FIJI

COUNTRY READER
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HARRY COBURN
Vice Consul
Suva (1966-1967)

Harry Coburn was born in Long Island, New York. He attended the College of the Holy Cross where he received a bachelors degree with a concentration in Political Science in 1956. He has served in the US Air Force. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961

Q: Sure, of course.

COBURN: The consular officers felt that we had that work all the time and we should have a weekend off. While I was there it remained that all the Foreign Service officers had to take their turn. Some of the weekends were pretty grisly. I remember one in particular. I was called by a marine guard at 3:00 in the morning. Somebody was burning to death in a terrible accident. They wouldn't send an ambulance to pick them up until the embassy gave a guarantee that we'd pay the cost of the ambulance. Unbelievable. Another time I was called by the military, also like 2:00 in the morning, and told that I had to get the DCM to come to the U.S. military facility. They had a highly classified cable and we couldn't send anybody to pick it up. I couldn't go get it and give it to him. He had to come and see it himself. I had to call the DCM and tell him that there was a sergeant who was being very difficult and demanded that he read this message within the next hour. He had to come in person. The DCM was not very happy. He said, well, come and get me and I'll go. So, I drove over and picked him up and he grumped the whole way. When he got to the building, the office was apparently on the eighth floor, but the elevator was broken. So, he had to walk up eight flights of stairs and when he came down he was as hot as a pistol. He said,

"That will not happen again. I will guarantee it." The consular work on the weekends had its moments and here almost 40 years later I remember those two instances.

Q: Well, it is worth noting that unlike people who give in to dilemmas domestically in the United States where service will be apportioned out among police forces or medical systems or whatever. Duty officers overseas receive calls totally across the spectrum of human needs for assistance and you are available 24 hours a day. The State Department does provide some services. So, you did two years in Madrid and then what happened to you after that?

COBURN: Well, as I found out later my good friend, who was my boss in personnel, still thinking of me, had me assigned to the political section in Manila as third secretary. By the time my assignment was made and I was actually ready to depart, the Department of State in one of its many cutbacks, had abolished the position in Manila. So, I was then the property of the Far East Bureau and was assigned as vice consul to Suva in the Fiji Islands.

Q: Did you apply for that or have any idea that that was coming?

COBURN: I knew the Fiji Islands existed and when I was in personnel we used to talk about what a glorious place it must be to live on the South Pacific island under all the palm trees, but no, I hadn't thought of it as a place where I would spend a tour of duty.

Q: So, thinking you were going to Manila one day you got a notsaying.

COBURN: I never knew I was going to Manila.

Q: Oh you never, you found out later? Oh. So, in those days did they have any system because you were still a junior officer that you actually bid on things or you just?

COBURN: Your bid was on the April Fool's list because it was due in Washington on April 1st and whatever you put down bore little resemblance to whatever you got. In those days there was no communication between the field and the Department. Nowadays people call Washington at the drop of a hat.

Q: Well, they send e-mails constantly to their counselors, it's continuous process.

COBURN: We had absolutely no contact with the personnel office in Washington until the cable came through assigning me. I might just add, as a footnote on the assassination of Kennedy, of course there was no television. We didn't know what was happening. All we had was BBC radio because we couldn't follow the local Spanish radio stations. The lack of information in those days and that's not that far back was dramatic as opposed to constant information we get today. I thought that somebody in their wisdom had decided that they were broadening me by assigning me to the Fiji Islands after having been in a Western European post. We departed and now we were four because my daughter was born in Spain. My son had been born in Washington. We departed for our trip to Fiji. The best part of the two years in Fiji was getting there and getting back because the Matson Lines sailed from San Francisco. American officials had to travel on American flagged vessels. The only American flagged vessel going to the Fiji Islands was the

Matson Cruise Line, which had a very small number of people and most of them over the age of 50. When we got on board with two small children, they were everybody's grandchildren. We sailed from San Francisco to Los Angeles and everybody went to Disneyland. Then we sailed from Los Angeles to Tahiti. I, as vice consul in the Fiji Islands, had responsibility for the entire Pacific Ocean from New Zealand to the California coast.

Q: How many people, how many American officers were assigned to Fiji?

COBURN: Three.

Q: There were three officers and so there was what, was there ambassador?

COBURN: It was a British crown colony.

Q: It was a British crown colony, so in effect it was a consulate.

COBURN: It was a consulate with a consul, a vice consul, myself, who did the political and economic reporting, and then a consular officer who was a staff officer, vice consul. The difference between a staff officer and a commissioned officer was that we had the commission from the Congress to perform our functions in the traditional sense. While a staff officer did the same job, but didn't have the commission. I don't know if that distinction still exists, but at the time it did.

Q: So, no secretary, no communicator?

COBURN: There was an American secretary assigned.

Q: A secretary who also acted as a communicator?

COBURN: Well, the communication was limited.

Q: Basically unclassified?

COBURN: One-time pads. Anytime you get a classified, I'm getting ahead of my story, but anytime you got a classified cable that came in the whole staff would have to come in and take three or four hours and go through this one time pad to find out that Governor so and so was going to come through and please provide courtesy support. Nobody in Washington who sent out these classified cables realized that we didn't have any facilities to declassify or break the codes other than this tedious method of going through one by one.

Q: How did you divide the work?

COBURN: The consul, who spoke French, visited all the Francophone islands, Tahiti, New Caledonia, while I had the English speaking islands with the exception of Tonga. Tonga was a protectorate with a reigning King. So the consul kept Tonga for himself. My trips were to the Gilbert and Ellis Islands, the Solomon Islands, and the Condominium of New Hebrides. Samoa

was partially an American territory and partially under the British flag. American Samoa was handled by the Department of the Interior and the rest of the island chain under the British flag was covered by our Embassy in New Zealand.

Q: So, you thought you were going to this tropical paradise that everyone had fantasized about during training?

COBURN: Yes.

Q: And?

COBURN: It was tropical but not quite a paradise. For one thing, Fiji was a grouping of about 300 islands. The native inhabitants were Melanesians, not Polynesians. They had been cannibals before the Methodist missionaries arrived. In appearance they are similar to the people of New Guinea and apparently have some African heritage. How they ever got from Africa to the middle of the Pacific still has anthropologists scratching their heads. Socially they were organized on a Polynesian type hierarchy because Fiji was the last reach of the Melanesians in the Pacific and is very near to the Tongan Islands where pure Polynesians inhabit. Just before the Europeans arrived in the area the sporadic warfare among the Fijians had resulted in the victory of one tribe whose chief became the senior chief of the Islands. The British, in keeping with their patterns in such cases, reinforced the structure and recognized the chiefs as the interlocutors keeping tribal land, with few exceptions from being broken up. So the Fijians had their structure maintained intact. They lived in villages under the rule of the local chiefs. Local chiefs reported to the more senior ones and the biggest chiefs met regular as a grand council under the leadership of the senior chief, the direct descendent of the warrior who had united the islands under his rule. Because the Fijians didn't see any need to work, they lived off the land, the British, in order to make the colony pay for itself, brought in Indian laborers to work in sugar cane fields that were developed. The Indians were very prolific and produced large families. They soon became local shopkeepers and dominated the local commerce, although the largest firms in the islands were owned by Australian interests. By the time we arrived, the population was almost 50/50. The Fijians were almost entirely Methodist. They were a religious people and mandated that Sunday was a day of rest. They were in church from 9 am to 2 pm and then from 5 pm to 7 pm. There was nothing to do on Sunday since everything was closed.

Q: By Fijians here you mean the Melanesian component of what was living in Fiji?

COBURN: In Fiji, the Melanesians are called Fijians; other native born non-white were called Fiji Islanders. The white inhabitants, many of them born there, were called Europeans, even the Australians and New Zealanders. Chinese were called Chinese even though they had been born there. Society was segmented in so many ways. As I said, the Fijians were Methodist, the Indians, Hindu. The Chinese were largely Catholic. Catholic missionaries in the Pacific were usually of French nationality. The Fijians played field hockey, the Chinese played basketball and the Indians played soccer. There was no intermarriage. I never saw any mixed couples. The Fijians spoke their native language and only the senior members of the tribes spoke English so communication was a problem. Most of the Indians spoke their local dialect. When we tried to

do outreach to this community, we had real trouble getting books and materials that could reach the community.

Q: Most of the Indians did not speak English?

COBURN: The shopkeepers did, but not in the country. When you got into the countryside where the people lived very primitive existences, the Fijians lived in what they called buries, which were thatched roofed huts with privies outside, no electricity. They were living as they had lived traditionally. The city, the town of Suva probably had 25,000 or 30,000 people. The pavement stopped at the city limits. There was a dirt road around Viti Levu, which was the main island. Suva was on the wet side because Suva had the best harbor for ships. On the dry side they had an international airport called Nandi and the airport when we were there was important because it was where the planes stopped for refueling on their way to Australia.

Q: Is that why, why was there a consulate there at all?

COBURN: That's a good question. I don't know.

Q: Had it been there a long time?

COBURN: It had been there since World War II. There had also been a consulate in Tahiti. In fact I think we still own property there. We tried to before, I got there to open it. The furniture, the seals, everything had been shipped to Suva, to ship to Papiete and the story that I was told was that when the exequatur, which is the document that gives the consular officers their authority to issue documents in the territory, reached President De Gaulle he said why are the Americans opening a consulate in Tahiti? His staff said the property there was closed for budgetary reasons and now they have the money and they want to open it. He said, they're not going to open it there. He refused to approve, probably suspecting our official presence in Tahiti during France's testing of its nuclear devices would be a security breach. So, one of my chores was to get rid of all the furniture we had because we had two consulates' furniture, seals, documents, rules, books, what have you, in storage in our little walk up consulate on the main street of Suva Town.

The culture of the community was interesting. Visitors would come through and say it was similar to Ceylon because there was a real hierarchy. The British Governor, Sir Derek Jakeway, lived on the domain in a house on top of a hill and had a plumed hat and an official guard of Fijian warriors.

Q: What do you mean on the domain?

COBURN: The domain was the part of town where the British civil servants who managed the bureaucracy lived.

Q: So, in effect they had like a compound of their own?

COBURN: A compound in downtown and it was a hill. On the top was the governor and one level down was the chief secretary and you know, two levels down were various minions etc. The pecking order there I figured out one day was the Oxford/Cambridge people, then the expatriate Brits, then New Zealanders, then the Australians, then the Chinese, then the Fijians and then the Indians. Somewhere off were the Americans. The Australians got most of the grief of the local community because they were the merchants. They had the stores and they had the economic activities there that people resented when they thought prices were high or things weren't working. They always tended to blame the Australians. It was interesting to see the frictions among the various groups. The New Zealanders told me that they were descended from the aristocracy while Australians were descended from prisoners. That kind of feeling permeated this very small town and the longer we were there, the smaller it got because you knew most of the people who had significant jobs or social positions in the colony and they all knew you. You would see the same people at social events around town and meet them at civic events or when special ceremonies were being held. The Queen's Birthday celebration at the Governors Mansion was the top event of the year. Everyone arrived in their best clothes and the Governor and his Lady would mingle with the guests in the garden while the Fijian military band played. Most of the social life outside of homes took place at the Suva yacht club which was off limits to all but the European community, which as I said included New Zealanders, Australians and our American staff. The radio, our only station, went off the air at 10 pm after playing God Save the Queen. We had one daily newspaper of four pages. There was one movie house in which the Europeans sat upstairs in the balcony and the locals sat downstairs. It was a very segregated place where expatriates could live at a level way above what they would find in their home countries.

Q: Hot, tropical climate?

COBURN: Hot, humid and very rainy. We had a tin roof on our housand in heavy rains, you couldn't carry on a conversation.

Q: Lots of insects around?

COBURN: More than you could count. We had rats in the house and outside since the drains from the kitchen sink ran down the hill in an open trench. We had bats who loved to eat the papaya which grew around the house. We had mice, lizards, spiders, and even some mongoose imported to eat snake eggs which finished off most of the snake population and then became a menace themselves. One night in bed we heard a terrible scream coming from outside. I looked out and couldn't see anything. The next day we went out on our balcony which had two electric wires brining power into the house. There was a dead bat which had gotten two wings on both wires and electrocuted himself. For a few days we had this dead bat looking at us. We had lizards in the house every night. We had mosquitoes since only the bedrooms were screened. The children had rashes and all sorts of infections. It was an unhealthy climate for children since they tended to run around without shoes and any cut would become infected. Getting medical attention was difficult because you would have to be screened by a general practitioner before you could get an appointment with any specialist.

Q: Were there beaches? Did people go to the beach?

COBURN: There wasn't a beach in Suva because the city's shoreline was covered with mangroves. Outside the harbor were coral reefs which kept the surf from reaching the shore. A breach in the reef allowed large ships to enter the harbor. There were beaches on the other side of the island but the nearest was 70 miles away and it took about 3 ? hours to reach it over an unpaved and rutted road. By the time you got to the beach you were hot and dirty and the realization that you have to return the same way tended to keep us from making too many trips. Many of the members of the yacht club had private boats which they used to take them out of the harbor and down to beaches not reachable by roads. So the long term residents and the wealthy merchants had a way of getting to the beaches. I don't recall seeing any swimming pools the entire time we were there except for one small one built in the house the consul rented - it was more of a bath tub than a pool.

Q: Was there a golf course or anything like that?

COBURN: Yes, there was a nine-hole golf course on the other end of town. I took up golf there although the course wasn't very good. We also started to collect shells, which was another very active group.

Q: People played bridge, that sort of thing?

COBURN: Not that we knew about.

Q: So, this is definitely not a tropical paradise?

COBURN: No, I don't think you could consider it a tropical paradise. I have one little vignette about the place that I want to share. Since we had the only white Ford station wagon in the crown colony, everybody knew where we were any moment of the day or night. The consul had given a party. He lived in the better part of town and as we were coming home at 11:00 in the evening, our car broke down and we, my wife and I, got out and we had to flag someone down. It turned out to be a taxi. They took us home. The next day I got the car and had it towed into a garage. For weeks people wanted to know what I was doing at the insane asylum on Saturday night. You had the feeling that everybody knew who you were, where you were and what you were doing. A total lack of privacy. You weren't a movie star, but sometimes you feel like how they must feel. They never can go anywhere and be themselves because people are watching them and what they're doing.

I had the opportunity to travel, which my wife unfortunately did not except for our rest and recuperation trip, which we had to Sydney. I'll talk about that trip because it will show what happened to the children. My daughter was a cranky child. She was always crying and unhappy. As soon as we got on the plane, she was only about two years old, she was a happy child, giggling and content. We got on the plane and flew back, she got off the plane, crying. To this day, she can't stand heat.

Q: So, just to back up a second. So, as vice consul, you were in effect the number two person in the three-man deal and your duties were not consular strictly in this case. They were more generally what?

COBURN: Well, generally reporting on activities and managing our outreach programs. I represented the East West Center in Hawaii. It ran a program to bring people from the islands to Hawaii to train them in the hotel industry, for example. We thought one of the development aims of that part of the world was to get efficient hotel staff. We would identify people and the East West Center, supported by the United States government, would pay their cost of travel to and training at the center in Hawaii and then send them back. Then we had a traveling troop, sponsored by the United States Information Agency, to demonstrate American culture. We had this group that came through and played American music of the day (the '60s). I became the information officer and arranged for their performances around the island. Then as a commercial officer I had to promote American wines. We had a wine festival at a tourist resort on the dry side of the island. We invited a lot of tourist industry people from Fiji there. There were many travails to get the wine there. Then the vice consul, the consul and I tried to make some determination as to which wines we thought were the best and then presented them to the locals. They drank everything we had. It didn't matter. That was my commercial experience. Then I did what I thought was the seminal study on land tenure systems in the Fiji Islands and subsequently having sent this off to Washington I was at Nandi Airport when Senator Rusk came through on his way to a...

Q: Senator Rusk?

COBURN: Secretary Rusk. Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, was going to a Southeast Asia Treaty Organization meeting, SEATO, in Sydney. As usual the plane had to land at Nandi for refueling. The consul and myself flew over. He had arranged for the high chief of Fiji, Ratu George, a direct descendent of the paramount chief of Fiji at the time of the annexation by the British to present a tabua to Secretary Rusk. A tabua is a whale's tooth and it's the most honored presentation that a Fijian can make. This was significant because they can't be exported out of Fiji. So, the consul arranged to have the most senior Fijian dignitary give the most honored Fijian award to Secretary of State Rusk.

I tell you this story because the secretary to Mrs. Rusk, Virginia Wallace, who was in personnel as the secretarial counselor when I was there got off the plane. I said, "Virginia, how are you?" She said, "Fine, Harry. How do you like Fiji?" I said, "Well, it's interesting." She said, "Oh, well, whatever you do, don't send him 55 pages of reports to Washington." I said, "You're three days too late." So, that was the last land tenure report I did.

Q: Did anybody ever respond to that or maybe just say we were happto get it or nothing?

COBURN: Nobody ever acknowledged it, one way or the other.

Q: Right.

COBURN: You're sitting out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean not knowing what's going on in the rest of the world, reading your four page newspaper everyday which was full of Vietnam stories. The consul used to spend a good amount of time writing letters to the paper about their editorial policy which was essentially get America out of Vietnam because you're killing too many people. We thought we would help by getting the chief political reporter of the paper on a trip to the United States, which we organized through the United States Information Agency (USIA). Off he went to the States and when he came back he was fired. The editors of the paper thought it was so funny that we didn't know his situation. We had given him a trip which they thought was a good way to get rid of him and when he was gone they cleaned out his office.

Q: Then, as part of your job you went around to all these various islands and did a little political reporting on them and the local dignitaries and so forth?

COBURN: Yes, that's right. Once a year I traveled to Tarawa in the then Gilbert Islands which was a British Colony. It is now an independent country. The local governor was from New Zealand and was a senior member of the British Colonial Service. Like many New Zealanders he had a rather cool and superior attitude. After flying for hours over the empty blue Pacific, I landed in Tarawa during a fierce rain storm and was immediately taken to the Resident Commissioners compound and put up in a Guest House, which was little more than a hut on the lawn of the Commissioner's residence. The Commissioner told me that he had organized an itinerary for me which would take me to Betio, an atoll across the lagoon where the major battle of Tarawa had taken place. The next day I would depart on a trip to a distant island of Abiang where I would see the "unspoiled" native habitat. I traveled to Betio on a launch with the Resident Commissioners wife and child which appeared to be a treat for them. There I was shown around the battlefield which was still littered with the wreckage of war. I learned that the U.S. troops were landed at low tide. Since the tides in that part of the world are severe, the marines were forced to fight their way toward the beach over several hundred yards of coral reef while being mowed down by Japanese machine guns. They said at the end of the battle there was only one palm tree left standing. The next day I was to leave on a boat for Abiang. I don't know if you have ever dealt with copra but...

Q: It is something from coconuts?

COBURN: Yes. The captain told me that I could use his cabin for the overnight trip. When I got on the boat I understood why everyone slept on the deck. The heat, the insects, the sweet smell of copra was overwhelming. The next morning when we arrived at Abiang, the natives came out to the copra boat in several outrigger canoes and escorted me to shore where my canoe was picked up in the water and carried several yards inland so I wouldn't have to get my feet wet. These people, the Gilbertese, were not Polynesians, but another race, the Melanesians, a distinctive race. They were tall, brown and wore sarongs. A British officer was present and escorted me to the meeting hall, called a marema, where over a hundred local Gilbertese were sitting on the mats on the ground awaiting my arrival. As soon as we entered, local men began to sing and dance. As opposed to the Polynesian and Fijian dances, the Gilbertese stomp their feet and hit their chests while they grunt and yell. Afterwards, I was asked to make a speech and they responded with a welcoming talk. I was then escorted around the island where I viewed their living quarters. The island was long and narrow, only about two feet above sea level. The huts

were built with a thatched roof and thatching halfway up the wall for privacy. But in fact, there wasn't much privacy since the huts were all grouped together in the village. Their latrines were built over the lagoon. Life on Abiang was very basic with little in the way of infrastructure.

When I returned to Tarawa, the Commissioner's wife told me that she had planned a reception for me with the local political leaders who were going to be in Tarawa for the colony's constitutional convention but that the trip her husband planned for Abiang made that impossible. Then, I realized that the Resident Commissioner had seen my trip as being planned to coincide with this meeting and fearing U.S. intentions, had sent me on a trip to the outer reaches of the colony. Little did he realize we had no interest nor intention in interfering in the internal political affairs of that small place.

Q: You didn't know about the constitutional convention?

COBURN: No, we had no advance notice of it. Communication at that time in that part of the world was slow and incomplete. The only news from the Gilber Islands was the local official publications which would arrive in Suva, Fiji several weeks or months after the event. The only means of contact other than mail was by cable. When I was in Tarawa, I learned that even among the islands, communication was a problem. On Sunday, while I was there, I visited the local Catholic bishop who was French as were most of the Catholic clergy. He told me of the problems he had with his priests since each one was isolated on small islands separated from each other. This put Europeans under some pressure and when he arrived he instituted weekly meetings where the priests could boat into Tarawa and spend time with each other exchanging information on how they could handle the problems they found. Since many of the French speaking priests were dealing with Gilbertese speaking islanders communication to each other in English, you can imagine the kinds of situations they found. It was interesting that the bishop's aunt, a nun, had been sent from France to the Gilberts when she was 20 years old and she spent the rest of her life living on one patch of land until she died at 98.

Q: How did you find it yourself? Here you are in this small three or four person post in Fiji. Somebody once said to me if you're going to be in a small post, it was best to be the headman of the post. Did you find that that caused a lot of feeling of pressure under that or were working relationships good?

COBURN: I've thought about this when you talked to me about my experiences. I felt one of the questions might be what was the best post you had and what was the worst post you had. I thought I really never really had a bad working relationship with any of my bosses. (End of tape)

Q: We're just talking about his experiences in Fiji and particularly of the dynamics of being in a very small post with only a few American officers. So, you were saying?

COBURN: I was saying that the consul, knowing that we had three small children and coping with some difficult housing situations, suggested that we get a weekend away. So, we went to Timbukula, which was the beach area about 70 miles from Suva and spent a weekend only to return to find that two of the children had come down with the measles. So, the consul really had

a tough task. They had three children of their own. They were supportive. Dick Mann and his wife were also a nice couple.

Q: Dick Mann was the?

COBURN: The consular officer. Probably it was helpful that the consul lived on one end of town. The Manns lived on the other and we lived on a hill overlooking the harbor so we saw each other, we worked together, but we weren't in a compound where we knew what everybody was doing and when they were doing it. The secretary who was a first tour from Minnesota was in shock for the first couple of months. She was a very good secretary. She had all the skills at the time that secretaries needed. She struck up a good relationship with the Australian commissioner's secretary and they traveled together.

