

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

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LEWIS HOFFACKER Ambassador Equatorial Guinea Yaounde, Cameroon (1969-1972)

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

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

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

HOFFACKER: No.

Q: *Nobody was interested, eh?*

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

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

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

Q: Moving over to Equatorial Guinea -

HOFFACKER: –the armpit -

Q: – the armpit. You've written a long report on the Erdos case, which we have in our records, so anybody who wants that can have that. But what about relations with the government per se?

HOFFACKER: We had a chargé there from the beginning of independence, three years before Erdos. It must have been '67, thereabouts; we had a chargé d'affaires and his wife. They were the two embassy people. And I was ambassador over there. And they did a great job, but I thought at the time that it would be a good idea to move them because the place was very difficult.

The president, Macias, was mad - let's put it bluntly. He was as bad as Idi Amin, if not worse. He terrorized his people. One-third or one-quarter of the people were refugees. Political opposition was physically eliminated. The treasury was raided. The Spanish had left a good package for them. The government of Macias was anti-Spanish, anti-white, anti-American and was vulnerable to the commies, because they were always looking for the little chinks in the armor. The economy had gone to pieces. There were virtually no Spanish left because they had been driven out.

Most importantly, the economy, which is based primarily on cocoa, had fallen completely because the Spanish cocoa farmers and the Nigerian laborers who were brought in to do the farming had all gone. Spaniards kept bringing in a little aid, not much. The French started aid after I left. The French brought them into their franc-zone and also developed other relations. When I was there, we had a CDC measles program; that was our only program.

Q: The Center for Communicable Diseases.

HOFFACKER: We were doing very well on eradicating measles, which is a serious thing in tropical Africa, but that ran out, too, because they were very difficult to work with.

I asked to have Al Williams replaced by another guy, after two and a half years. That's more than enough. Allison Palmer wanted the job. She was very African-oriented. I didn't think that was appropriate, and I don't think she's forgiven me. It wouldn't have worked. Williams' successor, Al Erdos, a good stuffy Foreign Service officer, looked stable to me. I asked him and his wife to come down from Niamey and look at the place before we decided to replace Williams. He decided he could cope, and I decided he could cope. He couldn't cope, of course, and that's the

story that you have in a separate file. After not many months he put a scissors into his American assistant, so all hell broke at that stage. But that's another story. It gives you some idea, though, of the environment in which people worked. Some of us thought that Erdos did this because he went crazy because of the terror and tension. But the federal jury in Alexandria, Virginia, which tried him felt otherwise. We don't have to get into that painful subject here; the separate file attempts to describe the case.

I was very pleased that we got out of that mess as we did, because I thought that they might get into the files, seize the Embassy, seize the body of the victim, and seize the chargé who did the murdering. We got all those things straightened out and then I was able to go in and kiss the president and continue business, such as there was.

Q: I still keep coming back to these very large Soviet bloc embassies. Why so many? I wouldn't think that there would be room. I think they'd be intriguing all over each other.

HOFFACKER: Well, they were numerous, living in their compounds. Likewise in Cameroon. And they were running a very cold-war pattern. Their people were kept in the compound, and they were very nasty when we would meet them. They were Bolsheviks; they weren't friendly. You know, diplomats are supposed to be gentlemen, but these characters were not. We didn't try to subvert them, nor were they trying to subvert us, but they were not good to have around. They had little projects, and they obviously had money. They had grants for visitors. They'd love to take people off and train them in Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. They had a big plan for Africa, and all these embassies were part of that.

The Cold War ended, and my understanding is that there is not that subversion going on. But there are communist or former communist embassies still around there, hopefully doing traditional embassy work. The Africans, I am convinced, are sufficiently nationalistic and sufficiently African to avoid communism. Communism is not compatible to their way of thinking. They love the West; they just wish they could be like us. I don't know any African who wants to be like them.

Q: Those that go to Moscow don't come back converted.

HOFFACKER: Africans are automatically oriented toward us unless their leaders start playing games. And Macias, of course, met an ugly end. His nephew murdered him, and his nephew is now president and runs a tight dictatorship. I gather that state terrorism has largely disappeared. Corruption is still the pattern, I am told, and the discovery of oil has inspired corruption in the obvious ways.

C. ROBERT MOORE
Ambassador Equatorial Guinea
Yaounde, Cameroon (1972-1975)

Ambassador C. Robert Moore was born in Illinois in 1915. He joined the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Turkey, France, Cambodia, and Syria, and ambassadorships to Mali, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. Ambassador Moore was interviewed by Dayton Mak in 1988.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I believe you served in Equatorial Guinea, as well. We don't hear as much about Equatorial Guinea around here. Perhaps you could tell us something of your experiences there and your relationship with that country.

MOORE: Equatorial Guinea was a Spanish colony, the only one, certainly, in Africa south of the Sahara. Equatorial Guinea comprised two areas, the island of Fernando Po, just off the coast of Cameroon and Gabon, and on the mainland, a little enclave called Rio Muni, between Cameroon and Gabon. Obtained its independence, I think, in late '68. I remember in 1969, on January 20th, when President Nixon was being inaugurated, suddenly there appeared--uninvited and unexpected--the foreign minister of Equatorial Guinea.

Actually, we had a great interest in Equatorial Guinea at that time, because it was one of the areas from which relief planes carried relief supplies for the Biafrans during the Nigerian civil war. They were threatening--in fact, they did deny, after they got independence, the use of Fernando Po for these so-called mercy flights. We were trying to develop a relationship with Equatorial Guinea that might permit these flights to resume.

So the foreign minister's presence was a fact, and we had to do something about him. I think they finally seated him in the press section of the inauguration area, because no chiefs of state or foreign ministers or foreign diplomats had been invited, only the resident ambassadors of the various countries. The foreign minister of Equatorial Guinea was the first one to have an appointment with the new Secretary of State, William Rogers, who again, because of our interest in the Biafra situation, courted this unexpected meeting on January 20, just after the ceremonies. However, the Secretary, I think, was probably pretty shocked to learn a couple of weeks later that the foreign minister, upon his return to his capital had been defenestrated - pushed out of the window and killed. That was the end of him, and, I suppose, the start of a relationship that never was and could not be very satisfactory.

It was a very dictatorial regime that became increasingly oppressive. A third, at least, of its population was in exile, escaped from the island, and the then-president, Masie, was ruthless in putting down any opposition whatsoever. Again, of course, he was very nationalist. He acted in such a way as to evict, eject the Nigerian workers that were responsible for the cocoa harvest on the island of Fernando Po, and as a matter of fact, it was perhaps the very highest quality processed cocoa that one could find. He tried to replace these Nigerian workers with workers from the mainland of Rio Muni, who were completely unadapted and uninterested in working on cocoa plantations. So the economic base of the country was pretty well destroyed. The ability to export and to obtain export earnings to finance imports disappeared. His whole policy was really one that was destroying what had been a lovely little colony, a beautiful island. Before independence, it was a wonderful resort area for countries in that neighborhood.

We had a rather unfortunate situation there because in 1971 or early '72, our chargé d'affaires murdered his administrative assistant, the only other American in the embassy. We decided then that we really had no interests in Equatorial Guinea that required a presence there. So for some years thereafter ambassadors accredited to Yaounde, Cameroon, were also accredited to Equatorial Guinea. We made periodic trips to the mainland or to the island to attend national days or special ceremonies.

Generally, I must say that sometimes these ruthless leaders, as long as you're not their victim, can be rather engaging people. President Masie was a very simple person and really seemed to be quite straightforward when you talked to him. It was hard to believe that he could have been guilty of all of the crimes that he was accused of, but I guess there could be no doubt of it whatsoever.

I think that we did reopen a mission there a few years ago after he was overthrown, largely on the encouragement of the Spaniards who wanted to see a stronger Western presence there in order to encourage the new regime to work towards a better economic and political relationship with the Western world.

