurt or was flourishing or what?

SANDERSON: Well, in Salvadoran terms it had been hurt, because of course we did have a lot of growing fields for marijuana and stuff because there were a lot of very isolated rural areas, and a lot of those were hard hit by the earthquake because they tended to be near the foot of mountains and a lot of those mountains came down. So there actually was decreased indigenous production in Salvador as a consequence of the earthquake. And there was a substantial decrease in transiting as well, because again the normal means were no longer available and so alternative supply routes were set up. So yeah, it was no thanks to me, but there was definitely a decrease in narcotics activity.

Q: What was the estimate of how many people were killed?

SANDERSON: Oh Lord, I don't even remember anymore, but it was tens of thousands, it was huge. Huge. And some just would never be known because whole villages were wiped away. So there was literally nobody to tell you if so and so had been home and the children and so forth,

because I mean there was just nobody left. And so then you had people from neighboring villages who would say well, maybe there were, you know, 600 people that lived in that village. But you didn't know if that meant 600 people had been killed there or some people were off on travel, maybe somebody was in the hospital. But it was, it was huge.

End of reader