Travel to the other islands of the South Pacific often resulted in my seeing these major battlefields of the Second World War and hearing stories from some of the old timers about the area. The Solomon Islands was the site of the battle of Guadalcanal. After the end of the war, the capital of the territory, Honiara, was built on the battlefield. It was a strange feeling to see rusted trucks and wrecked planes by the side of the road. I was told unexploded ordinance around the town was very dangerous and several natives had been injured by explosions. Any brush fire exploded long forgotten shells. This almost 20 years after the battle. The local people were Melanesians and lived a simple life. One of their practices was to bury their dead at sea. As a result the waters around Honiara were full of sharks and it was unsafe to enter the water.

I had the interesting experience of being the house guest of the British Governor who kindly offered to host a reception for me. The time of the reception was 7 pm. At 6:50, we went into the gardens. You could see the headlights of the cars as they drove up. At precisely 7 pm all the guests arrived and at precisely 8 pm, they all left. The Governor used the opportunity to ask me about American customs. He was stuck by the fact that we didn't say "sir" when talking to persons more senior. He also could not figure out why we used first names so easily. He told me he would never use a first name unless he had been properly introduced and thought the other was on his level. This remote part of the British Empire still carried on the customs long after much of them had fallen into disuse in the rest of the world.

The next day I met the Catholic bishop, who was German. He told me he had been a missionary during World War II and was stationed on an island up country from Guadalcanal. He learned, in the third year of the war, that the Japanese were going to arrest him because he was a foreigner. He told me he could see the ship coming to pick him up when suddenly it turned around. He found out later that the battle of Guadalcanal had begun and the Japanese commander recalled all his troops. He was able to survive the war without ever dealing with the Japanese and subsequently was made bishop. His cathedral was a Quonset hut left over from World War II. In fact, all the air strips in that part of the world had been built by the Americans and were still being used.

Q: So, you went around and you did reports about your encounters and so forth and you sent them off to Washington. Was there ever any feedback about any of these things? Did anybody

say to you would you follow up on this point or that or good report or no, this isn't what we want? Did you ever hear from them?

COBURN: No.

Q: What other islands did you visit?

COBURN: The New Hebrides was one of the more interesting places because it was a condominium, a joint rule by France and the United Kingdom. There was a French resident commissioner and a English commissioner and I had to pay courtesy calls on both officials. When I landed at Villa, the capital, I was met by a member of the French colonial service and a member of the English colonial service. They gave me a program for my visit which included official calls on both commissioners. The British commander lived on the island in the middle of the harbor at the top of a hill. In the islands, the chief executive officer always lived on the top of the highest hill, it seemed. To arrive at the residence, I had to climb 189 steps in the tropical heat. It was hard to see how a family could live in such a location obtaining supplies, entertaining, and carrying on business when every trip meant a boat ride from the port to the island and then a climb to the top of the hill. The French commissioner also lived on a hill on the other side in the town, but at least you could arrive at his residence by car. Both men offered a formal dinner for me with their local staff and contacts. The clash of cultures was significant. At the French commissioner's dinner, the food was excellent and the guests were all turned out in their Sunday best but the conversation at the table was in French and very lively. At the British commissioner's dinner, the food was standard English fare and the conversation was in English but very strained. Of course most of the guests were weary from the climb.

The next day I departed on a trip to a mission station where I was entertained by an English Presbyterian missionary who was translating the bible into the local language. The people in the New Hebrides were Melanesian, a similar race to those in the Solomon Islands. It seemed to be that the level of development in the New Hebrides was much superior to that of the Solomon Islands, perhaps the competition between France and England had something to do with the level of infrastructure that had been developed.

Q: Was there tensions between the populations of Fiji when you were there, was it noticeable?

COBURN: Yes, it was very noticeable.

Q: How did they, I mean, did they have gangs that brawled with one another?

COBURN: No, but they did it in their legislature. The legislative body would have debates on the forthcoming constitutional arrangements, which would prepare Fiji for its independence. The Indians used to make speeches about monkeys and baboons referring to the Fijians. The Fijians would make speeches about rats referring to the Indians. There was never any violence. But, there was always the feeling that it was just below the surface and that it wouldn't take much to start it. The Fijians were led by an Oxford trained physician, Ratu Mara. He was a senior chief, number two in the hierarchy. The British had spotted him a long time ago as a comer, a young man who was intelligent and who came from the right background. They'd given him all the

training and education and exposure to prepare him to be the first prime minister, which he subsequently was. Most of the Fijians were still in tribal structure and under control of the chiefs. Minor chiefs were under control of the senior chiefs and Ratu George was the most senior in prestige, but he wasn't very well educated and wasn't very well thought of. Ratu Mara, the number two, was very sophisticated and mixed easily with any group of people and was very highly thought of by Europeans who were there. Basically there was the Indian party (the federation), and the Fijian party (the alliance).

Q: Just to jump ahead, but not to spend so too much time on it, so what happened recently when they had all the trouble in Fiji I think it was technically the Indians won an election and the Fijians refused to accept the outcome. That's what precipitated all of that long several months government imbroglio about.

COBURN: Yes, it's happened twice. The Indian party won the election but, then, the army composed of Fijians overthrew the Indian dominated government. Then the Australians get involved because the stevedores, in Australia, who were left leaning, refused to load anything for ships going to Fiji and they tried to browbeat the Fijians into accepting democracy, but the Fijians were never going to accept any constitutional regime which didn't leave them in control. In the meantime, the Indian population kept growing. The upper class Indians would go back to India to marry.

Q: Did they have the, do the Fijian Indians now have a large part of the economy in their hands?

COBURN: Yes.

Q: So, you were how many years in Fiji?

COBURN: Just under two.

Q: Just under two and then what happened?

COBURN: Then.

Q: So, this brings us up to about what year. You're now finished in Fiji. You got there in January of '66.

COBURN: We left in November of '67.

Q: Okay. Going to what sort of an assignment at that point?

COBURN: Well, at this time the State Department had finally developed the conal system that we all had to be either political, economic, consular or administrative officers. In their wisdom after all those fine reports I sent in, they determined that I was an economic officer, but I didn't have any economic training in my record. They sent me to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). I was told to report in January of 1968. We came back from the tropics and landed in Washington in January of 1968 where the temperature was about 80 degrees colder than we had experienced

and we had no clothes for the children. They immediately placed me in this statistical and economic projections course. I was looking for a house in the Washington area. We needed to find schools for the children and purchase clothing for the winter. I had several difficult weeks trying to get my brain attuned to the economic studies. I wasn't really interested in statistical analysis, had no background in it and found the weather, the work and the commute very difficult. Also, the pace of living in Washington after two years on a tropical island was very unsettling.

Q: How long a program was that?

COBURN: I think it lasted six months. I remember I was at FSI, which had moved from the garages of Arlington Towers into a high rise building in the Rosslyn area of Arlington. Martin Luther King was assassinated. 1968 was a terrible year from all points of view.

Q: Riots in Washington after the assassination of King?

COBURN: Looking from the window of our classroom you could see across the city of Washington and on that day we saw black smoke rising from various parts of the city from the riots. Rumors went right through the student body that the city was burning and that gangs of blacks were on the loose in the city causing mayhem. Fear was prevalent and immediately everyone tried to call home and found that the lines were jammed. I learned later that my parents tried to call from New York and couldn't get a dial tone. We were all sent home as classes were canceled for the rest of the day. But when I got on the road I found that people were driving without any attention being paid to the lights or signs. Everyone appeared to want to get home as quickly as possible and a real feeling of panic was evident. In addition to the murders of King and Robert Kennedy, the Catholic Church was also in turmoil. Coming from the Fiji Islands we were not current with the changes that had happened and the fall out from the Papal Ban on birth control was especially shattering. In our local parish there were campaigns to throw pennies in the collection basket as a form of protest. When the bishops letter was read from the pulpit on the subject some parishioners got up and walked out. My children were completely twisted around. "What is happening, Daddy?" I didn't know what was happening myself.

Q: Yes, it's important to remember, isn't it, that in a place like Fiji where there's no cable television, no real sense. I mean I suppose you could get the New York Times six months later if you saw it, or if you ever got it.

COBURN: No, we didn't have any current news. We had official government publications and the local 4 page newspaper. We didn't get any magazines that I recall. They were out of date by the time they arrived.

Q: So, you had a real culture shock when you came back?

COBURN: We did. It was just walking into a world that had changed dramatically because we had been overseas since 1963. Fiji was completely cut off from what people in the U.S. were dealing with.

PETER DAVID EICHER
Economic/Commercial/Consular Officer
Suva (1974-1975)

Mr. Eicher, son of an American oil geologist, was born in Saudi Arabia and raised in the US and abroad. He was educated at McGill University, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California, Los Angeles. Entering the Foreign Service in 1973, Mr. Eicher became an Africa and Human Rights specialist, serving at posts in Fiji, South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Switzerland as well as in Washington and at the United Nations in New York. Mr. Eicher was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: How did your wife respond both to the idea of the Foreign Service and then to Suva and all that?

EICHER: Well, Suva was very much a joint decision, so she was happy about that. She also liked the idea of the Foreign Service. She had also grown up moving around overseas. I mentioned that we had met in seventh grade at the American School in Paris and then ended up again at the same high school in Connecticut, which is where we really got together. Her father was with IBM world trade and mine was with Conoco, so both ended up at the company headquarters not far from each other in the New York area and we ended up at the same high school in Westport. She was, I think, very excited to be going out and starting to see the world and – we can get into it more later – she eventually joined the Foreign Service herself and is now still a Foreign Service specialist in human resources. She's still in the Foreign Service more than ten years after I retired. So, I'm actually a "dependent spouse" and have been for our last couple of overseas assignments.

Q: How did you get to Suva?

EICHER: We flew by way of a stop in Hawaii, and then flew Honolulu-Suva. We stopped a couple of days in Hawaii to enjoy it there; we had never been before. I always thought one of the great things about the Foreign Service was that you could stop places on your moves around. There are a lot of different places in the world that we have seen for a weekend as we passed through on the way to an assignment someplace else, or on the way back, which was always fun. Particularly in the early days, you know, we couldn't afford to stay anywhere more than a couple of days. The State Department would pay for a one night rest stop and anything else was on you. In fact, Suva was one of the last places the Foreign Service could still theoretically travel to by ship. The Congress had passed the American carrier regulations and one of the last American passenger ships was still doing the South Pacific route from California. It was a cruise ship, of course, which went rarely and the timing was wrong for the trip out. Even coming back we missed it. In retrospect, we regretted that a lot since the timing coming back was just a couple of weeks off. But, being in my first post, I guess, maybe I didn't have the gumption to insist that I could leave a couple of weeks earlier than they wanted me to.

Q: You were in Suva from when to when?

EICHER: From 1974 through 1975. We must've gotten there in January of 1974, just four months after I joined the Foreign Service, and stayed until December of 1975, so we were there two full years.

Q: Tell me about Suva, Fiji. What was the situation there and of course this is a place that quite frankly most people know little about. What was going on when you got there?

EICHER: Well, first of all, it was at the time the smallest American Embassy in the world – I was the big expansion from three to four Americans at the embassy – and it covered the biggest consular district in the world, which was mainly fish, but we covered everything from what at the time was the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in the west to Tahiti in French Polynesia in the east. So, it was this huge district to be covered by four people out of Suva. Suva was, in fact, a very small and out-of-the-way place, just as people think of it, and maybe even more so at the time. Suva itself was isolated not only in the South Pacific but also within Fiji. The international airport was in Nadi on the other side of the big island; it was either a flight or a four-plus hour drive away from Suva at the time. The roads were generally unpaved still, so most people would fly in from Nadi to Suva, in a smaller plane which took about half an hour. We landed in Nadi about three in the morning or something like that, all your inconvenient travel times. We perhaps had not been advised as well as we should. The flight to Suva wasn't going to be until seven in the morning or something like that, and we hadn't booked ourselves a hotel in Nadi because no one told us to and we didn't realize it would be paid for as part of our travel costs since we had already stopped in Honolulu. We didn't realize that Nadi wasn't a real airport, in the American sense; in those days it was just a tiny building without even a real waiting room for people getting off flights. There were no chairs, no air conditioning. So, the three of us – my wife and son and I – just sort of wandered across the street and sat on a grassy knoll in a field and watched our first Fijian sunrise. It was very pretty and we were happy enough, on our first Foreign Service adventure, but all the workers at the airport thought we were crazy, I guess; Westerners go to hotels, they don't sit in a field waiting hours for a plane. Eventually, we did get on the plane to Suva and were we were met at the airport by the chargé, Vance Hall, and his wife, Julia, and taken to the Grand Pacific Hotel, which was a nice, old, colonial structure right on the water in Suva.

Q: Big veranda and all?

EICHER: Big veranda, high ceilings, you know, very colonial style. We only stayed there a few days before they moved us to more modest accommodations, not that the Grand Pacific was any great shakes. But, it was going to be a long hotel stay. Since we were a new addition to the embassy, there was no housing available for us and we had to start a search, which took quite some time.

In terms of the politics of it, Fiji was a former British colony, now independent and in its own way kind of a superpower among the many tiny South Pacific countries and islands. It was really much bigger and more significant than any of its major neighbors, most of which were, in fact, even still colonies at the time, so Fiji was significant in that sense. The U.S. ambassador was

resident in New Zealand and he had four hats, as ambassador to Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa, as well as New Zealand. Tonga was under the Fiji embassy, as were most of the Pacific Islands, but Western Samoa for some reason was under the embassy in New Zealand, I guess because of the flight connections or something. The Ambassador was a political appointee, Armistead Selden, a former congressman from Alabama, who would come up once every six months and kiss babies and slap people on the back and make a good impression and then disappear again. So, from that point of view it was a perfect arrangement where you didn't really have an ambassador to worry about.

The American Embassy when I got there was also an interesting place. It also had a very colonial kind of feeling. It was upstairs on the main shopping street of Suva, Cumming Street, which was a very small street full of duty-free shops. Fiji was a duty-free port and tourists from Australia would come in and would buy their cameras and stereo equipment, and so the street was just full of these little Indian run duty-free stores. And, above one of them in an old building, up a narrow staircase between two other entrances, was the American Embassy, which was just two rooms, one little private office for the chargé and then one quite large room where the other three Americans sat at one end and the four local employees, as we called them at the time, sat at the other end. A ceiling fan turned above us and it was quite easy to imagine that we were working there a century earlier than we were. There was a small walk-in vault which was sort of around the corner where the nationals couldn't see into it, not that there was anything to see. There were no communications. In order to send telegrams, we had to go down to the local cable and wireless office and send them off as commercial cables. If we wanted to send classified telegrams, we had a little machine which allowed us to encrypt them and still, we would have to carry the encrypted telegram – which was in five letter nonsense words by the time it was encrypted – down to the local cable and wireless office, where the clerks would raise their eyebrows if they were new employees. The old ones got used to it and would take the telegram and transmit it to Washington or wherever we were sending it to. This was a very interesting introduction to the Foreign Service, not quite what I had expected. It was so complicated to send and receive classified cables that we didn't do it often. Most of our reporting was still by letter or "airgram," which was the old State Department reporting format where you wrote hard copies of reports on special letterhead, numbered and recorded them, and then transmitted them by diplomatic pouch.

Q: Let's talk about the government. What was it like?

EICHER: It was a parliamentary democracy. There was a governor general who was appointed by the Queen but who was, in fact, a Fijian, a chief from one of the prominent families. There was a prime minister who was also a Fijian, Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara. These were chiefly Fijians who were from the best families and part of the ethnic Fijian nobility. But, there was an underlying tension because the country's population at the time was more than half ethnic Indian. These were Indians who had been brought in during the previous century as indentured laborers for the sugar plantations and who had stayed and prospered, sugar being the biggest export from Fiji. People got along pretty well with each other, but it was an extremely ethnically conscious society, not in a nasty way, but just the way people identified each other sort of struck us. If somebody was walking down the road, he wasn't a boy, he was a Fijian boy or an Indian boy, or a Chinese boy. At the time, I think about 51 or 52% of the population was Indian, about 40 or

45% was ethnic Fijian and then there were also Chinese and European communities. The Fijians were still in control of the political power at the time. The Indians did have politicians but most of them were in opposition. Fiji had a little parliament, which I attended a couple of times and found to be kind of eye opening and amusing in that it was almost sort of a caricature of the British Parliament, with constant catcalls and jibes across the divided floor of the very small parliament chamber. There was an army, which was really at the time regarded more as kind of a toy soldier army. They would parade on ceremonial occasions; they would wear bright red shirts and white sulus, which are the skirts that the Fijian men wore. The main activity the army seemed to have was going down and welcoming cruise ships in their colorful uniforms with a brass band.

The overall feeling, on the political side, was that it was a new government, a very moderate government that was just starting to feel its way in the world. It had just gotten its independence three or four years before, in 1970, I think. There was still a colonial feel about the place. A lot of the senior civil servants were still British, including the Secretary to Government, I think the title was, who was someone we dealt with a lot. The government was very pro-Western, not in the sense that it was a cheerleader for Western policies or causes, but that nobody even seemed to consider a different approach. Even though this was still the height of the Cold War there was no thought at all that Fiji would take the other side.

Q: They hadn't moved yet into the sort of peace keeping work, as they are now?

EICHER: Well, they are now. In fact, I think in retrospect, although I could only follow it from a distance, this probably contributed to a lot of the later coups and changes within Fiji. The army did go off first to Lebanon as peacekeepers, where they were in UNIFIL and they discovered that, you know, armies are powerful, armies are real, armies are in charge of governments, especially here in the Middle East. And so, they went back home and took over their government. This was really extremely sad. And there still are a lot of Fijian troops in the Middle East with the UN and I think they've been some other places as well. But that came later. At the time the army was not political. And it was very sad for us to see it change later, because during our time it was so peaceful and democratic.

But, even when we were there, you could see that the Indians were unhappy. I'm not pretending that it was a perfect situation. There were some discriminatory laws, for example. A lot of the land in Fiji was in tribal trust and could not be sold and this therefore made it very difficult for the Indians to become landowners. And, the Indians in general, as a community, tended to be looking to leave Fiji. The ethnic Fijians were certainly not looking to leave in any significant numbers. And so you had Indians in general trying to get to Australia, New Zealand or to the United States and a lot of them succeeded in doing that, to the extent that now I believe that the Fijians are solidly in the majority and the population might be down to about 40% Indian. But the ethnic troubles remain. Even when we were there, the ethnic situation was not really troublesome – people got along – but it was the big underlying political issue in Fiji even then. It was clear that there was a potential for real political tension. Fiji was not a melting pot; the two communities were very separate. It was, of course, the racial divide that eventually led to the military coups, after the Indians finally won an election and formed a government. The army was overwhelmingly ethnic Fijian.

Q: Was there much intermarriage?

EICHER: Some, but not a lot. You know, it wasn't a rare thing but neither was it a terribly common thing. It wasn't frowned on, but it just didn't happen very much.

Q: Somehow the mix sounds like it wasn't as deep there as it was in some places.

EICHER: I think it probably wasn't. Most Fijians still lived in villages and even the ones in towns still had very close ties to their villages, which might be on other islands of the Fiji group. It was very much the Third World, not the grinding, extreme poverty you see in Africa or South Asia, but still very underdeveloped conditions, with many places not having electricity, no paved roads outside the main towns, and many of the houses still built of sticks and thatched roofs. Those kinds of traditional Fijian houses were called bures and could be very picturesque, but they could also look very run down and unpleasant to live in. Conditions for the Indians were generally better, although a lot of them were still manual laborers in the sugar fields, which is extremely tough work.

The Indians as well as the Fijians tended to be rather communal. There would still be a lot of Indian festivals that would go on which were interesting. Moving to Fiji was initially liberating for many of the Indians. There were many middle-to-lower caste Indians who found that in Fiji the caste system didn't apply. A lot of the new arrivals just changed their names, their family names, and suddenly it looked like they came from much more significant families or higher castes. In fact, our best friends and next-door neighbors were the Maharajs, which of course, is about as high as you can get in India, but they acknowledged that their family probably had not been Maharajs when they left India for Fiji.

Q: On the staff at the embassy, was it mostly Indian?

EICHER: No, it was mostly Fijian, as matter of fact. I don't think there were any Indians. I'm not sure why, since the Indians tended to be better educated. I guess it probably developed the way it does at so many embassies, that when someone gets a position their friends and relatives seem to get in after them. There was at least one who was mixed race, Fijian and Chinese, I think. But remember, we're only talking bout four people; it was a very small staff.

Q: It's interesting because from what little I know about Polynesia, there's a tendency by sort of the Indians and the Chinese to take over many commercial or office type jobs and the native population is almost brushed aside.

EICHER: That was very much the case in Fiji, certainly. The commercial side and even the white collar side in general was overwhelmingly Indian. There was also a handful of Chinese small businessmen. Maybe it was a deliberate decision by the embassy to hire some Fijian's. Maybe it just happened that way. I don't know what the history of it was but we did end up with Fijians.

The Embassy made a move while I was there. We moved out of our little colonial-style office on Cumming Street down to a new high-rise along the waterfront; I guess it must have been six or seven stories tall and this was very much a skyscraper by Fijian standards, there were only a few buildings that big in Suva. The New Zealand Embassy – or High Commission, I guess it was – had the top two floors of the building and the U.S. Embassy had half the floor below that, which I guess shows the extent of how the U.S. official presence in Fiji compared even to a country the size of New Zealand. It was a modern office building, just constructed. I got my own office for the first time, which was a very nice office with a big picture window looking out on this gorgeous view over the bay. I could see all Suva from up there; it was great. I understand the Embassy has moved at least a couple of times since then and they are in new quarters now. Certainly the building we were in was far, far below the security standards we insist on for embassies these days. In fact, there was no security at all. No Marines, of course, and not even a local guard or a code on the door. Anyone could just walk in. There was a small, walk-in vault in the back that did have a door with a code, but aside from that, there were no barriers or locks at all between the entrance of the Embassy and all the offices inside.

Q: Was there a New Zealand or Australia or British presence in Fiji at the time?

EICHER: There was a very small diplomatic community. I mentioned that the New Zealand High Commission was right upstairs from us. The Australians were by far the largest diplomatic presence there, followed by the New Zealanders. The British were very influential and had a High Commission, as well as still having a lot of Brits in senior government positions. The Chinese were there and the Indians, of course, were there. The Indian High Commissioner was the dean of the diplomatic corps and had been there for many years; his wife used to give afternoon teas regularly for the diplomatic ladies, which my wife enjoyed. The French set up a one-person office while we were there. That was the extent of the diplomatic community. There were several very young Australian and New Zealand diplomats on their first postings, just about our age, who we got to be very good friends with.

Q: You mentioned the Chinese.