MABEL MURPHY SMYTHE
Ambassador Equatorial Guinea
Yaounde, Cameroon (1979-1980)

Ambassador Smythe was born and raised in Alabama and educated at Mt. Holyoke College, Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin. An educator by profession she taught at Northwestern and other Universities in the United States and Japan before serving as US Ambassador to Cameroon (1977-1980) and to Equatorial Guinea (1979 to 1980). Throughout her career, the Ambassador served as member of US delegations to several United Nations conferences and held other senior positions in governmental and non-governmental organizations. She was married to Ambassador Hugh Smythe and accompanied him on his embassies to Syria and Malta. Ambassador Mabel Smythe was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin in 1986 and by Ruth Stutts Njiiri in 1981. The following excerpts are from the Morin interview in 1986.

SMYTHE: Later on, when Equatorial Guinea became independent, I went to her. I said, "I think you'd be interested in knowing that here is a small country which has been carried down to the bottom of the economic ladder by circumstances beyond our prediction at the time of independence." I told her about the actions of the dictatorial ruler that they had, Macías Nguema, who was thought to be a very mild-mannered civil servant. The Spanish had built him up and left him in charge of the country when they withdrew, and they were confident he was going to be at least a sensible person. But some people get paranoid after a while and they sometimes don't see where their interests lie. They begin suspecting everyone around them, and that happened to him. So what he did was systematically destroy people who did not agree with him or support him, and he destroyed the country in so doing. When he was overthrown and Spain was invited to

come back and help them get on their feet again, the Spanish asked us, "Please send an ambassador there, and have somebody resident in Equatorial Guinea so that they know that we are being supported by the United States."

I went to Madrid and met with the foreign minister and the people who handed Equatorial Guinea for the Spanish, and with [Ambassador] Terry Todman, who was then in Spain, and we talked about the great need. I told Mrs. Fenwick about the whole thing, that how, if we take Equatorial Guinea as a case in point, here is a country which had been taken over almost lock, stock, and barrel by the Russians. They had an agreement that Equatorial Guineans could no longer fish, that they would have the right to fish in territorial waters, and that they would share the catch with the local people, with the country, and that they would therefore destroy all the native fleets... I said, "We disliked the dominance of Russia there. We didn't like having the Cubans there (and this was their staging place for going into Angola). They have ordered the Russians to withdraw and reduce their embassy. They have taken away the fishing rights."

Q: The Guineans had?

SMYTHE: The Guineans had. "They have invited us in. Spain, which is under great duress to keep us from having Torrejon Air Force Base and the other bases that we have in Spain, has only this one possession in a former colony in Africa and wants us to work with her. It seems to me all of these things make us want to do something. It will cost us \$1 million simply to say, "Okay, we'll have an embassy, the minimum embassy we can put up, represent us there, with a very junior ambassador. We'll have a very tiny program of AID while these people get on their feet." Disaster relief and refugee aid would be enough just to get them so they can feed themselves (and we knew they could feed themselves, because they used to). If they have thrown out the Reds on the advice that the Americans thought that was a good thing, don't you think we ought to come back and do something about it?"

She, herself, sponsored putting the million dollars in the budget that had been cut out. So she came around and supported us when she saw the reason for it, and I always felt that she was the kind of person who was intellectually honest. If she saw the rationale for things, she would do her own investigating, and if she saw that it stood up, she'd go along and support it. She was not just being doctrinaire. I think she made mistakes in judgment simply because she didn't know Africa; she didn't know enough about what was going on there. When somebody took the trouble to explain and demonstrate, she was as willing as the next fellow to say, "Well, this is true rather than that. I think our policy ought to follow the true path." As long as she remained in Congress, I felt that there was a potential friend there.

The following excerpts are from the Ruth Stutts Njiiri interview conducted in 1981.

Q: While you were Ambassador to Cameroon, you were also mandated to serve the United States Government in Equatorial Guinea. Would you talk about some of your experiences there?

SMYTHE: First a bit of background. Equatorial Guinea had been for eleven years, I believe, under the control of a man who had progressively seemed to lose touch with reality. He is given credit for virtually destroying the economy of the country. Equatorial Guinea was one of the jewels of Africa. It had coffee and cocoa production that was unusually high, and it had a surplus of foreign exchange. It also had one of the highest educational levels and the highest average personal income in all Africa. It also had the best health system of any, country in Africa.

When Macias Nguema, who was the President of the country, broke with the Spanish, he progressively removed the Spanish schools, Spanish hospitals, Spanish influence and replaced these things with socialist input. The Russians took over the fishing industry. They had a contract by which they were to take all the fish and share a portion of it with the local community, 25% of the catch, I believe. The local people complained that they gave the Equatorial Guineans the trash fish and kept the first-class fish for themselves and removed it from the country. The Chinese came in, the Cubans came in. Equatorial Guinea was a staging base for sending Cubans to Angola, for example.

In August of 1979, a coup took place and Macias Nguema was dethroned and was removed from office. And a cousin of his who had been a member of the Cabinet but who became estranged when the President executed his brother, succeeded as president. Now the new president, President Obiang, came into power in August. He declared that Equatorial Guinea wished to be friendly to any country that came as a friendly power. He wanted to establish relations with the United States. He welcomed the Spanish back: Equatorial Guinea had been a Spanish colony. The Spanish came back. They put money into the country so that... I understand that the civil servants had not been paid in six months. So it was possible for them to pay off the arrears of the civil service and get things going again.

But they had no postal system; no banking system; there was no place where you could officially exchange money when you came into the country. There was no real public transport system; there was no communication between the mainland and the island which had contained the capital of Malabo, because the regular public transport had been discontinued. Once in a while there would be a plane that would come over, but there wasn't regular service.

Well, President Obiang began to change this and tried to rebuild. And the Spanish, who are our allies in NATO and with whom we have a cordial relationship, asked us to come in and stand with them to support rehabilitation of the country. So after a great deal of discussion, we agreed that we would certify an ambassador there, and I would be the Ambassador. We had from the beginning of Equatorial Guinea's independence had the Ambassador resident in Yaoundé, but the government of Macias had declared persona non grata my predecessor and his deputy. As a result, we had not bothered to reestablish relations and certify someone else.

Well, when it was decided that I would go over and present my credentials, I went over in December of 1979 -- although before that we had sent in my deputy, who spoke Spanish -- he went over several times to assess the situation and make reports to Washington, and a team of people went to Equatorial Guinea to see what was needed, whether there was disaster of a magnitude that required immediate concern. They did determine that the people needed food and medicine so that the hospitals and dispensaries could begin functioning again. We even sent a

Peace Corps representative to look into the possibility that Peace Corps service might be appropriate.

We were not given a budget in our Embassy for any of the work in Equatorial Guinea. We simply had to use our local transport budget to finance these trips to Equatorial Guinea, because it was a time of great budget stringency. But somehow we managed, because we felt it was important for us to respond to a country which had, in accordance with our professed ideals, changed in several ways. It had broken with the Soviets and Cubans and turned the country around, holding an open door to all friendly powers. It was trying to establish its record in human rights; and they invited the International Commission of Jurists to attend and observe the trial of Macias for the murders of many of his people and so on, and see how they were conducting themselves. On the human rights basis, on the East-West basis, and simply on the basis of humanitarian concern for a country which was on its knees, we needed to respond.

People were not getting the kind of medical care they needed; lepers had not been treated for several years; there was an epidemic of measles, which is a very serious disease in Africa. There were other health hazards; and there was no functioning electrical system in any town in the country; there was no functioning educational system throughout the country, and so on. So our team decided that there was a need for immediate assistance in the health sphere, and we had a ton of medical supplies flown to Equatorial Guinea and delivered even before I presented my credentials.

When I went to Equatorial Guinea -- it was by that time December of 1979, since my presentation of credentials had had to wait while I was away in the United States -- and I returned by way of Madrid so as to talk with the Spanish Government about ways in which we could cooperate to set up a system for Equatorial Guinea. By the time all that was done, it was December. I presented my credentials and at the same time had to explain to the President that I was being asked to return as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and therefore would not be able to serve very long. However, we believed it was important to establish the fact that we were recognizing Equatorial Guinea by accrediting an ambassador, and that we did expect to be working with them in the future, and with the Spanish Government, toward the rehabilitation of the country.

The response to that was a positive one. President Obiang said, "Since you are going back to the United States, you can tell our story. You can tell our story better if you have seen our country, so I want you to come back and make a tour." So on my next trip, I went back and traveled around the island and visited a cocoa plantation which was working at a fraction of its capacity. I flew to the mainland and traveled all around to see the state of affairs in the rural areas and the local markets. I visited schools; I visited local government and even stayed overnight at an army post out in the middle of the country. I saw the conditions of the roads, and I saw how at the border, just across the border in Cameroon, there were goods for display that I had not seen in any of the markets in Equatorial Guinea. And some of the people from Equatorial Guinea would go across the border and buy or barter what they could from these local markets.

So it was a useful opportunity for me. After I came back, I was able to see the Vice President and Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea. when he visited the United Nations and welcomed him to

my country as he had welcomed me to his. Now what's the national interest in Equatorial Guinea? We can live without Equatorial Guinea, and obviously did, because they were not producing anything we had to have at the time they declared my predecessor persona non grata. But we do have an interest in seeing a democratic government rise there. We do have an interest in seeing that people have a government which makes it possible for them to live decently and to feel that they have a future. And we do have an interest in supporting our Spanish allies, who are active and concerned. That is their only African affiliate. That was once a Spanish colony. And we have very good relations with Spain and have air force and naval facilities there. So we had many reasons for feeling cooperative about redeveloping Equatorial Guinea. We are now planning to open an Embassy there, and while we may not have an ambassador at once, we will have someone, a chargé, there until we can get an ambassador accredited and resident.

So this is a story with a happy ending. The end is not in sight, because there is a great deal of hard work before Equatorial Guinea gets on its feet again. But the potential for good agricultural production is there, and I hope it will once again be a prosperous community.

CHARLES W. GROVER
Interim Charge
Equatorial Guinea (1980)

Charles Grover was raised in Gloversville, New York after several years of moving when his father was permanently assigned. He earned a major in American History from Antioch College in Ohio and then received his master's in history from the University of Oregon some years later. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956 and in 1971 served as principal officer in Medellin, Colombia. In addition to Colombia he was posted to Bolivia, Spain, Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador.

Q: Was that your last Foreign Service post?

GROVER: That was my last one except for a very interesting ten week period in Equatorial Guinea. I went out as an interim Charge between two Ambassadors and it was a lot of fun for ten weeks, and it reintroduced me to Africa and I realized how much I had missed by not having fulfilled that original assignment to Mozambique, and having an opportunity to do Africa. It was fascinating. Not so much Equatorial Guinea, which seemed to be working its way back into the middle ages, but things that you could see that were working other places in Africa. Things that were happening. It was an exciting place.

Q: A ten week tour there.

GROVER: We used to go shopping over to Douala in Cameroon, for example. There were only two Americans--I'm an expert on two-man posts--but we had hired every American citizen to perform some function or other at the embassy there. And during my ten weeks we also inaugurated the embassy office in Malabo. It used to be called Fernando Po, it's now the Island of Bioko in the country of Equatorial Guinea. The only Spanish speaking country in Africa, and it

was very, very interesting. It awakened an interest that I guess I'll never really fulfill, but maybe through visits. To understand Equatorial Guinea you have to read The Dogs of War. Did you ever read that by Frederick Forsyth? It was his first thriller, and it's based upon an attempt by white mercenaries to take over an African country, and give it to a defeated Biafran general to run. And this is how Frederick Forsyth got it started. He was a white mercenary, and he had tried to take over Equatorial Guinea when the dictator Macias was in charge there. He failed, but he wrote the story and it was such a good one that he took up a whole new field, dropped white mercenary business, and became a novelist. It's an interesting area. It's right in the Bight of Biafra which is very close to Nigeria, and Cameroon, Gabon-- where Africa turns from east-west to north-south on the west coast of Africa. But anyway, that was instructional but I guess it was too short to be of more than passing interest.

ALAN HARDY
Ambassador
Equatorial Guinea (1981-1984)

Ambassador Hardy served in the Army from 1957-1959. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956 His career included positions in Canada, Madagascar, Italy, Somalia, Hungary, Mexico, and an ambassadorship to Equatorial Guinea. Ambassador Hardy was interviewed by Lewis Hoffacker in 2001.

Q: Off to Malabo.

HARDY: This needs more of an explanation. I know most of you are wondering why the President would call me, and the answer was that I was going to Malabo, wonderful little country out there where there had been a couple of coups and many killings and so forth. And the reason why President Reagan was sending me to Malabo was because I had voted Democrat in the previous election.

Q: Now you're kidding.

HARDY: This is what I told everybody. That's not true. But anyway, not many people know about Equatorial Guinea, which is in the elbow where Africa bends as it heads eastward and then heads southward. It's a little enclave on land and a little part out in the sea. Under the Spanish as a colony, it had been very prosperous. It had an interesting history. Cocoa was one crop, coffee was another.

But it all went down the drain when we had a Patrice Lumumba-type figure who had taken charge there and became paranoid, destroyed the country's fishing fleet because he didn't want anyone able to leave the island on a boat. Had all the country's currency in the country's banks rounded up and put in his garage. Persecuted the church. (The Catholic Church was rather strong there.) Killed a lot of people. Very repressive regime, kind of like Idi Amin in Uganda. And eventually, anybody who would rise up in some way, or become prominent in some way, or look

like he had any stature at all, President Macias would either have him killed or exiled, or would attempt to kill him and the guy would flee.

Finally, in about 1980, I guess - I went in '81, so it must have been about a year earlier - he threatened the wrong guy, who then turned the tables and organized a coup. Then the Spanish were brought back. This guy had been educated in Spain in a military academy there. He seemed like a fairly progressive, nice guy. Name of Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Same tribe, and related to Macias.

The Spanish wanted help, so they wanted us there. We decided we would open an embassy there, where we had never had one before although we had had an office there. So we were there at the Spanish request and also because the Soviets and the Chinese and the North Koreans had all been very busy there. There was a rule that no matter how Godforsaken a place was, if the Soviets or North Koreans were there, we had to counter that. I suppose it would have been true for the Kerguelen Islands or anywhere, but it was certainly true. I never subscribed to that general principle. There wasn't much the Soviets could do to us by virtue of being in Equatorial Guinea, for example.

However, it was logical to be there for a time at least because the Spanish asked us and needed us, and they were for humanitarian reasons as well as for reasons of self interest taking on a burden there. Furthermore, it was better to have stability in the region.

So, what did I do when I arrived in Malabo? We had, I don't know, \$10 million dollars available for aid, something like that. Enough to do what we needed to do. Couldn't get anything going. If you had trucks to bring in for an economic project, such as getting the coffee crops to market, why then the district commissioner (political guy at the local level) would confiscate the truck because of course he didn't have a truck and he wasn't going to go around on a bicycle or hitchhiking while the economic ministry had a truck. Then maintenance became an impossibility and we tried to get maintenance people in but with limited success as the trucks were not located centrally. So the truck thing went down the drain. Oh, after a few years we got a little something out of the project but not our money's worth.

Then we had an extension project for chickens. Trying to raise chickens in the capital so then the chickens could be taken out and distributed throughout the country and people could raise chickens in their own little farms and haciendas and so forth and so on. Well, the problem with that was that there were no eggs in the capital and the President and his Ministers felt that as president and ministers, they ought to have a boiled egg at a banquet or whatever, and every once in a while, a roast chicken. So, we didn't succeed with that project. (This could be a metaphor for a lot of things in a lot of places.)

Very, very difficult to get anything done. I'm not sure that we accomplished much in aid while I was there. We did get the Peace Corps in there and I think they had more of a chance. I was instrumental in getting them there, but I left before they arrived and I never found out how that worked out. There was a lot of tribalism there, too. They was only one minister, a Bubi who was not from the ruling tribe.

Q: The Bubi lived on Bioko didn't they?