EICHER: It was the Taiwanese, now that you ask. At the time, the U.S. hadn't recognized Red China yet, and neither had the Fijians. So they were friendly Chinese, who we would sometimes see socially, although we didn't have much to do with them from a professional perspective. Most of the diplomatic offices in Suva were really high commissions rather than embassies because they represented Commonwealth countries. There were also a few other diplomatic representatives who were accredited to Fiji but resident elsewhere. You know, you might get a visitor from time to time, say a German ambassador resident in Australia, but not very often.

The economy depended even back then to a large extent on tourism. Tourists were overwhelmingly Australians which, again, was nice from our perspective because instead of having the "ugly American" image, the ones who got in trouble were usually the Australians and so the "ugly Australian" image prevailed. Americans tended to be very well-liked, still. We didn't see very many Americans. Fiji is quite remote and at the time it was quite expensive for American tourists to get to, so Americans looking for tropical islands would usually end up going to either the Caribbean or Tahiti or somewhere closer. Not many Americans came to Fiji,

and those who did were usually well off and went to the big tourist hotels along the south coast, so we didn't see many of them in Suva. I remember only once being marginally involved in looking for a missing American – who eventually turned up in another country – and I don't think we ever had an American in jail or otherwise in trouble during my two year tour. There were a very few prominent Americans who visited from time to time – for example, Raymond Burr owned a small island there – but we wouldn't normally see them. Raymond Burr raised orchids on his island – orchids grew all over Fiji, along with all kinds of other beautiful flowers – and once he sent a big bunch of orchids to the embassy.

Q: Before we move to the outlying islands and your impressions of that, what were you doing?

EICHER: It's interesting because, you know, I thought I was extremely busy at the time. It was my first real job out of university and I would go to the office at whatever time in the morning and leave at whatever the designated time was in the afternoon. I don't think overtime was ever an issue in Fiji. It seemed to me I was very busy. For the first 18 months I was doing mainly economic/commercial work. My first big task – which still sticks in my mind because it was my first big task in the Foreign Service – was putting together the annual "economic trends report," which was a report that the embassy was supposed to do once a year but which had not been done on Fiji for a very long time, if ever. I remember spending quite some time digging through different government papers and reports and dealing with other embassies and some businessmen to put together this report, and then presenting the draft to the chargé, having no idea what his reaction would be, and being quite pleased that he liked it very much and sent it off to Washington with practically no changes. It was published, as these reports were to be distributed to the business community, so my very first publication was a ten or twenty page report on economic trends in Fiji.

The other commercial work was trade promotion. There were a couple of programs we carried out in coordination with the Department of Commerce. One was called a WTDR – a world trader data report – which supplied information about local companies to American companies who wanted to know about them before entering into a business or trading agreement. I would have to check with local banks and others to get information about the companies to send in, their creditworthiness and their reputation, and such. There was another kind of standard report that I can't remember the acronym for, which was aimed at getting American exporters together with local companies. When we got an inquiry from a local firm that was interested in importing any kind of American product, I'd get the details and send them off to Washington, which had a huge register of firms interested in exporting just about everything; the American firm would then send information and offers directly to the Fijian firm. For example, a lot of the local Indian shops wanted sporting equipment, American sporting equipment, and so I would talk with them about what they wanted, and would look up some complicated code numbers, put it all into a telegram, send it back and it would go to the distributors who would send out their offers. The same thing for joint ventures. I remember trying to help out some company that was trying to start a joint venture to produce mattresses but never succeeded; American mattresses were too expensive. But I do remember some of the sporting goods sales. Things seemed to go well and the little Indian shops that sold tennis rackets and scuba equipment and so forth seemed to be very pleased and excited with the number of inquiries and offers they got from American companies to sell their things there. In general, Fiji was a very small market and I'm not sure the

sales amounted to much in real terms. We weren't involved in any big sales like airplanes. And the big American investors – say in hotels – didn't seem to want or need the Embassy's help.

It was very rare for an American salesman actually to come to Fiji during my time there. I remember one came trying to sell turkey tails. This seemed kind of strange to me, but he talked a lot about how they were almost all meat and very good. I never saw him again so I don't think he had much luck.

Since it was such a small embassy I also got involved in some other kinds of activities and reporting and did some consular work, mainly signing non-immigrant visas which were pretty much processed by our local employees.

Q: Sometimes in a place like Suva you end up with a lot of Iranians or other people who come in visa shopping. Did that happen?

EICHER: Practically not at all since we were so out-of-the-way and hard to get to. We had a fair sized non-immigrant visa business from Tahiti, since we were responsible for French Polynesia, and this would be handled through a system of travel agents. There were two or three of them, but one in particular, who would fly to Fiji every couple of months with a suitcase full of French passports of Tahitian residents who wanted to take their vacation in Los Angeles. He would park himself in a hotel for a couple of days while we worked our way through these couple of hundred passports that he'd brought with him. Then, once we issued the visas, he would take the passports and go back to Tahiti again. It was rare to turn down a visa applicant from Tahiti. Unfortunately, we were not actually allowed to visit Tahiti in an official capacity. The French considered that, of course, Tahiti was an integral part of France, so it should be handled by the embassy in Paris rather than the American Embassy in Suva. So, we could never make official visits to Tahiti but my wife and I, and the kids, did make a point of stopping there for a couple of days on the way back to the United States at the end of our tour. We were taken around and treated very nicely by one of these travel agents for whom we had been doing visas for the past couple of years. They kept saying, "Oh, you've got to stay longer and I can fly you to Bora Bora and put you up out there," but of course, being first tour people we didn't know how to work any of this in advance and, in any event, it probably would not have been appropriate to accept that kind of gift. I don't know if it would have been legal at the time or not but it certainly would not have been appropriate to accept it.

So I did do the consular work for the last six months I was there. When the consular officer left, after I had been in Suva for 18 months, I was shifted to consular duties and the outgoing consular officer's replacement, who was a bit more senior than me, took over the economic/commercial duties.

Before I get to consular, I should also mention I also do remember following a political convention, the so-called political convention of Fiji's ruling party, the name of which I forget. But I remember going down to attend the convention and even to my 24-year-old inexperienced eyes it really was quite an amateurish and unimpressive kind of gathering. I guess my report must have been a bit snide, because I remember the chargé teasing me about it. I also did some low level political reporting on other issues, some of it on the basis of newspaper reports from

other island groups we covered. For example, we'd get the French language newspapers from Tahiti and sometime they'd have news that was worth summarizing and sending on, for example, about nuclear testing. That allowed me to keep up my French, even though we were at an English language post. And I did reporting about developments in Tonga, whenever I visited there.

Most of our reports would be sent to Washington by "airgram," which was the standard reporting format at the time. We used cables relatively sparingly, not that we had a whole lot to report. I remember the chargé being delighted when we hit 100 cables in a year. We did get a telex machine installed when we moved to the new embassy office, so we no longer had to take cables down to the cable and wireless office for transmission. The telex was linked directly to the U.S. embassy in New Zealand and all our cable communications went through there. We also got a very small classified pouch every two weeks. The diplomatic courier would come all the way to Suva and we would take turns meeting him or her at the hotel on a weekend to pick up the pouch and then go lock it in the vault.

There were also endless other little jobs that you might not get at a big embassy. For example, I remember going with the chargé to the Suva garbage dump to burn classified papers. Literally, we just put them in a pile and set a match to them and then stood and watched until we were sure they were consumed. There was no shredder at the embassy; I'm not sure shredders even existed yet. There was a small incinerator that was shipped in at some point to use for burning classified, but for some reason it couldn't be hooked up. So, we went to the dump to burn classified. I'm sure that was an experience none of my entering classmates had.

As to consular work, when I switched from economic/commercial to consular, I started doing a lot more of the passports coming in from Tahiti and did some immigrant visas as well. There were a fair number of Indians who were eligible to immigrate to the U.S., through family connections, so those took some work. When I started doing consular work almost full time it had been about a year and a half since I had taken the consular course and I had never really done most of the tasks before. None of the other officers at the embassy at that point had ever really done much consular work either, so they couldn't offer much advice. I remember spending hours sweating over the consular manuals and the FAMs (Foreign Affairs Manuals) whenever anything strange would come up and, you know, making my best judgment and then six weeks later getting something back from Washington saying, "Well, next time you ought to do it this way." I didn't like the consular work very much. I hated denying visas to people, which we had to do frequently, in particular with Indians who wanted non-immigrant visas. I remember a couple of instances where people had come in who had criminal records, which they had lied about on their applications. I struggled at great length over whether these were "crimes involving moral turpitude," which is what the U.S. statute said would be prohibited. But what exactly constitutes moral turpitude was never clearly defined in any of our consular manuals. In at least one immigrant visa case in which a whole family was applying for visas, a man had clearly neglected to inform his wife that he had a criminal record, which was also a rather awkward situation. I did consular work as my main job for about six months and although I didn't much care for it, it was certainly not onerous. Fiji was not a visa mill by any means. I am quite certain I must've had time to do other kinds of work at the same time I was doing the consular work.

Q: What about Tonga? Tonga only came on, you might say, the world radar when Queen Elizabeth was crowned. I mean, the Queen of Tonga came, a huge woman and very personable. During your time what was happening in Tonga?

EICHER: Tonga was an amazing place. I visited every six months or so. When you flew in on one of the little inter-island planes you could see the whole main island from the plane as you came in. It was that small, although even Tonga was fairly large by South Pacific standards. It was still an absolute monarchy. King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV was the king. He was a huge Tongan, one of the biggest people I had ever met. He stood six foot three or four or more and must have weighed well over 300 pounds. Tongans, and Polynesians in general, are enormous people. There is kind of a general misimpression that the lithe Tahitian beauty is what the Polynesians look like. In fact, I think that's really more of the East Asian, Chinese, immigrant blood that makes for those slim builds. If you look more at the Gauguin paintings and so forth, at how the Tahitians looked 100 ago, they were very big people. The Samoans were also very big. Fiji is right on the border of Melanesia and Polynesia; the Melanesians are darker and aren't so big. So Fiji had both big and small people, although most were on the large side; the prime minister and the governor general were very large; Fijians tended to be big people but not all were.

In fact, I had heard an interesting theory that the Polynesians were big because of "survival of the fattest." As they were taking their canoe trips across the Pacific discovering new lands, the thin ones would die off and the "thin genes" would die off with them. The fat ones would survive and prosper, so you ended up with very heavy people. I have no idea whether it's true or not but the story has stuck with me.

So, you did have the enormous king in Tonga. He was apparently a sight to behold in his younger days as he would ride in on a surfboard. There is an extremely funny picture of his visit to Japan with his wife, who was also quite big, and the two are standing there together with tiny Emperor Hirohito and his wife and it's a very Mutt and Jeff kind of look. They said the king couldn't fit into an airplane seat, so they had to make special arrangements when he flew.

I did get a chance to meet the king. I accompanied the ambassador to Tonga, Ambassador Selden, on one trip and we had an audience with the king which was extremely interesting. We went to the royal palace, which was basically an old wooden Victorian house, the kind you might find in any American city. There was not a lot of ceremony but there were a few guards and butlers and so forth, who ushered you in to see the king. They told you beforehand that you would be served champagne and the king would be served orange squash, a kind of sweet orange drink, and when the king finished his orange drink, it was time for you to leave. So we sat down, Ambassador Selden and his wife and I, and chatted with the king. We were told the meeting would be about half an hour and after about forty-five minutes, the orange juice was still there and we were looking at our watches and the ambassador said something about, "Well, I guess we should be going" but the king just kept on talking and asking questions. After an hour the juice was still there and at this point, we were late for whatever else was on the schedule, which certainly couldn't have been as important as the king, but the ambassador was rather nervous and so we finally took our leave. I don't think he had finished his orange drink yet. I hope we didn't cause a diplomatic incident with that. I can't even remember what we talked about although I am sure I

wrote a report. At some point I should do some Freedom of Information Act requests and get some of these.

Q: Did we have any interest, I know at one point in some places we had the basic policy of strategic denial, which was to keep the Soviets from setting up in ports which might be used for military purposes, or even ship visits, but was there anything like that going on?

EICHER: Very, very little. There was no sign of Soviets in the South Pacific at that point that I can recall at all. We did have the occasional U.S. ship visit, which was rare but I certainly remember at least one for which the embassy gave a large cocktail party. It may have been the Fourth of July even – and probably at the Grand Pacific Hotel, although I don't swear to that – where one of the officers all dressed in his white uniform cut a cake with his saber, much to the delight of the many guests. In fact, I remember one of my early diplomatic faux pas surrounded that reception. With an embassy the size of Suva, everybody was enlisted to write the invitations. For whatever reason, we didn't have them printed out. We just used the standard invitations that had blanks on them and we had to fill in the date and time and "in honor of" and so forth on the top of the invitations. So, everybody had a lot of those to do and I, apparently, filled out one to His Worship the Mayor of Suva and put the wrong date on it and His Worship showed up at the hotel a day or two early for the reception. You know, everybody just laughed it off, the mayor arriving for a party two days early. The mayor of Suva, "His Worship," as mayors are called in British cities, was not really a big thing, since Suva was a city of only about 60 or 70,000 people. We're really talking about a small town. So it was not really a big deal but, of course, I was mortified and one of my colleagues at the embassy had great fun reminding me often about the incident.

So we did have a ship visit. One of the issues that was going on at the time was the law of the sea negotiations. And, in this, in fact, Fiji was of some significance. I wouldn't want to overplay it, but there were a whole range of issues including free passage and territorial waters and archipelagos and delineating maritime boundaries and others. We did get involved in some of that, in passing U.S. positions back and forth to the Fijians on these different aspects the law of the sea. I learned quite a bit about the law of the sea.

Another big political issue out there at the time was the French nuclear tests, which were going on in French Polynesia. The rest of the South Pacific was just really up in arms about that. Of course, it was far away from Fiji and the French did what they wanted, and there was not much the island countries could do about it, but it gave the French a very bad name.

Q: Was that at the time when some French special forces blew up the Rainbow Warrior?

EICHER: That came much later, long after I had left. You know, there really had not been those vigorous environmental protesters back at the time in the same way as now. We are talking in 1974-75. But the nuclear tests were quite an issue. And, I guess, the other general issue that was going on was the process of decolonization, which was starting to make its way across the South Pacific. You already had Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa as independent and in the years that followed, almost all of the islands were to become independent. They had put together a political body, the South Pacific Forum, which met every year. There were actually two different

organizations that met. It gets complicated. There was the South Pacific Commission, which included the outside powers such as the United States and the British and the Australians and so forth plus all of the island countries, both independent and still under colonial rule. Separately, there was an organization of the independent islands, called the South Pacific Forum, which was making a few radical, anti-colonial kinds of statements – or what appeared to us as such – but which were, in fact, quite mild and not at all threatening to the relationship with the West. So, I did attend a couple of South Pacific Commission meetings, which got me to Noumea, New Caledonia, another French territory.

Q: Did you get to the Solomon Islands?

EICHER: Only to pass through. At the time it was still the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. I stopped in Honiara, the capital, once to change planes, en route to a big South Pacific Commission meeting in Nauru.

Q: Isn't that just a mountain of lava or something?

EICHER: Pretty much. It's an island of mineral phosphate – or at least it was – and the whole island is just eleven or twelve miles around. At the time, it was quite a rich island because of its phosphate but it was sort of digging itself out of existence. They built a new hotel complex and conference center just specifically to host the South Pacific Commission. I was made a member of the three or four person U.S. delegation, along with the desk officer from Washington and a delegation leader who was a minor politician from Hawaii. It was two weeks in Nauru, which is quite a long time to spend in Nauru. But, it was interesting, I recall, although I can no longer remember what the issues we were discussing at the South Pacific Commission. Nauru, however, definitely sticks in my mind as being small, one small road going around the outside of the island, one small airstrip down the middle, one hotel which they built specifically for the conference, one nice conference center. I was pleased with the experience, which was my first multilateral conference; perhaps that helped increase my interest in a UN job many years later. I ended up with my photograph in *National Geographic*, only you can't tell it's me. They had somebody there covering Nauru at the time of the conference. He took a photograph of the plenary of the conference, I'm just a pinprick on the photograph, even though there weren't all that many people at the conference, perhaps a hundred at the most. The hotel wasn't big enough for everybody, so we ended up sharing rooms with other members of our delegation. Every delegation was assigned a chauffeur from among the local population, which was quite wealthy by South Pacific standards and many of them had their own automobiles. The guy who took us around had a Lincoln Continental and I asked him "what do you do when it breaks down?" There wasn't any sign of any car repair shops there. He said, "Oh, I send it back to Australia to be serviced." So they had money coming in. They still had pigs running around loose and so forth, like on the other South Pacific islands, but the houses were made of stone instead of twigs and generally had tin roofs and were slightly more prosperous looking. Supposedly, the government was putting the phosphate money into good investments in Australia so that they would be able to live after the phosphate ran out. At one point, the largest building in Melbourne, I think, was an office skyscraper called Nauru House. In general, however, I understand that the investments did not work out and now the phosphate is gone. Some of the investments went south and I don't know what that has done to the poor people of Nauru.

I remember the president of Nauru was a fellow named Hammer de Robert, who I met at a reception they gave for the delegates. It was a heady experience for me because he was the first president I had ever met, although he was the president of an island thirteen miles in circumference with a population of probably 5,000 or something. I met him under curious circumstances. I had never had sushi before and raw fish was not something that appealed to me as a concept. I was standing there with two or three other delegates chatting, as you do at these diplomatic receptions, and up walks the president himself with a tray of sushi in his hands saying, "I have just had this flown in from Japan. Wouldn't you like some?" So, I had my first sushi, which to my surprise was actually quite good, as much as I hated to admit it. Ah, the things I've done for my country. Anyway, I met my first president and it was all a very interesting experience.

Back to your original question, I passed through the Solomon Islands on my circuitous route to Nauru. There are not a lot of flights in and out of Nauru and my route took me from Fiji to Vila in the New Hebrides – which is now Vanuatu – then to Honiara and then to Port Moresby and thence to Nauru. It was an endless trip. In Honiara, we went down to the yacht club; I say "we" because on the flight from Vila to Honiara I linked up with a couple of Australians who were going to the conference. I had really wanted to go explore the city of Honiara and they got a big laugh out of that saying, "Ha, ha. There's nothing to explore here in Honiara." So, we went and sat at the yacht club and had a beer as we waited a few hours for a return to the airport to take the next plane. We did drive through Honiara and I have to admit there didn't seem to be much to see. In Port Moresby, I don't think we even left the airport.

I also did a little unusual traveling out of Nauru, which had its own airline – a reflection of its mineral wealth – which I think consisted of one plane, which was a real jet which must've held fifty or sixty people. As a little perk, the Nauruans had arranged to bring in a little band from another island to entertain the conference-goers and they invited anybody who wanted to fly along on the trip to pick them up. So, a bunch of us hopped on the plane and flew from Nauru to Ponapei to Truk and back to Nauru again and picked up the band which then entertained us at the nightly functions that they had for the conference-goers. It was quite an amazing show of hospitality that they put on for the foreigners in Nauru. I'm sure they had never had such a big group of officials from different countries there at one time before. I remember being at a dinner where they were pouring the wine for all the guests and one of the wines they poured was Blue Nun. One of the ladies at my table, when the waiter asked her "white or red" said that she would have the Blue Nun and the waiter said, "Oh, sorry ma'am. We only have white or red." It was a funny land of contrasts.

Q: Was the issue of Japanese and Soviet over-fishing an issue in that area at that time?

EICHER: I don't recall it being an issue of particular controversy, although it certainly would have come up in the context of the law of the sea negotiations. In fact, I have no doubt that, as they were claiming their two hundred mile territorial limit that was one of the issues they had in mind. In fact, the whole idea of a two hundred mile territorial limit, if you take some of these island groups and you draw what two hundred mile limits would be around them, it's really quite a significant swath of area. You can see why it was quite such an issue.

Q: I don't know how it was at the time but back in the mid-1990s I visited Ponapei for a week to talk about setting up consular operations there. Looking at this, you could see a sort of disaster looming there in that we were putting in a lot of subsidized money because it was part of our Department of Interior's responsibility, and essentially destroyed the fishing industry and there wasn't much else for people to do, other than a lot of beer drinking, and it looked like a town in the poor part of West Virginia or something. Were you seeing examples of that where you were, of modernity, sort of displacing the traditional work of people whether it be fishing or that sort of thing?

EICHER: I don't remember it quite that blatantly there but it was certainly a problem throughout the South Pacific. In Tonga for example, there was only one factory in the entire country; it produced desiccated coconut and employed very few people. That was it. Aside from that, people survived largely either on subsistence or on remittances from Tongans who were going to work in Australia and New Zealand and a little bit of tourist income. This, of course, strikes you as, you know, how did they survive before there were remittances from Australia and New Zealand? And so, whatever they were doing back then, they were apparently not doing to the same extent anymore. You know, there really are many desperately poor islands out there. You don't get the same feeling about poverty as you do in Africa, or in the Middle East or in South Asia, where I have subsequently seen such stark poverty. Maybe it didn't seem as grim because the weather is good, the fruit grows on trees, the fish are plenty and there are not so many people. You don't get the sense of desperate poverty, extreme poverty, that you get in the other places. And the people are – you know, I hate characterize national groups but as you spend enough time in the Foreign Service you can't avoid it sometimes – but they do seem to be generally happy. The Fijians, in particular, were just always smiling and singing and pleasant. So yes, they were poor. Yes, many of them had practically nothing. Yes, a lot of them lived in stick houses with thatched roofs. But you didn't get the sense of "my goodness, such destitute people" that you do definitely get in a lot of other countries.

Q: How did you find social life for you and your wife there?

EICHER: It was quiet, not a lot to it. Suva, I think I mentioned, was just a small city town, 60, 70, 80,000 people tops. The paved roads ended at the end of town and if you wanted to leave Suva, you had to drive on dirt roads. There were no beaches in the Suva area and to get to the nice beaches in the south part of the island was a drive of a couple of hours over kind of nasty dirt roads. We would do that sometimes but not so often. When you did get there it was just exactly the idea you would conjure up of the South Pacific, with the beautiful white beach stretching off as far as you can see in the distance and the palm trees waving in the breeze and nobody else on the beach either direction as far as you could see. But back in Suva, it wasn't unpleasant but in a lot of ways it was your typical isolated Third World town without much going on.

There was a little group of young diplomats, mainly Australians, New Zealanders and Brits, who were about our age and just starting off on their first Foreign Service tours, who we got along quite well with. We met lots of the other Europeans. We got to know our neighbors who were Indians and some of the Fijians. It was generally a friendly kind of area, a nice place to be with a young family. My second son was born there at a tiny little Fijian hospital; a maternity hospital

with six beds all in one room, no windows but just shutters that were held open with a stick. My wife was the first official American ever to have a baby in Fiji rather than being medevaced to New Zealand, which didn't have any appeal for her at all. It was interesting and exotic and, in retrospect, brave. We got to know a bunch of people who were having babies at the same time she was so that added to our circle of friends.

So, we had several groups of friends who we did things with; I don't remember feeling bored. But generally, it was quiet. I don't even remember there being a movie theater in town. The embassy had a movie projector and a very small library of short subject films and the occasional full length film that we would sometimes borrow and have friends over to watch movies.

There were very few restaurants in Suva. There was one Chinese restaurant on the main street that was called the Golden Dragon, which would seem to be the regular place that people went if you were going out. Before we left, a little American steakhouse, Biddy's, was opened. There were a couple of other places that we would go now and then but really not very much at all. There were a couple of very small, so-called department stores which were the old Australian trading companies – Morris Headstrom and Burns Philp – where we would do our shopping. In Fiji, they drove on the left side of the street, a good British tradition. I remember we wanted to get seatbelts put in our car. This was when we bought a car there, in Fiji, that didn't come with seatbelts. They thought this was a very strange concept, to want seatbelts, but they finally found some and installed them for us and were very proud of having put in these bright red seatbelts that clashed with the orange-ish interior of the car.

Another event was the visit of Prince Charles. Then, he was still a very handsome young man, very popular, a national hero in Fiji, I guess just by virtue of taking the time to visit. I think it was on the Queen's birthday that he came out, so there was a grand celebration given by the governor general on the big lawn of the governor's mansion. It was quite nice.

We had a lot of Peace Corps friends as well.

Q: This sounds like a fun place to be in the Peace Corps.

EICHER: I think it was a fun place to be a Peace Corps person. In some ways, we even think that our own Fiji experience was as much Peace Corps as Foreign Service. But, there were probably a hundred Peace Corps volunteers, most of whom were just right out of university. We got to know quite a number of them, as well as getting to be very good friends with the Peace Corps staff who were based in Suva, who were also young people with young families like we were. One of the volunteers, in fact, was a friend from high school who was there as a volunteer with his wife, so that was a very interesting development. My wife and I went out to see them on another island, Levuka, which was kind of a journey away. We were adventurous and took a local bus and local ferry out to Levuka, which was a trip of several hours altogether. Being the only Europeans undertaking the trek, we got a lot of interesting looks from very friendly Fijians who always wanted to talk and always wanted to stroke our son's white-blond hair. We ended up seeing a lot Levuka, which had originally been the capital of Fiji a hundred years ago, before they moved it to Suva, and where, in fact, an early American consul had been based who died there in 1840's. We went and found his grave; it's the kind of thing we go looking for in those places. Levuka

was one of Fiji's major cities, but it was a very small town. When we asked our Peace Corps friends for directions to their house from the pier where we would be landing, they laughed and said "just ask anyone where the Americans live." They were right; everyone knew.

Q: Fiji was not the center of operations during World War II. It was off to one side but there were troops based there. Did World War II have much impact and were you getting any reflections of the war?

EICHER: Not as much as I had expected, going to the South Pacific. I read Michener's Tales of the South Pacific before I went, as well as other World War II books about the South Pacific like Leon Uris's Battle Cry. You could see at the airport that there were some hangers and things which they said were left over from World War II. You even had seaplanes going in and out of Suva a little bit and occasionally people would talk about how during the war there were a lot of sea planes around. But it really, I guess, was much less a center of operations than I might have imagined for such a big island. I guess the Pacific is so big that it really was off the beaten track during the War.

Back to the Peace Corps for a moment, when I was in Nauru, my wife went to visit our Peace Corps friends on another island – the same friends had moved to a different place because Levuka was too civilized – and they were now on a tiny little island way, way off somewhere. She had an interesting cultural experience going out there with our two little kids on a small inter-island boat that makes the rounds. They had to take all their own food and supplies and stayed in a very small village in a thatched hut. I guess having a European family there, with kids, was a first for the island. She had to make her compliments to the chief at a special dinner and was offered the dish of honor, which is to suck the eye out a fish. But, being a woman, she was able to return the honor to the chief saying, "No, no. You must do it, the honor is yours." And so she avoided that, which I have to admit, would have been a little worse than the sushi experience I was having in Nauru at the same time. I didn't know how long she was going to be out there because there is no schedule for the boats; once you're there, you just have to wait until the next boat comes. One morning the cry came up from the beach "the boat is here." Then they loaded up her stuff and got back on the boat to Suva. With that trip and her time in a village, she had a much more real Fijian experience that I ever did.

Q: Did you have any typhoons or the equivalent?

EICHER: We had one hurricane. We had to tape up the windows and sliding glass doors as a precaution against them shattering. There were also some tropical storms. Most often, however, we just had lots and lots of rain. Fiji is one of the wettest places in the world. Suva is on the wet side of Fiji and gets about 180 inches a year of rain. There were two seasons that they called "the wet season" and "the rainy season;" those were the two seasons. During one it sort of drizzled and rained all the time and during the other the days were bright and sunny and then suddenly, boom, you had a tremendous downpour and thunderstorm and then it would clear up again. There were beautiful South Pacific sunsets, beautiful stars at night. It always seemed to me that the stars are brighter in the southern hemisphere but I suppose it also had something to do with less pollution and so forth.

On the subject of typhoons, however, another of my jobs at the embassy was to be disaster relief coordinator. I drafted the embassy's first disaster relief plan. This was a long required report that had never been done before, that described the types of disasters most likely to hit the country, and provided endless details on airport and port locations and capacities, communications systems, food stocks and many other things I can't remember off hand. The idea was to have as much accurate and up-to-date information as possible on hand in case the U.S. was suddenly called on to help out with a disaster. I remember that it involved quite a bit of contact with various government ministries. As the embassy's disaster relief coordinator, I was even sent to Manila for a couple of days of disaster relief training. That was quite interesting, and got me to another new country. There was no natural disaster while I was in Fiji, but there was a big hurricane sometime after we left and I remember hearing later that my plan was, in fact, used to some extent in helping the U.S. provide some relief.

Q: Well, you left there in 1975?

EICHER: The end of 1975.

Q: Where did you go?

EICHER: Well, I received my next assignment, which was Pretoria/Cape Town, by way of Afrikaans training. So we headed back to the States, to Washington, where I was going to take five months of Afrikaans and then African area studies before heading off to South Africa.

WILLIAM J. BODDE
Ambassador
Fiji (1980-1982)

William Bodde was born in Brooklyn and raised in Long Island. He served in the US Army in Korea and attended Hofstra College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1962 and served in Austria, Sweden, and German. He was also ambassador to Fiji, Tuvalu, Tonga and the Marshall Islands and served as EE/MP to Kiribati.

Q: I'm slightly older than you. I was born in 1928, and there was a wonderful sense of world geography.

BODDE: That's right. We got a geography lesson.

Q: You could tell where Iwo Jima was and Wake Island and Novorossiysk and on and on.

BODDE: Exactly. In Fiji my wife and I would go out into the bush to visit villages. We would meet the village headman or chief and maybe the minister and the schoolteacher. Often there would also be some old men there to greet us. They would dress up for the occasion. In Fiji they wore lava-lavas you know, sarongs, and they usually wore tattered white shirts. On their chests

would be their medals from the Second World War when they served as scouts with the American troops at Guadalcanal.

Q: Oh, boy. Yes, 15 destroyers and all that.

BODDE: Yes, before we entered the war, I guess in 1940, we were negotiating Lend Lease with the UK and the dispute over these islands came into it. I saw a State Department memo, which I should have copied because, given the lackadaisical record keeping system of the State Department, it may no longer exist. The memo had a notation from President Roosevelt instructing the State Department to include any islands where we had the slightest claim to use them as bargaining chips. In the case of some of the islands, the U.S. position was strong but others were dubious. We had a strong claim to Canton Island and for years we had a base on Canton. We had worked out an arrangement with the British in which both sides agreed that the dispute wasn't settled but that in good faith the U.S. would pay rent, which they in turn gave to the local Gilbert Islands government. First we used Canton Island as a refueling place for the old flying clippers, and then we used it to track satellites and missiles. We pulled out of that base on Canton Island when Kiribati became independent. Christmas Island was another strong claim with the UK and we used it for testing nuclear weapons.

As I said there were a couple of islands where our claims were strong because we had what the lawyers call "perfected" the claim by doing things there. In other cases it was doubtful whether we ever mined guano on them or who was the first to do so or even cases where there were inhabitants on them when they were "discovered". The first memo that was circulated in the interagency process proposed that the U.S. keep Canton and Christmas islands and we would give up our claims to the others in Kiribati and Tuvalu. Just when I took over as director, the British Embassy came back to us with a rejection of our proposal. They maintained that it was unacceptable for them to relinquish claims to islands that were going to be a part of a newly independent country.

I went back to the other agencies and worked out a new proposal. We finally reached consensus on a new proposal. This was a minor miracle because inter-agency negotiations can be even more acrimonious and duplicitous than international negotiations. For example, one time when I led the delegation to Hawaii for negotiations with Tuvalu I met with our delegation in the morning before a 10 o'clock negotiating session with Tuvalu's prime minister. The Defense Department representative opened my meeting with the statement that he had gotten a message during the night informing him that DOD no longer supported the previously agreed U.S. position. Christ, I'm going in there in an hour and he is telling me that crap. I avoided commitments to the Prime Minister and went back to Washington to get the Defense Department on board.

Anyhow, the interested agencies finally agreed that I could negotiate treaties with Tuvalu, Kiribati, The Cook Islands, and New Zealand (for the Tokelau). The treaties would include provisions that in a case of a crisis the island nations would favorably consider the reentry of the U.S. military forces. There were people in Washington who seemed to believe that Japan someday would try to re-conquer the islands. Anyhow we needed such language to satisfy the conservatives in Congress. Our renunciation of our claims was forever but the other provisions

were subject to renegotiations after ten years if either side requested. To my knowledge they have never been renegotiated.

Q: Keep the Japanese out for at least that long.

BODDE: Right. The other provision we needed was more important. We needed a commitment from the islands that they wouldn't discriminate against U.S. fishing boats. This was a sensitive issue because the U.S. tuna fleet had moved to the Western Pacific because of the problems they had in Latin American waters. The American tuna boats didn't want the Pacific island countries to pass laws banning purse seining, which in effect would have banned most of the American boats. The U.S. eventually solved the fishing problem by signing an agreement with the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Organization. Under the agreement the United States pays about $8 million a year, which is divided up among all the Pacific islands, including the Micronesians, depending on the size of the catch in those islands. This allows our ships to go into the 200-mile economic zones of the member nations.

I found the disputed island negotiations to be very educational. I learned how politically powerful the U.S. tuna industry was. If we did not have them on board, the U.S. Senate would never ratify the treaties. Even after the tuna fishermen's main protector, Senator Magnuson, died the tuna industry still was very powerful. I kept representatives of the industry informed each step of the way and they knew I had their interest at heart. If we didn't have some sort of security language in the treaties the conservative senators would have stopped ratification. The negotiations taught me a lot about how to deal with Congress.

I also learned that the Constitution notwithstanding, the U.S. state governments and other people who have legitimate interests should be included in the process. We may have a federal system and the Constitution empowers the federal government to be solely responsible for foreign relations. However, when you're dealing with Pacific islands it is a good idea to consult with the political leaders in Hawaii and American Samoa. After the first set of negotiations with Tuvalu I stopped by to brief the governor of Hawaii on what had transpired. I did so simply as a courtesy and I thought I was being really magnanimous to do so. I walked into the room, and there were at least 25 people in the room. In addition to the governor there were the key U.S. Senate and House staff members from the Hawaiian delegations in Congress and other Hawaiian state officials. Governor Ariyoshi really chewed me out. He asked how I could dare negotiate away American territory that belonged to Hawaii without consulting with Hawaii beforehand? He said this was typical East Coast arrogance - the Western states and Hawaii don't know anything and anyhow they don't count anyhow. Well, I walked out of that meeting saying to myself, "That was really smart, Bodde. Here you are a mid-grade bureaucrat and you are fighting with a Democratic governor in a Democratic Administration." You could be sure who was going to win that fight. I called my friend, George Chaplin, who was the chief editor of the Honolulu Advertiser and also the appointed U.S. representative to the South Pacific Commission. George was very well plugged in and a wonderful guy. He said Bill, you've got a problem and I suggest you do some political fence-mending. I spent the next couple of years cultivating the Hawaiians. It was well worth the effort.

Q: When you say "fence-mending," what did you do?

BODDE: I put a Hawaiian representative and an American Samoan representative on my delegation. I never went through Hawaii without stopping by and seeing the governor and keeping him in the loop. I worked closely with Hideto Kono, who the governor has appointed to monitor the negotiations. I knew Hawaiians were interested in Canton Island for a fishing station and transshipment installation. I also knew that it cost the U.S. Defense Department $15 million a year to maintain an installation on Canton Island and that Hawaii wasn't going to spend $15 million a year on such an installation. Their eyes were bigger than their stomachs or at least bigger than their ability to pay. I arranged for the military in Hawaii to fly down a Hawaiian delegation to look at Canton. The delegation came to the same conclusion. That is, unless the federal government was going to underwrite a fishing station and transshipment installation on Canton. Hawaii could not afford to underwrite the project. The same was true for American Samoa. We put some language in the treaties about fostering closer economic relations between Samoa and these islands.

So essentially I did a whole series of things, all of which should have been done in the first place. It makes sense to consult with people and institutions outside the federal government who have a legitimate interest. Later my office proposed to the White House staff that they appoint Governor Ariyoshi to represent President Carter at the Kiribati independence ceremonies and they did. In any event, my fence-mending paid off. Later when I was ambassador to Fiji the Hawaiian state legislature passed a joint resolution commending me for my work in the Pacific islands. I made a lot of friends in the process.

We negotiated the first agreement with Tuvalu, and then with Kiribati. The Kiribati tale is sad. Kiribati is like most Pacific island countries that are overpopulated and to make matters worse often suffer from severe lack of rain. When the U.S. left Canton Island, we left millions of dollars of facilities or equipment that could not be moved or were uneconomic to move, including a desalination plant. I was authorized to give equipment left behind to Kiribati as part of the negotiations. But the U.S. Senate took four years to ratify the treaty. The equipment and installations were not maintained during this period. During this period the islands were under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior who made American Samoa responsible for Canton Island. The governor sent over a few men to "protect American interests." It was really something out of a Peter Sellers movie. The British sent an Englishman with some people from Kiribati "to protect UK/Kiribati interests." Relations between the two groups were poor. Both sides insisted on driving on "their" side of the road. It was just lucky that there were no head-on collisions. The tragedy was that millions of dollars worth of equipment that might have been used by Kiribati to resettle people went to waste.

Q: He went to the Agricultural Committee.

BODDE: Fortunately, Helms chose to be chairman of the Agriculture Committee and Senator Lugar became chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. After the Reagan Administration reviewed the treaties, it decided to go ahead with ratification even though they had been negotiated in the Carter Administration. Later the political-appointee ambassadors in Fiji, New Zealand and Australia came in with telegrams saying this is important to our relations in the region to get the treaties ratified as soon as possible. The Australian and New Zealand

Ambassadors also lobbied for ratification. I am convinced that had the Democrats still controlled the Senate, the treaties would not have been ratified. The Reagan Administration endorsement undercut the opposition from Helms and other conservatives. As it was, the Democrats supported the treaties to be nice to the islanders and the Republicans supported them because good relations with the island states enhanced U.S. national security. Senator Frank Murkowski of Alaska was floor leader for the treaties, which finally passed 92 to 4. Helms and his friends had held them up for four years.

Well, I started telling you this because you asked me about working with Australia and New Zealand. Dealing with the Australians and the New Zealanders on these treaties was an eye-opener. The New Zealanders were particularly difficult. Part of the problem stemmed from not consulting with the New Zealanders or Australians before we began negotiating with Tuvalu and Kiribati. But that was just part of the problem. The two ambassadors demanded to see Holbrooke and we set a lunch for them with Holbrooke, my boss Deputy Assistant Secretary Evelyn Colbert, and me. The ambassadors objected to the security language in the treaties and accused us of militarizing the islands. According to them we were introducing the Cold War into an area that previously had been free of Cold War tensions. Holbrooke, in his typical political manner - and I have great respect for his intelligence and political skills, turned to me and said, "Bill, they are right. Take care of it." He then left the lunch. Well, no matter what Holbrooke said, we were not able to change the security provisions, which were very mild in any event. At least not if we ever wanted to get the treaties ratified. We worked on the Australians and after a while they came around, and we finally convinced the New Zealanders. But it was not easy.

Q: All right. You are getting ready for this delegation. You've mentioned you had your Samoan and your Hawaiian and all of that.

BODDE: Well, as I said, the first negotiating meeting was in Hawaii with Tuvalu. Then we met with the UK and Kiribati leaders in Hawaii. The night before the Kiribati negotiations we had an informal meeting to brief Coleman, the governor of American Samoa. He had had a few drinks and was belligerent. Over time I got to know Peter well and we became good friends. He was normally not a belligerent person, but that night he was and he went after me about giving away American territory. Not one grain of American sand was going to be given away as long as he was governor and that sort of nonsense.

We realized that we couldn't go in with the U.S. position that we had originally told the British we were going to go in with. We would have to work out this problem with the American Samoans.

So Buzz Busby, the fisheries expert from the State Department who later was U.S. Ambassador to Columbia and I had breakfast with the head of the British delegation from the Foreign Office and someone from their UK Embassy in Washington. We had told them that we were going to do A, B, and C, and now we are going to go into the meeting and do X, Y, and Z. I'll never forget, because the name of the head of the British delegation - it couldn't have been any more perfect - was John Snodgrass. He was a very fine fellow and very understanding. They said, "Okay. We had hoped to wrap up the negotiations at this session but we see that you have a problem." I explained that we could go over general principles we would like to see in the treaties at this

meeting and then I would go back and work out our differences with American Samoa but please be patient. He explained that he to was under pressure from his boss. The British foreign minister kept him sending messages, "Get this settled before Kiribati becomes independent." Well, that wasn't going to happen.

With considerable effort we finally got Hawaii and American Samoa on board. I went to Tuvalu and concluded the negotiations after independence. We had a joint meeting with Kiribati and the UK in Fiji before independence where we worked out the agreement but I did not sign the treaty with Kiribati until after independence. That left negotiations with New Zealand, The Cook Islands and Tokelau still to do.

When I went down to Wellington to negotiate with the New Zealand foreign ministry. Herb Hansell who was State Department legal advisor wouldn't let me take a lawyer. He objected to Department lawyers traveling too much. So there I was, negotiating a treaty in the New Zealand Foreign Office without a Department lawyer on the delegation. Fortunately, Dick Dols, the political counselor at the U.S. Embassy, had a law degree. Of course, I would not be authorized to sign any document until it was cleared with the lawyers in the Department. In reality these treaties were not complex legal documents but expressions of general political intent. You don't have to be a legal wizard to write them and, of course, I vetted them back in the Department. For their part, the New Zealanders presumed they knew everything about the islands and what the islanders think so they found no need to have any islanders on their delegations. I really enjoyed tweaking them. I always had an American Samoan on my delegation. When we sat down I would ask the New Zealand head of delegation, "Is there anybody here from the Cooks? Is there anybody here from the Tokelau?" He would reply, "No we will take care of their interests.

After we met in Wellington, two New Zealand diplomats and I went over to the Cook Islands to see if there was enough common ground with the Cook Island Government to bring out a U.S. team to the Cook Islands to negotiate. Well, the Cook Islands' relationship to New Zealand is a lot like the Micronesians' relationship with us. It's a kind of love-hate relationship. The Cook Islands get a tremendous amount of money from New Zealand, but they resent it. No one likes being the supplicant. In the company of the New Zealanders the Cook Island officials told me that they saw no need to negotiate a treaty about their sovereignty over their islands. I was disappointed, but as I was boarding the plane their foreign secretary came rushing up to tell me that they were ready to start negotiations in two weeks. I called Washington when I got to Tahiti where I was attending a South Pacific Conference and asked the delegation to meet me one week later in Tahiti and we would go together to the Cook Islands.

Q: Well, this was Holbrooke's thing. I mean, people laughed at him, but he always knew where the power was. I'm told even as a very young officer he would play tennis with the wives of the high and mighty or something to this effect. He's used them well. I mean he's done well for him, but for the country he's been used well.

BODDE: Right. He really was a great asset for a new office that had little standing in the Department. For example, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) wanted to pull their man out of Fiji. For some reason, the director of USIA, a Foreign Service Officer on loan from the State Department, didn't want to use their officers as regional public affairs officers. We told

Holbrooke and he went with the DAS Evelyn Colbert and me to see the USIA director. Getting Holbrooke to take time out of his tremendously busy schedule and to raise it with the USIA director was a testimony to the interest that he took in the Pacific islands. At the meeting he argued that there were only two areas where the Administration could really carve our new foreign policy initiatives. One was China and the other was the Pacific islands. As usual, he was successful and we kept the USIA position in Suva. No other East Asia and Pacific assistant secretary would have done that for the Pacific islands office. After I was director for about a year, he said, "Bill, I'm going to try to have you appointed Ambassador to Fiji when John Condon's time is up; I'm not sure I can pull it off, but I'm going to try."

Q: *Normally these things were sort of considered political payoffs to minor-*

BODDE: Not yet. Later this was the case, but back then we had career Foreign Service Officers as ambassadors in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. John Condon was the first resident U.S. ambassador in Fiji. Before that, the ambassador in Wellington, usually a political appointment, was also accredited to Fiji, Tonga, and Western Samoa.

Q: *Career people?*

BODDE: Holbrooke had to fight for my appointment. He went to see the Director General, Harry Barnes, and Deputy Secretary Christopher to propose my name. They told him no, they had their own candidate. He refused to give in and told them that Bodde has done a fantastic job and deserves it. He threatened to go to Secretary Vance. They backed off, so I am everlastingly grateful to Dick Holbrooke. It's funny, the other day, I was talking to Avis Bohlen, who was our ambassador in Bulgaria. She had been a DAS in EUR in the 1990s when Dick was Assistant Secretary for European Affairs and he did the same thing for her

Working on the islands in the Department was fun for my wife, too. Unlike the wives of most country directors in Washington, my wife got very involved in my work. For example, each year there is a Congressional National Prayer Breakfast in Washington. Because of the missionaries' influence in the South Pacific, the islanders tend to be religious and two or three of the island leaders would attend. Well, when they came, they'd get Secret Service protection as heads of state. They didn't have an embassy in Washington and there was no one to take care of them while they were here. We ended up hosting "state dinners" at our little house in Bethesda. Our neighbors were really impressed when the Secret Service would come and check out our modest neighborhood. I would warn our teenage son "If you get caught smoking pot, I'll kill you." Pacific islanders are very family oriented, so they were pleased that we had them to our home and that my wife did all the cooking. It helped cement personal relations with these leaders and that was very useful when I went out to the region as ambassador. Anyhow, how often do you get a chance to give a state dinner at home? The kids would pass the peanuts and Ingrid and I would serve.