HARDY: The Bubi tribe had less power in the country than I did. The island of Bioko, as Lew mentioned here, the island was a Bubi stronghold. The Minister of Agriculture was a Bubi and he knew a little bit about agriculture, but he couldn't help me with the chickens although he wanted to. I was going in to him, telling him, look, we've got to use these chickens to develop the country, not for ministers in the capital. That was a tough sell to the dominant tribe, the Fang, who came from mainland Equatorial Guinea and were the President's tribe, also the tribe who dominated the Government, the military and the police.

The Catholic Church had a very good bishop there who'd been educated abroad. Used to watch the Redskins games with me on videotape...of all things.

Q: Was he Spanish?

HARDY: No, he was Equatorial Guinean. Very educated and a confident guy. The Pope came to visit us in Equatorial Guinea. Which goes to show you, I guess there really aren't that many Catholics elsewhere in Africa. You'd think with the French... but this was a real Catholic place and the Pope did come to visit. It was one of the few places he visited in Africa. The church services were all very impressive normally and even more so for the Pope's visit, always with a lot of music and a lot of faith.

Now, we had CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) there. The problem was the Guineans tried to play the CIA off against me and me off against the CIA. They had some legitimate security concerns and that was one of the things the CIA addressed. They're a natural liaison to host country police or national security officials. By the way, President Obiang had a Moroccan bodyguard, because the Spanish had Moroccan ties and they brought people down from Morocco to provide stability because they didn't know whether with the support of the Soviets somebody would launch a coup to throw him out.

I also had problems with Washington, because just like them, perhaps in a different way, but just like the Equatorial Guinean government, Washington saw the Embassy and the CIA station, home-based in another country, as two different entities. I remember one time I supported a CIA project submitted in CIA channels, and State wouldn't believe I was supporting it. They thought that I was either being conned by the CIA guy or the CIA guy was misrepresenting me in his message.

Anyway, it was an interesting experience. You know, I'm talking about the CIA here but you could be talking about the Treasury Department in Mexico. That's a very good example. You might have the same kind of institutional problems, or you might be talking about the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) in a place like Mexico or in other big drug-supplying countries throughout the world. When significant things are at stake, it's very important and very difficult to work these relationships out Between State and the Ambassador who are supposed to be in charge of relations and any powerful other U.S. Government agency with a big stake in the host country in question. Even when you're in agreement, it can be difficult because you've got four parties. You've got the two parties in the field and you have the two parties in Washington. You

don't need agreement between two people. You need agreement between four. I guess that's the lesson out of what I'm saying. If you've got two in the field and two in Washington, you need all four. Even three is not enough, if you really want to make something work. Of course, if you have three, I suppose, or even two, you can slug it out and the winner can impose something, but that's not the best way to run an operation.

Well, I thought I did a good job of getting the Embassy up and running in Equatorial Guinea, in an almost impossible environment. When I first arrived, I was out there tending all my own generators because there was no electricity.

Q: You were your own GSO.

HARDY: Yes, and it took my admin officer about six months to find a couple good local people who knew enough about it to do it. It was tough for the administrative section to run around and get everything done. Our biggest struggle was getting fuel for the generators. I'd even have to call the President for help (Obiang not Reagan) to get oil for our generators. Fortunately, I played tennis with him on Sunday mornings. That helped. We had been running the embassy out of a little suite of rooms in a hotel. You know, where you get a kitchenette, a living room and a bedroom. First we had one suite like that - an efficiency apartment.

Yes, what is it, you know those temporary apartments when you first get into town. Anyway, eventually we rented four apartments together and turned them into an embassy. But we needed better facilities. When we finally found a site that was vacant but useable, the foreign minister wanted the same site for his residence and we had to go to the President just to get it for our embassy. That's the kind of place Malabo was. We used to have to fly over to Cameroon about every 10 days to get our own food and bring it back by airplane. When I arrived there, there were only two of us there, so I did it myself half the time. Later on, the administrative people could do it.

Q: This was a private plane.

HARDY: Yes, chartered. Fly-by-night outfit. Fortunately, they flew in the daytime.

Q: I've done both. Felt safer than the commercial plane.

HARDY: Actually, to tell you the kind of place this was, this charter airline was very accommodating to me as Ambassador. The airline had one plane. Its pilot, I later found out, had escaped from Germany with a plane that he didn't own. He and his partner were trying to make an agreement with the Guinean Government to set up a small airline. By getting the airline going, they hoped, at a minimum, to get enough money to pay off a lien on the plane and to keep from getting arrested and extradited back to Germany. Here's this guy coming to me saying "would you talk to President Obiang and see if you can help me get this agreement." Fortunately, I told the President while it was a great idea he ought to investigate it with United Nations experts. Which he did eventually, learning that the project's sponsors, who had approached him as well as me, were not trustworthy.

The Spanish and the French were there. When they wanted to get something accomplished, they would often come to me and ask me if I could help them with the President since he was less suspicious of the United States than the old colonizing powers, Spain, or than France still an influential force in West Africa. I believe I was able to help both parties. I tried to be objective, and the President regarded me as another source of advice, and one that perhaps he could trust a little more than the Spanish and the French. So we facilitated getting the country a little bit back on its feet. I think it's more on its feet now relative to the 1970s but still far from what it had once been in colonial times. It's taken a long, long time. I was trying to convince Obiang to have some elections at a local level and we had some projects with some of the non-profit institutions set up by the Republican and Democratic Party to assist them planning an election and how to amend their constitution to enable it. I haven't kept up with what happened. I know that elections were held in subsequent years but always with questionable results. Furthermore, Obiang's rule has degenerated and his regime has become corrupt and strongly repressive. Which is too bad. He had potential for going the other way.

Q: They have oil.

HARDY: They found oil, and that should help them but as yet according to press reports the money has all been skimmed off at the top and not gone to development. Well, you know, Latin America's been at it for a hundred years and look where they are. So let's give the Africans another fifty. (Perhaps 75 for Equatorial Guinea.) The right leader at the right time could help them come out of it. The Guineans in colonial times were a very educated people, by the way. Many spoke excellent Spanish. On the telephone you couldn't tell if you were speaking to a Spaniard or a Guinean.

We had an inspection. I can't remember whether I concurred or whether I suggested it but we went on to close the post. In this day and age, we don't need an embassy in every African country, and particularly we probably don't need an embassy in this one. I think we did the right thing to go in for that amount of time when we did. The Spanish were grateful that we did. Interesting thing about this is, the Spanish, having been out of the colonial mishmash in Africa for decades, and having been preoccupied with the transition from Franco's fascist regime, when the time came, had no idea whatever how to help Equatorial Guinea. So they came back to help. Here we are in 1981. They're acting almost like a 1950s colonial power. The upshot of this was that the French eventually took over the role that had seemed to be Spain's. The French had important interests in the whole Gulf of Guinea area, in Gabon which is a very rich country and Cameroon with its own set of resources only 30 miles away across the water from the island capital and adjacent to the mainland. So the French figure the Spanish are really going to bollix this up, we'd better move in. They eventually brought Equatorial Guinea into a French currency zone. (As I edit this transcript, the U.S. apparently acknowledging the vast amounts of oil discovered in recent years in Guinean waters is planning to reopen its Embassy.)

FRANK S. RUDDY
Ambassador
Equatorial Guinea (1985-1988)

Ambassador Ruddy was born and raised in New York and was educated at Holy Cross College, Loyola University, New York University and Cambridge University. A lawyer by training, he joined the US Information Agency in 1969 as a lawyer at its Washington, D.C. Headquarters. He subsequently served in the White House in the capacity of Chief, Office of Telecommunications Policy before joining the private oil firm EXXON in Texas. In 1985 he was appointed US Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, where he served until 1988. Ambassador Ruddy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: How did you become Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea?