The treaties with Kiribati and Tuvalu were each in two languages but it was agreed that English was the controlling language. That meant that if there were ever any argument, it was the English text that mattered. That can be important. I remember in Germany that after the Quadripartite Agreement was signed, there were arguments about what the German meant in English. By

having English as the controlling language we avoided that problem, but still, we couldn't sign a treaty without having some idea of what it said in the other language. Suppose it said something like: "This is a terrible treaty that we have been forced to agree to under duress." We had to find someone to translate the I-Kiribati language. So the question was, where do you find somebody who speaks I-Kiribati in Washington? We found an anthropologist at the University of Maryland who had done his field work in the Gilbert and Ellis Islands, and he could read the text enough to see that there was nothing untoward in the text. We didn't a need a formal, certified translation of it since it states in the treaties that English was the controlling language.

The negotiations with the islanders were not confrontational at all. When we were concluding the negotiations in Tuvalu, I thought we had run into a problem. Tuvalu's attorney general was a Brit. Although they were independent, they had a lawyer from the British Government seconded to Tuvalu as attorney general. After he reviewed the text, he and I went before the prime minister and the cabinet and he explained the language to them, sentence by sentence. I stressed that there was no foreign aid component in the treaty and they should not expect any. The attorney general finished going through the text and one cabinet member, an old man, put his hand up and said, "I think we need one more clause in the treaty." I thought, oh, my God, he is sure to suggest a killer amendment calling for U.S. aid. Whatever it was going to be, I was sure it would cost us money and we couldn't agree to it. Anyhow, the old man says, "The treaty we are agreeing to is a treaty of friendship therefore it should have a clause in it that states 'friendship is forever'." And you know, I was practically getting teary-eyed at that. The attorney general said "Oh, I don't think we have to put that in there." Although all the disputed islands treaties could be renegotiated after ten years if either side requested, the United States gave up all claims to the islands forever.

It was a wonderful experience. At the same time, I was doing the Micronesian negotiations. One of the things that struck me was that the fully independent South Pacific islanders had much less of a chip on their shoulders than the Micronesians. They didn't have a hell of a lot of material wealth but their indigenous cultures were more intact and they were more self secure. Tuvalu was a country of 8,000 people. I think now it has 10,000. And one can argue that maybe a place that small should not be considered a country, but that is the way the world is now. Tuvalu as a sovereign nation joined the United Nations in 2000. They helped finance their membership by selling their international designation "TV" to a dot com entrepreneur who paid them 4 million dollars per year for 10 years for the right to market domain names under dot.tv rather than dot.com.

When I negotiated the treaty Tuvalu only had a few cars in the capital, Funafuti. Mostly people got around by foot or bicycle. The UK gave the government a London taxi-type vehicle to use as the official vehicle of the prime minister. Except for the cars and electricity in some buildings and a handful of telephones, Funafuti looked about the same as it did 50 years ago. In fact, I used to say, especially in the early days when I'd go to Tuvalu, that I felt as if I had wandered onto the set of Mutiny on the Bounty. I'd get out of the airplane, and there'd be dancing girls. Now, dancing girls in Tuvalu usually tend to be all ages and about four feet tall and four feet wide. Although they are Polynesians, they are by our standards as attractive as the French Polynesians who, with that mixture of Caucasian, Asian, and Pacific islander blood are unbelievably beautiful. But different cultures have different concepts of beauty and I was flattered by my welcome. They "danced" sitting down, because years ago the Protestant missionaries forbade them to dance in a

sinful manner. They sat down and swayed back and forth and sang. When I was there later with Ingrid to present my credentials, she told me that some of the melodies were from old German hymns the missionaries had taught them.

There would always be a feast in honor of my visit. Fortunately, as the guest of honor there was a pole to lean back against, as you sat cross-legged on mats for hours. Ingrid was not so lucky. I couldn't do it now. They'd bring out a huge banana leaf with a whole chicken, a whole fish, and various root crops. At first I was worried that I could not eat it all. However, I learned that you weren't supposed to eat it all because once you finished the banana leaf was passed back to the women and children sitting behind the men. If you eat everything they would not have gotten anything to eat. Then there would be hours of singing and dancing. Time doesn't mean anything in the islands. At first the singing and dancing is really intriguing, but after a while it loses some of its charm. Still, it was a wonderful and unique experience.

Q: Oh, I know.

BODDE: It was like going to Africa in the old days without all the shortcomings of Africa. And the Pacific islanders were very personable.

Q: They're nice people.

BODDE: They're very nice people. We returned to the South Pacific on a Millennium Cruise last January. Ingrid and I lectured on a cruise that included Tahiti, The Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, and New Zealand. It was unbelievable. The cheapest cabin was $60,000 for two and no discount for children. It was our first time back to the South Pacific in 20 years. We saw some old friends and in general we found the islanders as friendly now as they were two decades ago. They remain very positive about the U.S.

I spent three years in the Department working on Pacific islands affairs - as deputy director in the office for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands and then two years as director of the office of Pacific islands affairs. The Department has since combined the offices again to save money, which is unfortunate. In 1980 I was appointed ambassador to Fiji, Tuvalu, and Tonga, and envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Kiribati. I couldn't be appointed ambassador to Kiribati because at that time they did not accredit an ambassador to the United States. Senator Claiborne Pell, who was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was convinced that the U.S. should not appoint an ambassador to a country that did not appoint an ambassador to the U.S. So I was named envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, which is a title we hardly use anymore. After WWII we used the title in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Q: Well, we had one for a long time in Switzerland. We used to have them all over until Roosevelt in the '30s raised all the ministers in South America up to be ambassadors, part of our Good Neighbor Policy, and the barn door was wide open after that.

BODDE: Well, I was envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in Kiribati. I thought it was a neat title. Later Kiribati did accredit an ambassador to the U.S. and we upgraded ours to

ambassador, but I had left Fiji by then. When I was still country director I came up with a solution to the accreditation problem that helped a number of the small countries. I remember having read somewhere that the Brits had an ambassador to some African country who was resident in London. He was the desk officer and they made him ambassador as well. Later the U.S. did something similar with Dick Williams who served as country director for China and concurrently was ambassador to Mongolia but resident in Washington. After Dick our ambassadors resided in Ulan Bator. The small Pacific island nations did not have the trained personnel or the money to send many ambassadors to live abroad so I suggested they use the British approach. Some of them liked the idea and appointed their number two man in the foreign ministry as ambassadors to many countries but they resided at home. The ambassador would make a trip to the capitals once or twice a year. It was a practical solution.

Q: Well, you were ambassador, what, from 1980 to when?

BODDE: From 1980 to '82.

Q: Where did you live?

BODDE: We lived in Suva, Fiji. Fiji with 700,000 inhabitants was the largest Pacific island country, in terms of population, after Papua New Guinea. We had an ambassador in Papua New Guinea, which has over four million people. The rest of the island nations are very much smaller, including Fiji, which in my day had about 700,000. Fiji was the most developed of the Pacific islands. When the British came to Fiji, they recognized the hierarchical chiefly system. It did look something like the British nobility system. So they actually sent a few of the children of the chiefs or the paramount chiefs to Cambridge and Oxford and trained them. The Fijians had that advantage of being taken seriously by the British, and having their elite trained.

In the 19th century the British realized that they would have to import labor because the Fijians didn't take well to the grueling work of picking cotton or harvesting sugar. At first they tried to man the plantations by using semi-slave ships called "blackbirds" that would go out and press-gang natives from Melanesia to work in Fiji. That didn't work well so the British imported Indians as indentured servants to work in the sugar fields. The Indians would sign up for so many years and after the contract was completed the laborer was free to return to India. Many brought their wives with them to Fiji and when their time was up most of them stayed in Fiji rather than returning to India. They also tended to have lots of children, and the Indian population grew larger and larger until it was almost as large as the Fijian population. So when Fiji was about to become independent in 1970, the British attempted to remedy the situation by drafting a constitution that essentially made it impossible for Fijians to alienate their land. That is, 90 per cent of the land belongs to Fijian tribes. It can't be sold or even given away. Only 10 per cent of the land is available for private ownership.

This meant that Indians who wanted to stay and grow sugar had to lease the land from the Fijian tribes. The original leases were for 99 years and many are coming up for renewal now in the year 2000. Now most of the Indians stayed in agriculture as the equivalent to sharecroppers. Another sizable group went into business, both manufacturing and retail. And a minority went into the professions, so that now in Fiji almost all lawyers, doctors, and dentists are Indians. Most stores

are Indian-owned except for a couple of big Australian and New Zealand firms and banks. The result is that the Fijians control the land and the Indo-Fijians control much of the wealth.

In Fiji the Indian Diaspora did not integrate with the local society at all. The Indo-Fijians live mostly in Indian villages or in cities in neighborhoods separate from the Fijians. They maintain their culture and language. There is practically no intermarriage between Indo-Fijians and Fijians. There is coexistence but no real integration.

This split between the two groups has made for great tensions. In 1987 two successive coups, led by a Fijian Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, overthrew the elected governments on the grounds that they were neglecting the needs of the indigenous Fijians and favoring the Indo-Fijians. In 1998 Rabuka, who had become the head of government, agreed to a democratic constitution. He lost the next election to an Indo-Fijian labor leader, Mahendra Chaudhry and stepped down. Within a year there was another coup, this time led by a civilian but with elements of the Fijian Army participating. George Speight, the coup leader, was a Fijian businessman of dubious reputation. He had only recently returned from Australia where he had "permanent resident status." Speight is very articulate in English but reportedly speaks Fijian poorly. He and his armed supporters took the prime minister and the cabinet prisoners. He forced the long-time leader of Fiji, President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, to resign and negotiated the formation of a new government. However Speight eventually overplayed his hand and the Fijian Army attacked his headquarters and put Speight and other rebel leaders under arrest. They did not restore the Chaudhry government to power and have appointed an interim government dominated by Fijians. A new constitution is being drafted that allegedly will better protect he rights of indigenous Fijians.

The economy is in shambles and as of August 2000 Fiji's future is unclear. While the ethnic split has historically created serious tensions, it has been the Indians who have been responsible for Fiji's economic success. The Indians contributed drive, ambition and entrepreneurial skills to the country. They forced the Fijians to compete and become more entrepreneurial. A quota system was set up to ensure that Fijians got into the university and medical school and obtained employment in business and government. Nevertheless, many Fijians resented the wealth of the Indo-Fijians.

As I said earlier, the British did more to prepare Fiji for independence by educating Fijian leaders and building an institutional infrastructure. They did not do the same for their other former Pacific island colonies such as the Solomons, Tuvalu, or Kiribati. The father of independent Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, was sent first to medical school in New Zealand. However, the ranking high chief of Lau, Ratu Lala Sukuna, decided it was more important to train Ratu Mara to be the future leader of Fiji. He ordered him to leave medical studies and go to Oxford. After Oxford Mara felt he needed more political and economic training so he attended the London School of Economics. Ratu Mara once told me that the socialist economists at the London School of Economics have ruined more economies in the Third World than colonialism. I think that's true. But Mara, Oxford-educated, articulate became, really, one of the most important leaders in the Pacific region. Therefore, Fiji was a natural place to put a regional embassy.

Q: At the time, '80-82, when you were there, who was the. . . . I mean, what was the government, and how did you deal with it?

BODDE: It was a parliamentary democracy and, like many of the Pacific island nations, it was the Westminster system overlaid on a tribal-hereditary system. The Pacific islanders solved the conflict between tradition and democracy by electing their paramount chiefs as the presidents or prime ministers. It worked well up until a point. Sometimes, though, it made for difficulties. You would see this particularly in the case of Ratu Mara who was prime minister when I was there. Later I saw similar problems in the Marshall Islands where the president was also the paramount chief. A paramount chief is never challenged. What he says is law. A democratically elected leader is frequently challenged and must justify his actions. Sometimes the paramount chief / president had trouble accepting this. They often have trouble separating their role as paramount chief and their role as an elected leader. They did not really accept the concept of a loyal opposition. That's why I believe that after Mara lost the election in 1987, he remained passive when the coup took place. If Mara, given his chiefly status, had stood together with the governor general, also a Fijian chief, and said, "Back to the barracks," the troops would have gone back to the barracks. I believe to this day that he didn't do it because he was appalled that his subjects had voted him out of power - how could they do that to him? It was a conflict of ego and tradition versus democracy.

Fiji in my time had an active parliament and multi-racial society. I admired Ratu Mara for what he had done for Fiji in the first ten years of independence. However, I never established a close relationship with him. Interestingly enough, he and my successor Freddie Eckert, a political appointee with a remarkably undistinguished background, became close friends. Eckert left Fiji after two years and successfully ran for Congress. Defeated after one term, he used his connections with Ratu Mara to land a lucrative contract as a consultant to the Fiji Government. Then they had a falling-out and he sued the Fiji Government for breech of contract. Ratu Mara was ambivalent about the United States and was convinced that we never gave him the respect he deserved. When I was ambassador, his daughter Karla worked at the embassy. Twenty years later, she was minister for tourism and was taken hostage in the coup. If Mara ran hot and cold about the U.S., he had an even more ambivalent relationship with Australia and New Zealand. Those ambassadors would often be called into his office to be chewed out because their prime ministers were reported on the radio to have said something Mara didn't like. He was not a man that was at ease with himself despite his high rank but he was nevertheless an impressive man. A tall handsome man with regal baring, he spoke the Queen's English and could be very eloquent. At the same time he was very insecure and always alert to real or intended slights. His wife, a high chief in her own right, was gracious and down to earth. Fijians are very simpatico people. They tend to be big and tall with erect posture. I used to get a crick in my neck from looking up to them. They wore their hair in what we used to call "an Afro" and sometimes they looked very fierce. But when you'd say hello to them, which is "bula, bula" they would give you a smile that would light up an auditorium and reply "bula, vinaka". They are also tremendously loyal. Our driver, Pania, considered us his family. I was his father, Ingrid was his mother, and our 16-year-old son, who was out there with us for a time, was his brother. I am convinced that even the specially trained bodyguards that I had in Frankfurt wouldn't have protected me better than Pania.

Despite Ratu Mara's moodiness, relations between the U.S. and Fiji were good. One day one of the government ministers came to see me and said that they were interested in discussing the use of Fijian troops in the U.S.-sponsored Sinai Multinational Force and Observers. I got in touch with Washington right away, and they quickly sent out a delegation to negotiate an agreement for Fiji's participation. Fijian troops had been part of the UN peacekeeping troops in Lebanon for some time and they had an excellent reputation. It is generally agreed that they are among the best of the UN peacekeepers. If you tell them not to let anyone pass, then nobody's coming through. Fifteen or twenty Fijian soldiers have been killed while on duty as peacekeepers. When a Fijian soldier is killed while serving as a peacekeeper he is given a hero's funeral when they bring the body home. It is part of their warrior tradition. Well, anyhow, this team came out to negotiate with a Foreign Service officer - Wat Cluverius

Q: Wat Cluverius, yes. I've interviewed him.

BODDE: He was the head of delegation, and he had two U.S. Army colonels, a DOD civilian and a State Department lawyer with him. When they arrived I explained how Fijians negotiate in contrast to negotiations in the Middle East. They had come to Fiji right from negotiating with the Egyptians and the Israelis, and that was an entirely different situation. Negotiating with the Fijians was not they say 20, and you respond with 10 and then settle at 15.

Q: Yes.

BODDE: If the Fijians propose a figure they do so because they believe it is a necessary and fair sum. What you have to do in response is to explain why their figure is too high and why it should be less. If your explanation makes sense they will accept it and agree to the lower figure. For example, the Fijians said, we require so much money to provide a compass for every soldier. We replied that in the U.S. Army we only issue a compass to squad leaders. The Fijians immediately reduced their request accordingly. Our delegation was very impressed with the quality of the Fijian military and their reasonableness in negotiating. In fact, the U.S. financial expert on the delegation was so favorably impressed that he voluntarily put in funds for a new mess hall in Suva although they had not requested it. He told me that he had never dealt with such reasonable people.

We had a party at the Fiji Veterans' Association Hall to celebrate the successful conclusion of the negotiations. One of the U.S. colonels, who was in charge of training at Fort Benning infantry school, approached me at the party. He said, "Mr. Ambassador when they sent me out here on the negotiating team I thought it was a joke. I thought these people still lived in the trees. I was really off base. Now I would like to take a squad of Fijian soldiers back to Benning to show them what real soldiers look like!" The Fijians were very proud of the role they had played in World War II fighting the Japanese and in fighting the communist guerrillas in Malaysia in the 1960s. A retired Gurkha general, who had commanded Gurkha troops alongside the Fijians in Malaysia, told me that the Fijians were the fiercest soldiers he had ever seen. In World War II the Fijians began as scouts for the U.S. forces on Guadalcanal and later had their own combat units. When I would visit a village out in the bush, the chief of the village and probably a Protestant clergyman and maybe the schoolteacher would meet us. Often there would be old World War II veterans in the welcoming party. They wore skirts, called a sulu in Fijian, and white shirts

tattered from being laundered for years. On the chests they proudly wore their medals from World War II to show the visiting American ambassador. I would get choked up.

Q: Oh, yes.

BODDE: Interestingly enough, the Indians, taking a cue from Mahatma Gandhi, did not participate in the war. The Fijians went to fight together with us, and the Indians didn't. This also served to widen the split between the two ethnic groups in Fiji. Anyhow, emotions ran high at the celebration at the veterans hall. I think if I had announced America and Fiji were once again allies, fighting together in a just cause, they all would have signed up!

Fijian troops are still in the Sinai. In 1999 my wife and I were on a cruise that took us through the Suez Canal and we stopped in the Sinai. We passed the Multilateral Force and Observers headquarters in our tour bus. When I looked at that terrain and the climate, I thought, what did I do to these people? Can you imagine if you come from a lush, tropical island where fruit falls from the tree to go live in a barren desert? But they're still there. The Fiji government offered its services for the very practical reason that it is a good source of revenue for the government. The government pays the troops a small percentage of the income and the rest goes into the national treasury. Still, for the troops it's a lot of money. The Lebanon and Sinai peacekeeping detachments employ about a thousand soldiers. They rotate the troops between Lebanon and Sinai. When they approached us, Fiji was concerned because the UN wasn't paying on time and wanted to be sure that the U.S. would pay them on time.

An unintended consequence of engaging the Fiji Army in the Sinai was that we probably strengthened the military and enhanced the military's role in Fiji politics. Colonel Rabuka was a product of the enhancement of Fiji's military, which enabled him to garner support as a coup leader in 1987. The latest coup included elements of the military among the rebels as well, but it was the Fiji Army that eventually put down the coup. All in all, our use of Fiji soldiers in peacekeeping has been a plus.

I was also accredited to other South Pacific counties. We lived in Suva but I also covered Tonga and Kiribati and Tuvalu. Tonga was something special, because Tonga has never been a colony. It has been a protectorate of the British, and the King is a descendant of the first king of Tonga. His mother, Queen Salote, received world attention when she was shown on television at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. At the coronation she insisted on riding in a open carriage through the rain because in Tonga you do not ride under cover when you pay your respects to a sovereign. Her son, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, weighs about 350 pounds and is Tonga's first college-educated king. He had a fascination with Germany. Even when I was ambassador, he preferred to talk about things German. I would have to remind him that, after all, I was the American Ambassador and we should talk a little bit about American and Tonga relations. But he had this thing about Germany and he knew I had served in Bonn and Berlin. Sometime later, I was talking to the president of Germany, Richard Von Weizsaecker, and he told me that the king came to Berlin when he was governing mayor and the king knew more about the history of Berlin than he did. There are many wonderful stories about the king. He loves McDonald's hamburgers, the story goes. So one time he was visiting Los Angeles he had a motorcycle escort from the airport to his hotel. They were driving along, when he spots the golden arches.

Q: McDonald's, yes.

BODDE: Yes the golden arches of McDonalds. Anyhow, he taps the driver on the shoulder and points to McDonalds. The driver makes a sharp right turn but the convoy with sirens wailing goes on to the hotel. Of course, when they get there they realize they have lost the king so they frantically retrace their steps to find him munching a hamburger at McDonalds.

He also is very fond of Chinese food, and the Taiwanese used this to their political advantage. Some years ago the king was deciding whether Tonga should recognize Taiwan or the People's Republic. The Taiwanese promised him if he would recognize Taiwan, they would provide him with the biggest Chinese restaurant in the Pacific islands. He agreed to recognize Taiwan and some months later, the Taiwanese ambassador called on him. He told the king that the cooks, pots and pans and foodstuffs had arrived but they needed a building to set up the restaurant. Well, the king as monarch has a claim on all property in Tonga. He looked around and decided that the Mormon Church would make a good location. So out went the Mormons, and in went the Chinese restaurant. It was the strangest Chinese restaurant you ever wanted to see. The king, a Presbyterian, had nothing against the Mormons who are very strong in Tonga. A few years later he permitted the Mormons to build a temple in Tonga.

The king had a sense of British tradition. You presented credentials to him at the palace, gingerbread Victorian house, in morning dress – striped pants, top hat, etc. These I rented by mail from New Zealand, which meant the material was heavy, scratchy wool - just what you needed in one hundred degree heat. Ingrid joined me after the king and I read our respective messages. He sat on a specially constructed couch blocking the only fan in the room. A servant brought out two flutes of champagne and large silver beaker for His Royal Highness. Turned out that the queen was trying to keep him on a diet and it was filled with Tab.

The crown prince of Tonga was foreign minister. He was educated at Sandhurst, the British military school, and was at loose ends to keep himself intellectually occupied in Tonga. He would much rather talk about Soviet military strategy than about economic development in Tonga. He gave a reception for me after I presented my credentials and then the next night I gave a reception in his honor. The receptions were at the famous Chinese restaurant for there are not many venues for a large reception in the Tongan capital. Ingrid and I walked into the restaurant for the foreign minister's reception. You walked down a long hallway that once led to the altar, I guess. It was lined with Taiwanese flags. If there had been a photo of that in the newspaper, the People's Republic of China would have protested and Washington would have recalled me [laughter] in a New York minute. Fortunately there were no photographers around. I didn't want to embarrass the Tongans so I went ahead with the reception but I told the manager afterwards that I was giving a reception the next night and there would be no Taiwanese flags, no Tongan flags, no American flags, just a reception. That's how they did it. When we were back in Tonga 20 years later we went looking for the restaurant, but now it's a TV station or something. I think that at the present time Tonga recognizes the PRC (People's Republic of China). The Pacific mini states are more sophisticated now and they play the PRC and Taiwan off against each other. By switching their recognition every few years when the other country offers more aid, they make some money. They've learned to play that game.

Q: Did we have any. . . . I mean, with all three areas, did we have any major interests or particular interests that you had to watch?