RUDDY: I got a call from the White House, from John Herrington's office. John was then the head of White House personnel. He and other Californians like Bill Clarke, the Interior Secretary who had been the Deputy Secretary of State...they all knew what was going on over there. Anyway, I got a call from the White House asking if I would like to be the Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea? My first reaction was "Equatorial Guinea! Oh no!" (I kept that reaction to myself, fortunately.) I knew Africa pretty well, but I didn't know where Equatorial Guinea was. I knew it was on the West coast somewhere, and I remembered from a meeting with Peter McPherson that I attended with their ambassador, it had a terrible reputation. I asked for some time to think it over, and I hoped I could use that time to get a better embassy. I went to two people: Frank Shakespeare and Bill Middendorf. Frank Shakespeare was back in town again as chairman of the Board of International Broadcasting. I asked him what I should do and he said I should take it. What I really wanted him to say was: "Frank, you don't have to take that embassy. Let me make a phone call, and we will get you some place a lot better." He didn't say that. He just said, "Why don't you take it." Then I went to Bill Middendorf, who was our Ambassador to the OAS at that time. I asked him the same question I asked Shakespeare, and I knew he would say he would take care of this for me and arrange for me to get a better posting. Wrong again. What he said was, and I remember this well: "Frank, sometimes the subway only stops once, you had better take it."

So I called the White House back and spoke to Joe Salgado, a tough ex-cop from Oakland, who was really a very kind guy and his support was, I am sure, one of the reasons I got an embassy. I asked: "You know I speak French. Of all the countries in Africa, why are you sending me to the only one that speaks Spanish?" Joe said, "You mean they don't speak French there?"

Anyway, to make a long story short, Teri (my wife) and I talked it over and decided to go. When I told the children, David who was about 13 at that time, said, "Dad, you have made some dumb decisions in your life, but this is the worst." That was about July. There were some funny incidents from then until we arrived in Malabo (the capital of Equatorial Guinea).

Since I didn't speak Spanish, I had to go to The Foreign Service Institute to learn. Teri was allowed to go too since she would have to be at home in Spanish to be effective in E.G. as well. FSI was a one of the great experiences of our lives. For 20 weeks you study Spanish full time: classes 9-3 and first class language labs after that. If you're a State employee, you get paid to do yourself a tremendous favor: learning the second most spoken language in the world (I'm not

including Chinese). In Teri's case, she wasn't paid, but she got to attend a 20- week Spanish language course that would probably cost \$20 or 25 thousand dollars if Berlitz offered it. It was like going back to university, and we both loved it. We even hired one of the FSI teachers to do a little moonlighting and teach our sons David and Stephen a little Spanish.

One of the things that happen while you are awaiting Senate confirmation as an ambassador is that the President himself calls you on the telephone and asks you to be his ambassador, in my case to Equatorial Guinea. It's all pro forma, but it is still done. It is one of the special things about being an ambassador that the President takes time out of his daily crises to play the game. He had to ask "Frank, I was wondering if you would be my Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea." And I had to say, "Of course." Well, on the appointed day I was at FSI, so The White House called FSI and said The President of The United States would like to talk to me. The FSI bureaucrat answering the phone told The White House operator that they were too busy to find me for the President. For the President! I found a note, one of those "while you were out" yellow telephone slips on the student's bulletin board. "To Frank Ruddy. You were called by The President of the United States." The "please return call" box was checked. I returned the President's call on a pay phone on the first floor. Returning the President's call would be personal, the FSI lady, probably the same one who was too busy to bother with the President's call, told me, so I couldn't use the FSI phone.

Another interesting call came the day before I was sworn in...I can't remember the exact date so let's say October 24... (1984) from Jim Lucier of Senator Helms' staff, asking if I would support an ad to run in the country's major newspapers endorsing the Senator. (My name was to be one of 20 or more U.S. ambassadors supporting Jesse.) Senator Helms was in a tough race that year, and the purpose of the ad was to show that a large number of U.S. ambassadors supported him, and by implication, his views on U.S. foreign policy. As political appointees we were not covered by the Hatch Act and could legally endorse a candidate without violating any law. I said I would be happy to go on record supporting the Senator for two very simple reasons: I agreed with him on most things, and, on a personal level, when I needed his help in my battles with McPherson, Helms had been there. He didn't hesitate or give me any of "on the one hand..." business. He just delivered. So when he needed my help I said, "Absolutely." The ad ran in all the major papers, at least all the major east coast papers. The ad itself and the participation of U.S. ambassadors in it were roundly criticized by the usual suspects, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and surprisingly by *The Washington Times*, a conservative paper. It turned out that Bill Cheshire, a deputy editor of *The Washington Times* had played a major role in Helms' '78 campaign, but had had a falling out with Jesse. *The Washington Times* criticism of the Helms ad was payback time. After all I had been through in the previous 4 years, the flap over the Helms ad was small potatoes. I even thought of it as a badge of honor. I was pleased. There were about 23 of us ambassadorial types, I think, who signed the ad. I liked Helms then and I like him now. He is a decent man who has been terribly maligned. I think there are few in Washington strong enough to stand up to the abuse he has taken. With all the jokes about members of Congress who will take any position to be re-elected, Helms stands out among U.S. senators like the Rock of Gibraltar.

One twist in the ad was that it appeared the day that I was sworn in as ambassador. Of course, The Secretary of State, George Shultz, had apoplexy when he heard about it. Did you know Nancy Rawls?

Q: I knew her name.

RUDDY: Nancy had been ambassador to several African countries, and I knew her when she was ambassador to The Ivory Coast. Nancy was a good friend who had very nice things to say about me when I was at AID. She telephoned me at one point after the ad ran and said, "How could you do that? That was so, so... unprofessional." I said to her just what I said to you: the Senator was a friend to me when I needed a friend, and I would do it again tomorrow. There is a marker system in political Washington. When someone does you a big favor, he has your marker. When the tide turns and that person comes to collect your marker, you had better deliver. I thought everyone in Washington knew that, so it seemed odd to be roundly criticized for doing what I thought was a perfectly understandable act, supporting a friend, and it hit all the big papers in the country. I suppose there is another tradition in Washington, in the press, at least, which might be called the Captain Renault syndrome. You remember Captain Renault from the movie Casablanca. He's the one who exclaimed he was "shocked; shocked, to learn gambling was going on..." in Rick's place, and then accepts his night's gambling take from one of the croupier's. I supposed The Washington Post and other papers have to exclaim to be "shocked" when publicly forced to acknowledge what they and everybody else knows goes on every day.

Q: What sort of preparation did you get before going out?

RUDDY: Not a great deal of formal preparation. FSI had a course in area studies which explains the politics, economics, in short, everything you ever wanted to know, about the area you are going to. In didn't work in our case for two reasons: first, the area studies for Africa were scheduled when I had be in Spanish class (African area studies were worked around Portuguese and French language lessons.) Secondly, and I'll get into this later, because nobody knew anything, really: nada, zip, nothing, about Equatorial Guinea. There was something we called ambassador prep, a three day seminar for ambassadors going out for the first time. It was a program run by Shirley Temple Black and David Newsom. It was a worthwhile program, and Shirley Temple Black was excellent. She had been an ambassador herself in Ghana, and, of course, she had a lot of presence and charm as you know if you have ever, and you must have done, seen her in the movies. A lovely person and very effective. If you could translate the enthusiasm and professionalism she exudes, and tries to instill, into out-going ambassadors, every U.S. ambassador would be a great one. Newsom was your basic 7th floor, State Department guy. He looked like a house detective in one of The Marx Brothers movies and was about as exciting. I suppose he was good at something, or had been, but his picture appeared under boring in the dictionary. The three days at ambassador prep covered basic things; some I knew and some I didn't. Little tricks of the trade, like good techniques for getting your cables around State without appearing as a prima donna, keeping track of embassy silverware (Various committees in Congress went ballistic over silverware issues) and making sure embassy financial records are squeaky clean made relations with Washington and life at the embassy a lot more pleasant. Covering these kinds of things was helpful, but by and large, I don't think it would have been a catastrophe if I missed it.

Q: Today it is a longer one, two weeks, and there is a lot more on management, fraud and problems like that.