BODDE: Well, we kept an eye on the Soviets and we did not want them to become active in the South Pacific. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan -

Q: Which was in '79, yes.

BODDE: - most Pacific island nations banned Soviet cruise ships, which were used by Australian tourists. The islanders were basically anti-Communist because their societies were very religious and conservative. My pitch to Washington was that there was a reservoir of good will towards the U.S. among the South Pacific islanders going back to World War II. We could preserve and even increase this reservoir by increasing our small aid package of five million dollars for the whole region and by paying a little more attention to them. They vote in the UN with us much more than most third world nations and even more than some of our allies such as France. For example, they voted with the U.S. to defeat the "Zionism is racism" resolution in the General Assembly. We don't have major interests out there, but with a little bit of effort, we could increase our influence. Holbrooke had the idea that we should train a small number of FSOs as Pacific islands specialists. We could send them to the University of Hawaii Pacific islands graduate program. They would, God forbid, not spend their whole career in the islands, but would do a tour after the training and then down the line would hopefully go back as ambassador. We did sent two very good officers to Hawaii for the training. One of them went to Port Moresby after training. The other one came to Suva as my DCM and later was director of Pacific Island Affairs. He was supposed to go to the Federated States of Micronesia as ambassador but lost out at the last minute.

In the twenty years since I went out as ambassador to Fiji, the political and economic situation in many of the island states has deteriorated. They are plagued by coups and civil wars and they have not developed very much economically. Sadly, it is very hard to see a rosy economic future for most of these tiny islands. They are too small to have much of an economic base and they are geographically remote. They require two things to survive economically. One is foreign assistance from the former colonial powers and international organizations. The other is repatriation of money from their citizens working abroad. This is the case with the Filipinos who work all over the world and send money home. American Samoans do the same by serving in the U.S. armed forces and a few highly paid Samoans play football in the NFL (National Football League). Tuvalu and Kiribati both have schools to train merchant seamen to serve on foreign vessels. It used to be considered a bad thing to export your talent. We worried about the brain drain. Well, there are only so many trained people you can use in small countries like the Pacific island states, so if their citizens can go and work as programmers in Silicon Valley or such and send money home, that's an efficient use of their resources.

Q: Absolutely.

BODDE: I think that it's very hard to see any way they can provide a standard of living similar to Hawaii or Australia without a large amount of foreign assistance. You can't educate people and say, "Now go back to the outer islands as hunters and gatherers."

Q: Well, for a lot of them on some of these islands, they've lost their fishing skills and -

BODDE: They don't have those skills any more, that's right. Ironically, the South Pacific islanders are better off than the former American territories because they were not so spoiled by the colonial powers. I remember once there was a change of government in Tuvalu and I asked their ambassador in Fiji would he be recalled and if so what would he do? He told me he would retire and go back to his home island. I asked him how he would support himself if he retired and received no government salary. He laughed and told me as long as the coconuts grew and there was fish in the ocean around his island he would do all right. Their standard of living may be lower but, in some cases, it is self-sustainable. But it was a great assignment. I later went back to it, so to speak, which we'll talk about the next time, about the Marshall Islands, but that was very different, of course.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point, Bill, and we'll put in this: we've really gone up to 1982. And this was all part of filling in this gap up to '87. So just put at the end, where did you go in '82?

BODDE: '82, I went to the East-West Center in Hawaii for a year. Then I went to Consulate General Frankfurt.

Q: Today is the 10th of May, 2000. So in 1982 you were going where? You were going to what?

BODDE: I was in Fiji. Actually, I was bounced out of Fiji by a political appointee.

Q: And how did that work?

BODDE: Well, when I went out there we knew that there'd be an election, but I thought that even if Ronald Reagan were elected it was unlikely that a political appointee would want to go to Fiji. I was wrong. Presidents' Bush and Clinton let most career people finish out a three-year tour as ambassador but the Reagan Administration was not as generous. There was a conservative New York State legislator who had supported Reagan going back to the Republican convention when he lost to Gerald Ford. Anyhow, he wanted to come to Fiji. We always suspected that he thought Fiji was Tahiti, but that may be too unkind. I know one thing. When the U.S. asked for agrément, the Department sent out his resume. It was monumentally unimpressive. His name was Freddie Eckert, and he was a strange guy. He mistrusted anyone who worked for the government. I wrote him a letter about the staff and other details about the post that would be of interest to the new ambassador. My wife wrote to his wife about the residence and the household staff and neither of us received an answer. He got off on a wrong foot with Ratu Mara, the prime minister, but later, for some peculiar reason, they became bosom buddies. He left after two years to run for Congress. He successfully ran for the seat held for many years by Barber Conable, who left to become the president of the World Bank.

Q: This is in what state?

BODDE: Upstate New York, Buffalo, I believe. In any event, he managed to lose the seat after two years, and by chance I was at a dinner with Conable once. I asked him how safe the seat was for a Republican. He told me that it had been the safest seat in the United States Congress and that a Republican would have to work hard to lose that seat. But anyhow, Eckert was again appointed an ambassador; this time to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome.

Q: In Rome, yes, that was the one that. . . . yes.

BODDE: But Eckert kept trying to involve himself in U.S.-Fiji relations and the Department finally told him to butt out -- that the U.S. had an ambassador in Fiji. In 1989 when I was DAS in EUR, I went to Rome with Secretary Shultz. We were there for the Easter services at St. Peter's. Mrs. Shultz was Catholic and she wanted to go to Easter mass in Saint Peters before Shultz resigned. It was a fantastic experience, just to see the Pope serve mass. We were probably 20 yards away from the altar. Just before the mass started who walked in but Ratu Mara with Freddie Eckert. Well, he got a contract from the Fijians after he resigned as ambassador to the UN agency. It was allegedly worth 300,000 dollars. I don't know what any American lobbyist could do for Fiji that was worth 300,000 dollars. Later they had a falling out, and there was a court case, and I think it's still in the court at this time. Anyhow that was my successor.

But we left Fiji, and we went to Hawaii for a year to the East-West Center. I became the first diplomat-in-residence at the East-West Center, which was very nice.

CARL EDWARD DILLERY
Ambassador
Fiji (1983-1987)

Ambassador Carl Edward Dillery was born in Seattle, Washington. He received a bachelor's degree from Seattle Pacific University and a master's degree from George Washington University. He joined the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included positions in Japan, Belgium, Vietnam, England, and Cyprus, and an ambassadorship to Fiji. Ambassador Dillery was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994.

Q: *Today is tax day, April 15, 1994. Your next assignment was Fiji. How did that come about?*

DILLERY: Probably in the way of most Foreign Service assignments. The Under Secretary for Management, Ron Spiers, approached me when I was the director of UN political affairs, and said, "How would you like to go to either Nepal or Bangladesh?" I said, "Oh, I would really like that and would like it even better for Nepal than Bangladesh." He said, "Bangladesh is a lot better assignment." I said, "Either one would be lovely." I can't even remember when that was, but it must have been in 1983. Later there was a Deputy Secretary's committee (the group that

makes formal choices of career officers for ambassadorial positions) meeting and I was indeed selected to be the Department's candidate for Nepal.

I was very pleased about that and started telling people. Among the people that I told was Ambassador Kirkpatrick. I said, "I am not going to be with you much longer." And she said, "You can't be going to Nepal because I know that Lee Weil is going to Nepal. He is a New York stockbroker and a friend of Helene Von Damm."

Q: *Oh yes, Reagan's secretary who had a lot of power.*

DILLERY: And who later became Ambassador to Austria. So then I went to the Department's office of White House Liaison where I knew a chap who had been in IO public affairs, or something like that. He later became Ambassador to Morocco. I asked if he could check this out for me. He did and he said, "You are right, Lee Weil is going to Nepal." It turned out that the White House was a little bit sheepish about it and then call came to me asking if I would like to go to Fiji rather than Nepal. I had all my wardrobe ready for Nepal. That is basically how I got to go there. I had some Far Eastern experience, but when I went to see the Assistant Secretary he said to me, "Well, you weren't my choice." So I was picked by the Deputy Secretary's Committee and went to Fiji.

I was accredited to Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Kiribati. Then we also did consular work for French Polynesia which includes Tahiti and for New Caledonia.

Q: *You were there from 1984-87.*

DILLERY: Right, I was there from October, 1984 until late August, 1987.

Q: This was a new area for you. Did you have any agenda from EA or from your talks with the desk?

DILLERY: We didn't particularly. At that point we were still in the throes of getting rid of the Trust Territories, which by this time were well into the process of becoming autonomous. This included the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Northern Marianas. The point was that we wanted the islands' support for things that we wanted in the UN.

Q: Being an island nation it would have a little more clout with .....

DILLERY: Well, yes, they are neighbors. Kiribati and the Marshalls are next door to each other. So it was just the case that you want regional support for your position in the region. Probably the biggest part of our agenda was keeping the Soviets out of the area. They were beginning, even as I arrived, to try...they had no missions on the ground in any of the countries, but they were talking about setting up fishing arrangements partly for political reasons, partly because they had some trawlers that had been built for them in Poland on a barter arrangement that they needed to use and decided to use them to try to catch tuna. But they had political things in mind as well. So a large part of this was to try to keep them out. The Cold War was still on.

Q: Well, the policy with many of those islands was basically one called denial. That was keeping the Soviets out. We had what we wanted, we just wanted to deny them.

DILLERY: There were a few economic issues at the beginning when we went out. Some got larger later. Basically the idea was to have good relations with them. It was partly a situation of finding ways to...being as small as they are it is sort of easy to be neglected, and they felt that way. So part of the job was to really try to demonstrate to them that we did really care about them. We had an assistance program which was regional with the headquarters in Suva. It was for the whole South Pacific, not just the four islands I had. It was about $10 million a year. We were trying to use that program to demonstrate our interest in the area. Those were the main things.

There were no major issues. The Fijians were troubled by our delinquency in peacekeeping contributions because two/thirds of their army is in peacekeeping in Lebanon and the Sinai. That was their agenda. Besides that, things were relatively small pieces of business which is maintaining good relations.

Q: How long had they been an independent country by the time you arrived?

DILLERY: Fiji became independent in 1974.

Q: So about nine years.

DILLERY: Yes. Tonga really maintains that they have been independent for 400 years, or forever. Even when the Germans took over it was some kind of a trust or some kind of a relationship under which the monarchy was still there.

Q: Tonga is part of Fiji?

DILLERY: No, Tonga is a separate country.

Q: Was there a separate ambassador to Tonga?

DILLERY: No, I was the Ambassador to four countries: Fiji, Tonga, and then the little countries of Kiribati and Tuvalu which are probably better known to people of our age as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands had been independent only since 1980, about four years.

Q: Could you explain at the time you were there the political structure and the economy of each island?

DILLERY: I will go from the small to the large. Tuvalu is a little group of about eight or nine islands, all coral atolls. The resident population was very small, only about 7,000. The capital is Funafuti. The dominant influence there is Australia and New Zealand. The dominant influence in the whole area is Australia. They have the largest assistant programs. To illustrate the importance of this, the Australians, without consulting the Tuvaluans produced a government which

suggested and almost passed that they just depopulate Tuvalu. It would be cheaper for Australia to bring all the Tuvaluans to Australia than to leave them on the islands.

A little about the history. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands were, as in so many British colonies, an anomaly. The Gilbert are Micronesian and the Ellice are Polynesian. Polynesians are much more confident. They had always been the sort of aristocracy in the region. And the British also in their traditional fashion used the minority to be the controllers of the majority. Well, when I say majority, the Gilbertese are about 70,000 and about 7,000 Ellice Islanders. Tarawa in Kribati was the capital of the colony but a lot of Ellice Islanders went up there to form the nucleus of the civil service. So most of the leaders of Tuvalu were Ellice Islanders. When independence came in 1980, the Ellice Islanders took a look around and realized that with voting all of a sudden they were going to be out voted by 10 to 1 and decided that and Independent Tuvalu was better for them.

There was some suggestion that they might stick together. For instance, the prime minister of Tuvalu was married to a Gilbertese and the president of Kiribati was married to an Ellice Islander. So there was still a lot of relationships.

We had a tiny AID program at Tuvalu. There were two Peace Corps volunteers. The political issue there was that the country was ruled by people from an outer island and the capital of Funafuti was talking secession to get rid of these outsiders. I think ten percent of the population was in the civil service. The country is so small and undeveloped that the airfield is still a grass strip we made for World War II. It is the only flat place on the island - perhaps in the country. It is the soccer field and when an airplane comes in they take the goal posts down.

The Gilbert Islands were a little bit bigger and actually in territory are very wide. They go all the way from the Gilbert Islands right at the equator all the way over to Christmas Island. The width of the country is about 3,500 miles. So they have considerable fishing assets. For all of these people coconuts and fishing are the main businesses. The Gilbert Islands has, like all the rest of them, very little industry and mostly dependent upon assistance. The Japanese had a fairly large program of assistance there because of the war and the impact of the fighting on Tarawa. Tarawa is the atoll where the capital is...there are two little cities, the major town where the people live, which is Betio (pronounced Baysho, where the battle was, and then the next little town, which is about three miles away on the next island is the administrative capital. Then about 15-20 miles around the atoll is the airport. There was no way to get from the administrative capital to the place where people lived except by ferry and it took about an hour. So the Japanese built a causeway between and that was the biggest aid program.

Our biggest issue with them was that the Second Marines had a memorial to the battle there. One of the features of the battle was that we landed from inside the atoll and there was a jetty there where they sheltered for a while. The memorial was right there by the jetty. That site has now become a fish factory and it was thought not to be seemly for the memorial to be there, so they wanted to move it. The problem was that the Kiribati wanted to have it in what they called their "Peace Park" which also had Japanese memorials in it. The Second Marine Association was not too keen to have it there. So that was our big negotiation.

Q: Did you solve that one?

DILLERY: We did solve that and actually the memorial now is in the peace park to everybody's satisfaction.

Later on we had some other interesting business with them because...you said what was the agenda when we started, it turned out later that a major thing was when the el Niño came and the tuna stocks disappeared...

Q: El Niño being a weather phenomena that comes every once and a while.

DILLERY: It increases the temperature of the water, particularly around the equator. The result of that was that the tuna crop off the western coast of the Americas declined and American tuna boat people found that there were a lot of them in the South Pacific. So they started going out there and where there were no agreements that might hinder an industry has always been noted for free enterprise. They were amazingly effective, but they also were not very responsive to the concept of other people's sovereignty. So there were a lot of complaints. In fact, in Kiribati we had one American fishing boat captured, or detained, and we had to work on that. There is a USG fund for paying off fines and all that sort of thing. That was another major piece of business with them.

Kiribati is a semiparliamentary type of government. There is a president, not a governor general, and a parliament. The president is limited in his power. When I was there he was 32 years old. When I presented my credentials to him, he was dressed in a flowered shirt, different patterned shorts and no shoes. I was wearing a summer suit and felt quite formal.

When we went to Tuvalu to present credentials, we found that the one hotel with nine rooms in the capital city is about two minutes from the airport by foot. One of the things that one of the Peace Corps volunteers did there was to make beautiful signs for the public buildings. So there is a lovely sign outside this little building which says, "Funafuti International Airport" and the building is a thatched roof open structure about 12 x 12, with a little concrete place in the middle for you to put your luggage on.

We didn't stay in the hotel, we stayed in the governor general's guest house, which was about five minutes from the center of town by foot. The Governor General was an older man and we had a very desultory conversation during our call on him, but very nice. The prime minister was a physician, a very nice man whom we got to know later and came in and had dinner with us in Fiji many times.

But to give you an idea of the scope of that place, there is an airplane three times a week from Fiji...well really there are five landings because one airplane goes from the Marshalls, to the Gilberts, to Tuvalu, to Fiji on a Saturday and then back up on Sunday. The Prime Minister frequently went down to meet the airplane just to see who was on it. Pretty informal.

Tonga is the opposite of that. Tonga is an ancient kingdom. I had said 400, but I think they trace their lineage back 1600 years. You may remember the famous story of the present king's mother,

who was Queen Salote, at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth. In the formal procession she was in an open carriage with the Grand Vizier of Oman, or something like that, who was a little guy. She was about 6' 6" or so and weighed 280 or 300 pounds. It was raining but she made great friends because she had a great smile.

Anyway the present king has actually lost a little weight, he now weighs about 375 pounds and is about 6' 6". Shaking hands with him is like picking up a bunch of bananas. But he is a lovely man. They have a parliament, but basically the country is still run by royalty. The ministers are all nobles. There aren't very many of them as there is quite a lot of inbreeding.

One colorful person in the whole thing is the Crown Prince, a nice man of about 40 who is very into modern technology. The King is a deacon in the local Methodist church and preaches once a month. They have blue laws on Sunday -- you are not supposed even to take pictures.

Once again there is not very much business. Tonga has a penchant for weird and wacky economic ideas. One of the little things they did which was after my time but gives you the idea was that they had some American lawyer who came and suggested that since there were 16 of the synchronous satellite orbital positions over the equator in the South Pacific that hadn't yet been used, Tonga should claim them. Of course you have to have a certain space between the satellites and there was only x number around the equator. Basically it has been on a first come first serve basis. Nobody ever asked for them. Tonga asked for all 16 and they were going rent those out. I don't know how it finally came out, but it caused a great fuss. That kind of fuss was happening frequently in other schemes.

Tonga exports seasonal fruits and vegetables to New Zealand, for instance, because they don't have any winter...melons and things like that, and fish. They send that same kind of produce to America, mostly to Hawaii. Besides from that we really had no major issue with them to speak of. They didn't have a very good fishing area.

Q: *Do we have fleet visits to those places?*

DILLERY: We do. That was another major area of interest and that is to try to preserve access as much as possible...this developed later on. During my stay New Zealand established its policy of no visits by ships that were either nuclear powered or which might carry nuclear weapons. Of course, as you know, we have a very strict policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons so that effectively shut New Zealand out of our ship visit program. It was our job to try to keep the other places in the area open for ship visits. We managed to accomplish visits to all of them.

We had lovely programs coming out of CINCPAC in Hawaii when they would send SeaBees, for instance, to the islands and do construction work. One of our really huge hospital ships came to Suva and stayed three or four weeks to do operations and eye checks, etc. It was really a wonderful program. We accomplished a nuclear attack submarine visit in Fiji during a conference of Peaceniks, which was kind of fun. So there was a lot of that and we kept working to keep that access open. Frankly, the leadership in all of these countries is fairly conservative and it was not a major problem.

So Tonga was really that kind of thing, maintaining this relationship and then kind of keeping your finger on the pulse, there is a small democratic effort there of thinking that perhaps the monarchy is past it. We have a few American citizens there. The Mormon church is very big. Our biggest piece of business with Tonga was visas. Going to America is a very important thing for them. In their system of inheritance, they give property to all the sons so the land is broken up to such an extent that there really isn't any property left.
The result is a lot of questionable visa applications. We refused 90 percent of the applicants and of the other 10 percent, about 90 percent were fraudulent, both immigrant and nonimmigrant.

Q: They were going to the United States to stay.

DILLERY: Right. So that was our main business with them really. We were constantly being importuned by everybody from the Crown Prince to the prime minister of Fiji (who also had some Tonga relatives) to grant visas.

Q: Well, then to Fiji, which I guess was your main occupation.

DILLERY: Yes. Let me give you some population figures. Tonga is about 100,000 and Fiji is about 720,000. The latter is a real country and it has an infrastructure. It has ship building and copper mines and an important sugar industry. They started developing a textile industry while we were there. Tourism, of course, is another main business. And there is fishing and farming. But for us the main economic problems were sugar, where they had a quota for exports to the US and they were always trying to make it a little bigger...as we kept restraining the sugar quota it got down to the place where it wasn't even a ship load a year and therefore hardly worth sending, but they wanted to do it for symbolic sake and they were always trying to get it up to at least that level. And, of course, the attractiveness of selling sugar to the United States is that we pay about four or five times as much as anybody else's price. So, whatever they did sell was well worth it.

We also had aviation problems. We had an aviation agreement with Fiji. They had chartered with Western Airlines for an airplane which went from Fiji to Hawaii, and they wanted that flight to go onward to San Francisco or Los Angeles as Air Pacific, the Fiji National Airline. I think we offered them Hawaii to Sacramento, Portland or Reno and they didn't like that.

The other side of the coin was trying to maintain the access for Continental Airlines which stopped in Fiji on the way to Australia. In the end Continental pulled out just before we left because of the coup that occurred in 1987. I'll mention that in just a second. So those were really the main bilateral items.

Then with all of them late in the day, about 1986, we started negotiating a fishing treaty with all of the South Pacific Island countries that would compensate all of them for tuna fishing rights. That was a major piece of our business. It also was for our Embassies in Papua New Guinea and New Zealand.

Q: Well, with those fishing agreements, I would think this would be something you would want to do in coordination with some other powers like Australia, New Zealand.

DILLERY: No, we didn't. It was just between us and the island countries. The Australians and New Zealanders don't have tuna fishing industries. Japan is another country that does have a tuna industry but our relationship with them on that is not one of cooperation. So in this negotiation, we in the area assisted our chief negotiators from the Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science in their dealings with the islanders. In the end we got an agreement that satisfied all parties and our fishermen were able to use the waters around the island nations.

The other thing that developed at that time was an international effort to fight against drift net fishing. In this form of fishing, nets several miles long are deployed and allowed to drift -- almost all fish get caught in the nets and the result is bad for the fish populations and for the ocean environment. We were on the side of the gods on that one because we were against drift net fishing and they wanted us to be stronger on that.

We finally came to a conclusion on this, by the way. There are two regional organizations, the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Coordination, which is kind like their inter-island group including Australia and New Zealand organization that tries to coordinate economic things. It has become kind of a political forum as well. Then there was the South Pacific Conference, which was a conference for the coordination of aid projects for the whole area. That was headquartered in New Caledonia. The French, British, Australians, New Zealanders, Japanese, US and all the island countries were members of the Conference. That was another forum that I worked in as representative of the US.

The other major thing that came up which related very much to the ship visit issue was that the political forum of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Coordination, came up with the idea of a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ or "Spinfizz"), which the US opposed. But there was a great debate in the United States as to whether we should go along with the island nations. They tried to modify their nuclear free zone so that it wouldn't affect our ship visits but our policy on this point was so strong that we could not. Spinfizz really was aimed at the French to get them to stop nuclear testing in French Polynesia. That was another big piece of our business there. The Fijians were very big in that. Our embassy got in some controversy over this issue because we recommended that the US sign the treaty and the non-signers won out in Washington. I note with some amusement that one of the policies of the Clinton Administration is to sign the treaty now.

Other things in Fiji. There is a regional university for all the countries. I think nine or ten of the countries jointly own a university and the largest campus is in Suva. There is another one in Samoa and one in Papua New Guinea and then little satellite teaching stations in the other countries where teaching is done by voice radio from Suva. Working with them was again part of our AID program.