RUDDY: That makes sense. There are two kinds of ambassadors in a program like that: someone like me and someone who was going to be a figurehead at a large post, where the day-to-day management is handled by the foreign service resident staff. In my class that would be someone like Bob Stuart, a former C.E.O. for Quaker Oats, who was going to Oslo. There were career and non-career people, and the career people rarely got the figurehead posts. That's changing, I think, with President Bush. In any event, for those of us who actually had to sit down with the admin officer and go over the books before the regional State Department fiscal officer arrived, like a bank examiner, to check up on us, that extra fraud, waste and abuse training would have been very useful. Fortunately for me, my main admin officer was a lawyer, and he and I pored over the regs to make sure everything was Kosher. We did the same with the procurement regs, security regs, etc. We taught ourselves everything, well, almost everything at the post. We could have profited from some help in those areas before we left. It sounds like they're doing that now, and if they are, it's a good thing. The other real gap we found at State, and if State didn't know, Shirley Temple surely didn't, was information about Equatorial Guinea. Nobody in Washington knew anything about Equatorial Guinea. We made it a point to cure that situation by sending loads of material on the country to State and to FSI so that our successors would know more than we did before leaving.

Q: I was going to ask if you were getting any support from the Desk?

RUDDY: They were very helpful, as helpful as they could be, but they just didn't know much. My predecessor in Equatorial Guinea, Alan Hardy, came home in the summer of 1984, and was retiring. We had lunch, and he told me a lunch worth's (we had lunch in the FDIC cafeteria across from State) about the country, and that was it. Then he was off to his retirement life, and I am sure the desk gave me whatever they had, but that wasn't much.

I was a lawyer at USIA in the 70's, and I remembered the weird cables coming in from Equatorial Guinea. It turned out there had been a murder there, but before we knew that, the cables from E.G. were like dispatches from The Twilight Zone: "Soviet troops marching through the streets...the screams of victims being tortured by the E.G. Government are driving us mad ...". These were the kinds of details in the cables from E.G. What made them less unbelievable was the situation in E.G. The country's dictator, Francisco Macias, was a mass murderer, a poor man's Idi Amin. He called himself "The Divine Miracle" and massacred people in the capital's soccer stadium to the accompaniment of Beatles music. He once settled a Cabinet disagreement by hurling the dissenting minister out a second floor window. Macias was certainly capable of the atrocities described in the cables, so desk officers and cable watchers suspended disbelief for a while. As the cables became more and more bizarre something had to be done. The Department sent over two officers from Cameroon, I think, Lannon Walker and another gentleman named Sherthoff or something similar. They finally gained entrance to the embassy in what appeared to be a scene scripted by Francis Ford Coppola and began a search for the communicator who was missing. The communicator's wife eventually found his body behind a locked door. The Chargé d'Affaires, Al Erdos, had killed him with a pair of those very long G.I. shears you find in every

mail room. It was the result of a spat during a homosexual love affair as I later found out from Dr. Moran, the Spanish doctor who formed the autopsy (sperm in the deceased's stomach, that sort of thing.) That was about the sum total of what I knew about the country, and nobody I met at State knew any more. So when we went out it was really to terra incognita.

I arrived in Malabo, the capital of E.G., January 12, 1985. Teri (short for Kateri), my wife, came with our two youngest sons, David and Stephen, February 9. I went from a very freezing cold Madrid, where I had spent a week meeting the U.S. Embassy Madrid folks and waiting for the once a week flight to Malabo (there was no other way of getting there at the time), into this lush, tropical setting, right out of "Love in The Time of Cholera." The capital city is Malabo, emphasis on the second "a," a once magnificent city when E.G. was "the Switzerland of West Africa." Maybe not Switzerland, but it was a slice of Europe, with hospitals, casinos, fine hotels, a place wealthy West Africans went to vacation, to gamble, or to get medical treatment, and Americans, like Peace Corps types, went for R & R. With independence in 1968, the country destroyed itself, or, more accurately, the first President, the infamous Francisco Macias, destroyed the country. Cocoa production virtually ceased, and with it foreign income, and E.G. which had the second highest literacy rate in black Africa (behind Uganda) at 87 % produced destroyed the school system and produced a generation (from 1968-79) of illiterates. The city of Malabo decayed visibly during Macias' years, and when he was overthrown (1979), a bankrupt successor government was no more competent to restore the city than it was to revive the economy. A return to law and order and economic normalcy would have regenerated the country but attracting the necessary foreign and domestic investment, but that would also have diluted the government's power, and that was not an option the new dictator, who overthrew Francisco Macias, his nephew, Teodoro Obiang, was willing to consider. In any event, as you drive around the city and squint your eyes, you can see what the old Gothic cathedral, the Moorish building that serves as defense department, the Supreme Court building and 100 other magnificent structures must have looked like in their prime.

Since 1980 when diplomatic relations between the U.S. and E.G. were established again, the Embassy had been a set of rooms on the fifth floor of a seedy (but the only) hotel in Malabo. My predecessor Alan Hardy would have done a fine job if he only succeeded in keeping his sanity operating out of an office Sam Spade would have turned down, but, in fact, he did a great deal more. He got us started there, toured the country, got to know the government and its officials. He got hit with a very unflattering portrait in a story on E.G. in the *London Sunday Times*, but that was a result of his seedy, unairconditioned office, over which he had no control and which by Malabo standards was Trump Plaza, rather than his accomplishments. I still remember the articles reference to the fly-stained portrait of President Reagan hanging behind Ambassador Hardy. The irony was just as a real embassy was being completed (Hardy had negotiated for two adjoining houses for the embassy and ambassador's residence respectively, it was time for him to leave. He did get to move into the office, but he never had the comforts of the new residence which he had acquired and modeled to his specifications. Running the embassy when we got there was a young officer who was on his first tour as an officer, and he was probably the Department's youngest Chargé d'affaires. He had been in E.G. for a long time, and they were beginning to get a little worried about him at State. His cables were showing signs of strain (he had advised Washington that he was considering a major confrontation with the Spanish

ambassador over some minor parking matter), and they thought, correctly in my opinion, he needed his long deferred R & R. He got it when I arrived.

In the very first month that I was there I got quite an education in the relationship between E.G. and Nigeria. Strange as it seems today, there was a time when E.G., or Fernando Po as the main island used to be known, was much more important than Nigeria. Nigerian workers used to come over to E.G. to work the cocoa plantations, as many as 75,000 Nigerian workers at times. This led, understandably, to tensions between the residents of the main island of E.G. who simply rented out their lands to the cocoa developers and the Nigerians who actually worked the land. As Nigeria became more powerful, this historical dependency became an embarrassment, and the Nigerians starting talking about Nigerian "slaves" brought over to harvest cocoa in E.G. Nigerian-Equatorial Guinea animosity had simmered for generations, and I was about to see it erupt again. A Nigerian cocoa worker was shot by a Equatorial Guinean policeman in a bar in a slum called "Campo Yaounde" on Saturday night. (It's hard to visualize a slum in a city (Malabo) which has itself become a large slum, but everything is relative.) The shooting wasn't a political act or a statement by the government of E.G. A policeman got drunk and shot someone who annoyed him. Did the policeman decide to shoot the fellow because he was a Nigerian? Maybe. Who knows. In any event, the important point is that the government of E.G. had nothing to do with it. To get buried, as well as to do anything, in Equatorial Guinea, you need a permit. Since the deceased was a Nigerian, the Nigerian chargé went through the regular process to get the burial permit, but he didn't succeed which is not surprising because the bureaucracy there doesn't do anything well or efficiently, even when it concerns disposing of a body which is putrefying in the equatorial sun. So he then went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to get their help but still no luck. Now remember: The Nigerian was shot on Saturday night at 10:00. It is very hot in E.G. There is no electricity and no way of refrigerating or preserving dead bodies. The Nigerian Chargé d'Affaires had tried unsuccessfully for over 40 hours to get his countryman buried. On Monday afternoon, the charge arrives at the Foreign Ministry at 3, just as it is closing for the day. He has the dead body angled in the back seat of his Mercedes. He catches the Foreign Minister as he is coming out and says: "I have the body here. You won't give me a permit to bury it, perhaps that is because you would like to eat it." He got the burial permit, as he gloated to me over lunch one day.

Q: This is known as diplomacy?

RUDDY: Hardly. It was not only a bizarre incident in its own terms, it was even worse if you knew the local history. There is a certain amount of cannibalism, in the country, necrophilia really, even to this day. When Francisco Macias was overthrown, the story was that he was executed and the executioner, including the current president, had a picnic on various of his body parts (brain, heart, etc.). American Indians used to do this same sort of thing to incorporate, literally, the best qualities of their enemies. Whether this ever happened in the case of Macias is not the point. The charge's was reminding the Foreign Minister of the reputation for necrophilia just to give an extra twist. That little story gives you an idea of the relations between the two countries. As I mentioned, the charge got his certificate, but the following Saturday two gun Nigerian gunboats arrived in the port of Malabo along with a giant transport; two Hercules aircraft (the kind they carry tanks and troops in) arrived at the airport, all without permission. Sunday morning Nigerian soldiers and sailors scoured the cocoa plantations and Nigerian living

areas to find and repatriate all the "Nigerian slaves." (That's what the giant transport was for.) Agence France reported that Nigeria had sent an armada against E.G. and BBC World Service reported it as dramatically. The Guineans, for once used good sense and treated the planes, boats and Nigerian search parties as a non-event. There was nothing they could do about, so they ignored it on the state controlled radio and TV. The gun boats left within hours of their arrival since the Nigerian commander who was in charge of the search parties must have realized very quickly he was on a wild goose chase: the Nigerians he met were very happy to stay where they were. Many were married and had families. The ship stayed but nobody wanted to go except for 7 people who wanted a free ride back to Lagos.

We had no radio (I'm so used to saying it that I forget that it must sound like a fluke or temporary abnormality for a U.S. embassy not to have a radio when, as a matter of fact, it was routine for us to be totally isolated), so while the BBC and Agence France were describing what sounded like Nigeria's answer to D-Day, we weren't saying boo. Washington, which is used to dealing with embassies with new-fangled inventions like radios, never considered the possibility that we just could not communicate. They interpreted our silence ominously. We were finally able to make a telephone call and alert the station chief that there was nothing to worry about. That put our mind at ease, but Gimbel's doesn't talk to Macy's, and our little chat did not get into State Department channels. While we went whistling about our business, fat and happy, thinking all was well with the world, the State Department truly believed we were under siege and unable even to communicate. That sort of confusion that was always going on when, as usual, we didn't have any communications. We came to realize, of course, that being out of touch with Washington was not necessarily such a bad thing.

Q: Why didn't you have communications? I would have thought that would have been a number one priority.

RUDDY: As of the time I left Malabo (February, 1988), the embassy still didn't have reliable communications. We had an old system which wasn't very effective even when well it was working well, which was rare. And we didn't have any reliable international telephone. Every once in a while, we did get a call through, but you just couldn't rely on it. The telephone hours would be erratic, and even when the phone was supposed to be working, it wouldn't. We went for months without reliable communications, and sometimes without any communications at all, except for what couriers would bring. Typically, we would have to communicate routine matters with Douala (in Cameroon) by radio. Classified material had to go out from Douala or be carried to us from Douala. It was not a good way to run a railroad. For other things, like mail, we depended on Iberia, the Spanish airline, which carried the diplomatic pouch, including letters from home, from Madrid to us. Iberia was always in a snit with Equatorial Guinea, and when things got nasty, as they frequently did, Iberia just suspended flights to E.G. At one stage we went just about 4 months without any mail. That meant no American Express bills, no Visa/MasterCard bills, and when mail finally resumed there were some very nasty dunning letters.

Q: This all harks back to the 19th century consular posts.

RUDDY: It really does. It was almost like being an embassy in the days of the clipper ships. It was hard to deal with people like American Express because even their notices telling you that you didn't pay their last bill didn't get there either. And there was not much you could do about it. You could send out your bills, or whatever it was that came up and on other things you had to hope you could find someone, a missionary, a Peace Corps volunteer, somebody going to the States who could mail your letters there. Otherwise, you were on Mars. You couldn't call, you couldn't be called. For long periods, you couldn't send mail out; you couldn't get mail in. You couldn't get messages in; you couldn't send work messages out.

But, there was a good side. It meant we had to, repeat had to, send somebody to Douala regularly on courier trips. That was the only way we had to get and send important (classified) materials, and that being the case, State (as opposed to the embassy) paid for these trips. Frequently we could only go by charter because the national (E.G.) airline flights, such as they were, were inconsistent and sometimes non-existent because they didn't pay their fuel bills. Even Cameroon Airlines required payment from E.G. up front before they would allow any passengers to board. On other occasions, where we had a great many things to take to or from Douala (copiers, motors, booze and goodies for a major reception like the 4th) a charter was actually a better buy. So we used to get a charter every other week or so to take the mail out and bring back goods from Douala, which is about 20 miles away across the channel, and a big city. We rotated it among the Americans at post so that everybody would get a turn and have something to look forward to. I know Teri and I didn't take our full turns. I had no particular interest in going to Douala; I much preferred Malabo. But for others, though, it was just a nice break. They would go over, stay at Novotel or Le Meridien, have a few tasty French meals, swim in the topless pools, do some shopping and return refreshed. It was a therapeutic break, and everyone knew when his turn was coming up. The anticipation might have been greater than the event, but it was very good for morale.

Q: Morale must have been a major concern of yours.

RUDDY: Yes, it was, but all things considered, we had surprisingly good morale. In addition to the Douala trips, the embassy rented a house in a mountainous region of the country, about an hour and a half away by car. It was called the ambassador's guesthouse, but I guess we used it less than anyone. The house was in a Swiss-like area (here the comparison with Switzerland was appropriate) or in an area like the mountainous regions of Burundi, above Bujumbura. This part of Equatorial Guinea, called Moka (no relation to coffee), is high, is pastoral and cool. You actually need a blanket at night. We would rotate the house among the embassy staff (American), so that every fourth week or so you knew you had use of the house. The only exception would be if I needed it for some official entertaining, and I did only once. The sea level part of Equatorial Guinea is great for mosquitoes and tsetse flies, malaria and sleeping sickness. Cattle can't survive there (sleeping sickness). But up in the higher regions you are in Marlboro country. Fresh air, great areas for hiking, reading, and some serious sleeping. Moka was another very good thing for morale.

One of the demoralizing sides of E.G. for some, i.e. those who didn't speak it, was language. Spanish is the official language, but if you didn't speak Spanish, you could get by in French. There were enough people in Malabo from the continent (E.G. is in two parts: one part is an

island (former Fernando Po), and the other part is a pie slice between Gabon and Cameroon) that a foreigner (American) could get by in French. Foreign Service officers did not have a problem since they could all speak Spanish. Secretaries, communicators, the non-coms, as it were were the ones who had language problems, and therefore, by definition if they were young and single, problems with their social lives. I'll get back to that in a minute.

A real fear, and therefore a morale problem, for parents, was for the health of young children. One of the officers and his wife had a small child at post, and there was always the fear of illness, exacerbated because there was no real hospital. There was a hospital, of course, but it would make you gag walking around the grounds to smell the medical garbage and trash just thrown behind the buildings. The U.S. Navy doctor who came to E.G. on a ship visit visited the hospital and said that we would never be so sick to go to that hospital, no matter what we had. They treated patients with contagious diseases in the bed next to someone there for some internal problem. Patients brought their own food; there was no electricity, therefore: no x-rays, no refrigeration, no medicines requiring cooling, no whole blood supply. Another fear was trauma? What do you do if you or your wife or child is in a motor accident, for example, bleeding, internal injuries, if you could do anything? It was not an academic question. During my stay in E.G. several ex-pats (a few Europeans and a South African woman) died in different parts of the country as a result of car crashes. In Malabo, at least, we, in the embassies had an agreement among ourselves, to help each other in several ways. First, we listed those diplomats who could be called on to give blood, on the hoof, as it were. (It was the honor system; don't volunteer unless you're sure your blood is untainted.) We arranged to have a plane from Douala, to come out when signaled, land at in Malabo, at night if necessary, without airport lights (the various embassies' cars would go out and provide runway lights...this was right out of a movie) and medevac the injured person. Fortunately we never had to use that.