In May, 1987, there was a military coup in Fiji. The political problem in Fiji is that, it has changed a little bit now, but when we were there 48 percent of the population were from South Asia--India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka--and only 45 percent of the population were indigenous Fijians. The other 8 percent were Chinese and Europeans. The constitution was frankly racial because out of 52 seats in the Parliament, 22 were for ethnic Fijians, 22 for South Asians and 8

for what were called general electors. The voting system was very complicated. Every voter had four votes in the most complicated formula I have seen.

A sort of unwritten agreement was that while the Indians would run the economy of the country, the Fijians would run the government.

Once before, shortly after independence in 1978 or so, there had been a standoff in an election. The Parliament had come out 26 of the Indian party and 25 of the Fijian party and 1 independent. The Indians couldn't bring themselves to suggest a name to the Governor General to be the Prime Minister, so he offered the chance to form a government back to the Fijians on a minority basis. They did successfully form a government and three months later they had another election where the right side won and everything was okay.

But in the 1987 elections that didn't happen. The government that came with 27 on the winning side; of that number, 19 were South Asians. By the way, the army is 96 percent ethnic Fijian. The Fijians could not accept the new government and they took action in a bloodless coup. There were actually two or three little incidents where people were injured, but nobody was killed. The Fijian Army just took over.

This was personally devastating to me because I had good friends on both sides. The Fijians and the South Asians actually had a fairly decent relationship, but the election brought out all the angst on both sides and so it was very painful dealing with everybody. I have to say that obviously even in this case Fiji wasn't on the top of anybody's agenda in the US, although I did understand that right after the coup there was a time when in the Secretary's staff meeting there was no other news and we were on the agenda. Aside from that, it was pretty much up to me to decide what to do. The Australians and New Zealanders were outraged at this blow to democracy because it was a straight military coup and the party that was deposed was Labor Party, quite close to theirs at the time.

We had to stop giving military assistance to Fiji -- we had a small training program -- because it was a military coup and the Foreign Assistance Act does not allow aid to continue in those circumstances. We did not condone the act, in fact we had no relations with the military government. The Governor General, under the part of the Constitution that said that if the parliament was unable to act he would take over the running of the government, did that. So we did our business with the Governor General, but it was clear that he couldn't do anything the military didn't want him to do.

I tried to steer a middle course where we would make it clear that we did not condone this coup and felt that democracy should be returned, but that on the other hand we understood how it had happened and we were not casting judgment on anybody. Our relationship, however, had to be based on the fact of what our laws are and what we believe. So we said to our Fijian friends, "don't take this personally but realize that we cannot accept this under our law". Actually it worked out that we were able to maintain a relationship with both sides in the debate which probably was helpful in what later then became a sort of half way decent situation in which the constitution was modified (this was after I was there) so that the Fijians now have a guaranteed majority in the Parliament. Now it is 32 Fijians, 22 Indians and 8 electors.

Q: Did you find yourself as an intermediary talking to the leaders on both sides?

DILLERY: We were more carriers of information rather than mediators who came up with plans for them to solve this.

Q: Did the Indians have a different thrust? Was it more ethnic or were there sort of philosophical....?

DILLERY: Well, a little more history. The first political movement in Fiji was by Indians. What had happened was the Australian companies that began to do plantation work in the South Pacific--sugar, cotton which was grown in the islands during the American Civil War when Britain couldn't get cotton from the US--brought in the first boat load in 1854 and they were indentured. That immigration continued until about 1915. These were people of very modest economic means.

A couple of interesting things happened. One was that there was no caste system in Fiji, but there were a lot of different groups and practices because the workers came from everywhere in South Asia. So the "Indian" community was never totally unified.

The other thing was that one of the first things that happened when the British accepted Fiji as a colony (Fiji had been very wild westy -- and not unified at all up until then), the Governor General in creating the Constitution reserved the majority of the land -- some 80 percent -- for the indigenous Fijians on a communal basis, they couldn't sell it. So the Indians who came who were the plantation people leased fairly small plots from the Fijian tribes. The main political issue always was the length and terms of these leases.

As a result of that, even before World War II, the Fiji National Federation Party grew up out of the Union of Indian Farmers. They were really the only political force through World War II and up until independence began to be on the horizon. At that point a party was formed called the Alliance Party, which was Fijian. The two major factors in elections up until 1987 were those two, the NFP and Alliance Party. It was pretty much racial and this one economic issue. However, by 1987...and remember also apart from the areas where the Indians were, and they were really in places which were conducive to growing sugar mostly on the windward side of the two largest islands where it was wetter, etc., the rest of the islands were mostly subsistence with no economy at all, except for a copper mine and a few things like that. As time has gone by, of course, more and more development has occurred. As in many developing countries, a market economy has arrived, it has grown rapidly and there has been a resulting implosion of people from the outlying islands and villages into the cities. Another big factor was the University which was a hot bed of political activism.

Partly as a result oaf these changes, a new party grew up called the Fiji Labor Party. This party was composed of Fijian intellectuals and they won the 1987 election in a coalition with the NFP. Of the 27 members I mentioned in the parliament of the new government, 7 were staff members at the university. Like many young universities there were many left wing thinkers. Also the labor unions, which were not part of the traditional...there had been an uneasy alliance between

the farmer and the laborer for many years, but the labor people, their head was an Indian...So it was a combination really of Fijians who had come to the cities and didn't want to accept the traditional form of Fijian government and the people from the university and labor union people who all came together and won this election. So it was really an ideological change as well as an ethnic change.

Q: During this time you were calling your own shots pretty much?

DILLERY: Pretty much. Since there was hardly any violence and no threat to national or regional stability and no Cold War implications, the coup did not generate a lot of interest in Washington -- there were a lot of higher priority foreign policy activities at the time.

Q: You didn't have any outraged members of Congress saying we should be...?

DILLERY: Oh, there were a few but it was very muted. Robert Lilly was our Deputy Assistant Secretary. He was very helpful and supportive. That was about as high up in the system that it got.

Q: How about with UN votes?

DILLERY: Of my little countries, only Fiji was a member of the UN. Tonga chose not to be. Tuvalu and Kiribati couldn't afford even the minimum dues or to have anybody in New York. Other places in the Pacific islands were notorious for being against us like Vanuatu which had an American as its representative who voted against us all the time. Nauru also voted against us. But Fiji was not a problem.

Q: So when you left in 1987, what was the situation?

DILLERY: I left in August, 1987 and everything was still in turmoil in Fiji and in fact there was another coup literally by the Army against themselves in September. But in August, things were starting to settle down. The major impact of this whole thing probably was that there was a great exodus of Indian intellectuals from Fiji, depriving the country of a lot of talent. Oh, I should say one more thing about the history of Fiji. About 1930 the pattern of immigration from India changed and a good number of Gujarati came. That was when the Indians really became interested in politics and more of the monetary side of the economy. Before that time most of them were farmers. Actually a little bit of a caste system developed because the Gujarati did not intermingle with the other Indians.

But all of the Indians were very family oriented and wanting to develop and education their children, etc. So the children of the farmers as well as the shopkeepers grew up to be businessmen and also lawyers, doctors and senior civil servants doing a lot to bring this country into the modern world. Probably the saddest result of the coup was that many of them left for Australia, New Zealand or the US. The level of ability and capability in the infrastructure of both the economy and the government was weakened by this loss of experienced people.

Q: One last question on Fiji, what sort of staff did you have?

DILLERY: We had 25 Americans at the embassy. I think the total number of State personnel was about nine. We had one USIA. We had one military...we had an attach resident in New Zealand but for ship visits CINCPAC had someone stationed there as "CINCPAC Representative". We had about three or four Peace Corps staff with 130 Peace Corps volunteers in Fiji, 30 in Tonga, 12 in Kiribati and 2 in Tuvalu. And there were about a dozen AID people in a regional assistance office. There were about 40 Foreign Service National employees.

Q: How effective did you think the Peace Corps was?

DILLERY: It was very effective for them at that time. They had several major programs. In earlier days many had been English teachers. Now there was a nursing school and we provided teachers for that. There was a forestry activity and we had provided volunteers to help them to develop a forestry industry. Many of the volunteers were in rural development trying to help health conditions, cottage industries, etc. They did a good job and had a number of nice projects.

By the way, one of the enjoyable things for the ambassador was that at that time we had a small self-help program to which we gave a little money for projects, most of which were developed by the Peace Corps volunteers. It was called the Accelerated Impact Program -- AIP. The volunteers worked with villagers to build water systems, community halls, salt pans, health stations. The building of kitchens was a big project. In the traditional village the kitchens were one end of the thatched roof house. They built little annexes on it with concrete slab and concrete blocks and a little stove and running water. They did a lot of that kind of thing and we provided the money for it. My wife and I got to open those projects with ceremonies, and when that happened we received the traditional ceremonial thank you with the roasted pig and traditional dressed native dancers and cup bearers giving you the native drink, whales teeth as a sign of respect, etc. It was a great experience. You will find plaques in remote Fijian villages which say that in 1986, Ambassador Dillery opened this school or water system -- a nice legacy.

Q: Oh, wonderful. So you left there in 1987.

DILLERY: I left on August 17, 1987 and on August 20 I went to work in the Department in the Office of Management Operations.

HARIADENE JOHNSON
TDY, USAID
Islands of the South Pacific (1988-1989)

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

JOHNSON: Well, it happened after I left, but during the period I was there it didn't. I left there in July of '88 and went to the South Pacific.

Q: South Pacific, that's quite a transition.

JOHNSON: Washington still couldn't figure out what to do with me, so I continued on my series of TDY's and went to the South Pacific to the Regional South Pacific Office, which had a Regional Development Office in Fiji with no bilateral aid to Fiji. But, Fiji was the islands that had the connections like Barbados did. Fiji had the airplane connections to get in and out of all the 11 islands that were receiving aid from the U.S. I went out to South Pacific for two months to do a strategic planning document with themes. There were certain themes that would be carried on throughout the islands, but each island would have its own bilateral laid program. And, the one theme of course, was population and health. Another theme was environment; another theme was the private sector initiative in fishing and some agricultural exporting ideas. I wound up doing a strategic plan and the budget submission, which called for increasing the level to the South Pacific from about five to six million a year to 20 to 30 million a year. That was accepted in Washington.

Q: What about your role in the South Pacific?

JOHNSON: I was going to say, the South Pacific came through at that point with the offer for a TDY and I took it. It was a very small office in terms of budget and people. They had gotten approval from the Asian Bureau to use personal service contracts for staffing in lieu of direct hire. So, they had OE funding contractors and a green light from the Bureau.

At that point, I'd worked with start up countries and regional programs enough to where if they wanted someone with my background to take a look at, you know, what would be a justification for increasing the program levels. If you increased them, how would you staff yourself to carry them out and manage them and what would you do, substantially. And, the justification of why we should do more in the South Pacific was already agreed to. The AA for the Asia Bureau was a former Peace Corp volunteer from one of the islands and the Assistant Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa was a former Peace Corps volunteer from one of the islands, and George H.W. Bush had been off in the South Pacific. We were coming up on the 50th anniversary of World War II and the fact that thousands of Americans lost their lives fighting over these islands. Essentially, they had been ignored by us for the next 50s years. So, I came back with a strategic plan for the area which argued that the Regional Office should run each country as a separate development objective.

Q: Each country?

JOHNSON: Each country, which I had a hard time selling, because you had countries with a total populations of 2,000 people. You know, it was..., why do we want to have a USAID program? Why can't we just have regional projects and then they could get some of the regional benefits. I was backed up by John Woods who was a Mission Director. The argument was, the Regional Office can back stop the programs, but if you really want to have an impact on the countries, you have to interact with their developing planning office, their Ministries of Health.

You can't just have a regional contractor who wanders in and out of all the countries. In the real small islands it probably did make sense to only do a training program, but you set a training program before them, rather than having a regional training program that just drops scholarships here and there.

And, in terms of management, that they should keep the Regional Office in Fiji, which was the old problem that you know about from Abidjan. Fiji was well enough off to where they really didn't have a development program there. But, because it was the nexus of all the airplanes and the traffic, if we have the USAID Office there, then the Embassy would get upset that they had all these USAID people wandering around and no USAID program in Fiji. Eventually the State Department put ESF money in to Fiji and wound up having a small ESF program there that worked primarily, as I recall, on a democracy project helping provide Xerox machines, a parliamentary house and other thing like that.

The program was strongly environmental. That became the major thrust to what we did on each of the islands where we started a program, which got into private sector marketing, private sector agricultural development and marketing, because you had a fairly active private sector import-export group that did export copper and (?) So, you had something of a nucleus there to work with.

I started up a program in New Guinea which as far as I could figure out was like 20 years behind Africa. And, got pushed into doing some developmental activities there, rather than doing institutional development, which is what I thought we ought to do, but they wanted more presence, so they wanted USAID to do more things. We wound up working on a big fishing project there that was pretty successful. We were in fishing as our agriculture sector. It was a nice little program and lasted about three years. No, it lasted longer than that, because this was in '88 and Brian Atwood (USAID Administrator) saw the South Pacific as one of the programs to be consolidated when he grouped the programs; the people out there kept saying, but they shouldn't, this isn't fair. These programs and the governments work. The host countries are doing what they ought to do. At that time, we were cutting programs out in countries where the host government wasn't carrying its share of the burden and etc. etc. etc. The implication was that if you cut a country out that it was a wrong doer. And, the islands didn't do much, but they weren't very big.

Q: Why were we interested in the islands at that time?

JOHNSON: It was a combination of reasons. The major thrust was that then, the Assistant Administrator for the Asia Bureau had been a Peace Core volunteer out in the islands and one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State for Africa had been a Peace Core volunteer on the islands. The 50th anniversary of World War II was coming up and it was the Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands, Tarawa. All the names that are familiar from World War II movies, if anything else and the American shed blood for. A feeling that nothing had happened since World War II, and that a number of the islands were essentially French colonies. We had American Samoa, which was essentially a colony. The assistance to American Samoa and to the northern islands, the Marianas, I forget who else was up there, were all handled by the U.S. Department of Interior, which sent out a local rep and tried to run aid programs and absolutely did not want any advice

from USAID on its experience in running aid programs. In most peoples opinion they were running a disaster and so the idea was that USAID would become more involved in the Southern Pacific; would show by example how you could help the islands that maybe the Department of Interior would pick up on, and that the islands were, as small as they were, they still were represented in the United Nations. Therefore, the U.S. should remain on good terms with those islands and most of them were supportive of the U.S. So, you had a combination of reasons. I think, the case for increasing the aid levels was made before I did a paper. The paper just served as the written paper trail, if you will.

Q: This was Economic Supporting Assistance fund?

JOHNSON: The Economic Supporting Assistance fund (ESF) and approximately at the same time, they did approve a million dollars for ESF funds for Fiji, because the Ambassador was so upset that there were no bilateral aid to Fiji and he had his seven person USAID Office there.

Also, extremely interesting, the U.S. had negotiated a fishing treaty, which involved Japan, all the islands, and the American fishing fleet, as to what kind of fish could be taken, and what time of year the tonnage and everything. Then, at some point and I'm not really sure of the time period here, but I think it was in 1985 or '86, one of the islands had seized an American fishing boat for fishing illegally in their waters. It was like the mouse that roared kind of thing. They had gone out at night and seized the boat while everybody was in town at a tavern and then here was the U.S. threatening to send carriers and airplanes to get the fishing boat back. Partially because there were feelings for that and for other fishing kinds of conflicts and collisions, the U.S. negotiated a fishing treaty, whereby the American Tuna Association, the American Fisheries Association, or something, the equivalent America marketing group put up ten million dollars to be available for fisheries, fishing development or fishy problems, fishy related problems on the islands. And, USAID became the administrator of that ten million dollars. It totally bypassed the USAID structure and the congressional structure in Washington. It came through the State Department and the private sector directly to the governments, which as part of the agreement they'd written with the governments, the government had to co-program with USAID on the use of the money. So, there was this chunk of money which also in some cases involved the local currency that the USAID Office out there programmed and most of it was for fishing, fishing development.

Q: So, it was tied to fishing?

JOHNSON: It was very loosely tied. The USAID Mission did the tying more than the actual agreement, because the agreement had enough loop holes to drive the proverbial truck through.

Q: What did they do with all that money; the fish money and the 25 million dollars?

JOHNSON: Like I said, you had rural health, primary health and family planning activities. You had an HIV/AID's Program; you had an environmental program. Again, on each island there would be a different type of environmental program, so they did vary. But, the environment was a major theme of the whole program. In fishing development we put in piers, outfitted boats to have long nets instead of short nets. One of the Women in Development Program... the women

do the fishing in the coves where you walk out into the water and the water is never higher than your waist. Men do the long haul fishing where they'll go out in the boats and stay for two or three weeks and then come back. So, we worked with the women to come up with ways where they could do the cove fishing and create better conditions for them so they didn't wind up with so many related problems and diseases from wading in the water up to their waist. There were educational programs on how to not fish out certain coves, because the tendency was to fish until the cove was completely non-responsive and then move to another cove. So, we worked on some environmental programs with the women. We worked with a lot of PVO's who were out there ....

Q: Local or international?

JOHNSON: International, but primarily U.S. related to Peace Core Volunteers who had been in the islands and then had come home and had set up some sort of continuing relationship, the Friends of the South Pacific. The Peace Core program was very active throughout all the islands too. I'm trying to think of what else.

Environmentally we had a major issue with the Japanese; the Japanese fishing approach was to catch everything in these huge nets and then dump anything that wasn't commercial fish, which resulted in an enormous waste of fishing resources. So, we had a couple of negotiations with the Japanese in trying to work out joint fisheries programs with the Japanese.

With the education program, which we had a scholarship program, having scholarships for each island, which was a continual pain in the neck, because the students had to go to Fiji to get an American Visa. They couldn't get one out of the Embassy or the Counselor Officer on their own island.

All of the visa applicants had to go to Fiji and USAID worked out a way of having housing and food for them while they waited for their visas to come through and then they would pay for their airport transportation to the States. We were constantly missing deadlines in terms of the student has to be here by August 29th in order to start orientation. And, September 20th the student was still sitting in Fiji waiting for his visa. A lot of just really strong feelings I guess I came away from the South Pacific as to what is the Embassy role was. I had a much easier time picking out a USAID role in the islands than I did the Embassy role. The Embassy really was a meet and greet for American investors. It was a place for them to go in and say hello, shake hands, get a briefing about the local economy in the countries and then leave.

Q: Were there any Americans to worry about?

JOHNSON: Had a lot of tourists, major tourists, that if you are going to Australia or New Zealand, Fiji is a connecting flight and has an enormous investment from the Japanese on atoll development. It's a major tourist attraction. The Fijian government actually worked it very nicely where they built each hotel but didn't sell the beach front. The beach front was considered needed land, but the hotels could get long term leases on the local area. But, then they had to sit down with the local chiefs and figure out employment opportunities for how the Fijians could actually get the work at the hotels. In Fiji it was particularly difficult, because historically when the British came and set up the colonies, they found that the Fijians were very quarrelsome, not

very productive as farm workers; they wanted to set up sugar plantations, so they imported Indians from India who then worked the sugar factories and the sugar plantations. As a consequence, they set up an incredible polarization of society between the Indians and the Fijians. Indians had been there for four generations and 200 years later are still considered Indians. And, if anything happens the India Consular goes trotting down and tries to work it out. They all carry Indian passports. They're the Fijians after 20 years.

Q: What size population are we talking about?

JOHNSON: Small, very small. I can't remember.

Q: Under a million?

JOHNSON: Definitely under a million. I remember some of the islands we worked with were like 2,500 and 7,000. A big island was one that had over a hundred thousand. Fiji is the most developed of all the islands, but I can't remember what the figures are.

Q: Did they have any local capacity to carry out the programs?

JOHNSON: The Fijians had an enormous local capacity in trained Indians. You had very few Fijians who really wanted to go to school. They didn't like school, so they wouldn't go in it for advanced degrees and they wouldn't stick around to get their degrees. The Fijians liked primarily to volunteer for the U.N. military police. They're scattered all over the world with the U.N. security arrangements, because that's an admiral and honorable way to see world and then you go off and do some fighting. Historically, a very war liked people. It's military arrangements are still admired and honored. Very few Fijians go into business. A lot go into government, but they don't go into business. The Indians tend to predominate in business and lawyers and doctors in professional fields. You would have had a very high trained capacity of Fijians.

Our problem is that, because Fiji did have a high trained development capacity and they had a high per capita income, we didn't do bilateral assistance with Fiji. We had the Regional Officers, but they worked with the Solomon Islands, the Christmas Islands, a couple of French Islands that are still under the French control, all of which have extremely limited development capacity. They simply didn't have functioning government structures in a lot of ways. Most of them, however, had been taken over in some sort of adoption fashion. Like New Zealand had particularly close relationship with two or three islands; Australia had close relationships; the French had close relationships with different islands. So, one of the things that USAID had carved out as an area that we would work on was donor coordination in trying to get more donors into one set of islands, so you didn't have one donor dominating the whole economy and the government. They were trying to develop little mini-donor group discussions. There were half a dozen interregional organizations. An interregional organization on shipping; interregional organizational on health; interregional organization on airlines and so on to get the islands to see themselves as working together through those interregional groups.

Q: Politically they would never be brought together?

JOHNSON: No, politically they had no interest; they had no background of history of being associated with each other. Fiji and Tonga probably had a history of fighting each other more than anything else and would use the long range canoes almost like the Vikings did to wage war back and forth on each other. Beautiful, beautiful part of the world though. I could see why people served as volunteers or had anything to do with it, you know; they would have a feeling of continuing commitment of trying to do something in that area.

Q: Most of our work was carried out through PVO's?

JOHNSON: PVO's and some contract groups. The USAID office essentially consisted of about seven people, three of whom were OE funded private service contractors. One was Australian; two, I think were New Zealand; and one was a New Zealander married to a Carabaos girl. The argument was that they simply couldn't recruit Americans to go out there when they'd have vacancies and they'd try to go through the USAID Personnel System to fill the vacancies. They'd come up with people who were willing to go out there for a year or two years

Q: How many Americans did we have?

JOHNSON: I think there were only about four (USAID) Americans there. The problem was that the South Pacific program had been perceived as a good place to go on your last tour before you retired. There was very little activity there. Then, they sent John Woods out who was a product of the Africa Bureau; he was very activist and raring to go and by no means, mentally or physically ready to retire. They sent him out because of the promise or the mandate, if you will, that they were going to increase the program and he should start in motion all of the steps it would take to increase the program.

Q: How did the projects work?

JOHNSON: The projects worked really well. Sharon Fee was in the Regional Office in '96 and '97, ten years after I left; I talked to her about the projects and they were all working. The same projects weren't still active, but the Mission was still in the same general theme areas of working with beneficiaries on the environment, working private sector, and health, population and HIV/AIDS. They worked pretty well. Sharon said they got really good cooperation in health from the governments, that the people that were assigned to the projects tended to be good and tended to stay with the projects. There wasn't a lot of switching around. She was very upset when the Atwood's (USAID Administrator) decision that came down in '95, '96 to close down programs that weren't performing, which became translated into close down programs without local (support ed?), because she felt that it was the wrong program to close down. They pulled the USAID Office out of Fiji; I think they do some general regional support types of things out of the Philippines.

Q: What happened to the projects?

JOHNSON: The projects were ended. Contractors were sent home.

Q: They just finished work and walked away?

JOHNSON: They walked away, yeah. Sharon's feeling was that the implication and all of the public announcements were that we were closing down programs in countries where the host governments hadn't held up their part of the bargain, or for poor performance, or for various invidious kinds of reasons. And, the South Pacific essentially got tired of that brush, when in fact, the programs there worked very well and that they'd made good progress on all of the individual type goals and in the general themes of health and environmental, but simply because it was a small program. The political Godfathers, if you will, in State and USAID who had supported the expansion were out because they were Republicans, so essentially we closed them.

Q: Do you think we had a substantial impact with that program?

JOHNSON: It's hard to say. And clearly, the U.S. had a substantial impact on the islands in World War II. I mean, just absolute total impact on the islands to where they developed, you may have heard of them, Cargo Cults, where the airplanes flew in with all this cargo of specialty items and food and drinks that no one in the islands had ever seen before. So, they developed religious cults around the shipment of goods and services through these cargo planes. I was told, to this day, you will have an isolated tribe that essentially worships an icebox. They'll adorn the icebox with candles and wreaths and periodically have services there, and periodically they'll open the doors to see if it's filled up yet. Since the icebox is still empty, they'll close the door and say they haven't prayed enough. And, they call them Cargo Cults and they're still active throughout the South Pacific.

At the same time you have absolute first rate air service, Fiji Airlines flown by the Fijians; you have the Air Traffic Controllers, who all have moved into the modern world and clearly handle communication equipment with no problems. You have one of the more sophisticated inter-island shipping systems for export goods that I think has ever been developed.

It is much more difficult there than in the Caribbean, because in the Caribbean the islands are closer to each other. Essentially to this day, you can sail from one Caribbean island to another and not lay down or put your anchor out and stay overnight and then go the next day during day light. In the South Pacific, you're talking about weeks where you'll go before you see the sight of land again. The South Pacific is a huge ocean. It is like one little finger tip on your piggy; it would be the Caribbean compared to your whole body being the South Pacific Ocean. So, you think about the Caribbean as being islands, and they are, but not in the same sense of isolated, long distance, communication kinds of things that you face with the South Pacific.

Q: What about the impact of health and education programs?

JOHNSON: Health programs, from what I got back, had a hard time. Not because of lack of personnel; it was just lack of priority. The South Pacific Islanders tended to be very healthy. They didn't pressure the government for a lot of health services, because they just didn't see a need for it. Some, who were trying to work with the HIV/AIDs Program, were trying to break through, the myth that the South Pacific Islanders don't get HIV/AIDs, you know, weren't susceptible to them for some reason. The doctor that was out there said, that part of the trouble was they had a very, very low rate and it was hard to figure out that maybe there was some

reason why. So, he was trying to get some AIDs research done out there to see whether or not there was some natural immunity going on. I think, even in terms of raising the awareness of people of critical diseases and how vulnerable islands can be to a critical disease, really had an impact. Again, I think people brought to the United States, trained in the United States, returned to home, had the most lasting impact that we had.

Q: Good. Anymore on the islands? You were there how long?

JOHNSON: First trip out I was there for two months and later I went back for another TDY and was there for about six months.

Over a three year period I did a series of overseas TDY's that went from working on the management assessment in Latin America, in Brazil, Peru and Mexico, to doing the Sudan for refugees with the Embassy, to doing the strategic planning for the South Pacific. At one point I asked Ray Love, who at that point was Counselor to the Agency, how long was personnel going to let me keep doing this floating around and charting my own individual TDY's. At that point, I reported to no one, other than Ray who used to be my boss when I was in the Africa Bureau. So, I asked Ray, how long was personnel going to let me keep on doing this. I was enjoying it and I was getting a lot of overseas experience, but I couldn't really see that the Agency structuring this program just for me. A lot of people in Personnel were still mad at me, because I pulled off two years on TDY to Cameroon. They were questioning whether what I was doing was serious or was it just my own development program. Ray's response was, that as long as there was a need, essentially the Agency had to send somebody. If it hadn't been me, it would have been somebody else.

For a while there I became a specialist on the islands, that was the other thing. I worked in the Seychelles, Marianas, Comoros, Madagascar, Indian Oceans Islands, and then I worked the South Pacific Islands, and then when I came back from South Pacific I went over to Grenada and I worked in the Caribbean Islands. Most governments functioned. The areas are small enough and their variables are enough under control that the islands do okay. Much like Hong Kong or Singapore. It's just a lot more feasible than if you're talking about Somalia that goes from Maine to Florida and as far as Chicago. It has one road that goes to Richmond. Islands were fun.

JANE MILLER FLOYD
Political/Economic Officer
Suva (1993-1996)

Jane Miller Floyd was born in Spokane, Washington. She received a bachelor's degree from the University of Washington . She has severed at USIA. She joined the Foreign Service in 1980. Her career included positions in Moscow as Political/Economic Officer, in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Leningrad and Fiji. Jane Miller Floyd was interviewed December 6th 2004.

Q: In 92 you moved. What did you do?

FLOYD: I took an assignment with the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs, which was a six-month bridge assignment before starting French language training before going out to the embassy in Suva, Fiji.

Q: What was your bridge assignment?

FLOYD: It was primarily to deal with the human rights report of – I'm going to say nine, but it always felt like 800 – the nine countries that were handled by the Pacific Islands Affairs desk. And anything else that came up, from when prime ministers came to visit and you needed more escorts, when you needed any number of things. It was a Y tour, meaning I did not actually have a designated position. All the other desk officers remained in place, so I was an extra. I was a designated hitter who could be sent in as needed.

Q: Then you took French.

FLOYD: Then I took French for six months.

Q: What were you taking French to go to Suva for?

FLOYD: Because the embassy in Suva has consular and political reporting responsibilities for the French territories in the South Pacific, meaning New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

Q: You did that from when to when?

FLOYD: I was in Fiji from 93 to 96. Summer of 93 to summer of 96.

Q: Now what happened family-wise?

FLOYD: We all went to Fiji. My husband retired from the Navy in the spring of 93 with the singular request that we go someplace that he didn't have to wear long underwear, and we ended up in the South Pacific.

Q: How'd you break out of the Russian orbit?

FLOYD: It was very intentional. One of the advantages of the Foreign Service is that they do ask you to be multi-faceted. And I convinced the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs that I had enough learning capacity that I could bring some of my knowledge of Russia's own ethnic challenges to the ethnic challenges in the South Pacific, specifically Fiji which had already had one coup over ethnic conflicts. And they paneled me.

Q: Okay. This would be 93 to 96. Explain. What was the situation at first when you went out there in Fiji and then I know New Caledonia is always having problems.

FLOYD: They all have their specific challenges. And the Embassy in Fiji is also accredited to Tonga, which is a monarchy trying to figure out how to work in a world of democracy. We were

accredited to Nauru, which is trying to figure out how not to be abused by slim and slimy entrepreneurs who . . .

Q: It's just a pile of bird dung, isn't it?

FLOYD: That is correct. Hottest place I have ever been. Then you've got countries like Tuvalu, which global warming could conceivably wipe out, seeing that the highest point in the country is about two feet above high tide.

Q: Maybe we ought to take each one at a time. While you were there, what was the situation in Fiji?

FLOYD: It was actually a fairly hopeful time. For much of it, they had agreed to a constitutional review and had set a committee under the auspices of an eminent British jurist to try and re-craft a new constitution for Fiji which would figure out a way to give the Indo-Fijians adequate representation and yet assuage the ethnic Fijian concern that they were losing their country. Some very good discussions. Some very good engagement. Appeared to be moving in a hopeful way. So I left fairly happy. During that three years, the saddest thing that happened was the former president, a gentleman by the name of Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau passed away. And it was very interesting to see the ornateness of his funeral arrangements and the inauguration of a new president in a skirt and sandals.

Q: Let's talk about Fiji. The ethnic – I think it was the native Fijians and then the Indians who had been brought there as laborers, wasn't it?

FLOYD: That is the major distinction. There is a growing Chinese presence. Since independence they have divided themselves into ethnic Fijians, Indo-Fijians and "others." Seats in the parliament were divvied up by those distinctions. They paralleled religious divisions. They paralleled economic divisions. Paralleled geographic, occupational divisions. A pretty complex situation.

Q: Having both Indians and Chinese on a small island. These are two very strong entrepreneurial groups.

FLOYD: And that was the challenge. The "others" and the Indo-Fijians were the economically successful outward face of Fiji. The ethnic Fijians maintain political power but were challenged to get that economic power. Partly because the majority lived in small isolated villages and had subsistence lifestyles. They were not predominately urban. They were not predominately commercial agricultural workers. They owned the land, but it was the Indo-Fijians who ran the cane farms.

Q: I spent a week in Pohnpei, which is different, but at the same time, seeing the Federated States of Micronesia. It was one of the saddest places I've been because it looked like it was living off of essentially subsistence. They had given up their fishing. I mean there was nothing there except for Uncle Sam handing out checks.

FLOYD: One of the interesting elements of Fiji is that the dependency relationship, such as it exists, for Fiji is with Australia. The inheritance of a British Commonwealth. It meant that the United States was not seen as the big brother. It meant that we were actually seen quite nicely as an honest broker and sort of an ideal. We had more issues with immigration. Fiji is the single largest, by percentage, participant in the diversity lottery program. Everybody wants out.

Q: Where do they go?

FLOYD: West Coast. Lots in California. Huge Tongan population in Utah. The Mormons have made their connection. It is exceedingly interesting to see the population flows.

Q: Well these are big people, aren't they?

FLOYD: I was going to say, ten years ago if you looked at the NFL rosters there were no islander names. And now you get a whole bunch of them. We used to joke that every landscaper in California was probably a Pacific Islander because they could lift trees single-handedly.

Q: What did they do, outside of the ones that ended up in the National Football League?

FLOYD: Sugar cane growing is a major economic factor. It was dependent on European Union and U.S. sugar quotas, or in the case of the EU, as sugar subsidy. They had a significant pine export, a wood export capability. They were part of the 1970s tuna treaty with the US, which was the only U.S. subsidy, if you will, which was greatly reduced by that time because the United States no longer needed to keep its access to these countries vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, which was the genesis of the tuna treaty. So those are the major exports. And the tourist industry.

Q: How was that doing?

FLOYD: It had rebounded from the coups of the late 80s. It had recovered from a cyclone by the name of Kina that came through before we got there. But every time there was any agitation, primarily by ethnic Fijians, you saw an instant impact, particularly on the Australian market.

Q: These coups were what?

FLOYD: Almost the stuff of the mouse that roars. In the first one, an army colonel walked into the parliament unarmed and said "We're taking over. Everybody get in the buses. We are taking you to the government guest house to hold you." I mean, that was their hostage taking idea, send them to the government guest house. And he set up another government. Literally not a shot was fired. There were weapons visible, but never used.

Q: And then what happened?

FLOYD: You probably have to be more of a Pacific Island scholar than I am. I always saw it as a desperate inferiority complex where the ethnic Fijians thought they could not compete. The Indo-Fijians seemed to be primarily interested in getting along – living. Even during the coup era, immediately after the coup, there were Indo-Fijians who joined the government, because what

they wanted to do was live in peace. There were an isolated number of ethnic Fijians who found that challenging. Who saw the inevitable takeover of economic power over political power.

And I also think they saw two other elements which challenged them. One was that the best and the brightest of ethnic Fijians beat feet. They did not stay and re-energize Fiji. There was also an increasing inter-marriage trend. Not huge. But enough so that those who by their own legal definition of ethnic Fijian was reducing. And because the Indo-Fijian definition was somewhat broader, that number stayed solid and the "other" percentage was growing by leaps and bounds. And the "others" were the most energetic, the most globalized.

Q: These were mostly Chinese, were they?

FLOYD: A real mix is the issue. It was Australians who had taken on Fijian citizenship. It was French folks who wanted to live in the South Pacific but not in the French territories. It was American entrepreneurs who had taken on Fijian citizenship. And it was anyone, any ethnic Fijian, who had married one of those folks because when you married one of those folks you lost your ethnic Fijian purity, which of course as an American who comes from a culture where on St. Patrick's Day everyone is Irish and on Chinese New Year everyone is Chinese and you loudly proclaim . . . (turn over tape) Our definition of ethnicity is first off voluntary, self-selected and quite fungible.

Q: Yes. I play the German card, the Spanish card and the Irish card depending on the audience.

FLOYD: It was one of those mindset elements. And then the fact that what political party you would likely belong to, what parliamentary seat you could compete for, was based on that, was a dissonant note in an American's thinking.

Q: Was there something about the Fijian culture that impeded them? I think in some of the other islands, particularly up in Micronesia, where they have this, if you get a store you use the store to give away stuff to your friends and make yourself broke but you made a lot of friends. In other words, it didn't have much to do with accumulation. It was mainly to pass on gifts.

FLOYD: Ethnic Fijian society is communal. What one person has, everyone had. And it works when you have to worry about getting eighteen people out with a fish net in order to feed a village. It doesn't work very well in a globalized, commercialized society. So yes, on a different scale but with some similarities, just as Islam is trying to figure out its role in the 21st century, ethnic Fijians face the same challenge of how much of their traditional and cultural identity would be lost if they sought to compete, or if they sought to exist – because competition is primarily for sports for them. It does require a mind-set change and there is a legitimate concern that in adopting other standards you lose something of your identity. And that is a challenge that most – the Catholic church in the United States has certainly faced it. Women have gone through it tremendously in the United States since the 70s. What do you give up? What do you get? How do you maintain? There is no singular answer and therefore I believe you tend to get irritated towards anybody who is the other. The human difficulty of questioning yourself gets translated into "Why are you making me do this? You are the bad person. All of my frustration and challenges must be your fault."

Q: We had an embassy in Suva.

FLOYD: We did.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FLOYD: That was one of the greater challenges. In the general slowness with which the Clinton administration staffed some of the embassies, we went two and a half out of my three years there without an ambassador. We had an outstanding DCM, chargé, Michael Marine, who was just tremendous. Went on to be DCM in Beijing. Is now our ambassador in Vietnam and was just a tremendous, tremendous person.

Q: What was your job?

FLOYD: I was the political/economic officer. The number two. So I got to play DCM a lot. And when Michael was out of the country, I got my first chance to be a charge, flag and all.

Q: What were our main concerns?

FLOYD: Domestically it was to monitor their development of a constitution and political system which conformed to international standards of human rights. On the economic front it was to open the markets to U.S. goods. Chickens being the very specific one that we beat our head against the wall forever and then we finally got frozen chickens in. The competition there was, interestingly enough, not so much specifically against the Fijian market but against the Australian market. The Australians had helped them set up their import-export system which favored imports from Australia – logically enough – and so it was beating down two sets of concerns. But we did that.

Q: I would think the Australians would be playing a major hand there.

FLOYD: Tremendous. Their aid programs were ten times the size of USAID. We did have a Peace Corps contingent there. Both of those operations, AID and Peace Corps, "graduated" Fiji at the very end of my tenure, which was not the happiest moment in our bilateral relationship. But that's life.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing?

FLOYD: Primarily teaching English, also small business.

Q: How did they fit in the scheme of things?

FLOYD: Well and favorably known. Loved by the folks because they lived in the villages, lived in the communities. They were well taken care of. It was a good setup. Now whether Fiji needed them more than Rwanda, somebody else can decide that.

Q: You were saying, by the time you left it wasn't the happiest of times in our relations?

FLOYD: Well, the Fijians were very disappointed to lose an AID mission. Were very disappointed to lose Peace Corps volunteers. But could understand that the United States couldn't do everything everywhere. So you got constant reminders and constant question of was the United States losing interest in the South Pacific. Is the embassy going to close?

Q: Was Fiji a contributor to peace keepers?

FLOYD: Huge.

Q: Yeah. That was a big source of national pride.

FLOYD: Income. Both. And, I would argue, a major social safety valve in terms of getting large numbers of young ethnic Fijian males filled with testosterone out of the country. It also hopefully in some ways demonstrated to them the futility of ethnic/religious/racial hatreds, because primarily they served in the UN force in Lebanon and got to see the Israeli-Palestinian divisions in their face every day.

Q: How did you find the men were trained?

FLOYD: There were three Fijian battalions. One was preparing, one had just come back, and one was there. They had virtually no domestic role. It wasn't a draft. It was a volunteer army. So folks stayed in.

Q: I assume that you were going about your business and keeping contact with all the different groups there?

FLOYD: Very intentionally. Very deliberately. Very obviously.

Q: How did the native Fijians respond to our interest?

FLOYD: All of the major ethnic groups saw the United States as an ideal. Therefore they were very interested in having the United States on their side. Never got any pushback in terms of the U.S. was interfering in Fiji's internal affairs to discuss the challenges of democracy and multi-ethnicity.

Q: Was Islam taking any role there?

FLOYD: Only very miniscule. Only about ten percent of the Indo-Fijian population was Muslim. No particular role at that time in terms of concerns with Islamic fundamentalism.

Q: How about the island countries surrounding it? I imagine they must have been fighting each other all of the time. But was there much . . .

FLOYD: It was harder to get to each other. Most of the Fijians fought among themselves. There were huge clan federation rivalries. You would even see it on rugby teams.

Q: Did the Indian government have interest there or not?

FLOYD: No. Because the Indo-Fijian population in Fiji had immigrated in the mid to late 1800s, there was miniscule involvement from the Indian government.

Q: It wasn't a continuing migration.

FLOYD: No.

Q: Were Indo-Fijians going to find a nice bride?

FLOYD: No. Because Indian society, at least at the time that these guys immigrated, said that once you left the mother country you lost all ties, all concerns. There was not even much travel back and forth. The greater identity for most of the Indo-Fijians was with other immigrant Indo-Fijian populations. They would come to the Caribbean where there was also a chunk of Indo-immigrants.

Q: Did you feel that the coup business had sort of gone out of style?

FLOYD: Yes. When the good George Speight and company went back to coup-ing, I was disappointed. I thought that the constitutional review process had taken care of most of that. And it probably did take care of most of that. Speight's rag tag band of discontents was clearly not overwhelmingly large, but still totally disruptive. It put Fiji back on the coup list – those countries ineligible for US assistance because of coups.

Q: What has happened since then?

FLOYD: I have followed it only as much as the Washington Post gives. Speight has gone on trial, been convicted, he's in jail. Fiji is trying to recover, once again.

Q: The French side. What islands or countries comprised the French islands?

FLOYD: French Polynesia, New Caledonia were the ones that we visited. There's another one out there that I can't even think of right now. There was a third territory that we never went to because it was so small. . . .

Q: What was happening in New Caledonia?

FLOYD: There were independence movements in both countries. France had tried to negotiate agreements with the various local political entities. France wanted out and – in my opinion – the islanders were trying to make them pay for it. Because they faced the same economic challenges, they needed economic support from the motherland. In French Polynesian it was slightly

different because there was a significantly larger French population. In New Caledonia, the French were primarily the administrative class.

Q: How did you find dealing with them?

FLOYD: A pain in the tush. They did object to America putting its nose into what they saw as an internal matter. Whenever we traveled, we had to ask our embassy in Paris to get permission for the travel from the French Foreign Ministry. And they followed me. I'm not sure if they thought I was giving money to people or what.

Q: Do you think this was just colonials out there, the last vestige of the French empire.

FLOYD: Absolutely. A huge number of retired French military who went out there on a tour and have now retired from the French military with the exact same retirement salary that they would have gotten in Paris, which in New Caledonia makes you a king. Decent weather. Lots of gambling. Pleasant enough local population. Food, drink, women, sunshine.

Q: Sounds good to me.

FLOYD: What's to mind here, and for me the funny one was because of the flight schedules – primarily the flights in both those areas are oriented towards the tourist market, not trans-island. When you went, you had to stay a week. Gee darn. So I would always have a weekend in Tahiti. Did a lot of scuba diving on the weekend. In fact, had one amazing trip to New Caledonia because the local scuba divers discovered – well they knew that there were several American planes sunk off of Noumea, where we had a training base. But a local scuba diving club scuba diving club swimming around one of them discovered some bones. The United States is very committed to returning the remains of American service members and so the central laboratory . . .

Q: This is the one in . . .

FLOYD: Hawaii. Sent a good sized delegation out and spent a week investigating this site. And because they needed a diplomatic presence who spoke French and had a C license for scuba diving, I got to go and my basic job was to sit there in about 40 feet of water and watch them work, which checking out the lobsters and the fish and everything else. I got paid to scuba dive.

Q: Did you find a difference between the political situation in Tahiti?

FLOYD: Yes. The folks in Tahiti were considerably more laid back. Had not engaged in the types of violence that had been seen in New Caledonia. They are also a much more spread out, much more assimilated group of folks. Also much more dependent on the tourist industry which requires a good image.

Q: Well they've had demonstrations from time to time.

FLOYD: Yes. But New Caledonia has had a couple murders and a lot of burning of stores.

Q: What were American interests in Tahiti and New Caledonia?

FLOYD: There are enough American citizens in French Polynesia that they want us to open a consulate. So we've got a lot of American citizen interest, registering births, marriages. American commercial interests from tourist companies to folks engaged in the pearl industry, food imports. And then just the general human rights, independence interest. We are talking two to three trips a year. You can gauge just how interested we are.

Q: What about the Japanese? I'm thinking fishing and all this. Is this a concern?

FLOYD: Not in the South Pacific anymore. They've been too fished out for mass commercial interest. And it's far away from Japan. Much more significant is the Japanese honeymoon tourist industry.

Q: Oahu gets them and Guam gets them. It's a big business, isn't it?

FLOYD: Absolutely. Huge business.

Q: I think it's the only time Japanese couples hold hands. After that they go back to their traditional the guy goes to the office and the woman stays at home.

FLOYD: I have such limited experience in Japan that I have not made that observation.

Q: I'm no authority on it. As far as Washington goes, did you feel that you had descended below the radar?

FLOYD: Absolutely. You're dealing with a bureau that also has to worry about China and Japan and Korea, and opening up in Vietnam. And you want them to pay attention to your garment quota or your chickens. In some ways it was very nice and in other ways, obviously, it was a challenge.

Q: Well then in 96 you left your island paradise.

FLOYD: I left the South Pacific and headed to the North Pacific.

End of reader