We did have direct cable traffic with Europe through the Spanish Embassy and their Foreign Ministry in Madrid. The Foreign Ministry could inform our embassy in Madrid and arrange whatever kind of medical help the USG could provide us. We could at least get the word out that way. There was a real medical risk, no doubt about it. That's why E.G. was a hardship post, why everybody got paid about 25% more to go there.

Language was also a great a problem. One of big mistakes State made, and probably still does, was to send communicators and secretaries out to post without any language training. The rationale, I guess, is that they don't need a foreign language to do their job in the embassy, so why bother? The reason to bother is that 16 hours of each day are spent out of the embassy, and if they can't relax by shopping locally, dining out, having a drink, dancing, doing the things people need language to do, they are going to become unhappy and depressed. In some cases the non-coms, as I called them, would try to learn Spanish. We offered language classes free, had native speakers come in, provided books and tapes and did what we could. (I took Spanish all the time we were there, because you can never be good enough.) But we always started classes for anybody who wanted it...basic, "market" Spanish to let people mingle in town, order a drink, be a little less self-conscious. But they weren't interested. They would try for a while and then drop off. I couldn't understand that, especially since, without Spanish, they knew they were too embarrassed to do simple things like go shopping. They couldn't go to the bars and do the social things that they liked doing. Nobody expects you to have perfect Spanish (the Guineans are so

nice about helping you along if you have any Spanish at all), but without any Spanish you are playing charades.

The married people were in better shape. For example, there was a communicator and his wife, neither of whom spoke Spanish, but they were married and had each other, and that solved a lot of the language problem. If you didn't have someone to unburden to in English, it seemed to me you had a problem. But we had (to my knowledge) no drinking problems, no drug problems, the kinds of problems you would expect in so isolated a place.

We did have some unhappy people, no question about that. I don't know how State solves that, but if everybody, especially the non-coms, were given language training, it would open up new worlds for them. One secretary, a lovely young woman really tried to learn Spanish on her own but just didn't have much success, although she was extraverted and gave it the college try. As a result of being unable to speak Spanish, she asked to leave post early and, of course, I said all right because she really had tried. But if she had had a couple of months of Spanish before she came out it would have made things a lot easier and State would have had a trained secretary in place for a much longer period.

Q: Since Equatorial Guinea is a place that really does not show up on the normal radar, could you explain a little about its background?

RUDDY: Actually it is fairly well known among Africanists, but by the name Fernando Po, the Main Island. The Portuguese discovered, or in political-correctese, encountered Fernando Po (Po rhymes with goo) in the 15th century. Many people had sailed down the West coast of Africa, but few made it back. They didn't have the technology to do so. The Portuguese developed the corsair, the height of naval technology in those days, a technological equivalent in its time to the nuclear subs we have developed which can sail around the world under water. The corsairs, with their special sails and Portuguese knowledge of the winds and tides, allowed them to get down the coast of Africa and back again. That is how they were able to get around the Cape of Good Hope, an achievement for those days equivalent to our moon landing.

The Portuguese were the astronauts of the 15th century, and they explored everywhere, including Africa. That is why so many places like Sierra Leone and Cabo Verde have Portuguese names (Papua New Guinea in the Pacific was so called because the native hair pieces reminded the Portuguese of a papal tiara). Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau were Portuguese colonies (they even landed on The East Cape of Good Hope but used it only for a fueling and R & R station; they didn't think it worth colonizing!), and in their voyages they landed on the island known until 1968 or so as Fernando Po. (No, I don't know who the eponymous Fernando Po was.)

There is a humorous story I tell on myself. The capital of Mozambique in the late 60's when I got to USIA was Lourenço Marques, named I guess, in Portuguese fashion after some famous Portuguese. All the African cables I saw on arriving at USIA had the notation: "Copy Lourenco Marques." I didn't know it was a place. I pictured some old colonial planter in a white suit, the kind of person Fernando Lamas played in *SOUTH PACIFIC*, grown old but still very

knowledgeable about East Africa. I assumed he was on our payroll and the "copy Lourenco Marques" was to keep him informed. Dumb? Yes, very.

Anyway, there was a trade made between Spain and Portugal in the 18th century. Spain ceded Portugal some islands off Brazil, and Spain was given Fernando Po in West Africa. Thus, in a nutshell, is how Fernando Po became Spanish. It gained independence in 1968, but it had exercised autonomy for some time before and had its own representatives in the Spanish Cortes.

The first President was Francisco Macias, and his accession to power was the result of a power struggle in the UN Poland, of all countries, was influential in gathering support around him. He was not Spain's first choice by any means, but in one of the great underestimates of all time, they went along with him as someone who couldn't do any harm. It is the vogue to say he was a madman. I think he was just a very bad and very stupid man. He gave himself the title of "Divine Miracle", and woe to anyone who snickered on hearing it. He took Equatorial Guinea which had the third highest per capita income in Africa, after Libya and South Africa, right over a cliff. He destroyed the economy. E.G. had the best cocoa in the world, and he destroyed its production and export. He made it a crime to be an "intellectual," the corpus delicti sufficing in owning a single book. He drove out priests and nuns, and many others fled for their lives. The schools, which the nuns had run with such great success, closed, and for a decade young Guineans had no schooling whatsoever. He also murdered many people, leading anyone with a brain and means to escape to flee. If someone drew up a plan to destroy a country, he could not have improved on what Macias actually did. When he was finally convicted... they had a trial for him of sorts...they named 4500 people that he was responsible for killing, some as I mentioned, executed in the national soccer stadium to the accompaniment of Beatles music.

Q: We are talking about a population of how many?

RUDDY: The current population is roughly 300,000. That's probably a good working figure. You know that records don't mean much in a country where many births and deaths are not recorded. Add to that the great numbers that fled, obviously without getting their passports stamped. There is no really accurate number of those killed or driven out by Macias, but the number I heard frequently was 100,000 or a third of the population. Those who could flee went to Gabon, to Cameroon, to The Canaries or to Spain itself, and probably other places as well, such as Nigeria, but how many is just guess work.

Those who were able to escape formed Guinean exile associations in the countries in which they settled. I have seen the minutes of some of these groups. They were, of course, all against the government of E.G. (you have to wait in line to do that), but they reminded me of the Young Republicans: they spent all their time trying to purge each other, half the group accusing the other half of disloyalty, intrigue, etc. It didn't matter where the group was, The Canaries, Paris, Gabon, the minutes always read alike.

Their plight, of course, was anything but humorous. Families were separated forever, many Guinean women became prostitutes to support themselves in places like Libreville (the red light district there is largely Guinean), and all because of Francisco Macias, who had done just terrible things, abominable things, an Idi Amin without the publicity. Many people think he had to be

demented. I think he was just a bad person. He admired Hitler whom he used to quote in his speeches. He used bong, rhymes with gong, a kind of marijuana which he smoked all the time. "The Dogs of War" if you have ever read that book is about Equatorial Guinea.

Q: John Forsythe?

RUDDY: Fredrick Forsyth, I think. John is the actor. That book was not only about E.G., it was written in Equatorial Guinea. If you want to know what the city looked like that book will tell you. The description is just wonderful. Forsyth was in E.G. during the Macias period, and the book is about a fictional attempt to overthrow him. Forsyth, himself, did fund an aborted attempt to overthrow Macias, but the Spanish Coast Guard intercepted the guns and mercenaries before they could get out of Spanish waters, and that was the end of that. There has been a recent book on E.G., and The New York Times rated it as one of the best books of 1990. Written by Bob Klitgaard, it's called "Tropical Gangsters" and treats Equatorial Guinea about the time when I was there. I knew Bob and actually reviewed the book for the Foreign Service Journal. The title tells it all: the tropical gangsters are the corrupt government officials (is that redundant?) in E.G., a tropical nomenclature headed by the President himself, Teodoro Obiang, as gang leader.

End of reader